

**(Un)Belonging, Affect and Gender in a Selection of Contemporary British  
South Asian Women's Novels by Sunetra Gupta, Meera Syal, Monica Ali,  
and Rekha Waheed**

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## **Dedication**

*With full love and affection, I dedicate this thesis to my parents.*

## Abstract

Questions of human being and identity have been around for centuries. But questions of belonging and identity politics in Britain have only upsurged since the large-scale waves of postwar immigration in the latter part of the twentieth century, especially from the Indian Subcontinent. Across the Atlantic, this era has also seen the birth of affect theory in 1962 with the publication of the *Affect Imagery Consciousness* by the American psychologist Silvan Solomon Tomkins. From an affective perspective, this thesis discusses feminist questions about women's (un)belongings in selected novels by the British South Asian women writers Suntra Gutpa, Meera Syal, Monica Ali, and Rekha Waheed. It seeks to establish whether the affective experiences of disgust, distress, pride, shame, interest, fear and anger can provide new insights into the British Asian women's belonging and sexist social and cultural identity politics. Therefore, this thesis highlights the gendered interplay between intra-personal (psychological) and extra-personal (sociocultural) dynamics of (un)belonging as an act as well as an affect.

This thesis asks whether the women characters in the selected novels in question belong or wish to (un)belong. At this postmodern age of globalisation and increased communication, crossborder movements and intercultural transactions, identity and belonging have become plural and even more variable and controversial. A simplistic yes/no answer to plural belonging is no longer the question. Instead, this thesis explores the affective social and political dynamics that influence men's and women's (un)belongings in various settings. If (un)belonging involves subjective and, at times, silent affects and feelings, I wonder what if one gives a voice to these unvoiced states and whether these affective states can react and imply action. What sort of original commentary would they produce concerning the status quo of *diasporic* (refugees, diasporans and immigrant) women's belongings and identities? Furthermore, if identity is fluid, dynamic and postmodern, can a critical analysis of these affective responses indicate a specific trend or trajectory in women's attitudes and aspirations concerning their being (self-identity) and (un)belonging within specific British South Asian contexts?

This thesis aims to answer these controversial questions affective interdisciplinary approach that draws on affect theory as first conceptualised by Spinoza and Charles Darwin and as pioneered by Tomkins and later studied by Donald L. Nathanson, Brian Massumi, Sara Ahmed and Nira Yuval-Davis. It dismantles the intersections between the 'affected', on the one hand, and the various 'affecting' social, cultural, racial or patriarchal forces outside subjectivity, on the other, to use Spinoza's words. This thesis argues that uncharted trajectories transpire about the South Asian women's aspirations to (re)define their being and belonging. This thesis is not a definitive and exhaustive account of the cornucopia of British South Asian women's writing. I hope that it will provide a missing link between gender, affect and belongings and thereby initiate a stepping-stone for further topic-related interdisciplinary studies in the future.

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## Abbreviations

<b><i>AM</i></b>	<i>Anita and Me</i> by Meera Syal
<b><i>A-Z</i></b>	<i>The A-Z Guide of Arranged Marriage</i> by Rekha Waheed
<b><i>BL</i></b>	<i>Brick Lane</i> by Monica Ali
<b><i>Life</i></b>	<i>Life Is Not All Haa Ha Hee Hee</i> by Meera Syal
<b><i>MR</i></b>	<i>Memories of Rain</i> by Sunetra Gupta
<b><i>SC</i></b>	<i>A Sin of Colour</i> by Sunetra Gupta

## Preface

When I first came to the UK more than a decade ago to complete my postgraduate studies at Brunel University London, I did not know, even after starting my course, that I would somehow end up in that ‘in-between reality’ Homi K. Bhabha writes about (*Location of Culture* 216) —never mind my reservations to the designation of inbetweenness. The civil war broke out back ‘home’ in Syria one month after starting my eventful journey, and by sheer coincidence, I became not only the authorial subject of this thesis but also, in empathy and bicultural experience, its object of study. I use the word *home* here between inverted commas to acknowledge and highlight the controversiality of this term and the multiplicity of its meanings.

Coming originally from Edward Said’s Orient and having previously completed a master’s degree in contemporary literature and culture with a dissertation on postcolonial humanism, I developed an interest in identity studies and psychology, in addition to humanism. The unique position of being astride at least two cultures has bestowed a privileged and insightful point of view on various social and cultural norms shared among many Eastern societies. It might be a claim to controversial privileges we (call us immigrants or diasporic communities) make to make up for a loss of sorts subconsciously, but let’s be optimistic and, ‘never look at the empty seats,’ as the American singer Charlie Daniels says in his 2017 memoir book that has the same title (xvi). It is indeed a matter of attitude and perspective; a half-full glass is also half-empty, allegorically speaking. This study is anyway about Tomkins’ consciousness, not Freud’s subconscious. In other words, I will not automatically attribute any feelings of alienation, unbelonging and unhappiness to such claims of inability to belong or loss of home. I will instead attempt to elicit specific and personal underpinning reasons drawing



upon an interdisciplinary approach that mainly uses affect and feminist theories and literary texts.

The first working title used was *Transnational Ethico-Aesthetics of Unbelonging in Postwar British Asian Fiction*. It might be a broad and ambitious hypothesis. Still, it is not completely different from the current theory that insightful (un)belonging (insiders outside or outsiders inside) provides the text with ethical and aesthetical values of cultural diversity. It opens up new and free horizons to belonging and non-parochial identity formations. In other words, it argues that being part of a diaspora, away from home, a writer has an opportunity to write with constructive criticism, not to satisfy nostalgic desires. When I first wrote my proposal, what echoed in my mind was Said's exciting point that Auerbach's exile and distance from home was the revelatory experience that helped him accomplish *Mimesis* (6–7). Bhabha also reiterates this point in his *Location of Culture* (13). A noteworthy divergence from the 'victim-based' viewpoints claims that diasporans and immigrants often struggle with identity crises between cultures and homes (G. Mohan 81).

Many books, such books as *The Pain of Unbelonging* by Sheila Collingwood-Whittick, clearly and only invoke negative connotations and conceptions about unbelonging. The Jamaican-British writer Joan Riley's novel *The Unbelonging* (1985) also highlights such melancholic aspects as alienation, inability to belong, loss and disorientation. Myriads of other examples prevail in literature, literary theories and relevant critical accounts of the so-called diasporic literature. My original and current contribution or general aim is to complicate perspectives and, as Daniels advises, to look at the full half of the glass! Therefore, I selected the novelists and the primary texts for authorial and textual reasons; that is, —never mind

Roland Barthes's 'The Death of the Author' (142) — the authorial biography and diasporic/immigratory background and journey matter.

In hindsight and reflection, when I first embarked on my MPhil research project, the scope was over-ambitious and broad. My thesis first aimed to study the ethics and aesthetics of unbelonging in contemporary British Asian fiction with eighteen novels by nine British Asian male and female novelists from across Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Japan, and China). It was afterwards narrowed down to the current four female British South Asian novelists: Sunetra Gupta, Meera Syal, Monica Ali and Rekha Waheed. In addition to other challenges, an oscillation between ideas, schools of thought and theories and the over-ambitiousness of scope had impeded progress and caused problems. Much time was spent on reading works by Kazuo Ishiguro, Timothy Mo, Hong Ying and Tash Aw, which are now beyond the scope of this thesis. After many years into my course, trying to cope with an overly broad context, I narrowed down *British Asian* to *British South Asian*. This focus helped focus the research efforts on a smaller geographical area but did not help with narrowing down the idea and the approach.

The moment of epiphany in the journey of this thesis to completion was during an annual progress review meeting. The panel critiqued my 'ethico-aesthetical unbelonging'. My previous second supervisor Dr Wendy Knepper, who chaired the panel meeting, pointed out the interesting textual analysis demonstrated in 'Pride and Prejudice in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*' (Chapter 3) and the 'promising' application of some aspects of affect theory. Upon further reading and research, I later decided to expand on affect theory and adopt it as an analytical tool to shed light on the *Transitive (un)belongings*, another re-modification and rephrasing of the title. That is, to argue that belonging and unbelonging are representations and reactions to

extra-personal environments and interpersonal social dynamics and politics, rather than a self-contained emotional state. Later on, I decided to narrow down the focus to *British South Asian women writers* only: Sunetra Gupta, Meera Syal, Monica Ali and Rekha Waheed.

After further reading and writing, affect theory sounded more appealing and exciting to illuminate uncharted and grey areas of the realm of women's subjectivity and untold stories. Eureka! I thought. The thesis is going to be a femino-affective study of (un)belonging. *Gender, affect* and *belonging* will be the approach. This focus clears all the previous clutter, oscillation and confusion. The seminal work of the American psychologist Silvan Tomkins and his fellow American Nathanson have been beneficial. Sara Ahmed's books have also been a source of inspiration, and they have influenced my writing in the unique way Ahmed uses affects and emotions to elicit exciting meanings. More reading and reflection on the trope of belonging have shown that such an ostensibly simple word as *unbelonging* conjures up different controversial and polar attitudes that are both subjective and relative. In other words, a diasporan's unbelonging to, and distance from, the original homeland as an emigrant can perhaps be viewed as belonging to the hostland from the position and perspective of an immigrant (Huysen 83). Furthermore, as identities are fluid and changeable or dynamic rather than static and monolithic ('Culture, Identity and Diaspora' 222), I've decided to use (un)belonging to capture those negotiations and tensions when it comes to gendered belonging and identity politics.

The journey of this thesis to completion has faced exceptional challenges and survived many adversities. The successful writing up of this thesis, despite all obstacles, is thanks to many people: my supervisory team, friends and family. It is indebted to have had their guidance, feedback and support.

Yaser Hamed  
London, 2020

## Introduction

### Section 1: Overview of Research Project

#### 1. Aims and Objectives

This thesis starts from the premise reiterated by many writers and literary critics such as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha: distance and detachment from home can be an insightful experience. That is, the various diasporic and (im)migratory experiences can provide an insight into both the home countries and cultures, as Said maintains, as well as the new home or hostland they live in, according to Bhabha (Said 5–8; Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 13). Because such a claim is too broad and vague, and because of some reservations on Bhabha's theory of those diasporic 'in-between' or 'interstitial' spaces, this thesis will focus on how (un)belonging, as a subjective act, affect or an omniscient intertwinement between distance and proximity (as detailed in Section 6), provides a constructive critique of the social and cultural aspects of identity. Specifically, it seeks to address the understudied interconnections between affect, sexism (and instances of racism) and belonging. Thus, the aim is to find out how the British South Asian women writers in question enunciate an affective discourse on identity politics foregrounding gendered tensions inherent in the collective patriarchal identity and the desire for change, (un)belonging and identity reformation on women's part.

The four British South Asian women writers are Suntra Gupta and Meera Syal (British Indian), and Monica Ali and Rekha Waheed (British Bangladeshi). A selection of their novels, chosen for their thematic concern and suitability for the scope of this thesis, constitute the subject matter for discussion in the body of this thesis. The novels are: *Memories of Rain* (1992) and *A Sin of Colour* (1995) by Sunetra Gupta, *Anita and Me* (1996) and *Life Is Not All Haa Ha Hee Hee* (1999) by Meera Syal, *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali and *The A-Z Guide of*

*Arranged Marriage* by Rekha Waheed (2005). This thesis seeks to explore how the authorial voice in these texts becomes somehow self-reflective and critical of the gendered home cultures and identities (and the culture of racism in Britain in Meerya Syal's *Anita and Me* in Chapter 3. It also aims to challenge and question the 'legitimacy' of the uncontested 'metanarratives' or claims of cultures and collective and patriarchal cultural identities (Lyotard 26). By doing so, I will complicate the models of the homogenising object-based conceptualisations of the diasporic/immigratory experience of unbelonging with heterogenous subject-based (un)belongings as discussed in detail in the following sections (See Sections 3-6).

As Deborah Lupton says in *The Emotional Self: A Sociocultural Exploration*, 'emotional experience is considered an essential and insightful conduit to knowledge' (3). In other words, it is essential to carefully consider the meanings hidden within the emotional and affective realm of human consciousness. This thesis draws on a selection of the nine affects theorised by Silvan S. Tomkins's in his *Affect Imagery Consciousness*: disgust, distress, shame, pride, interest, fear and anger, and each of these affects is paired with a text-relevant idea: lust, dejection, prejudice, change, homeliness and family. The novels the affect-theme clusters will discuss are: *Memories of Rain* (1992) and *A Sin of Colour* (1995) by Sunetra Gupta, *Anita and Me* (1996) and *Life Is Not All Haa Ha Hee Hee* (1999) by Meera Syal, *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali and *The A-Z Guide of Arranged Marriage* by Rekha Waheed (2005). These texts are chosen not only for their thematic concerns but also for the critical time span they cover from 1992 to 2005, the turn of the twenty-first century starting from the 1990s which saw an upsurge in international migrations in addition to global developments such as the post-Cold War, rise of neo-liberalism and the technological advancements (see section 2.2 for more details).

## 2. Research Questions

The challenging undertaking to study the active and affective (un)belongings and its interconnections with gendered politics (as explicated in Section 6), is bound to trigger a variety of related research questions. First and foremost, it asks whether an interdisciplinary study of Gender, Affect and *Belonging* can show new insights, tensions or interconnections between the collective cultural identity and the subjective states and acts of affect and belonging. Could an affective investigation of (un)belonging reveal women's implicit or explicit rebellion against patriarchal prejudice and injustice? How can affect theory contribute to questioning and refuting sexist and racist narratives and myths of identity?

Furthermore, do the British South Asian women writers and their selected novels show a common viewpoint in respect to their definitions of their being women and belonging to a South Asian culture? Do they usher in change and show new trajectories of identity formation and reformation? Does women's change or desire to change and reconfigure their being and belonging represent a progression, digression or regression? If women and women's actions and aspirations is being judged, who does the judgement and how ethical, political or credible are the standards of judgement, as Lyotard asks in his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (6-30)?

## 3. Contribution and Findings

This thesis makes three contributions to the current state of knowledge in terms of its approach, conceptualisation and social purpose. First, it uses an innovative interdisciplinary approach that marries between gender, affect and belonging to provide a different perspective on diasporic and immigrant experiences of belongings. Second, it thereby reconceptualises diasporic and immigratory identities and belongings as non-linear, subject-based and

heterogeneous, rather than linear, object- and position-based, and homogenised, as demonstrated in the following sections of this introductory chapter (See Sections 3, 4 and 5). This hypothetical underpinning understanding of the workings of diasporic and immigrant identities and belongings contributes to a new conceptualisation of (un)belonging as an act and affect (see full definition in Section 6).

Affect theory is applied to determine not only the trajectory and destination of belonging but also the social politics, tensions and dynamics that cause, accompany, or follow the change. This thesis has limited space and scope and therefore these negotiations and desires for change is mainly looked at from a feminist perspective. Hence, the third contribution is in fact its social purpose and humanist end. That is, through its phenomenologically oriented perspective, it foregrounds women's affective and subjective voice in face gender prejudice and cultural norms and prejudices, whether those pertaining to their South Asian home culture or the hostland's/new homeland's racial prejudice. Arguably, women are sometimes twice marginalised as is the case with Sunetra Gupta's *Moni* in Chapter 1 and many of Meera Shyal's characters in Chapter 3. Thus, the contribution of this thesis tends to support an activist mission of advocating liberation and rejecting prejudice, not simply a feminist study of gendered identity politics and affective (un)belongings.

#### **4. An Outline of the Introduction**

This introductory chapter is divided into seven sections. This section (1) is to provide an overview of the aims and objectives, research questions, contributions, a brief description of the key terms in addition to giving an outline of this whole chapter. In Section 2, I will provide an historical background to the beginnings of the phenomenon of the British Asian diasporas through postwar waves of immigrations to Britain. In Section 3, I will review and



critique the main discourses on diasporic identities and unbelonging. About six debates will be used to demonstrate the problem of in current literature: diasporans are homogenised and objectified through the very linear, position-based and judgment-based conceptualisations in which diasporics are objects, not subjects, of their own belonging and identity. The conceptual problems and shortcomings are encapsulated and articulated reiteratively in Section 4, which also highlights a problem of current approaches into postcolonial and diasporic literatures. In Section 5, I present my hypothesis and methodology and in Section 5, I define and situate the concept of (un)belonging. In the final section (Section 7), I provide an overview of the body chapters.

## Section 2: Historical Background

### 1. Globe Connected: Histories and Trajectories

In 1855, the famous American humanist poet Walt Whitman wrote in his volume 'Leaves of Grass': "The earth to be spann'd, connected by net-work / The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage / The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near" (6). About three decades later in 1889, Kipling wrote 'The Ballad of East and West' in which he, as if in a transatlantic dialectic with Whitman, wrote that 'Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet' (245). A century later, after the collapse of the British empire, the colonial eastward journey was followed by a postcolonial westward emigration; as John Henry Taylor says in *The Half-Way Generation*, the Europeans were however the first to migrate eastward to their ex-colonies during the '500-year period European Empires' (5). A variety of political and socio-economic reasons in the postwar era such as the conflicts and wars, post-empire tumultuous times, the Partition and independence of previous colonies, and the economic interests in new opportunities and transnational markets have all caused unprecedented large-scale crossborder movements of migrations and displacement (Castles et al. 84).

Diasporas, migrations and displacement, fuelled by many factors such as political crises, economic needs and cultural globalisation, have helped to 'connect' the world by 'net-work' as Whitman foresaw in 1855 (6). The physical meeting has thus taken place between the two binary poles of Orient and Occident or between 'self and other' through the new diasporic figure that has, in Leila Neti's words, 'crossed the threshold of the nation' (Neti 98). By the 1970s, as Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller say, 'the emergence of ethnic minorities was inescapable' and 'the immigrant presence in Western Europe had become so substantial that scholars and governments began to ask about its political ramifications' (73, 254). The question

has become no longer about the possibility of meeting between the East and West, but about a cornucopia of consequences of this confluence following the postwar era of large-scale migrations (Brazier and Mannur, 'Diaspora' 1; Maxey 217; Anwar, *Between Cultures* 10–11; T. Weiss 37; Castles and Miller 104; Westwood and Phizacklea 5; Castles et al. 84). As Castles et al point out, these developments and demographical changes have the potential to reconfigure the social, cultural and political stability of any society (123). Hence, to give some credit to Kipling, despite the East-West meeting, tensions persist. Homi Bhabha, Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi among so many other writers and literary critics, still dispute the Kipling-Waltman dialectic.

As Skotnes and Benmayor also argue, crossborder migrations have indeed proliferated the 'zones of cultural contact with creative constructions of identity and belonging' (vii). As Hall says in 1996, the postwar developments have led to an upsurge of scholarly interest in identity studies ('Introduction: Who Needs an Identity?' 1). The sociologist philosopher Zygmunt Bauman not only reaffirms Hall's standpoint but also contends that the unprecedented attention to the issue of identity has caused an intellectual 'avalanche' that has recast our way of thinking in the humanities like a 'prism through which other topical aspects of contemporary life are spotted, grasped and examined' (471). Belonging is not only closely associated with identity, as Greg A. Maddison says, also, according to Tuuli Lahdesmaki et al, it has received as much academic interest on its own recently and studies primarily concerned with this line of enquiry have seen a remarkable upsurge since the turn of the twenty-first century (Lähdesmäki et al. 233; Madison 47).

Peter van der Veer introduces his book *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* underscoring the importance and 'insights' one can gain from

studying the unique phenomenon of the South Asian diaspora due to its size as the largest diasporic group in the world, and also ‘complexity and diversity’ (1). Furthermore, he contends that the ‘different historical trajectories’ and the ‘fragmented nature’ of the heterogeneous South Asian diasporic experiences destabilise any potential homogenisation or use of the term ‘South Asian,’ which entails a study of the specifics and particulars, as this study aims to do (1). Thus, while Whitman does show foresight to have ushered in this contemporary age of globalisation, multiculturalism and diasporisation, Kipling is also right to perhaps stress his reservations on the meeting and highlight the potential problems and tensions this might incur, not to read his poetic statement literally.

## **2. 1945-1990s: An Era of Postwar Migrations**

‘Britain is now permanently a multi-racial and multi-cultural society. Asians are an integral part of British society,’ writes Anwar (*Between Cultures* xii). Immigration and diasporas, especially the South Asian, have thus reshaped British society, socially, culturally and demographically (Maxey 217). As Anwar says in *Between Cultures: Continuity and Change in the Lives of Young Asians Britain*, this country has ‘received and absorbed’ so many people coming from different places around the world (*Between Cultures* 1). Braziel and Mannur also refer to the settlement of thousands of South Asian immigrants in postwar Britain (*Theorizing Diaspora* 1). The number of Indian immigrants in the diaspora reached millions after the end of the ‘indenture system’ (Mohanram and Sim viii). Anwar cites 49,000 South Asian (Indian and Pakistani) immigrants in Britain by 1961 in addition to the following waves of ‘chain migration’ of friends and family (2). Taylor maintains that migrations to the West have been the result of various factors and developments (5). In the flourishing postwar British industry, a great number of South Asians emigrated from the Subcontinent to Britain for economic reasons, according to Anwar, but they had very low income working in the ‘unskilled

sectors' (*Between Cultures* 17). This immigration, Anwar adds, is a result of what he calls 'institutional arrangements' when British overseas companies encouraged workers to relocate and migrate abroad (*Between Cultures* 3).

The history of this South Asian presence in the British society reached another landmark by the 1990s, which is the decade of transnational migrations and crossborder movements (Lindstrom 30; Daiya 15). Robinson writes that "writers and observers have estimated the number of displaced people during the last decade of the twentieth century at over 200 million" (Robinson vii). The Asian population in Britain 'increased substantially' in the 1990s<sup>1</sup> (Anwar, *Between Cultures* 182). There has been an increase of migrations and crossborder movements in the 1990s because of four main reasons: first, the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1991; second, the fall of Berlin Wall in 1989; third, the crisis in former Yugoslavia; and fourth, the continuing postcolonial conflicts in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (Lindstrom 30; Daiya 15). According to Castles and Miller, the reunification of Germany and the Gulf War in the 1990s had a significant impact on migrations across Europe (Castles and Miller 11). Daiya cites the 'economic globalisation and the end of the Cold war' as the accelerator of the cross-border migrations since 1990 as the number of migrants reached 120 million worldwide (15). In a similar vein, Castles and Miller refers to the post-Cold War era that 'ushered in a period marked by enormous change and uncertainty' (1).

As Salman Rushdie says, these 'upheavals' of the 1989 and 1990 have reshaped the 'structures of the world' and brought about a 'transformed international scene, with its new possibilities, uncertainties, intransigences and dangers' (1). The transnational migrations and

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<sup>1</sup> It increased from about 100,000 in the 1961 to approximately 1.7 million in 1996 (Anwar, *Between Cultures* 182).

the scholarly interest in this remarkable phenomenon show no signs of abating in the twenty-first century (Daiya 15). Thus, ‘emigration/immigration,’ according to Timothy Weiss, ‘has become a distinguishing characteristic of the contemporary world’ (37). New ‘diasporic spaces’ and ‘imagined nations’ emerged (Daiya 16). As Andor Skotnes and Rina Benmayor say, the various postwar developments and events 1945-1990s have proliferated the ‘zones of cultural contact with creative constructions of identity and belonging’(vii). So more studies have sought explore the impact of globalisation and transnational migrations on cultures and cultural identities in an increasingly more connected world (Jones 210; Daiya 16).

According to Anwar, by the 1990s, a genre of immigrant and diaspora literature has evolved (*Between Cultures* 182). Diasporic literatures and theories have addressed at length and with great elaboration the theme of postwar identities, attracting considerable scholarly interest, and in that process, has created a range of disparate attitudes. According to Shirley Chew, British South Asian diasporic fiction has witnessed significant changes and expansion since the 1970s, and it is expected to undergo further changes in the future (xii). Susheila Nasta maintains that ‘the figure of the immigrant has clearly become a fashionable trope in metropolitan postmodern and postcolonial literary studies’ (6). In ‘DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,’ Homi Bhabha talks about the ‘scatterings’ and ‘gatherings,’ that is, ‘the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering’:

Gatherings of exiles and émigrés and refugees, gathering on the edge of ‘foreign’ cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another’s language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds

lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also the gathering of the people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal statutes, immigration status — the genealogy of that lonely figure that John Berger named the seventh man. (291)

Due to the worldwide developments and big social and cultural changes, the turn of this century, roughly from 1990 to the present, is a key period that has witnessed a reinvigorated academic interest in discourses of globalisation, plural identities and cosmopolitan ideals (Trepanier and Habib 1; Werbner, ‘Introduction’ 2; Lewis 4; Vieten 1). As Lee Trepanier and Khalil M. Habib say in their introduction to *Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Globalization: Citizens without States*, notions of belonging to the world and believing in the upholding of human rights, freedom and democracy have been in the spotlight of academic attention in this period (Trepanier and Habib 1; Werbner, ‘Introduction’ 2). But, on the other hand, as Jenny Robinson points out, the sense of belonging associated with place has been destabilised and problematised by experiences of displacement, which reinforce ‘a very particular view of “place” as somewhere to belong, or where life is settled and, therefore, better’ (9).

Bhabha’s notions of the diasporic spaces explicated in his *Location of Culture* and Rushdie’s dwelling in the interstitial comma of his 1995 book *East, West* seem to voice Kiplingian tensions and politics in the post-meeting age. Furthermore, in his *My Beautiful Laundrette and the Rainbow Sign*, Hanif Kureishi points out the problem of discrimination, unbelonging and uprootedness many Pakistanis and South Asians experienced in Britain in the latter part of the twentieth century, especially in the 1960s and 1970s (9). He says, ‘Pakistanis were a risible subject in England, derided on television and exploited by politicians. They had the worst jobs, they were uncomfortable in England, some of them had difficulties with the

English language. They were despised and out of place' (9). Thus, the problems and politics of identity, place and belonging have triggered a wide range of debates and disputes and they continue to be a hot topic. Britishness and diasporic position (East, West or in between) seem to be the subject of most debates while others are concerned with a special inbetweenness. Diasporans do not seem to be the subject (not to say diasporic women) because their different and heterogeneous experiences are homogenised and thereby their specificities are overlooked in the process. I will demonstrate in the critical review of six key debates in following section (1.3).



### Section 3: A Critical Review: Diasporics As Homogenised Objects

In this section, I will present six of the most common debates of diasporic identity and (un)belonging. The purpose is to demonstrate how diasporics are *objectified* and *homogenised* by these six *linear*, *bipolar* and *two-dimensional position-based* debates and conceptualisations. In other words, diasporics are an object of positioning that are conceptually thrown somewhere on a linear space *here* (West), *there* (East), or *in between*. This will help to situate and make sense of my alternative hypothetical conceptualisation of this phenomenon as illustrated in Section 5. In the first part of this section (3.1), I will show how the diasporic presence is conceived of as a threat to British identity. The varied and heterogeneous experiences and specificities do not matter at all. What matters is that they do not belong *here* in Britain and, therefore, the argument goes, they should be kept away and excluded. This thinking breeds and fuels racial discrimination, as will be discussed in Section 3.2. These two racist viewpoints are not at all concerned with difference as diasporans and immigrants are homogenised and collectively rejected as not belonging *here*. In Section 3.3, this attitude is disputed with a counterargument seeking to reshape Britishness to include the newcomers; British identity is thus not only white and monocultural, but a multicultural black-and-white space. Again, regardless of the welcoming and tolerant tone, diasporics (who do belong and are an integral part of Britain) are objectified as the debate is more concerned with *positioning* and *placing* them *here*.

In Section 3.4, the debate moves from inclusion to crisis. Despite being included *here*, diasporics, especially members of the diasporic communities, are claimed to have a dilemma of belonging. It is claimed that they cannot belong *here* (in the West/Britain) because of being attached to homes back *there* (in the East/South Asia). Thus, in Section 3.5, the presence becomes a ‘foreign country,’ while the past is the desired home to return to (Hartley 9–10).

Such debates are not only thus ‘victim’-based in which diasporics struggle with acceptance or belonging, to use Robin Cohen’s word. This is not to say that many authors have not celebrated the inbetweenness, such as Cohen himself, who maintains that diaspora’s unique position ‘inside and outside’ is an aesthetic and insightful positive experience (149), as will be discussed in Section 6.1. The final part of this section (3.6) seeks to discuss the remarkable shift from *here* and *there*, to *nowhere* and/or *everywhere* through cosmopolitan and chameleonic belonging where the world is home. I will critique some views that equate chameleonic belonging with cosmopolitanism; hence, I question the *cosmoleonic* thinking of identity and belonging and the absence of gender in cosmopolitan theory.

### **1. Protecting Britishness: To Stop the Threat of Aliens?**

The Anglo-centred perspective, as illustrated in dominates so many accounts of the diasporic phenomenon. As Sallie Westwood and Annie Phizaclea maintain, the immigrant figure, ‘embodied and imagined, condenses our concerns with race, space and time and politics of belonging’ (3). In *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Leela Gandhi maintains that ‘waves of voluntary and unwanted migrations continue to challenge the cultural and demographic stability of the Western world’ (134). As Stephen Castles, Hein de Hass and Mark J. Miller also say, immigrants have been deemed a ‘threat’ because of the ‘perception of migrant and migrant-background populations as challenging the cultural status quo’ (200). Rajesh Rai and Peter Reeves also maintain that the emergence of non-native communities ‘can be a cause for concern on the part of the ‘hosts’, who may feel threatened by the emergence of a new social entity in their midst, practising strange rites, set in very different ways of social behaviour’ (8).

Yasmin Hussain and Lindstrom reiterate this same point about the concerns of some white Britons about the preservation of identity and protection of their security from the ‘threat’ of immigrants (Hussain 6; Lindstrom 289). Paul Gilroy calls such concerns as ‘pathologies of nationalism’ (‘The Sugar You Stir . . .’ 126). In her *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain*, Susheila Nasta reiterates that the increasing number of immigrants from Asia and Africa in postwar Britain have ‘challenged embedded conceptions of “Englishness”, an imagined homeland built on ideas of purity, rootedness and cultural dominance’ (2). Taylor argues that ‘Western countries need not, should not and cannot control transborder movement in the manner attempted up till now’ and he recommends collaboration between the nation-states that send and receive migrants in order to solve this intractable problem co-operatively (6). This points out the racial insularity and peninsular mentality that conceives of the other as an object of fear and threat. Castles et al maintain that such views are prevalent across Europe in the latter part of the twentieth century and they are conducive to ‘migrant insecurity’ (200).

In her debut novel *Anita and Me*, Syal refers to racial thinking and discrimination (conscious and unconscious), which is a result of perceiving the other to be not only an outsider but also a threat and source of fear to distance oneself from. Asians and blacks in Britain are thus not by default subjects of fear that actively form a threat to British way of life, culture and identity; rather, they are simply imagined objects of fear, mental constructs seen so by some white indigenes as a misinterpretation caused by their own provincial minds. Under ‘The Affective Politics of Fear’ in her *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed illustrates such misunderstanding and misconception with an affective analysis of Frantz Fanon’s description of the white man’s fear of the black man (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 62–63; Fanon 111–14). The black man trembles and shakes because of cold, while the white boy’s racialised imagination misinterprets this trembling as a sign of anger, hatred and intention to

bite him (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 62–63; Fanon 111–14). The black man is therefore an imaginary threat construct, a backdrop object onto whom one's imagined and 'learned' fears are projected and inscribed (Greenberg 37).

Similarly, Salman Rushdie contends in his *Imaginary Homelands* that the 'dream-England is no more than a dream. [And] sadly it is a dream from which many white Britons refuse to be awake from' (18). Catherine Jones also point out the voices that rose in British society to 'impose some legislative restrictions upon the free immigration of destitute aliens' (80). Anwar recalls the controversies around the issue of non-white immigration to Britain in 1960s when Enoch Powell, the MP for Wolverhampton South West at the time, was dropped from the Tory shadow cabinet after his racial speech 'Rivers of Blood' on twentieth April 1968 (*Between Cultures* 11–12). Among many anti-immigrant campaigners in the 1960s, Powell stood against non-white immigration and the rising racial discrimination led the Labour government at the time to enact the infamous Race Relations Act of 1968, which was criticised by British South Asians as 'creating a two-tier British citizenship' (11). Today's rising anti-immigrant voice in British politics is therefore not something new but it has roots in the twentieth century British history.

The Polish-British philosopher Zygmunt Bauman points out that British and Western people's fear of refugees and immigrants can be psychologically explained. As he argues in his interview with Felicity Barr on Aljazeera English, the 'Global Powers' of globalisation have caused large-scale uncertainty and insecurity, far stronger than any local authority's capacity to cope. One of the consequences is the emergence of the 'precariat,' which refers to people who live in 'Liquid Fear' that is 'diffuse' and not necessarily 'concrete and specific'. According to him, the word 'precariat' comes from French and literally means 'walking on moving sand,'

which connotes the uncertainty and the constant fear of loss of employment, income, relationships and so on. They live 'by anxiety, by fear,' he says. When the refugees and immigrants arrive in the West, they face the 'precariat' to whom the refugees seem to 'signalise' and 'embody' all their fears and anxieties. He says that 'They bring the threats from far away countries here at our backyard. They suddenly appear next to us so you can't turn your back, we can't turn our face. They are too obtrusive, there are too many of them. We can't omit their presence. And they signalise, they embody our fears' (Aljazeera English).

This argument is in line with the psychological and affective understanding of the formation of fear. First, uncertainty in the outside world contributes to the arousal of fear because, as Robert M. Gordon explains in 'Fear,' 'fearing requires uncertainty' (560). Second, as John Kekes says in 'Fear and Reason,' the threat or danger that evokes fear can be 'real or imagined' (555). According to Bauman, Morgan and Kekes, it is perhaps that uncertainties in the real world tend to create imagined threats by means of misinterpreting the world and mistaking the wrong object of fear as the real threat. Many political campaigns heavily draw on, contribute to or strive against some sort of affective dislocation. Some Brexiteers, for instance, succeeded in redirecting almost all uncertainties in British society to fear from the other as a threat to economy, security, Britishness and even happiness, the Brit-centred one.

According to Germaine Greer, 'unbelonging hurts' but 'belonging hurts, too, when what you belong to and what belongs to you is being withheld, exploited, undermined and destroyed. That pain is entirely destructive, toxic, relentless, maddening' ('Preface' xi). Thus, as Bauman also suggests, it is perhaps ironic and provocative to argue that unbelonging is perhaps also, paradoxically, a symptom of those patriotic and nationalist 'precariat' who call for protecting and reclaiming their countries. They may think they fully belong to the country they

seek to 'reclaim' but they in fact belong to that form of provincial dreamland untouched by immigration and other forces of globalisation. These people's assertions that their lands (cultural, demographic and social) do not reflect and return that full belonging is perhaps a form of unbelonging, an unrequited full belonging that is continuously becoming partial and uncertain. The difference is therefore seen from the perspective of communicating vessels in the sense that 'they' displaces and reduces 'us'. The diasporic figure is clearly not the centre of attention here but rather an insignificant and unwelcome other revolving around the epicentre of self-interested British narcissistic identity.

## **2. Racial Discrimination: To Exclude the Inferior Others?**

The political sense of the nation-state as conferring the right to 'exclude non-citizens' is a recent late-nineteenth-century phenomenon (Taylor 5). As Anwar explains, the UK enacted laws and put in measures to control immigration in the 1960s (10-11). Racial discrimination against immigrants has prevailed in line with the upsurge of postwar immigration. In *An Immigration History of Britain*, Panikos Panayi refers to a 'pervasive nature of discrimination in British society' in the 1960s and 1970s (200-01). As Castles and Miller say, racism is 'a threat, not only to the immigrants, but also to the democratic institutions and social order' (14). In *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, Rushdie warns of the racial 'chasm' that divides British society and endangers social cohesion (134). He adds:

And the rift isn't narrowing; it's getting wider. We stand on opposite sides of the abyss, yelling at each other and sometimes hurling stones, while the ground crumbles beneath our feet.[...] The fact remains that every major institution in this country is permeated by racial prejudice to some degree, and the unwillingness of the white majority to recognize this is the main reason why it can remain the case. (134)

In Syal's *Anita and Me*, Meena dwells on the thoughts of the Indian Bank manager being attacked by her white peers and on Sam's words: "Yow don't know what we want! None of yow lot!" (AM 192, 282). These racial acts (physical and verbal) are claimed to be an externalisation of a sense of endangered of identity or imagined fear of castrated belonging that is thought to exclude inferior outsiders, the Others. Rushdie maintains that there is obvious 'institutional racial prejudice' and steps must be taken to face the risks: 'It is not good enough to deplore the existence of neo-Fascists in society. They exist because they are permitted to exist,' Rushdie says (134–35).

Brah's example of the black British Jamaican, who has more sense of belonging to London than to Jamaica, but still identifies herself as Jamaican —the identity foregrounded when the blacks are racially described to be 'outside "Britishness"'— (190), invokes the concept of 'disbelonging,' an intentional exclusion and *not letting one belong* (Spurlin 2, 20). This exclusion echoes Meena's experience, even though much of the discrimination against Meena is unconscious as will be illustrated in Chapter 3. Ahmed also discusses what she calls 'stranger danger' in her book *Strange Encounters* as she humorously refers to 'encounters with aliens, those who are beyond the category of "the human" [ . . . and are ] not from this planet' (*Strange Encounters* 1–3). Castles and Miller define racism as 'the process whereby social groups categorise other groups as different or inferior' (32). This definition that is built upon the inferior-superior formula supports Rushdie's claims that 'British thought, British society, has never been cleansed of the filth of imperialism' which draws on the assumption that 'military superiority implied cultural superiority' (131–32). Rushdie maintains that even multiculturalism, which is 'the latest token gesture' towards the immigrant communities, should be 'exposed, like "integration" and "racial harmony", for the sham it is; because multiculturalism keeps stereotyping' (137). Like Rushdie, Stuart Hall also questions British

multiculturalism and exposes ‘the insidious—and ostensibly multiculturalist— procedures whereby the convenient Othering and exoticisation of ethnicity merely confirms and stabilises the hegemonic notion of ‘Englishness’ (Gandhi 126).

Rushdie contends that the prejudice and discrimination immigrants suffered from in postwar Britain has not shown this country as ‘the England of fair play, tolerance, decency and equality—maybe that place never existed anyway, except in fairy-tales,’ says Rushdie (134). Similarly, in *My Beautiful Laundrette and Rainbow Sign*, Kureishi reflects upon his childhood and recalls those days when he was ‘ashamed’ of his ‘Pakistani self’ and therefore he sought to renounce his identity; ‘it was a curse and I wanted to be rid of it,’ he says (9). This experience of Kureishi’s echoes Meera Syal’s Meena who also experiences racism and attempts to deny her Indianness, as will be further explained in Chapter 3 where I use the affects of pride and shame to externalise Syal’s response to racism and the underpinning reasons for Maya to ostensibly disclaim her Indianness in favour of Britishness. Meena adopts what Meera Syal and Rekha Waheed call a ‘coconut identity,’ brown/black outside and white inside, a form of bilateral (un)belonging referred to with different views in Syal’s *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* and Waheed’s *The A-Z Guide to Arranged Marriage* (Syal, *Life* 144; Waheed, *A-Z* 14).

My reading of Meena’s (un)belonging in Syal’s *Anita and Me* contradicts conventional and simplistic readings that draw on theories of identity crises and inability to belong being stuck between two identities and cultures, as claimed by critics like, for example, Shweta Kushal and Evangeline Manickam (87), Rosellen Brown (7), and Leila Neti (98). I compare Meena’s fictional experience with Hanif Kureishi’s as both seem to switch between belongings and unbelongings, affecting attitudes of ostensible denial and adoption to ward off racial discrimination. These (un)belongings are thus, by implication, claimed to be intransitive states



(self-contained and intrapersonal) and the diasporic is reduced to an object of its own inextricable and intractable status quo of position in between binary poles of homes, places and cultures. But this thesis asks, what if the perspectives are shifted in a way that gives the voice and judgment to the subject of (un)belonging? Are (un)belongings not transitive, denoting to social and political forces outside subjectivity as active affects (as will be further discussed in Section 6.3)?

### **3. Reshaping Britishness: To Include the Outsiders?**

Immigrants of various generations are now part of the British society (Braziel and Mannur, 'Diaspora' 1; Maxey 217; Anwar, *Between Cultures* xii, 10–11; T. Weiss 37; Castles and Miller 104; Westwood and Phizacklea 5). As Murphy and Sim say, the British demographical scene has undergone significant transformations and there has been increasing scholarly interest in debates about the reformation and reconceptualisation of British identity ('Introduction' 5–6) In *Global South Asians: Introducing the Modern Diaspora*, Judith Margaret Brown maintains that immigrant communities are 'included or excluded from concepts of national identity at different times; their own sense of belonging is also liable to change' (113). Westwood and Phizacklea quote the well-known cultural theorist Stuart Hall's ironic 'West and the rest' to critique the concentration on the differences, rather than the 'shared histories and cultures' (5). So rather than concentrating on the differences and dissimilarities, they seek to foreground what is common and shared between immigrant communities and the larger hostland British society, ushering in a form of British identity that comprises white, Asian and black people (5). Thus, despite persistent racialization of British identity and racial discrimination in British society as explained in the previous paragraphs, there have been voices calling for a reappraisal of Britishness: to include non-indigenous and non-white cultures and elements.

Bhabha sounds very critical of the ‘fatal notions of a self-contained European culture and the absurd notion of an uncontaminated culture in a single country’ (‘Culture’s In-Between’ 54). In *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture, and Ethnicity*, Yasmin Hussain also argues that Britishness is now perhaps ‘corroded and expanded’ to include non-white diasporic communities (15). Murphy and Sim maintain that British literature, for example, is no more a viable denomination, at least as a monocultural literature (‘Introduction’ 2). They maintain that the increased immigratory and diasporic presence has not only caused a ‘problematization of Britishness’ but also, through their significant literary and cultural contributions, diasporics ‘enjoin an expansion of the cultural and semantic parameters of Britishness—or Englishness’ (*British Asian Fiction: Framing the Contemporary* 2). They also contend that, ‘the dynamics of multi-ethnic belonging and affiliation in Britain’ stands out in many literary and lit-critical works to usher in that ‘exciting, inaugural moment when non-European contours were added to the literary map of the postwar British fiction’ (*British Asian Fiction: Framing the Contemporary* 5).

Such a debate on reshaping Britishness and inclusion is positive and inclusive perhaps but is still Anglocentric, not diasporic-centred, in perspective. What the three main debates discussed so far are concerned with in effect is the positioning of an outsider and marginal object within the social, cultural and political Brit-centred *here* spaces, which understates, or perhaps obliterates, the values of the varied personal and affective experiences, voices and (un)belonging of diasporics as subjects. These debates are obsessed with inclusion and exclusion and are narcissistically centred on Britain as the subject of discussion. This conceptual standpoint underestimates and overlooks the important diasporic-centred point of view and the tensions and negotiations within the diasporic spaces (communities and societies)

whether in Britain or in South Asian (India and Bangladesh) as the novels selected show in the following chapters.

#### 4. Schizophrenic Inbetweeners: A Bipolar Tug of War?

Passive descriptions of diasporic (un)belonging as schizophrenic and stuck in between poles of homelands and hostlands (non- and quasi-homes) are abundant in fact and fiction. Ralph J. Crane's explains the so-called 'crisis of identity' as the 'dislocation and cultural expatriation (a sense of belonging to one place and simultaneous refusal to accept another)' (1, 4). Bhabha also describes 'minoritarian' formations as a 'predicament' (*Location of Culture* xvii). In a similar vein, in his collection of short stories *East, West* (1995), Rushdie believes that immigrants like himself constitute the comma between the binary poles of East and West or, otherwise, simply reside within that comma-sphere (Kuortti 184; Maunder 131). He tends to support a Bhabha-style tertiary sphere, or a conjunction of sorts in between Kipling's absolute others, somewhere in Bhabha's 'third-space' (*Location of Culture* 56).

However, Rushdie's stories show that he strongly agrees with diasporic theories of loss, alienation and inability to belong. This view is castigated in Bruce King's review *East, West*. King contends that Rushdie's title 'uses a superficial opposition typical of the worst theorists' and that the last story within the collection, 'The Courter,' is, according to King, 'inflated with nonsense about being caught between two worlds and refusing to choose' ('Review of East, West' 650). The crux of this debate is living physically in the West but conceived of as struggling in between the East and West, psychologically speaking. So, whether Rushdie proposes a go-between link or a potential in-between sphere, the juxtaposition and polarisation of binary spaces, with alienated immigrants and diasporans in between, tends to support King's negative evaluation of this conceptual standpoint.

The Jamaican-British novelist Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985) is an outstanding example from early postcolonial women's writing concerning the passive feelings of alienation and unbelonging. The protagonist in *The Unbelonging* Hyacinth Williams is a thirteen-year-old girl who struggles with alienation, racism and a painful sense of (un)belonging after she leaves Jamaica to live with her father and step-mother in England (17, 29, 67). Hyacinth's experience echoes Kureishi's and Meena's childhood accounts of racial discrimination. Her PE teacher Mrs Mullins, for example, shouts at her: 'You blacks had better learn that you are in our country now' or when her classmates say, 'go back to the jungle where you come from' (17, 19). In outlook and general thematic concerns, Riley's *Unbelonging* is similar to Rushdie's 'The Courter' story in *East, West*.

Rushdie's concept of the in-between comma echoes Bhabha's Third Space outlined in his *Location of Culture* (2004). Bhabha strives to realise Kipling's impossible meeting and actualise a diasporic form of (un)belonging and 'intimacy that questions binary divisions,' according to him (19). He theorises an 'in-between' 'liminal space' which is an 'interstitial passage between fixed identifications' (10). But while he strives against polarity, he seems to slip into homogenisation claiming that the 'Third Space' would erase alterity as we would 'emerge as others of our selves' (61). Leila Neti claims that diasporans live in an alienating 'threshold' or 'cusp' position (97). As Madison argues in his book *The End of Belonging*, this 'liminal space' can also be on the peripheries of hostland societies (7). Madison moves a step further in the debate of diasporic (un)belonging to voice his concerns for those immigrants and refugees who live marginalised on the fringes of western societies 'without a sense of belonging' (7). In a similar vein, Westwood and Phizacklea reiterate the same viewpoint maintaining that 'there is no space for a sense of belonging' for refugees and immigrants as 'they must be on the move, shunted from border in search of a home and a safe place' (162).

The message encapsulated in Madison's book title is perhaps a daring declaration of 'the end of belonging'.

While Kureishi, Rushdie and Bhabha argue for the *absence of full belonging* (a form of partial belonging), Madison's, and Westwood and Phizacklea's go further to enunciate *full absence of belonging*. In her foreword prefacing *The Pain of Unbelonging: Alienation and Identity in Australasian Literature*, Germaine Greer points out 'the pain of unbelonging' and contends that it 'hurts' ('Preface' ix, x). Clearly, the claim is that diasporans are doomed to struggle and suffer with no belonging or at least, as Rushdie puts it, to 'fall between two stools' with agonising partial belonging (15). Such claims seem to be colonised with a clichéd rhetoric of universalised crises of identity. They are also obsessed with the idea of positioning diasporic identities linearly in between poles of identification, and collectively as if they were homogenous objects and their heterogeneous identities where a single and non-fluid identity. Allegorically speaking, they are stuck in middle of a tug of war game. It really hurts! But an embedded aim of this thesis is to decolonise the trope of identity and identities from this negativity and spotlight the archaeology (causes) and aetiology (effects and futures).

The idea of homes repressed and then re-surfacing again invokes Sigmund Freud's 'The Uncanny' in which he argues that the homely and the unhomely, the familiar and the unfamiliar, or the '*heimlich*' and the '*unheimlich*' work in unison to trigger strange uncanny feelings. In their 'Introduction: Constructing the Diasporic Body,' Ralph J. Crane and Radhika Mohanram seek psychoanalytical answers to the meaning and dynamics of home memory, integration and belonging in this Freudian theory of the uncanny. Freud argues that 'this uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed' (Freud 148; Crane and

Mohanram ix–x). Crane and Mohanram imply that their Freudian conceptualisation of the negotiations and dynamics of homes can shed more light on the workings of diasporic identities. They maintain that, ‘the subcontinental home that is repressed to allow the construction of an identity which accommodates – and is accommodated by – the West does inevitably surface. As psychoanalysis teaches us, what is repressed eventually forces its way out’ (x). As such, the familiar and unfamiliar interact upon the diasporic body as ‘bodies belong to, and are materialised in places, terrains and landscapes’ (Crane and Mohanram x).

This is in fact an interesting application of the Freudian theory of the familiar-unfamiliar interplay to further explore the psychic negotiations of diasporic homes and non-homes. What is especially commendable is the foregrounding of the subjective intra-personal workings of (un)belonging. The shortcoming of such an interpretation is its overreliance on the theory of the subconscious and tending to draw a single general conclusion about the phenomenon of varied and variable diasporic (un)belongings, objectifying them by means of discounting the differences involved. This thesis however draws mainly on conscious affects, rather than the subconscious psychology, and it aims to explore the individual and personal experiences by an interdisciplinary analysis of the particulars of the subjectivities and voices of diasporic women.

### **5. The Past Qua Home: The Present Is a ‘Foreign Country’?**

The British novelist Leslie Poles Hartley begins his novel *The Go Between* stating ‘The past is a foreign country: they do things differently’ because Leo Colston could not understand or remember the events in the diary he stumbles upon (9–10). Rushdie however disagrees with Hartley that for most diasporans and immigrants, it is the ‘present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time,’ he says (9). This section aims to illustrate this viewpoint that diasporans live physically in the present location while

longing to and emotionally obsessed with the past as home and home as past and lost. Hyacinth in Riley's *The Unbelonging* seems to be nostalgic of Jamaica and her pleasant past, sunny days and care-free time in there. When she is asked by her schoolmates to return to 'the jungle' where she belongs, Hyacinth retorts, 'I come from a city. A nice big city with lots of sunshine and grass' (19). She 'bitterly' regrets leaving Jamaica for England where, as she tells Peter Adams from social services, she feels 'strange everywhere in this country' (70). 'The thought of Jamaica sustained her' and her longing and desire to return there 'remained constant, steadfast' has turned into a 'passionate force' (17, 46, 68).

Hyacinth's statements seem to endorse Rushdie's that the past, unlike the present, is the home desired, which also supports his inversion of Hartley's notion of past as strange, different and uncanny to diasporics and displaced people (Hartley 9–10; Rushdie 9; Riley 17, 46, 68). Hyacinth's story and Rushdie's ideas conform to Janelle L. Wilson's definition of nostalgia. According to Wilson, nostalgia was first diagnosed by Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer as a 'medical condition' of 'extreme homesickness' and 'persistent thoughts about home, melancholy, insomnia, anorexia, weakness, anxiety, lack of breath, and palpitations of the heart' (21). Thus, the claimed diasporic inbetweenness is not simply spatial between geographical homes (with all the social and cultural variety and difference associated with home), but it is also claimed to be temporal between the past and the present.

But what, and where is home? Home is indeed integral to the understanding of diasporic longing and (un)belonging but it is a problematic and variable concept, especially among different generations of immigrants. For instance, in Syal's *Anita and Me* (Chapter 3), the first-generation father Shyam tells his daughter, 'We will take Nanima home ourselves' but the taken-for-granted-ness of home shocks Meena, who says, 'I felt strange that he used that word "home" so naturally, did that mean that everything surrounding us was merely our temporary

lodgings?’ (AM 263). Clearly, home in her father’s definition does not mean the same to her. This dialogue recurs in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (Chapter 5) when Shehana confronts her father Chanu’s ideas and dreams of home. Unlike her father who is born in Dhaka, Bangladesh and then immigrates to Britain, Shehana is a second-generation British-born Bengali girl living along with her parents and younger sister in East London. When the family gather around the newly bought computer to search for kadam flowers on the internet, Chanu and Nazneen’s ‘noticeable excitement’ contrasts with Shehan’s disinterest. To her parents, the kadam flower is symbolic of home, but it is just *a* flower to Shehan; she argues in English that what the family is doing (searching and watching kadam flowers) is ‘bor-ing’ (M. Ali, *BL* 143). As Avtar Brah says, home for Shyam and Chanu among other first-generation immigrants is a ‘mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination’ (*Cartographies of Diaspora* 188–89).

Chanu does eventually make the long-awaited eastward journey back ‘home’ but it turns out to be disillusioning to rediscover home in Dhaka and Bangladesh. ‘One cannot step in the river twice,’ he says to his wife Nazneen over the phone from Dhaka in a meaningful moment of reality (366). The home he had in mind and imagination is not the home he finds there. According to Wilson and Brah, it is not feasible to achieve a loco-temporal return, that is, to return to a location as it was at the time of emigration, or to go back to homes mentally constructed by the diasporic imagination through memory and romanticisation (J. L. Wilson 27; Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora* 189). In a similar vein, Hyacinth’s return to Jamaica in Riley’s *The Unbelonging* is also shockingly disillusioning. Ironically, she is told in Jamaica to ‘go back whey o come from,’ that is to England (142). She discovers that the ‘dream world’ homeland is in fact a ‘nightmare’ and she feels ‘rejected, unbelonging’ (139–42). ‘She remembered England as a child, the beatings, the jeers. “Go back where you belong,” they said, and then she had thought she knew where that was. But if it was not Jamaica, where did she



belong?’ (142). Clearly, it is impossible for Hyacinth and Chanu to satisfy the nostalgic memories and actualise *the* imagined return by re-living the same past moments that have gone by once and for all, which seems to cause negative feelings of melancholy, alienation and unbelonging (J. L. Wilson 21; Riley 142).

On the other hand, Chanu’s and Hyacinth’s desires to return home are for the purpose of *being and feeling at home* and actualising *the sense of belonging*. When this end of the return is not met, is home still home? According Byron Miller home is not a geographical place, but a ‘haven’ and ‘heaven,’ where one does belong (73). In *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations*, Nira Yuval-Davis stresses that belonging involves an ‘emotional attachment’ and ‘feeling at home’ (*Politics of Belonging* 10). Thus, home, belonging and homeliness are inseparable. This thesis builds on this conception of home to raise the question of gendered homes and belongings, wondering why (British) South Asian women in the novels in question, unlike men, often lack this positive feeling of belonging and at-home-ness. Examples of sexist marginalisation of women at home abound in the texts selected for this study. For example, in Chapter 5, Nazneen’s patronised sister Hasina, a woman who never leaves Bangladesh, does not show feelings of homeliness, security and safety despite being at home. Like Yuval-Davis, Brah maintains that home is ‘a place with which we remain intimate even in moments of intense alienation from it. It is a sense of “feeling at home”’ (Brah 4). This thesis will explore the social and cultural ‘metanarratives’ of the collective identity as the grounds justifying oppression and triggering a diasporic feminist rebellion aiming to reconfigure the gendered ‘metanarrative’ of the collective sociocultural identity, to borrow Lyotard’s word (35).

Brah also poses a good question about places becoming homes: ‘When does a location become home? What is the difference between ‘feeling at home’ and staking claim to a place as one's own? It is quite possible to feel at home in a place and, yet, the experience of social exclusions may inhibit public proclamations of the place as home’ (190). She gives the example of a British Jamaican woman who feels more attached to Britain than to Jamaica but when asked about her identity and home, she refers to Jamaica, the place she is always asked by racists in Britain to return to and reclaim as home (190). This woman, who has more sense of belonging to London than to her Jamaica but still, in accordance with racial classifications, identifies herself as Jamaican and as if ‘outside “Britishness”’ (190), invokes William Spurlin’s concept of ‘disbelonging’, that is, being politically and racially prevented from belonging and kept away and outside a specific identity (Spurlin 2, 20). The Jamaican-British woman’s feelings and experience echoes Meena Kumar’s in Chapter 3 where she is distanced and subconsciously discriminated against and excluded by her white peers.

I will discuss this point of inter-ethnic tensions and racial discrimination from an affective perspective in Chapter 3. But much of the discussion in the other body chapters will focus on the intra-South Asian negotiations between gender, affect and belonging. In other words, this thesis goes beyond the conventional accounts of being stuck between local and temporal polarities of east and west or past and present. The present is no longer seen as uncanny and unfamiliar and the past as home is lost and desired. The past and the present are two different and illuminating experiences that help diaspora women reflect their personal versus collective identity to usher change in the future. The four British South Asian women writers Sunetra Gupta, Meera Syal, Monica Ali, and Rekha Waheed are argued to have a shared femino-diasporic authorial voice that goes beyond nostalgic romanticisation of home to a targeted feminist critique of patriarchal identities and gendered sociocultural practices.

## 6. Cosmopolitans and Chameleons: *Cosmoleonic* Belonging?

In the following paragraphs I will address some aspects of the global and diasporic interlinkages between homes, identities and belongings in our (post)modern age. In his *Kazuo Ishiguro*, Barry Lewis says that the twentieth century is marked by an increasing number of exiles who are ‘forced to leave’ and chameleons who choose ‘to drift and adapt’ (4). The in- or go-between theories are a recent development in the debate on belonging and identity. It is however not without shortcomings. Some postcolonial and diasporic writers such as Bhabha and Lewis seek a way out of polar tensions through a discourse of cosmopolitanism, but they tend to unwittingly revert into what they attempt to transcend. For example, Lewis refers to the unique position of the British novelist and Nobel Laureate Kazuo Ishiguro, who was born in Japan to Japanese parents but has been living in England since the age of five, a position that is generally applicable to most, if not all, novelists selected for this thesis (3–5). He writes about Ishiguro stating that:

He feels quite at home in London, that most cosmopolitan of cities, where he has resided since the early 1980s. It is the perfect environment for someone who straddles different cultures. In those syncretic streets and suburbs, he can blend into the background. As Kate Kellaway puts it, ‘Ishiguro is a chameleon. He's not quite at home anywhere, but can seem to be at ease everywhere. His placelessness gives him freedom and he has mastered the art of projection and protective coloration.’ (4).

The idea of ‘straddling’ cultural identities is perhaps true of many immigrants and diasporans of various generations whose identities are hybridised and amalgamated (see more in Section 5.1). As Rushdie says, these people in his shoes ‘are partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times,

that we fall between two stools' (15). This indicates a move from the *either-or* polarity to hybridity and plurality of individual identities, a plurality made possible by the very partiality that reopens the door to an *all-versus-none* polar debate of belonging (belonging everywhere and/or belonging nowhere).

Lewis tries to posit Ishiguro in that privileged transnational category, but he seems to revert into implicit polar tensions of some sort. He reiterates the idea of chameleonism and he associates — if not equates — it with cosmopolitanism (4). That is homelessness, freedom and chameleonism are strangely associated together to form an oxymoron of incongruent elements because chameleonic behaviour does not show freedom and authenticity (Cheah, 'Cosmopolitanism' 486; Rosen 13–14). In *Masks and Mirrors: Generation X and the Chameleon Personality*, Bernard Carl Rosen states persuasively that 'human chameleons, like their reptilian counterparts, ward off danger by assuming a protective coloration whenever danger arises. Not willing to run away, not wanting to put up their fists (even figuratively), reluctant to give in, chameleons take cover. Deception is their game. They pretend to be what they are not' (13–14). This echoes Jacques Lacan's idea of 'mimicry' that is to hide and 'camouflage'; he says, 'the effect of mimicry is camouflage, in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare' (Lacan 99). These connotations and implications of chameleonic belonging do not fit in with cosmopolitan belonging.

Multicultural cosmopolitan cities like London where Ishiguro lives are supposed to eliminate this need for chameleonist acts of camouflaging and mimicry. According to Cheah, cosmopolitanism should 'maximize human freedom' (Cheah, 'Cosmopolitanism' 486; Lewis

4). Cosmopolitan and multicultural places, as Bhabha and W.E.B. Du Bois put it, should also automatically guarantee the ‘right to difference-in-equality’ (*Location of Culture* xvii). Thus, a cosmopolitan is expected to do the opposite of chameleonism: to pride in one’s universal (un)belonging or ‘global citizenship’ as it is and without the ‘protective coloration’ Rosen and Lewis refer to (Rosen 13–14; Lewis 4; Trepanier and Habib 5; Werbner, ‘Introduction’ 2). Otherwise, if chameleonism (adoption of unreal and pretentious identity) is still needed and resorted to as a means of self-protection, survival or integration, cosmopolitanism becomes perform a hollow and false claim, which conforms with Cheah’s theory that it is an abstract concept that has no automatic access to practice. This would also perhaps reveal some sort of prejudice or threat to be overcome by the chameleonic behaviour, as discussed in Section 3.2 and Section 6.2.

Clearly, Lewis’s argument to equate chameleonism with cosmopolitanism is controversial. Cosmopolitanism can be an elusive theoretical concept but not perhaps Machiavellian, hypocritical or, as Rushdie describes multiculturalism, ‘sham’ (Gandhi 126; Rushdie 137; Lewis 4; Rosen 13–14; Cheah, ‘Cosmopolitanism’ 486). As Lee Trepanier, Khalil M. Habib say in their introduction to *Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Globalization: Citizens without States*, the contemporary post-1990 era is marked with an increasing attention to cosmopolitanism and the notions of belonging to the world and believing in universal rights, freedom and democracy (Trepanier and Habib 1; Werbner, ‘Introduction’ 2). According to Pheng Cheah’s ‘Cosmopolitanism’, this term originates from the Greek language because ‘*cosmos*’ in Greek means ‘world’ and ‘*polis*’ means ‘city’, and (in reference to Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert’s definition in the French encyclopaedia *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts, et des Métiers*), ‘cosmopolitan’ means ‘a man without a fixed abode, or better, a man who is nowhere a stranger’ (Cheah, ‘Cosmopolitanism’

487; Diderot and d'Alembert 297; Werbner, 'Introduction' 2). The German philosopher Immanuel Kant is among the pioneers to usher in and write about 'the rights of men, as citizens of the world' (*Practical Philosophy* 17).

Trepanier and Habib define the cosmopolitan citizen of the world as 'an enlightened individual who believes he or she belongs to a common humanity or world order rather than to a set of particular customs or traditions' (Trepanier and Habib 1). And to achieve peace worldwide, people and nation-states need to 'transcend their parochial identities and interests in the name of a global state or consciousness,' which adds a 'democratic spirit' to cosmopolitanism, according to Trepanier and Habib (1). In a similar vein, Pheng Cheah reiterates that cosmopolitanism implies a 'universal circle of belonging that involves the transcendence of the particularistic and blindly given ties of kinship and country. The cosmopolitan therefore embodies the universality of philosophical reason itself, namely its power of transcending the particular and contingent' ('Cosmopolitanism' 487). Cheah, Trepanier and Habib underscore 'transcendence' of the local and parochial ('Cosmopolitanism' 487). But, as Cheah adds, 'the popular view of cosmopolitanism as an elite form of rootlessness and a state of detachment and nomadic non-belonging is mistaken' ('Cosmopolitanism' 487). Thus, homeless and placeless diasporans, those who do not belong anywhere and have no place to call home, are not necessarily cosmopolitans, or citizens of the whole world.

In *Practical Philosophy*, Kant reiterates that he is concerned with a discourse of rights and that by 'hospitality' he means 'the claim of a stranger entering foreign territory' (*Practical Philosophy* 17). Thus, Kant acknowledges the existence of autonomous nation-states and borders, and suggests that people are expected to respect them (*Practical Philosophy* 18). He however contends that people have 'a right of visitation,' that is not a right of abode, neither 'a

right to be treated as a guest to which the stranger can lay claim' (*Practical Philosophy* 18). On the contrary, border guards can deny the 'stranger' access to the country 'if this can be done without causing his death,' which is perhaps the basis of today's asylum system (*Practical Philosophy* 18). He adds that 'this right to present themselves to society belongs to all mankind in virtue of our common right of possession of the surface of the earth on which, as it is a globe, we cannot be infinitely scattered, and must in the end reconcile ourselves to existence side by side: at the same time, originally no one individual had more right than another to live in any one particular spot' (*Practical Philosophy* 18).

Clearly, Kant juxtaposes the idea of foreignness with that of world citizenship. This might sound self-conflicting but obviously Kant is also referring to cosmopolitanism as a feeling and as an ethical belief system of human rights and shared human values. Humankind, men and women of this world belong to and inhabit one globe and they should seek to promote peace and mutual respect among people and peoples. In a similar vein, Pnina Werbner defines vernacular cosmopolitanism as 'an oxymoron that joins notions of local specificity and universal enlightenment' ('Vernacular Cosmopolitanism' 496). She maintains that contemporary cosmopolitan discourses seek to explore if and how 'the local, parochial, rooted, culturally specific and demotic may co-exist with the translocal, transnational, transcendent, elitist, enlightened universalist and modernist' ('Vernacular Cosmopolitanism' 496).

If homelessness, nomadism and the absence of belonging are no prerequisites or qualifiers for cosmopolitanism, this means that cosmopolitanism is also not at odds with belonging to homes and local cultures and the specific. This is because the cosmopolitan condition is not determined geographically, but it is rather an ethico-affective combination of human feelings and morals that start from the personal and specific and aims at humanity and

the whole world (Cheah, 'Cosmopolitanism' 487; Diderot and d'Alembert 297; Werbner, 'Introduction' 2; Trepanier and Habib 1; Kant, *Practical Philosophy* 18). Cheah further illustrates this point stating:

The cosmopolitan's universal circle of belonging embraces the whole of humanity. When cosmopolitanism is criticized for being a form of elitist detachment, the real point of dissatisfaction is that it is merely an intellectual ethos or perspective espoused by a select clerisy because the philosophers of the French Enlightenment could not envision feasible political structures for the regular and widespread institutionalization of mass-based cosmopolitan feeling. The bonds of humanity, whether they are predicated in terms of reason or moral sentiment, may be the strongest possible ties. But for various reasons, not many people are able to feel their pull. ('Cosmopolitanism' 487)

Therefore, the reiterated word 'transcendence' of the local, national or socially/culturally specific does not necessitate or dictate full abandoning and denunciation of local identity; in a similar vein, nonbelonging does not guarantee or necessitate a cosmopolitan belonging (Cheah, 'Cosmopolitanism' 487; Werbner, 'Introduction' 2; Trepanier and Habib 1). Like identity, the realm of human affect and emotions is also dynamic and plural and has the capacity to negotiate and combine complex attachments and belongings. This conclusion tends to contradict Bhabha's notions of the cosmopolitan Third space as providing an anti-polar and in-between 'interstitial passage between fixed identifications' where, according to him, we 'emerge as others of our selves' (*Location of Culture* 10, 19, 61). Cosmopolitanism, boosted by globalisation, cross-border migrations and technological developments, may well open up new horizons and engender sophisticated change *in* (rather than *of*) identities but there is no evidence that it seeks to erase difference and individuality for the sake of the collective, as



Bhabha wrongly implies; on the contrary, difference is celebrated and embraced, as Cheah and others suggest ('Cosmopolitanism' 487).

Thus, it might not be an overstatement to say that *(un)belonging* (as discussed in Section 5) is a phenomenon that has opened the door to many grey areas for ongoing academic interest and controversy. Some critics highlight the negativity of the position and the consequential alienation that follows (as illustrated in the earlier Sections 3.1-5), while others focus on the positive aspects and privileges of being astride cultures and identities, as will be discussed in Section 5.1 (Rushdie 15; Lewis 4). Rather than engaging in innovative discussions of specific diasporic experiences, many current debates tend to be more concerned with evaluating whether the *position* is good (positive/ rising/ straddling/ bridging / privileged / progressive) or bad (negative/ threatening/ falling/ alienating/ nostalgic/ retrogressive). Diasporic belonging and identities in our contemporary and global age are as ever, addressed in general terms without enough accounting for the intra-community differences, tensions and injustices, especially those caused by gendered politics in patriarchal diasporic spheres.

Reinforced by displacement, globalisation and other technological developments (Cohen and Vertovec 9), the cosmopolitan and globalised confluence between the local and translocal or the national and transnational prerequisites 'transcendence' and transactions between the cultural and multicultural, and the racial and interracial, and the social and inter-societal (Cheah, 'Cosmopolitanism' 487; Werbner, 'Introduction' 2; Trepanier and Habib 1; Cohen and Vertovec 4). According to the OED, to 'transcend' means 'to pass over or go beyond' and this aspect of cosmopolitanism is clearly neutral to the tensions and politics of the passing and stepping over the local, the national or the sociocultural particularity. In other words, the cosmopolitan transnational desires and practices of transcending and surpassing the

local or parochial (depending on one's politics) limits and conceptions face the big and understudied controversial question of transgression, encroachment and violation, especially when those very limits to surpass involve symbolic codes of the collective identity, social contracts and ideals well-guarded by the society's patriarchs and old guards.

For example, as concerns this thesis, women's transcendence and the change they seek is often regarded as transgression of the social and cultural norms of good morals and ethical demeanour. So arguably, from a feminist point of view, Kant's reference to the 'the rights of men, as citizens of the world' (*Practical Philosophy* 17), or Cheah's and Diderot and d'Alembert's definition of cosmopolitanism as 'a man without a fixed abode, or better, a man who is nowhere a stranger' (Cheah, 'Cosmopolitanism' 487; Diderot and d'Alembert 297), can be seen as examples of sexism and androcentrism at the heart of seminal and incipient cosmopolitan thought because women are absent or simply reduced to an insignificant shadow to men even when it comes to issues related to the whole of humankind. Thus, as Maila Stevens notes in 'Gender, Rights and Cosmopolitanisms,' 'the virtually insignificant presence of gender issues in the now voluminous literature on cosmopolitanism is remarkable' (87). This is because, as she explains, any 'efforts to theorise the relationship of gender to cosmopolitanism confront ongoing androcentrisms within social theory'(87).

One might raise here a noteworthy question that is strangely overlooked and understudied in this debate: Are women not expected or allowed to transcend the local and surpass the social and cultural specificities of place? What are the social and ethical limits or politics that govern women's attempts in diasporic communities in Britain and transnationally in the South Asian societies as set out in the novels selected for this thesis? The diasporic *local* here is meant to be deterritorialised and non-spatial but associated with the values of the

collective community's identity. Further, are such attempts and desires to go beyond and surpass examples of progressive transcendence (good), or retrogressive signs of social evolution and unacceptable transgression (bad)? Whatever the answer, it is an opinion with a certain politics, which brings up the very important question of the 'legitimation' and 'legitimacy' of those evaluative opinions, to use Jean-François Lyotard's terms discussed in his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (6–8, 18–19). In this postmodernist book, Lyotard explains that knowledge prerequisites an authority (he calls 'legislator') that is 'authorised' to set the standards and criteria to be met and thereby make it possible to enunciate such opinions ('legitimizing statements') of 'good' or 'bad' (18–19). These opinions are not simply 'evaluative' but also 'prescriptive' (18–19). He provides an important definition of knowledge that shows the difference between science and non-scientific knowledge, which is now to be challenged and scrutinised with reason and research (xxiii-xxiv, 18-27). According to him, knowledge is

a question of competence that goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth, extending to the determination and application of criteria of efficiency (technical qualification), of justice and/or happiness (ethical wisdom), of the beauty of a sound or color (auditory and visual sensibility), etc. Understood in this way, knowledge is what makes someone capable of forming 'good' denotative utterances, but also 'good' prescriptive and 'good' evaluative utterances. (18).

Lyotard points out 5 key points to illustrate the telling differences between science and narrative knowledge, which calls for a reconsideration of many unsupported but deeply-held cultural conceptions and philosophical views: 1) science draws on denotative language, while narrative knowledge uses 'prescriptive' and 'evaluative' 'language games'; 2) science, unlike non-science, does not use language games that seek to promote and create social unity; 3) the

requirement of 'competence' is only required for those who transmit the scientific knowledge and, unlike 'narrative knowledge, it exempts the receiver from competence, transmission and obedience; 4) science cannot be defended with telling and reporting and it is always at risk of 'falsification' with counter-evidence, unlike narrative knowledge that lives on memory, telling and retelling; and 5) science adopts a 'cumulative' and evidence-based approach to new knowledge, while 'narrative knowledge does not give priority to the question of its own legitimation' and it 'certifies itself in the pragmatics of its own transmission without having recourse to argumentation and proof,' therefrom arises the importance of memory and the past for its continuity and authority through telling (18-27). As Lyotard says, 'the scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes that they are never subject to argumentation or proof. He classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology. Narratives are fables, myths, legends' (27). Lyotard is right in my view to question the rules and processes of the 'legitimation' of 'narrative discourses such those homogenising and totalising theories, philosophies, religions and cultures that claim universality applicability (6-8, 18-19).

The huge advancements and developments in technology, science and media communication have contributed to a 'crisis of narratives' because, he argues, narrative knowledge or 'metanarratives' are now under more scrutiny with logic, reason and science, which has put them at the risk of collapsing and invalidation. As he says, 'Science has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables' (xxxiii). As a relevant example of the philosophical narrative knowledge, Lyotard refers to Renaissance Humanism, which is broad and elusive, and sometimes self-contradictory. (Vernon xii; Lyotard 30). It claims to be a universal anthropocentric philosophy

of life that draws upon reason and logic and thereby seeks to liberate man and human abilities and emotions from the previously uncontested shackles and restrictions, positing man at the centre of the universe in place of the divine or the supernatural (Norman 15; Davies 20; Corliss Lamont 11–12; Soper 120; Ehrenfeld 5). However, many anti-humanist theorists and social activists have sought to expose European Humanism as a sham and hypocritical philosophy whose ‘man’ is not the centre of the universe but a ‘recent invention’ that is ‘nearing its end,’ as the French poststructuralist Michel Foucault argues in his book *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (*The Order of Things* 422). The American social activist and writer W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt) Du Bois dedicates much of his oeuvre to the black cause in America and worldwide. He denounces the anti-humanist Euro-centric narratives that dehumanises non-whites, stating in a counter-narrative that:

Not only does Western Europe believe that most of the rest of the world is biologically different but it believes that in this difference lies congenital inferiority; that the black and brown and yellow people are not simply untrained in certain ways of doing and methods of civilization; that they are naturally inferior and inefficient; that they are a danger to civilization as civilization is understood in Europe. This belief is so fundamental that it enters into the very reforms that we have in mind for the postwar world. (415–16)

Humanism has also come under fire from the likes of the Francophone Martinican French author and writer Aimé Césaire who launches a scathing critique of this Eurocentric philosophy in his *Discourse on Colonialism*. He argues that this Western humanist ideology underpins European colonialism and its atrocities committed against the non-white people (35). As such, he contends, it only idolises the European whites, not the whole of humankind as it claims, and Europe had only admitted its hypocrisy and sham pan-humanity claims when it

suffered a humanist ‘boomerang effect’ with its horrors were afflicted upon Europe itself via Hitler’s anti-humanist Holocaust (35). In his words, he says:

it would be worthwhile to study clinically, in detail, the steps taken by Hitler and Hitlerism and to reveal to the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that without his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler *inhabits* him, that Hitler is his *demon*, that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom, what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not *the crime* in itself, *the crime against man*, it is not *the humiliation of man as such*, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the “coolies” of India, and the “niggers” of Africa. (25)

Many other theorists and writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Tony Davies, Martin Halliwell and Andy Mousley among many others, reiterate similar viewpoints that associate between humanism and Europe’s anti-human past and the dehumanisation of other nations and peoples from the Caribbean and Africa to Asia (Davies 130–35; Halliwell and Mousley 9, 133). Sartre maintains that ‘In the colonies, truth displayed its nakedness’ because, he addresses European colonialists, ‘your humanism wants us to be universal and your racist practices are differentiating us’ (xliv, xliv). Bhabha also underscores the irony of humanism and the ‘farce’ of the colonialist ‘civilising mission’ (*Location of Culture* 85), while Fanon seeks to free the blacks from the inferiority complexes and the colonial myths that they are not fully human, exposing thereby the sham claims of Humanism’s ‘man — meaning, white man,’ as Fanon sarcastically says (17, 30). As Lyotard contends, humanism —like all totalising theories and philosophies, ‘grand narratives’ or ‘metanarratives,’ to borrow Lyotard’s words — have clearly lost any claim to universality and legitimacy (xxiv, 37-41). As he says,

‘humanistic philosophy is forced to relinquish its legitimation duties, which explains why philosophy is facing a crisis’ (41). In other words, any homogenising theory or philosophy is now challenged because it can no longer claim automatic credibility, which is a natural outcome of the huge scientific developments, computerisation and advanced media communications (xxiv, 41).

Being another outstanding domain of narrative knowledge, culture is facing the same threats as humanism and other totalising philosophical theories of life or metanarratives (xxiv). Further, I think cultures are facing a double challenge: that resulting from the problematic/privileged bicultural diasporic position (homeland-versus-hostland transactions), and the threat of scepticism engendered by the technological advancements and info-revolution (global-versus-local negotiations), which poses real threats to local, parochial or patriarchal cultures, but these very tensions open up more opportunities and potentialities for new discourses of change and/or resistance, based on narrative-counternarrative negotiations (Lyotard xxiv). In Chapter 3, I discuss how the Kumar’s family in Meera Syal’s *Anita and Me* celebrate their cultural identity and difference to resist the racial prejudices and narratives of their white Tollington community. The Kumars’ valorising one’s cultural heritage and identity, as Fanon argues, boosts up their pride and self-esteem (Fanon 18). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon maintains that the decolonised should strive to retain their home language and culture in face of the coloniser’s cultural invasion, and thereby pride themselves in their identity and cultural heritage:

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality —finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to

his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (18)

Unlike her first-generation immigrant parents, the second-generation daughter Meena's hiding behind a Tollington accent shows an 'inferiority complex' that is racially and psychologically enforced upon the thirteen-year-old who eventually comes to terms with her identity and the 'inferiority' narrative is exposed as a racial discourse of imagined superiority, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3 (Fanon 18; Syal, *AM* 105). Thus, the truthfulness of stories of 'narrative' or 'popular knowledge', as Lyotard maintains, is not an intrinsic quality innate within itself via conformity to a 'metaprinciple' or 'metasubject' of sorts that somehow enables them to simultaneously be narrated and self-legitimated, without questions (e.g. the claim that white people are superior) (34). Rather, such knowledge can be validated when the vicious circle of narration and unquestioned self-legitimation is severed when the storytellers are liberated to tell the real story about themselves adopting thereby the role of the 'legislator' who is both the subject and object of narration or the new objective knowledge coming to light (Lyotard 34-36):

knowledge finds its validity not within itself, not in a subject that develops by actualizing its learning possibilities, but in a practical subject—humanity. The principle of the movement animating the people is not the self-legitimation of knowledge, but the self-grounding of freedom or, if preferred, its self-management. The subject is concrete, or supposedly so, and its epic is the story of its emancipation from everything that prevents it from governing itself. It is assumed that the laws it makes for itself are just, not because they conform to some outside nature, but because the legislators are, constitutionally, the very citizens who are subject to the laws. As a result, the legislator's will – the desire that the laws be just – will always coincide with the will of the citizen, who desires the law and will therefore obey it. (35)



As Fanon, Lyotard and Spivak imply, the colonised, and all marginalised at large, often provide evidential real-life stories that undermine and refute the universality of reductive philosophies or ideologies and gender equality in patriarchal cultures. As Fanon advises, the colonised should reject the Eurocentric version of humanity and white superiority by upholding their language and culture, and thereby maintain their pride in their identity and way of life (18). In a similar vein, Syal's *Anita and Me* in Chapter 2 challenges the racist imagination and racial prejudice against the Kumar family by celebrating their cultural difference and their South Asian identity within the ex-colonial British metropolis. Such stories support those postcolonial writers such as Edward Said, Paul Gilroy and Gayatri Spivak who call for a redefinition of humanity, not simply of Britishness, a redefinition that accounts for the marginalised, especially ethnic minorities and women within those communities (Fanon 9; Gilroy 327-55). For example, Fanon's notion of 'a new humanism' is not essentially different from Gilroy's that is non-racial and 'planetary' as both seek to account and cater for all people and peoples of the globe (Fanon 9; Gilroy, *Against Race* 327-55).

That is, if postcolonialism critiques the humanism's colonial 'man,' feminism seeks to decolonise patriarchal cultures from androcentric domination and gender inequality. In other words, Lyotard's 'good' of judgement is not different from Spivak's story of the Indian name of 'Sati', meaning 'good wife,' which stems from Hindu myth where Sati's body is torn to pieces and thrown all over the earth (Spivak 306; Lyotard 18). The implication in a word is this: the marginalised are either discounted or designated as passive objects to be judged and abused. This negative narrative that the marginalised are voiceless is challenged in all chapters of this thesis. For example, in Chapter 1, Moni transcends all impediments and plans a new free life without her abusive husband and her patriarchal community. Also, in Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 6, the idea of 'good' women and girls recurs. In Chapter 6, Maya Malik turns this men-

judge-women equation upside down when she exposes the vanity and void of her suitors and their biased and gendered conceptions of identity.

## Section 4: The Problems in Current Literature

### 1. A Problem of Approaches

In a 1988 Interview with Lawrence Kirtman, Michel Foucault rightly contends that literature is ‘something I observed’ and not simply ‘reduced, or integrated into the very field of analysis’ (*Lost Interview* 307). As Foucault notes, Neil Murphy and Wai-chew Sim maintain in their introduction to *British Asian Fiction: Framing the Contemporary* (2008) that the variegated literary output of diasporic writers is being ‘reduced’ to fit in a ‘ready-made critical apparatus’ (‘Introduction’ 1). This has led to the homogenisation of ‘widely divergent texts’ and to ‘text-tangential’ and ‘text-distant’ debates (‘Introduction’ 1–2). They point out A. Robert Lee’s views that question such generic classifications and hyphenated identifications as ‘*Asian-British*’ or ‘*Caribbean-British*,’ because they have ‘their own freight of “heterogeneity” and “tension”’ (‘Introduction’ 2). Hence, one should delve deeper into the specifics and particularities of these homogeneous categories, and replace them with, for example, ‘*Cardiff-Bengali* or *Brixton-Jamaican*,’ they maintain (‘Introduction’ 2). They argue that this will make it possible to ‘pay scrupulous attention to the material and specificities of different migrant encounters’ (2). The suggestion is that new and innovative approaches are needed to study diasporic texts and experiences from new perspectives that foreground the heterogeneity of those experiences.

In a similar vein, Aijaz Ahmad’s *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992) rejects Bhabha’s, Said’s and Jameson’s conceptual approaches and generic terminology like Third World, Commonwealth, Oriental or even Indian Literature. Such broad and homogeneous labels, according to Ahmad, under-represent the variegated, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic mosaic of heterogeneous individual experiences (245). Hallward’s *Absolutely Postcolonial*:

*Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* resonates with Ahmad's standpoint foregrounding the theoretical shortcomings of postcolonial theory which, he contends, lacks 'individuation' and 'singularisation' of specific experiences (129, 330). He also argues that it tends to 'present itself precisely as a sort of general theory of the non-generalisable' (xi). In other words, Ahmad, Hallward and Murphy and Sim show unanimous dissatisfaction with the homogenising theories and approaches into British Asian literatures. They demand that we use innovative exegetical tools that help us *heed the differences*.

Susheila Nasta, correctly in my view, also criticises the overdependence of literary criticism on diaspora and nostalgia theories in the interpretation of (im)migratory literatures. She contends that such concepts of diaspora and nostalgia have become homogenising 'catch all' terms used to represent a cornucopia of different experiences (7). For example, Romesh Gunsekera's *Sandglass* looks at both birthplace homeland (Sri Lanka) and 'host homeland' (Britain), but his writing does not constitute a nostalgic account of a 'past lost' but a way to 'make the negative memory the conduit of an ever shifting present' (Nasta 10). I strongly agree with Nasta, Ahmad, Hallward and Sim and Murphy and this thesis draws on a novel trilateral interdisciplinary approach (using gender, affect, and belonging) to capture the changing and variable phenomenon of diasporic (un)belongings as will be outlined in Section 5.2 below.

## **2. A Conceptual Problem**

As demonstrated in the critical literature review (Section 3.1-6), the figure of the diasporan is often conceptualised in linear and two-dimensional terms within or in between local and/or temporal poles. The linearity and two-dimensionality result in 1) a *horizontal perspective* that points out the *position-based* problem of diasporic objectification and homogenisation, and 2) a *vertical perspective* that symbolise the *judgement-based* discourses

concerning diasporic identities and (un)belongings. The first three debates are Anglo-centred. They are primarily concerned with the British sphere and diasporans are collectively seen as objects that could potentially 1) endanger as a looming threat, 2) destabilise as a racialised body, or 3) alter, if they are to be admitted in, the British identity. The debate shows that the objects of the ex-colonies are holistically considered a potential threat to be held away or at bay *without* —excluded, so to speak. The second represents how diasporans are also collectively discriminated against as odd and inferior others *within*. The third debate however points out the need, prospect or reality of a new plural and multicultural form of Britishness with diasporics included — *within*. Britain is thus seen as a multi-ethnic and multi-racial society in which the originally non-British diasporic has become a reality object whose presence has reshaped the British identity, the subject.

The much-theorised and problematised diasporic position in the Anglo-centred *here* perspective moves to the Anglo-Asian *here-and-there* and the transnational debates of *inbetweenness*. To describe diasporans as struggling in between homes, cultures and times (i.e. between the reality of the ‘unhomely’ present and memories of the ‘homely’ past, to use Freud’s words), unable to belong here or satisfyingly return there, means that identity is by implication a monolithic indivisible and one-way process with not much emotional variety or acts of volition involved (129). In my hypothesis in Section 5.2, I will argue that this is representation is incomplete. As Mohan says, these accounts are ‘victim-based’ (81). I will however ask: if there is a victim, there must be a crime, which this thesis tries to explore and investigate its nature, causes and effects as well as find out the criminal, allegorically speaking. Thus, such accounts discount the subjective and phenomenological experiences of (un)belonging from the diasporic point of view.

The linear and position-based understanding of singular identity as static thus becomes performative schizophrenic as the reality contradicts the homogenised diasporic desire to return. This suggests that to belong and not to belong simultaneously is not a possibility causes melancholy and alienation. The sixth debate focuses on the negotiations between the local and global and the possibility of moving from the bipolarity of homes and belonging to the duality and plurality of cosmopolitan identities in the contemporary globalised age. Almost all these six conceptualisations summed up above do not prioritise the diasporic point of view, especially women's different experiences, and they therefore tend to obfuscate subjectivity, affectivity and gendered differences and politics that impact on women's varied (un)belongings and identities. This is a result of two-dimensional and *position-obsessed* conceptualisations or that are mainly keen on situating identities within linear bipolarity of places, homes, and cultures and establishing generic theories.

To illustrate, let us reconsider the idea of *change* in the previous section (*Section 3.1-3*) where it is believed that the increased diasporic presence is threatening the British identity and reshaping the social, cultural and demographic map of Britain. The point of discussion is thus change; the subject is Britain; and the object is diasporans. From a British point of view, this change is either positive or negative, depending on one's politics, but it is mainly seen as a threat or crisis. Considering this change in politically neutral terms, British identity (the subject) can be conceived of as if moving horizontally between black-and-white poles. This linearity-oriented and position-based horizontal Brit-centred perspective implies two things: 1) the diasporic point of view is insignificant and absent, and 2) and British identity is conceived of as if it were a singular monolithic entity. This is a conceptualisation problem; the change *per se* can be however statistically and scientifically proven, which is beyond the evaluative and prescriptive tensions, ethics and politics of 'narrative knowledge' as Lyotard argues (18).

Contemplating this change from a Lyotardian narrative point of view, where politics, power and interests come into play, neutrality of language disappears as it is bound to adopt techniques of 'self-legitimation' and transmission techniques and 'language games' (Lyotard 10, 18, 35). As Stuart Hall and Jamil Kahder, quoting Derrida argue, identity becomes a concept that functions '*sous rature*' ('under erasure') where moving towards one end is deemed to create imagined distance from the other (Kahder 12; Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs an Identity?' 2; Derrida 61). Thus, Britishness or Indianness becomes eroded and replaced by its counterpart identity. This visualisation brings to mind the concept the communicating vessels where what goes into one container is necessarily lost from the other. Britishness, Indianness Bengalianness is claimed to be lost or regained in a similar manner.

This perhaps conforms to the racist patriarchal thinking. For example, In Meera Syal's *Life*, the procession of Deepak's wedding ceremony passes by in one of London streets, and an old man remarks with clenched fists, 'bleedin hell' (*Life* 11, 12). 'Swamped, thought the old man; someone said that once, we'll be swamped by them. [...] It's silent and gentle, so gradual that you hardly notice it at all until you look up and see that everything's different. "Like snow," he said, out loud' (*Life* 11). In a similar vein, in 'Cultural Conservatism and the Sites of Transformation in Meera Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*,' Dave Gunning thinks that Tania is alienated from her family and community because she adopts a form of 'Britishness that closes down the potential of her Asian heritage and effects an alienating caesura' (126).

The old man is clearly furious, and *change* is not the word he's chosen but 'hell' (11). For him, it is a matter of falling or rising, loss or regain, and black or white. British identity is claimed to be falling, collectively and monolithically down the abyss. From a different perspective, same change can also be seen a positive rise or progression. Let's not forget that

the old man's 'hell' is Deepak's heaven; it is his wedding ceremony after all. The old man's description is part of 'narrative knowledge' that is certainly disputable (Lyotard 18). The problem is that this sort of racial discourse tends to homogenise and objectify diasporans and obfuscates the diasporic standpoint, subjectivity and affective experiences.

Even when the debates moves beyond the Anglo-centred point of view and static conceptions of identity as in *Section 3.3-6* above, diasporic identities and (un)belongings are still thought of in *linear* and *two-dimensional position-based* terms that discounts the variety and gendered tensions and politics of the diasporic subjective and affective experiences. To illustrate, Rushdie and Bhabha among others highlight the plurality of singular and individual identities, which is a positive progression that I agree with and use an underpinning conception in this thesis. Identity is indeed plural and comprises many belongings. But when Rushdie states that diasporans like himself either 'fall in between stools' (negative/bad) or feel privileged (positive/good), he is in fact simply describing and evaluating the momentary feeling of being situated linearly in between, of positionality. As he suggests when he says, 'We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork' [...] we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial' (15), identity is a collectivity comprising language, social norms, religion, food culture, familial bonds and so on, these elements are prone to change, which is consequential to the varied diasporic experiences of diasporisation and (im)migration, globalisation, or postmodern technological developments and computerisation of knowledge and societies (8).

The so-called inbetweenness of plural identities, positive or negative, a privilege or a crisis, entails referents of polar homes, locations or cultures. Thus, linearity is restored. It also implies that the in-between position is established by some sort of compromising the various



elements, values or constituents of a given individual's plural identity. This can possibly happen in two ways: 1) Either by having all elements (represented by stars) placed in between these two abstract and conceptual poles of belonging. The shades of grey here between the white and black to indicate the identity reformation, change and move to or from a given zone. The so-called 'interstitial' and 'liminal' belonging, to borrow Bhabha's words, is represented by the grey star in between (*Location of Culture* 41, 51); or 2) through a some sort of process of finding an estimate total average of (un)belongings for the various elements of a plural identity, which somehow happens to be about in between, near a 50-percent value, as it were, which leads to claimed in-between identity and belonging.

To illustrate further, let us take the example of Monica Ali's Nazneen who asks her husband to learn English upon her arrival in Britain. You may and may not think that learning English in *Brick Lane* would affect her identity but Chanu, her husband, believes that this undertaking and thereby the change it brings about to the status quo is unwelcome and therefore he prevents her from going to the college (see Chapter 5 for full discussion). As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues, language is integral to cultural identities; it 'embodies' the codes and 'values' as Ngũgĩ says (4, 13–15); it also 'affords remarkable power,' according to Fanon (18). Language is thus one of these values. So if the Bengali language (as a separate value in itself and within the collectivity of a single plural identity) represents a 100 percent Bengaliness while English indicates a 100 percent Britishness (and the power of new knowledge and access to a new cultural world in Nazneen's case), claims of inbetween identities and belongings seem thus to an average percentage of sorts when we have other values and elements that constitute and symbolise cultural identity and belonging (food culture, religion, customs, traditions, marriage norms and so on). A 50 percent average is what inbetweenness should mean,

mathematically speaking, if one could ever think maths in such relative and qualitative matters as identity and belonging.

Therefore, plurality of identity does not by itself solve the problem of thinking about identity in polar and linear terms, which breeds *position-obsessed* (linear horizontal) and *judgement-based* (linear vertical) debates in which the subject of identity and belonging is objectified. This also tends to overlook the specificities of the diasporic subjective and affective experiences of (un)belongings in relation to sexuality, gender, power and interests. Racists, fascist nationalists and patronising and androcentric sexists seem to conceive of identity and belonging in linear terms: position and judgement. I sought to explain the *position-based* conceptualisations and will now illustrate further what I mean by *judgment-based* understanding. Referring to Ali's novel and her protagonist Nazneen, her attempt to learn a new language can be viewed from different perspectives: an empowering versus alienating inbetweenness, a progression versus degeneration, or loss versus gains. Chanu thinks of Nazneen, the woman he marries in Bangladesh and brings to London, as a 'good village' woman and his refusal to grant her access to the new cultural world, values and power, as wa Thiong'o and Fanon say, implies a thoughtful political and strategic patriarchal decision. It also implies a political judgement that ethicises the new position and the change or challenge it will bring about, drawing on narratives protecting one's own cultural identity and difference where women's desires for change are countered with a make-believe ethical narrative that describes change (women's independence in this case) as falling or rising (see Chapter 5).

In a similar vein, in Rekha Waheed's *A-Z* (Chapter 6), Maya is frowned upon for travelling alone around Europe for work, without a man, contradicting thereby the social and cultural norms. Furthermore, Indranath Roy in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* in Chapter 2,

and Hasina's father Hamid as well as her landlord Mr Choudhury in Chapter 6, are a few textual examples of sexist patriarchs who think of women's desires for identity reformation (self-identity or collective community's cultural identity) in *vertical linear* terms of *judgement*. While Maya challenges these narratives of gendered ethical judgement in Chapter 6, Hasina struggles with it and by doing so the novel exposes the sham of ethics in the sexist politics.

Gupta's *Memories of Rain*, as discussed in Chapter 1, shows that sexism is not limited to any ethnicity but to individuals when the Englishman husband Anthony does not allow his Indian wife Moni to work in the local library and tries to choose her friends for her in an attempt to possess and control her. This means two things: 1) the ostensibly ethical act of determining the right and wrong for women is itself unethical because the end is not morality but politics; 2) the antifeminist acts of such patriarchs within diasporic communities are not more concerned with the preservation of cultural identity and women's belonging than they are with objectifying and possessing them. By uncovering the end of such patriarchal actions like Chanu's, we can expose the sham of their ethicising judgements, rising and falling performed against the backdrop of a vertical linear conceptualisation and culturally-constructed ethical narratives of the collective social and cultural identity.

The act of uncovering the real ends of sexist actions without falling into the same rhetoric of linear (un)belongings that is being criticised is a challenging undertaking. It requires an alternative conceptualisation and a new approach with different perspectives. In this thesis, I will use an interdisciplinary approach to highlight the tensions and politics between gender and belonging using diasporic women's subjective and affective point of view as I will demonstrate in the following section (Section 5).

## Section 5: Hypotheses and Approaches

### 1. An Alternative Conceptualisation: Diasporans as Heterogeneous Subjects

#### A. A Subject Affective Perspective: A Diasporic Point of View

This thesis is based on an alternative hypothetical conceptualisation of the diasporic identity and (un)belongings that is no longer linear and bipolar (position-based horizontal or judgement-based vertical) but trilateral in inception or change (figure 1) and circular in final shape (figure 1). Rather than being placed as an object of somewhere within or in between poles and values of belonging, homes and connected linearly (horizontally or vertically as

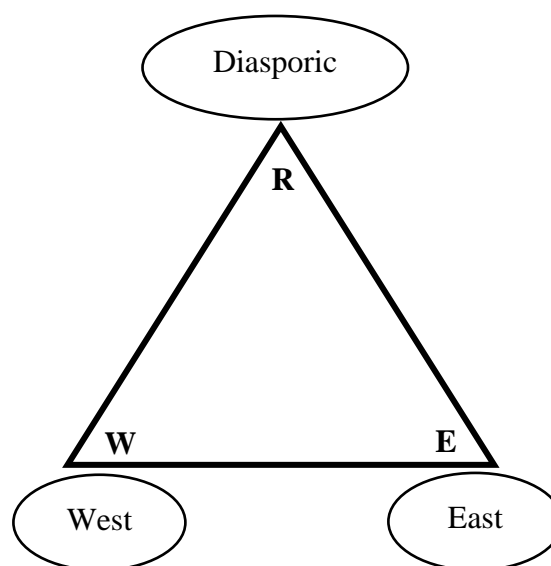


Fig. 1. A Trilateral Prototype of Diasporic (Un)belongings

explained above), diasporics here occupy the vertex *R* as in the prototype of (un)belonging in figure 1 above. The diasporic figure (mainly women in the case of this thesis) is a subject that can act and react, ‘affect or be affected,’ as Spinoza puts it (Massumi, ‘Pleasures of Philosophy’ xvi; Spinoza, *Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* 212) This thesis is thus mainly concerned with the *R* point of view and its interconnections with *E* and *W*.

This thesis uses the *REW* prototypical interrelationship to stress the archaeology, trajectory and phenomenology of diasporic experiences of (un)belongings at the subjective and affective *R* vertex. It seeks to problematise any dehumanising and antifeminist generalisation of linear positionality and judgement. By doing so, the thesis creates a space for the marginalised and objectified Spivakian ‘subaltern’ to comment on their own identities and state

of (un)belonging through their consciousness, feelings and affects, not to mention speech and words suppressed by the oppressor. The British South Asian women's affective voice, as it were, will thus be put in the spotlight as signifier and indicator of the state of their (un)belongings, given that identity is plural and dynamic.

### B. Circular Identities: Individuality and Difference of Personal Plural Identities

As demonstrated in figure 2 below, this thesis has another underpinning idea that identity is a circular collectivity of (un)belongings stemming from the R-E-W interrelationships explained in figure 1 above.

The triangular shapes within the *A* and *B* circular domains stand for the various elements and constituents of plural identities (such as food, clothes, language, religion, gender roles, marriage norms, and other

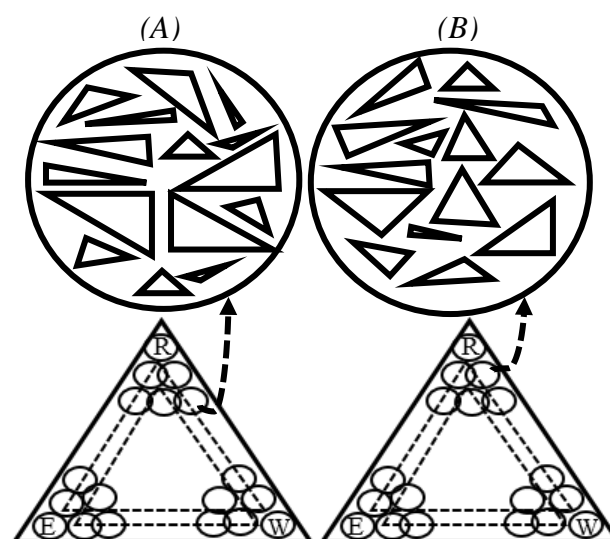


Fig. 2. Heterogeneous and Non-Linear Plural Identities

social, cultural and patriarchal conceptions that underpin identity). This is an alternative reconceptualisation that helps break the linearity and objectification by reinstating diasporans and women as the subject of identity and belonging. Whatever the status and shape of the internal values and their distances and proximities to *E* or *W*, the individuality, singularity and specificity of the collectivity retains its shape and identity. This thesis is specifically interested in those ossified, rigid and change-resistant patriarchal belongings that are based on gendered sociocultural metanarratives that are questioned by the British South Asian women writers and their female characters.

## 2. My Interdisciplinary GAB Approach: Gender, Affect and Belonging (2p)

As discussed in the previous section (4.1), a conventional approach would not be capable of capturing the specificities and vicissitudes of the non-linear conceptualisation of diasporic women's identities and their desire to change, be and belong freely from dehumanising patriarchal cultural practices and gendered identity politics. In 'Diaspora, Border

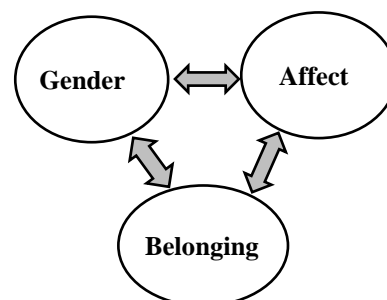


Fig. 3. My Interdisciplinary GAB Approach

and Transnational Identities,' Avtar Brah points out the 'confluence and intersectionality' of conceptual discourses and disciplines and suggests a 'theoretical creolisation' that would enable us to 'address fully the contradictions of modalities of enunciation, identities, positionalities and standpoints that are simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside' cultures and locations ('Diaspora, Border' 633). Following Brah's suggestions, I will use an interdisciplinary approach (figure 3) that does not only address what is explicitly spoken and declared but more importantly seeks to uncover the implicit meanings and messages embedded within women's affective experiences buried in the texts selected. *Affect* is thus used to illuminate the interconnections between *gender* and *belonging*, between diasporic feminism and identity politics. That is, this GAB approach is intended to help elucidate how *gender*, *affect* and *belonging* intersect and overlap.

This interdisciplinary approach lies at the heart of three interconnected disciplines, namely, identity (belonging), feminism (gender) and psychology (affect theory). It is a tri-lateral interdisciplinary study. It looks at specific feminist questions of diasporic (un)belongings from the perspective of affect theory. In other words, it asks how and whether affect theory provides new insight into the relationship between gender and belonging. I am not aware of studies that combine affect, gender and belonging. But feminist studies seeking

to capture the troubled and controversial relationship between identity/belonging and gender/sexuality in diasporic contexts is not something new. For example, in 'Gendering Diaspora: Transnational Feminism, Diaspora and its Hegemonies,' Tina Compt and Debora A. Thomas maintain that their 'Diasporic Hegemonies' project initiated at Duke University and the later related conferences that took place in America and Canada between 2005 and 2008 have sought to explore and consolidate the connections between transnational feminism and diasporic discourses (1–2). They state that all the contributors have three things in common, with which this thesis has sympathies and oneness of objective:

a commitment to feminist analysis and a keen awareness of the mutual constitution of gender, class, race, and sexuality; a common interest in the dynamics of racial and cultural formation in the diaspora at different generational moments; and a desire to explore the vexing tensions of difference and inequity that characterize the internal relations of diaspora, [... and] a strong investment in understanding the effects of contemporary processes of globalization on diasporic formations – an investment inspired by the insights of feminist international studies. (1–2).

Compt and Thomas adopt transnational feminism to investigate gender and identity. As Vertovec also says, 'Transnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition. This is so because many peoples' transnational networks of exchange and participation are grounded upon some perception of common identity; conversely, the identities of numerous individuals and groups of people are negotiated within social worlds that span more than one place.' (573). I agree with Vertovec in terms of the negotiations of (un)belongings in and among many social spaces and the role of shared identities in developing international links and networks, but I have my some reservation on such terms as 'transnational,' and Compt and Thomas's presumptive use of the denomination 'transnational

feminism’ The word ‘transnational’ means ‘extending or having interests extending beyond national bounds or frontiers’ (OED, ‘Transnational’). Does this not imply that feminism, which is the ‘advocacy’ of values of gender equality and women’s ‘political, social, and economic’ rights (OED, ‘Feminism, n.’), does clearly and unequivocally presume the existence of a ‘national’ and then move from there towards what lies ‘beyond’? Is it this easy and uncontroversial to take the ‘national’ and even its borders for granted? Likewise, some writers use ‘Diasporic Feminism’ to explore feminist questions within diasporic communities (Shareena Banu), but this again will either disregard refugees and migrants or, mistakenly, merge them into the conceptual denomination of ‘diasporic,’ in which case diaspora loses its meaning.

As I argue that my conceptualisation of (un)belonging and identity is *non-linear* and *trilateral* (3D), revoking the vertical and horizontal perspectives (*position-based* and *judgement-based* objectification of reductive approaches, as demonstrated above in *Section 4.2* and *S.5.1*), locations, homes and nation-states are no longer the primary concern or the focal point, but those who dwell in them, diasporans, regardless of the differences in the trajectories and specificities of their experiences. Thus, instead of a *transnational feminism* (location-based) *diaspora feminism* (experience-based), I will opt for a new voice of diasporic feminism that seeks to express the varied experiences of immigrants, migrants, refugees, and diasporans, in fact or fiction, and to avoid stereotypical racist and sexist attitudes.

My affective feminism of diasporics or diasporic feminism of affects means that it is done from diasporic point of view and drawing on an interpretation of the dynamics and workings of affects. It draws to deconstruct women’s feelings and affects using affect theory as pioneered by Silvan S. Tomkins in 1960s. As Brewster Smith says in his introduction to



*Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S Tomkins*, 'Tomkins threw down the gauntlet to both psychoanalysis and neobehaviorism in his attack on drive theory' and he thereby 'thumbed his nose at all behaviorisms in his emphasis on imagery and consciousness, and by putting more weight on consciousness than on the unconscious, he further departed from his Freudian roots' (2). Tomkins has categorised affects into nine positive, negative and neutral affects: 'surprise-startle,' 'distress-anguish,' 'anger-rage,' 'enjoyment-joy,' 'interest-excitement,' 'fear-terror,' 'shame-humiliation,' 'disgust and disgust' (Nathanson, 'Prologue' xv–xix). This thesis draws upon this Tomkinsian classification and conceptualisation of affects as illustrated in his *Affect Imagery Consciousness*. Each of the six body chapters will enlarge on one of these affects along with an idea relevant to the text and the overarching aims of this thesis as follows: disgust and lust (Chapter 1), distress and dejection (Chapter 2), pride and prejudice (Chapter 3), shame and change (Chapter 4), interest and homeliness (Chapter 5), fear and family (Chapter 6).

### **3. Why this Thesis Matters: Significance and Underpinnings**

This research project is worth the endeavour for three reasons: epistemological, ethical, and human. As explained in *Section 3.7* of this chapter, Lyotard argues that cultures are part of narrative knowledge, which is antithetical to science and research-evidenced reasoning (19). By inference and implication, many sociocultural norms and practices are, in Lyotard's words, based on 'fables, [and] myths' that stem from a different category of minds that are 'savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology' (27). The epistemological role of this thesis and the wider academic community is to expose such misconceptions passing as knowledge uncontested. For example, in *Chapter 6*, the protagonist of Rekha Waheed's *A-Z Maya Malik* challenges the social and cultural myths and fears of 1) being a spinster and beyond the age of

marriage, 2) being judged as a bride by judging her suitors and reversing the social norm, 3) false idea of choice in arranged marriages, and 4) the crippling fear of community and conception that women cannot travel alone and if they do, they are categorised as unsuitable for marriage. Hence, this thesis has an epistemological significance as it seeks to expose unjustifiable knowledge.

The epistemological role of this thesis, to contribute to knowledge, intersects with the ethical and humanist mission when the racial or patriarchal conceptions underpinning much of the social prejudices and inhuman practices and norms are falsified and exposed. The end is thus to bring about social change by constructive and purposeful literary criticism that puts individuals, especially the marginalised and voiceless, and their personal choice, happiness and freedom above the limitations of identity and the crippling and prejudiced sociocultural symbolic codes and standards of belonging. I believe that literature is a representation of reality, and writing like art, is ‘propagandist,’ as Du Bois strongly believes, stating:

Thus all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent. (258).

When the ethical judgments of ‘good,’ ‘right’ and ‘righteous’ draw on idolising and obeying unjustified or justifiable taken-for-granted ‘narrative knowledge’ to the benefit and interests of a group of people, it is an ethical, human and epistemological responsibility upon writers to provide counter-arguments and demonstrate the truth. According to Du Bois, ethical values are manipulated for Machiavellian ends; as he says, ‘Goodness—goodness in all its aspects of justice, honor and right —[is used] not for sake of an ethical sanction but as the one

true method of gaining sympathy and human interest' (258). In this context Du Bois's writing is form of social activism and ethically oriented epistemological engagement with a sublime two-dimensional aim: research-evidenced truth and then equality for the marginalised. The scepticism this thesis shows towards identity's social and cultural conceptions and customs shares a postmodernist standpoint with Lyotard; the foregrounding of diasporic subjectivity and affectivity has a phenomenological point of commonality with Edmund Husserl's 'knowing' or 'perceiving' subject (17). These are however only points of intersection, sympathies if you like, with larger philosophical realms, not approaches this thesis adopts in the body chapters.

This thesis could perhaps, I humbly hope, be generally classified as an example of a Lyotardian postmodernist example of doubting and questioning unscientific narratives and totalising knowledge, namely the social and cultural authority of collective and gender-reductive identities. It can simultaneously be an example of foregrounding the Husserlian acting and reacting "I"— the female and feminist "I" — that feels and experiences (un)belonging and identity. As Husserl says,

'In perception, the perceived object is supposed to be immediately given. There stands the thing before my perceiving eyes. I see it; I grasp it. But the perception is nothing more than an experience that belongs to me, the perceiving subject. Likewise, memory and expectation are subjective experiences, along with all the acts of thought built upon them, on the basis of which we mediately posit real existence and determine any truth about such existence. (17)

This thesis is interested in perceptions of identity and belonging to homes and cultures from a subjective and affective perspective. Therefore, affect theory will be used as the tool

to investigate and explore the South Asian women's affective and emotional experiences concerning individuals' notions of being and belonging, which shows that they do not necessarily feel and share the same gendered identity and belongings prescribed by their communities. Many writers have invested their time and intellect in writing about emotions, feelings and affects, or about identity and gender. For example, Sarah Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* and *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* are interesting examples of exploring the meanings of human emotions and desire for happiness, but she does not address the relationships between affect, belonging and gender. Therefore, this thesis is a humble intervention and step, with many limitations, impediments and shortcomings of its own, to bridge this gap.

From a world literary perspective, writing about diasporic literatures will hopefully, as David Damrosch (2009) argues, 'expand our literary and cultural horizons far beyond the borders of our own culture' (46). As Pheng Cheah also points out in his 'What Is a World?: On World Literature as World-Making Activity,' the world is not only 'geographical' and 'physical' but it is also 'a higher intellectual community that opens up a new universal horizon' ('What Is a World?' 29). In this context, this thesis also aims to contribute to a such larger context that seek to raise awareness of other social and cultural worlds and bring about social change, freedom of being and belonging and gender equality. Thus, the concept of *(un)belonging* is not simply a short term instead of 'belonging or unbelonging' but rather belonging and unbelonging simultaneously to a variety of cultures, homes and identities as I explain further in the following section.

## Section 6: Contextualising (Un)Belonging

### 1. *(Un)belonging Qua Insight of Omnipresence*

In addition to an abbreviation denoting belonging *or* unbelonging, (un)belonging has other meanings and implications as a concept of its own when it refers to belonging *and* unbelonging simultaneously as I will explain in this section. Linguistically, the word and concept *belonging* derives from the verb *to belong*, which, according the OED, means the following:

- (a) intransitive. Of a person: to be rightfully or fittingly situated in, or have an affinity for, a specified place or situation.
- (b) intransitive. Of a material or immaterial thing: to be rightfully or fittingly placed in a specified location or position.
- c. intransitive. Without construction. Of a person: to have the right personal or social qualities to be a member of a particular group; to fit in.

This lexical sets many standards and meanings for belonging but I would like to point out three of them: 1) ‘affinity’ —the emotional attachment, 2) ‘fittingly,’ ‘rightfully’ and ‘right’ — an evaluation of suitability, legitimacy and conformity to pre-existing criteria, and 3) ‘a specified place,’ ‘a specified location’ and ‘a particular group’ —singleness of the object of belonging. That is, if the subject of belonging in the sentence ‘*I/They belong to Britain*’ is ‘*I/They*,’ the object is ‘*Britain*’. Thus, the OED definition does not take into consideration the changing and plurality of the places of belonging, which is a matter of fact as explained in the earlier sections. Thus, in this section (6.1), I argue for the positive aspects of dual and multiple belongings. The first point of this OED definition (i.e. emotion and evaluation) emphasise the importance of subjectivity (the first-person point of view), which is a discussion I will return to later in Section 6.3. The third point raises the problematic question of the authoritarian third-person

judgements, evaluations, prescriptions and restrictions (an ethico-political discourse of belonging). The underpinning aim of this thesis is to challenge such narrative definitions that focus on the racial and gendered prejudices. I will discuss the implicit acts and activity within the concept of belonging in Section 6.2.

In *Development and Displacement*, Jenny Robinson states that displacement and distance from homes is mostly described in negative terms, but the recent developments in transportation and technology in the (post)modern and contemporary era have led to a reconsideration of these experiences to foreground their positive aspects (7). The American writer Ralph Ellison (1914-1994) states in his short story collection *Shadow Act* that he has a ‘passion’ for a double-edged bi-cultural awareness and belonging not only to his black community but also to worlds beyond his own (12). He says, ‘there were certain yearnings which I felt, certain emotions, certain needs for other forms of transcendence and identification [. . .] I was taken very early with a passion to link together all I loved within the Negro community and all those things I felt in the world which lay beyond’ (12). Rushdie restates Ellison’s message of opening to new worlds other than ours to broaden our horizons; he also refers to Saul Bellow’s 1982 novel *The Dean December* where Albert Corde, the main character, interprets a distant dog’s barking as ‘a protest against the limits of dog experience (for God’s sake, open the universe a little more!)’ —so Corde felt, being shut in’ (Bellow 11; Rushdie 20–21). When Corde’s accompanies his wife to Romania, her country of origin, after the death of her mother, he has an insightful first-hand experience of the authoritarian communist regime and about the diversity of human life.

As Rushdie points out, the unique inside-outside standpoint opens up new horizons for aesthetic representation and gives the writer in his position new insights (15). In a similar vein,

Robin Cohen (2008) maintains that diasporans are ‘both inside and outside a particular national society. They are outsiders as well as participants and, as spectators, are able to compare and learn from “how things are done” in other societies as well as in one in which they find themselves’ (149). Edward Said also refers to the aesthetic distance and new horizons opened in his discussion of the insightful exile of Auerbach in Istanbul where he could write his *Mimesis*; Said says that:

it was precisely his distance from home—in all senses of that word—that made possible superb undertaking of Mimesis. How did exile become converted from a challenge or a risk, or even from an active impingement on his European selfhood, into a positive mission, whose success would be a cultural act of great importance? The answer to this question is [...when] work deals with humanity at large and transcends national boundaries. (6–7)

In a very similar vein, and in reference to the African-American writer Charles Johnson, in his book *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (2001), Peter Hallward writes under the capitalised headline ‘CHARLES JOHNSON AND THE TRANSCENDENCE OF PLACE’ that ‘Johnson believes that in order to describe the ultimate truth of the world, you have first to escape. [ . . . ] Again and again, Johnson's novels and stories narrate the emancipation of characters from the relations that fix their identity’ (133).

That is, double belonging can be a privileged double-edged awareness and knowledge of different cultures, societies and ways of life. The idea of transcendence and distance implies an unbelonging that makes an insightful view possible. Rushdie reiterates the same message maintaining that diaspora writers are bestowed and privileged with a ‘double perspective’ or ‘stereoscopic vision’ being both and at the same time ‘insiders and outsiders in this society’ (19). Thus, belonging coexists with unbelonging, which calls for a special term that captures this uncanny and unique moment of belonging that combines distance with proximity,

conscious or unconscious. The term *(un)belonging* seeks to capture this aesthetic moment and experience. (Un)belonging is relevant to this thesis because all the women writers of the texts selected for this thesis are either first- or second-generation immigrants from the Subcontinent and are exposed to British and South Asian cultures. Their texts clearly draw on author biographical experiences and their bicultural knowledge that helps question the Eastern cultural narratives.

Robinson rightly points out that ‘displacement as a form of openness to change can be thought of as a positive virtue’ (8). Her idea of the new possibilities and potentiality of change intersects with Rushdie’s ‘post-lapsarian’ and Lyotard’s ‘eclecticism’ (Lyotard 76; Rushdie 15; Robinson 8). Rushdie states that when he reflects upon his emigration from home, India in his case, to Britain, with regret and ‘guilt-tinted spectacles,’ sometimes ‘we seem, to ourselves, post-lapsarian men and women. We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork. And as a result—as my use of the Christian notion of the Fall indicates—we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial’ (15). In a strikingly similar vein, Lyotard says, ‘Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald’s food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and “retro” clothes in Hong Kong’ (76).

In other words, living in the turmoil and wreckage of late modernity transfiguring into postmodernity seems to cause similar effects on one’s identities and belongings as displacement, diaspora and crossborder migrations. Both phenomena blur the lines of demarcation between identities and cause a surrealist and (un)belonging. Cosmopolitan people thus become selective, as Lyotard and Rushdie say, which involves change and challenge to local, parochial and patriarchal conservatism. Thus, identities and belongings have become ‘pastiche’ or like ‘the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language’ or ‘mimicry’



without ‘any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists,’ as Fredric Jameson puts it (Rushdie 15; Lyotard 76; Jameson 17). Despite the uncertainty and negativity of postmodern times and diasporic experiences, I am stressing their positive aspects: the insights and possibilities of choice and change made available, which leads to the idea of belonging as an activity, an action with volition as will be demonstrated in the following paragraphs.

## **2. *(Un)belonging Qua Acts of Plurality and Choice***

In Section 3.6, I discussed and differentiated between chameleonic and cosmopolitan belonging. In particular, I have demonstrated how chameleonism shows unbelonging because the belonging and identity displayed is intentional and unreal (Rosen 13–14; Lewis 4; Trepanier and Habib 5; Werbner, ‘Introduction’ 2). To forge an identity does indeed imply an intentional act or process of belonging, not an affective state of true and authentic attachment. The act shows a political and strategic maneuver to ward off oppression, discrimination or as a means of ‘passing’ to use Elaine K. Ginsberg’s word (1). In this section, I will illustrate the idea of belonging or unbelonging as an act with volition and some choice, which is key to the later discussion in the body chapters where I will be arguing how affect theory can reveal and betray the racial and gendered tensions and thereby the authentic state and desire of women’s belonging. The South Asian women in the novels in question will either adopt a chameleonic identity or publicly revolt against the discrimination and oppression forcing them to adopt that chameleonic identity.

That is, when all the academic attention is directed to the chameleonic belonging of diasporans in the wider Western metropolises, this thesis ventures also to ask the daring question:

what about the women chameleons at home? Can we initiate a discourse of home unbelonging, especially in the case of women? By *At home* I mean East (South Asia) or home within South Asian families and communities in the West (Britain). In Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*, Reba and her mother-in-law Srimati are both examples of women struggling to fit in and belong at home in India (see more in Chapter 3). Likewise, in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Nazneen's sister Hasina, who is back home in Bangladesh, revolts against the constraints of her community's patriarchal culture and sexist politics of belonging and elopes with a man despite her father's threats while her mother continues with her chameleonic make-believe belonging and her sister acquiesces to the arranged marriage at an early age and joins her 40-year-old husband in England (Chapter 6.). In addition, Meera Syal's Tania (in *Life*) and Rekha Waheed's Malik (in *A-Z*) both explicitly reject the identity imposed upon them by their communities and, refusing to be chameleons acting to be what they are not, they seek to reshape their community's sexist and gendered cultural identity (Chapters 5 and 7, respectively).

In *Introduction: Politics of Passing*, Elaine K. Ginsberg discusses (un)belonging as a means of survival and overcoming social injustices and prejudices (1). First, Ginsberg refers to slavery in the US in 1836 where a slave could 'pass out of slavery' and the discriminatory system that foregrounds his "'African blood" — invisible on the surface of the body — over the obviously dominant and visible heritage that would cause a "stranger" to assume Kenney [slave's name] is both white and free' (1). 'Thus,' Ginsberg adds, 'Kenney's creation of a new "white" identity — that is his "passing" — was a transgression not only of legal boundaries (that is from slave to free man) but also of cultural boundaries as well' (1). Such a conscious act is in fact a two- or three-dimensional one, an act of false, superficial and temporary renunciation of one identity followed by an inauthentic adoption of another, and then reclamation of the authentic identity to which the person really belongs.

Hence, *(un)belonging* does not denote a simple and singular one-dimensional act or a state of belonging or unbelonging, but a plural and more sophisticated one. In other words, the question is not simply to belong or not to belong, but rather how and why to belong and unbelong—to (un)belong, simultaneously. I am therefore using (un)belonging in such contexts as a complex concept to point out the negotiations and tensions of a conscious, double- or treble-edged process of belongings. Ginsberg maintains that such acts of (un)belonging can also be extended in a similar manner to sexual and gender identities; in 1933, she adds, Teena Brandon could transgress the socially constructed sexual identities and live as man in Nebraska. As Ginsberg points out, ‘gender identity in this instance, like racial identity in the case of Edmunt Kenney, has a dual aspect. It is from one perspective performative, neither constituted by nor indicating the existence of a “true self” or core identity. But, like racial identity, gender identity is bound by social and legal constraints related to the physical body’ (2). The body becomes the site and premise for racial and sexist discrimination and oppression because of the very identity signifiers it carries (being a woman or black).

As pointed out in Section 3.2 and discussed further in detail in Chapter 4, Kureishi’s factual experience of racial discrimination and Syal’s Meena’s fictional experience in *Anita and Me* show that ostensible unbelonging to and denial of their Asian identity betray and expose extra-personal social problems. Rather than explaining it away as a crisis of identity, schizophrenic belonging or alienation and failing to belong, I will be searching in Chapter 4 for the reasons of unbelonging in the social milieu from the diasporic own subjective point of view. Allegorically speaking, belonging as an experience to be analysed is like a piece of art, a portrait, where one can either be preoccupied with what lies in the centre or extend the gaze to have a broader picture of what lies in the background as well. The background here represents the surroundings and the social and cultural environments to which the state of

belonging is a reaction among a set of other affective responses. The diasporic is thus a subject reclaiming the right to have the final say on the reality of their (un)belongings. So when Meena and Kureishi maintain that they sought to become ‘unrecognisable’ within their social settings in postwar Britain, the motives for chameleonic belonging and identities should become the main site of investigation, not the belonging per se (Syal, *AM* 146; Kureishi 9). Affected unbelonging thus shows the causes false attempts to deny belonging. In Meena’s and Kureishi’s cases, the reason is a crisis of racial discrimination, not a crisis of identity (See more in Chapter).

If we overlook or disregard the background of the picture, the social and cultural environment of unbelonging, ‘disbelonging’ will be mistaken for unbelonging, to borrow this concept used by Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, William Spurlin and Helene Cixous (Spurlin; Cixous 69; Hillier and Rooksby 380). In his book *Lost Intimacies: Rethinking Homosexuality Under National Socialism*, Spurlin refers to ‘strategies of national disbelonging’ in Nazi Germany when homosexuals were excluded from Germanness on the basis of their sexuality by the Nazis who, in addition to ‘disbelonging,’ had a ‘wider range of nazi policies on racial hygiene, social degeneracy, and eugenics’ (20). As for Hillier and Rooksby, ‘disbelonging’ is ‘an active state or process of denying or rejecting certain kinds of origins and ties’ (380). In a similar vein, Cixous maintains that it represents the act of ‘escaping [...] a place of arrest’(69). That is, the concept of disbelonging seems to the absence of belonging with the lack of volition and will: to intentionally deny belonging to self or other.

This reinvoles the questions of inequality, discrimination and marginalisation. These limitations are transcended through the adoption of chameleonic and non-authentic identities, which does not only denote those extra-personal social problems of prejudice and injustice but

also a degree of choice and volition. This is indicated by the capacity to switch between identities, even though the options are limited, and the acts affected and pretentious. But nonetheless, choice has a ‘frustrating dimension’ as the philosopher Slavoj Zizek contends in his *On Belief* (28). This is because, whether in the case of chameleonist identities or in the example of unforced arranged marriages where the bride has a say, what is missing is ‘the basic, authentic, choice itself’ (28). As Zizek also writes, ‘the truly free choice is a choice in which I do not merely choose between two or more options WITHIN a pre-given set of coordinates, but I choose to change this set of coordinates itself’ (121).

That is, it is important to search for meaning between choices, within the implicit desires for real change and true choice. In ‘Belonging,’ Schneider et al say, ‘The enactment of identity and identities is situational, depending on who one is interacting with, when, and where’ (206). Examples of this are abundant in all the texts discussed in this thesis such as Moni’s choice in Chapter 1 to leave Anthony and go back to Rural Bengal to rebuild her life away from Anthony and her family, Reba’s attempt in Chapter 2 to redirect her attention to art and singing, Meena’s choices in Chapter 3 between Britishness and Indianness, Tania’s choice in Chapter 4 between family and friends or life, Nazneen’s choice in Chapter 5 to accept the arranged marriage like her mother, and the choices and decisions Maya makes in Chapter 6 to avoid arranged marriages. The true choice of being and belonging thus goes beyond the circumstances and situations and that real meta-choice is what matters, as Zizek maintains throughout his book.

To illustrate, in Meera Syal’s *Anita and Me* in Chapter 2, for example, Meena finds herself in an unfavorable situation as a victim of unconscious discrimination but, in search of peer acceptance, she disclaims her Indian identity and chameleonicly adopts (AM 105). For

instance, when the mother Daljit is stuck in traffic on the way to the Gurdwara in Birmingham, Meena leaves the car to ask other road-users to cooperate and reverse to give space for her mother to maneuver. To avoid racism, Meena says, she ‘deliberately exaggerated Tollington accent, thus proving I was very much one of them, they did not need to shout to make themselves understood or think they could get away with muttered swearing and I would not understand, that I belonged’ (97). Meena thinks she has succeeded in making the strategic choice of identity tactics, and feels happy and excited, but when she reaches the end of the queue, a ‘sweet-faced elderly woman’ looked at her, ‘blinked once and fumbled with the gear stick and said casually, ‘Bloody stupid wog. Stupid woggy wog. Stupid’ (97). She has failed as the racial gaze has associated identity with skin colour.

Thus, Meena has the free will but on many occasions she cannot choose what she really wills when she faces a mandatory and ‘frustrating’ Zizekian ‘urge to choose’(28). Therefore, she affects Britishness and suspends Indianness to ward off racism or seek inclusion, which is the reason that breeds the need to make choices. Unlike many critics such as Kushal and Manickam, Rosellen Brown, and Leila Neti, who read Meena’s mimetic act of speaking the Tollington dialect as a sign of an internal identity crisis (Neti 89; R. Brown 7; Kushal and Manickam 87), I explore the reasons leading to the choices and their implications, psychological and social. As Zizek says, in such limiting circumstances, the aim is to bring in real change and remove the limitations necessitating choice, which is not a representation of true freedom (121). Thus, by embracing Indianness, exposing the vanity of racial thinking and celebrating their cultural difference, Meena and the whole Kumars family break free from the racially predetermined choices (see Chapter 3).

But as mentioned previously, the tensions this thesis is concerned with are not simply and only between diasporics and indigenous people in Britain but within diasporic communities in Britain and back home in South Asian communities (India and Bangladesh). For example, in Meera Syal's *Life Is Not All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, Akash works in a psychotherapy clinic where he advises non-British families and couples on ways to fit in and integrate in Britain, solve their marital problems and rebuild their lives. Raj and Seema attend his clinic to find solutions and have advice on how to overcome their disagreements and unhappy marital life. The text is an example of how women are subjugated to patriarchal sociocultural norms and codes of good morals. Seema says, 'I've already had enough practice at being a good girl and keeping quiet' (104). Seema is clearly tired of blindly obeying the socially imposed narratives and rules determining how women become 'good' or 'bad'. Shaming women (external shame) is exposed by the very feelings of true shame (an internal affective experience). Racists and patriarchs think of identity as fixed, rather than a plural, dynamic, changeable and 'always "in process"' identity (Weigert et al. 14; Madison 47; Rushdie 15; Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs an Identity?' 2-5).

Seema and most of the women in most of the other novels selected seek to change some sexist aspects of the South Asian cultural identity, to liberate women from limiting demoralisation and ethical judgements. Belonging, unbelonging and rebelonging are thus proposed as concepts with action and volition. To *unbelong* to patriarchal and gendered elements of one's identity, as Akash advises Raj, is to 'unlearn' a set of sexist social and cultural values embedded, guarded and enshrined within a collective group identity (*Life* 102-03). This endeavour is not an easy undertaking because it requires a daring confrontation with an ossified and well-guarded 'grand narrative' of identity politics and belonging (prescribed and judged, rather than authentically felt). As Akash says, addressing Seema's husband Raj,

‘these are the hardest habits to break’ (*Life* 102–03). As Chila, the most conventional woman in Syal’s novel *Life*, says that ‘there’s too many people’s minds to change’ (233). However, Tania, the protagonist of Syal’s *Life*, leads a life of her choice, as she leaves her family and marries the Englishman Martin, rejecting and revolting against the type of belonging and life dictated; she ‘broke loose from her traditional moorings and drifted into an uncharted ocean with her English man and snappy Soho job’ (*Life* 18, 110)

Tania celebrates her plural ‘coconut’ identity, ‘white on the inside, brown on the outside,’ and she seems proud of who she is (*Life* 147). She also says, ‘See how I combine this bindi with that that leather jacket and make a bold statement about my duality? [...] Watch how I glide effortlessly from old paths to new pastures, creating a new culture as I walk on virgin snow! And then it was time to cut the crap and own up to who we really were’ (*Life* 148). Rekha Waheed rejects the concept of coconut identity in Chapter 6. But regardless of the nomination, women characters and writers clearly usher in a varied and personal reconfiguration and reappraisal of specific sexist narratives and values of one’s individual plural identity. That is, to develop a new identity with new redefined values as Akash says, speaking to Raj:

we are also having to reassess our cultural-habits’ too.’ [...]. ‘It is extremely hard, having to dismantle your belief system. Because we ... you are not only having to question your attitudes as a man, but more specifically, as an Asian man. It can seem like you’re losing, everything that makes you you but [...] we are also the generation that can change things, redefine what being Asian and male or Asian and female, means, without losing pride in who we are. Because culture evolves and changes, just like human beings. (*Life* 103)



(Un)belonging is therefore a two-dimensional act of change (to renounce the old and adopt the new) with volition and choice, but sometimes the process involves a limited and binary political choice, to draw on Žižek's concept of the limitations of choice (28). This has social, cultural and psychological implications as women tend to either acquiesce and accept the status quo or revolt against, either voice their rejection implicitly or explicitly. This thesis seeks to externalise the implicit meanings betrayed by a system of affective reactions as I will explain in the following paragraphs.

### **3. (Un)belonging Qua Affects of Social Politics**

Lahdesmaki et al point out that 'the concept of belonging has emerged alongside, and partly replaced or challenged, the concept of identity' (234). This thesis exemplifies the increasing academic attention to studies of belonging that problematises any notions of fixed identities, as Lahdesmaki et al suggest (234). Nira Yuval-Davis also reiterates that belonging is 'dynamic' and 'multi-layered' or 'multi-territorial' (*Politics of Belonging* 12). As Basia Sliwiska also says, identity 'does not define my sense of belonging' (287). In other words, Sliwiska implies, identity tends to be an outer image, a façade, whereas belonging is an inner affective state, which may or may not conform and identify with the visible or ostensible identity (or the group collective identity). In *Outside Belongings*, Elspeth Probyn reiterates that belonging involves 'desires' and a 'wish to belong' (*Outside Belongings* 24). The concept of 'coconut identity' referred to by Syal and Waheed in their novels *Life* and *A-Z*, respectively (as discussed above in Section 6.2 and later in Chapters 3 and 6), is an example that ethnic identity can contradict the emotional state of belonging (Syal, *Life* 144; Waheed, *A-Z* 14). (Syal, *Life* 144; Waheed, *A-Z* 14).

In *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson maintains that ‘my perception is outside my body, and my affection within it’ (59). He also says, ‘there is no perception without affection. Affection is, then, that part or aspect of the inside of our body which we mix with the image of external bodies; it is what we must first of all subtract from perception to get the image in its purity’ (60). To Bergson affections are then those personal subjective and emotional states that intervene in our understanding of the outside world and external phenomena. The real and clear picture, according to Bergson, is rid of affection and our internal bodily emotional states. Bergson’s reference to affection is however not specific as he does not seem to differentiate between emotions, feelings and affects.

In ‘On the Origin and Nature of the Affects,’ which is part three of his seventeenth century book *Ethic: Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*, Benedict De Spinoza states that ‘no one so far as I know has determined the nature and strength of the affects, and what the mind is able to do towards controlling them’ (*Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* 104). Spinoza politely criticises Descartes stating that all the latter has demonstrated is the ‘acuteness of his great intellect’ but not the nature of affects (105). Affects, according to him, include ‘hatred, anger and envy’ as well as ‘joy and sorrow,’ ‘will,’ ‘appetite’ and ‘desire’ (*Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* 104, 115–16, 127). He also argues that ‘the affections of the body’ are affects that are ‘produced in the mind’ (6, 65-66). ‘The human body,’ he adds, ‘is affected in many ways by external bodies, and is so disposed as to affect external bodies in many ways’ (66). The relationship of the mind and the body with affect is key to Spinoza’s conceptualisation of affect. When he refers to ‘controlling’ affect, he seems to suggest a negative judgement of affects (104). In his later book *Improvement of the Understanding, Ethics and Correspondence*, he defines emotions, which is clearly used interchangeably with affect, as a ‘passivity of the soul’ and claims that it is ‘bondage’ to let one’s emotions go

unregulated and be a 'prey' to them (Spinoza, *Improvement* 187, 189). Spinoza's intra-bodily affects, as perceived by the mind and caused by inter-bodily affections, echo Bergson's notions on affect: he maintains that affect should be detached from our perceptions of external objects and that is how to get a clear and pure picture and knowledge about things in the outside world (Bergson 59–60; Spinoza, *Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* 6, 65–66).

In his 'Pleasures of Philosophy,' a foreword to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi echoes Spinoza's conceptualisation of affect in terms of the interpersonal influence, bodily activity and ability to act being increased or decreased by affect. Massumi states:

AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). *L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include "mental" or ideal bodies). ('Pleasures of Philosophy' xvi)

This definition by Massumi has much in common with Spinoza's who also says to further clarify his conceptualisation, 'By affect I understand the affections of the body, by which the power of acting of the body itself is increased, diminished, helped, or hindered, together with the ideas of these affections,' maintaining that affections involve bodily 'action' (Spinoza, *Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* 106).

Spinoza puts in considerable efforts and thought to illustrate, for example, the meanings of ‘WONDER,’ ‘VENERATION,’ ‘DEVOTION,’ ‘HORROR,’ ‘CONTEMPT,’<sup>2</sup> and ‘love, or fear’ but he fails to provide a clear-cut definition of affects as we now understand them from the pioneering affect theorist and psychologist Sivan S. Tomkins (Spinoza, *Improvement* 164, 166). Charles Darwin’s *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* is a landmark in the understanding of the various bodily manifestations of human emotions and affective in men and animals. Darwin echoes Spinoza and Massumi when he states that different people are ‘affected’ differently (*The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* 68). However, he also stops short of Tomkins’s affect theory. Tomkins points out that philosophers (Aristotle) and biologists (Darwin) have been the first to pay attention to affect (239). ‘In biology, Darwin’s *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872),’ Tomkins says, ‘is the classic statement of the evolutionary significance of the emotions’ (239). In his book, Tomkins credits Darwin’s efforts and attempts to capture the physical and bodily manifestations of the affective reactions in the following parts of his book: ‘Enjoyment-Joy and the Smiling Response’ (204, 206); ‘Surprise-Startle: The Resetting Affect’ 273; and in ‘Distress-Anguish: And the Crying Response’ (290).

In his prologue to Tomkins’s seminal book *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition*, his fellow American psychologist Donald L. Nathanson describes affects as ‘physiological mechanisms easily visible on the face of the newborn and although muted through the process of maturation, can be easily identified throughout life into senescence’ (‘Prologue’ xiv). He also points out how differently Tomkins uses affects, feelings and emotions:

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<sup>2</sup> Capitals are in the original text quoted.

1) by the terms “affect” or “innate affect,” we reference a group of nine highly specific *unmodulated physiological reactions* present from birth. 2) We use the term “feeling” to describe our *awareness* that an affect has been triggered. 3) The formal term “emotion” describes the combination of whatever affect has just been triggered as it is *coassembled with our memory* of previous experiences of that affect. (‘Prologue’ xiv).

I have italicised the key words in Nathanson’s notes to stress that affects are natural and unmediated physical responses; feeling as a state of consciousness; and memory as integral to emotions (‘Prologue’ xiv). This echoes the emotion of diasporic nostalgia in which memories of home and the ideas of unsatisfiable desires to return are essential (J. L. Wilson; Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*).

As M. Brewster Smith says in his introduction to *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S Tomkins*, ‘Tomkins threw down the gauntlet to both psychoanalysis and neobehaviorism in his attack on drive theory’ and he thereby ‘thumbed his nose at all behaviorisms in his emphasis on imagery and consciousness, and by putting more weight on consciousness than on the unconscious, he further departed from his Freudian roots’ (2). Tomkins is an influential theorist and is largely considered the father of affect theory for his *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (1963). Nathanson also makes considerable contributions to the development of this field of knowledge. He points out that Tomkins has categorised affects into nine positive, negative and neutral affects: ‘surprise-startle,’ ‘distress-anguish,’ ‘anger-rage,’ ‘enjoyment-joy,’ ‘interest-excitement,’ ‘fear-terror,’ ‘shame-humiliation,’ ‘dissembl and disgust’ (Nathanson, ‘Prologue’ xv–xix). This thesis draws upon the Tomkinsian classification and conceptualisation of affects as illustrated in his seminal *Affect Imagery Consciousness*. Each of the six body chapters will address at least one Tomkinsian affect along with a key idea to the text and the overarching argument as follows starting from chapter one to six,

respectively: *Disgust and Lust, Distress and Dejection, Pride and Prejudice, Shame and Change, Interest and Homeliness, Fear and Family.*

Belonging or unbelonging qua an affective emotional experience, as Jesse J. Prinz writes in *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (2004), are ‘typically elicited by external events’ (3). By default, an affect denotes a set of referents like an effect that continuously points out to the cause. As Ruth Stein also says in *Psychoanalytic Theories of Affect*, an affect is ‘an essentially automatic response to an inner or outer stimulus,’ a feeling that occupies ‘an intermediary position between the motive and the action’ (70–71). In a similar vein, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth maintain that affect, and (un)belonging as an affective experience by extension I would add, is ‘in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*’ because it ‘arises in the midst of *inbetween-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon’ (‘An Inventory of Shimmers’ 1–2). The ‘outer stimulus’ and ‘forces of encounter’ of affective experience with which this thesis is concerned are mainly social and cultural (Stein 70–71; Gregg and Seigworth, ‘An Inventory of Shimmers’ 1–2).

In ‘Belonging,’ Jens Schneider et al says ‘feelings of belonging or of being at home are difficult to grasp in surveys because how one feels about one’s identity depends so much on the context’ (206). As June et al also say in *Emotion and Gender: Constructing Meaning from Memory*, emotions rely greatly on the ‘social context’ and the individual’s circumstances in terms of their arousal and significance (8). Belonging is thus used as a contextual and ‘socially induced affect,’ to use Teresa Brennan’s words(1). Thus, the ‘inbetween-ness’ Gregg and Seigworth refer to is not positional describing the diasporic figure as an object between poles of homes and temporalities (as discussed in Sections 3.1-6 and Section 4.2), but a causal one that explores the interconnections between sexist and patriarchal prejudices and women’s

affects and desires for change. In *The End of Belonging*, Madison explains that belonging as an affect and emotional experience is the sense of ‘being “seen”, feeling understood and accepted, within the space *to be* without the intrusion of others’ expectations. It is the felt sense of being cared about as the person recognizes oneself to be’ (48). The social ‘others’ and their judgements and sometimes patronising prescriptive standards seem to interfere with our feelings of belonging, especially in the case of women.

Arguably, Spinoza’s key and most remarkable contribution to the understanding of affect is his statement that affect is the ability ‘to affect or be affected’ (*Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* 212). If affect is ‘socially induced,’ involving the acts of ‘affecting’ (interpersonal affections) and being ‘affected’ (intrapersonal affections) and reactions to external events and stimuli in the environment, affect is then a social and political phenomenon (Spinoza, *Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* 212; Massumi, ‘Pleasures of Philosophy’ xvi; Brennan 1; Stein 70–71). In fact, Massumi contends in his book *Politics of Affect* that affect is ‘politically oriented from the get go’ (viii). It is ‘proto-political’ (ix). Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari argue that ‘affect is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel’ (Deleuze and Guattari *Thousand Plateaus* (240) By ‘pack’ he means ‘band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity’ (239). Hence, the social politics of power, interests and interpersonal influences within and of any social group is integral to studies of social affects and belonging.

In fact, as John Tomlinson argues, identity is also a site of politics (161). As he says in ‘Globalisation and Cultural Analysis,’ our identities have become these days ‘structured into an array—one might say a portfolio—of identities, each with implications for our material and

psychological well-being, each, thus, with a “politics” (161). Thus, both affect and identity have a stake in politics. But given the various limitations of space and time, the politics affect and identity this thesis is concerned with is mainly the social and cultural power relations, especially sexism (and racism in Chapter 3) in the (British) South Asian communities and home societies.

In this thesis, I use a selection of affects as an approach or exegetical tools to analyse the texts and externalise embedded voices concerning the state and trajectory of diasporic women’s (un)belonging. For instance, in Chapter 1: the deconstruction of the experiences of disgust, coupled with the idea of lust, seeks to answer questions about Moni’s notions of being a woman and Indian and stuck in between her husband’s desire to possess her and her androcentric community’s patronisation. In Chapter 2, I point out and analyse the manifestations of distress and dejection to uncover the implicit meanings of the story of two women, Reba and her mother-in-law Srimati Neerupam, in a patriarchal society, and voice out their suppressed desires. In Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, the affects of pride and shame are key to the discussion of belonging and identity of Syal’s Meena and Tanya in her *Anita and Me* and in *Life*. In Chapters 5 and 6, the affects of interest and fear foreground the gendered power relations and expose some sexist cultural myths that dehumanise women. Much of sexist prejudices are premised on narratives of belonging and cultural identities. This thesis thus seeks to voice out the call for change that is enunciated and advocated by the women writers of the selected texts in question.

In addition to referring to insightful experiences of distance and proximity as well as a two-dimensional act of learning and unlearning, adoption/pretention and change, as demonstrated in the previous two sections 6.1 and 6.2, by extension, *(un)belonging* qua affect



here denotes belonging and unbelonging at the same time, especially when women are negotiating and oscillating between bipolar belongings of cultural identities. That is, in the case of diasporics, unbelonging here will automatically and necessarily invoke the idea of belonging there or somewhere else as identities tend to evoke and be linked with a place or a home, as Anastasia Christou and Stephanie Taylor suggest in *Narratives of Place, Culture and Identity* and *Narratives of Identity and Place*, respectively (Christou 45; S. Taylor 40). Belonging as an affective and subjective state of ‘affect’ and ‘affections,’ to use Spinoza’s words, has social, cultural and political dimensions in addition to the inner affectivity (*Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* 254).

As demonstrated earlier in Sections 3.2, 3.5 and 6.2, upon a closer affective analysis of the texts, a claimed unbelonging might therefore transpire to be an instance of ‘disbelonging,’ which, is an intentional and systematic exclusion as Spurlin argues in his *Lost Intimacies* (2, 20). Further, as Bhabha also points out, a discourse of belonging might not simply express an ‘affirmation or authentication of origins and ‘identities’’ but somehow signify and represent ‘political practices’ and ‘ethical choices’ (*Location of Culture* xvii–xviii); for example, he adds, ‘minoritarian affiliations or solidarities arise in response to the failures and limits of democratic representation’ (*Location of Culture* xvii). Referencing Du Bois’s social writings on black people’s struggles for freedom, Bhabha suggests that the lack of integration in the case of immigrants and refugees is not perhaps an inherent unwillingness to assimilate on their part, but rather larger social and institutional problems and failings from the host society’s end. The same critique and line of argument applies to belonging within diasporic communities and homeland societies. Hence, women are arguably a victim of double oppression in their own patriarchal communities and the wider British society. This thesis is thus a voice among many, different but with imperfections and limitations of its own, it is far from being exhaustive.



## Section 7: Overview of Body Chapters

### Chapter 1

In this chapter, I argue that a close analysis of the affect of disgust and lust in Sunetra Gupta's debut novel *Memories of Rain* (1995) shows a double oppression of women: sexual and patriarchal. This chapter asks whether and how an affective reading of the instances of disgust in this novel can help reveal embedded desires for freedom and redefinition of women's being and belonging. Drawing on Tomkins and other writers and theorists, I pose such questions as: What does it mean to be disgusted? Does disgust always signify a desire for distance and rejection or perhaps otherwise? What does it mean to Moni, the Indian woman who marries Anthony the Englishman and travels to London? This thesis argues that her problem of inbetweenness is not between homes, but between androcentric poles: it is a spousal sexual desire to possess and manipulate her on one the hand, and her patriarchal social and cultural norms and expectation of her community on the other. How does Moni finally react, and what is the significance of her journey back to India? In Gupta's novel, lust and disgust work together and collaborate as an analytical tool which illuminates uncharted hues of meaning such as gendered and intergenerational differences of standpoint towards change, identity and belonging.

### Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, distress and unhappiness are key to my reading of Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* (1995). Given that affects require social contexts and extra-personal events that trigger such reactions and negative feelings, questions are raised as to why it is often women characters that seem to struggle with unhappy lives and what the affective manifestations of distress and dejection signify. Looking at three women of three different generations, the discussion shows how Neerupama, her daughter in law Reba, and Reba's daughter Niharika respond to

dehumanising and patronising social environment where man defines woman and femininity and determines gender roles. I explore the relationship between women's desires thwarted and happiness lost and how the three women react differently: inwardly (Srimati Neerupama), outwardly (Reba) or with freedom and rejection (Niharika) and outwardly.

The discussion is illuminated by the thought and theory of such feminist writers as Mary Knny, Michel Lambek, Marleen Barr, Thomas Martin, Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir and Carole Pateman, in addition to identity theorists Nera Yuval-Davis and Elspeth Probyn. As discussed earlier in Section 6.3, and according also to others who write on the affect of distress and dejection, John Stuart Mill, Catherine E. Ross, Jessica A. Leveto, distress and unhappiness have social meanings and interpersonal significance. The purpose of exploring these social transactions and implications in this chapter with respect to Gupta's novel in this chapter and all others is to find out their impact of and on (un)belonging. That is, the authorial insightful and omniscient (un)belonging is conceived of as an aesthetic and artistic voice seeking to articulate women's active and affective (un)belongings and rewrite antifeminist elements of cultural identity.

### **Chapter 3**

In Chapter 3, Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) is read through the lens of pride responding to social and cultural prejudices that are based on conceptions and politics of identity. The text foregrounds language as an expression of cultural identity and it reveals a discourse of pride and belonging in face of racial prejudices. In accordance with Floya Anthias's views on diaspora theories, my critique of the text tends to contradict some previous readings by such writers as Shweta Kushal, Evangeline Manickan and Rosellen Brown and Leila Neti. Drawing on an analysis of the pride affect and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's theory of

language, this chapter asks how Syal's text respond to questions of (un)belongings and articulate itself affectively and aesthetically? Why does Meena, the main character and protagonist, seek to disown (unbelong to) her Indianness in favour of Britishness? What does language and the language of pride signify when it comes to identity and belonging: manifestation, celebration or reformation? Is *Anita and Me* concerned with intra-diasporic and inter-racial questions of identity and prejudice? This chapter aims to address such questions and thereby demonstrate that more research is needed to better understand the sophisticated relationship between affect, prejudice and (un)belonging.

#### **Chapter 4**

In this chapter, I explore the representations of shame, change and gender in Syal's *Life Is Not All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999). It will discuss how shame and shaming interact and differ depending on the context of identity and belonging. Tanya, Sunita and Chila are three close friends living in London. They have different circumstances and lead different lives but they agree on the challenges that face Indian British women living in London and the change that needs to take place or the actions they need to take to reformulate their belongings and identities. How will shame indicate these women's (un)belonging? And how will they respond to shaming? What kind of identity change they seek to bring about? The notion of change involves time and invokes Lyotard's idea of the 'transformation of society' and the cultural 'narrative knowledge that is to be challenged and questioned, but do the female protagonists in this novel question cultural narratives and patriarchal values? This chapter seeks to discuss these questions and find out through the workings and politics of shame and shaming the reality of women's (un)belonging the changes to cultural identity they strive for.

## Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, I will look at the affect of interest and the feelings of homeliness in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). Nazneen is the main character in this novel and she is Hamid's first child. His lack of interest at her birth is tells a tale of two species, as it were: men and women. Tomkins and Nathanson critique Freud in terms of the interpretation of interest-excitement affect as simply sexual. At the age of eighteen, Nazneen's father gives her in an arranged marriage to the fortyish Chanu and the couple come back to London where another Chanu-centred chapter of her life starts. Chanu's desire to return to Dhakha come true eventually but his two daughters disrupt Chanu's dream of returning 'home' where Hasina, Nazneen's sister never feels at home, despite living at home all her life. In addition to affect theorists, the discussion of home, homeliness and belonging in this chapter also draws on Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Solotaroff and Rohini Prabha Pande' *Violence against Women and Girls: Lessons from South Asia*, Byron Miller's *Spaces of Contention: Spatialities and Social Movements*, Anastasia Christou's *Narratives of Place, Culture and Identity*, Jan Willem Duyvendak's *Politics of Home* and McGavin's *(Be)Longings*.

## Chapter 6

This chapter discusses affects of fear and anger associated with some social and cultural practices and conceptions of arranged marriage in Rekha Waheed's debut novel *The A-Z Guide to Arranged Marriage* (2005). I will outline some historical Indian and Bengali aspects of this sophisticated and controversial social phenomenon. Such writers as Dr Shetty strongly argues in favour of arranged marriage and against the Western style love marriages (80). This debut novel by Rekha Waheed draws on a variety of arranged meetings of 'brideviewing,' to use Marian Aguiar's word (181-82). Maya, a 28-year-old Bengali British girl, struggles between fear of spinsterhood and respecting her family's wishes on the one hand, and her pride and

desire for freedom and marrying her 'soulmate' Jhanghir, on the other. Her pride and love, however, eventually win as she has 'messed up' every single *alaap* or marriage proposal and turned the judgemental 'brideviewing' *alaap* meetings upside down by deriding and satirising her suitors and thereby critiquing the vanity of patronising sociocultural myths and misconceptions about women (A-Z 2).

Drawing upon Darwin, Tomkins, Sara Ahmad, and Carroll E. Izard this chapter addresses the fear-terror affect in light of the varied social writings and research on South Asian family culture and arranged marriage by Psksha Pande, Devyani Prabhat, Stopes-Roe and Cochrane, Dr Shetty, Allendorf and Pndian, Kalwant Bhopal, Nashra Balagamwala. I seek to find out whether the cultural tradition of arranged marriages is corroded or applauded by South Asian women themselves as represented in this novel. This discussion on fear and family is also bound to evoke anger, show the irony and satire the social fallacy and vice of sexist myths. Given the values of family and marriage are tied up with the collective group identity, whether the trend is going up or down will necessarily affect the trajectory of belonging and identity reformation.

## Chapter 1: Disgust and Lust in Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain* (1992)

The news about the novel coronavirus pandemic is everywhere nowadays as Britons and millions of people around the world live in lockdown to stop the spread of the virus. What has caught my eye, however, is the role disgust is playing in this crisis. 'Disgust' has appeared in many news headlines related to this crisis, such as 'Woman's disgust at finding used tissue in her Morrisons food box' (Parker and Rodger) and 'Four Ways Disgust Is Shaping the Coronavirus Pandemic' (Colarossi). Parker and Rodger, and Colarossi want to refer to the unprecedented behavioural changes motivated by the fear of infection and the desire to self-protect and keep clear from this invisible threat. I like the succinct and concise definition of disgust as 'the gatekeeper emotion' (S. Miller).

It is 'an ancient and primal mechanism, ingrained in humans to help avoid contamination and disease' (Gutierrez). But how is disgust related to identity, belonging and culture? This is certainly an interesting question I will discuss in this chapter using some examples from Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain* (1992). Gupta was born in Calcutta, India, but she spent her childhood in Ethiopia and Zambia. She returned to Calcutta in her teens, and, supported by her father, she started reading Tagore and writing fiction. She studied biology at Princeton University in the US and then a PhD at Imperial College London. She currently lives in Oxford and works as an epidemiologist at the University of Oxford. (Vijay Lakshmi 100–01; Potter). The purpose of this chapter is to find out if the affect theory of disgust can explain some grey areas of identity and how people of different attitudes and generations can differ in interpreting the outside objects of disgust. I will argue for a significant and sophisticated relationship between disgust and belonging; furthermore, lust interferes in this novel to



articulate the sexism and gendered prejudices and bias in cultural identities and androcentrism, which necessitates Moni's reaction to redefine their being qua women and belonging as Indian.

Narrated through a flashback technique and stream of consciousness, the novel moves back and forth between the protagonist Moni's Calcutta and her English husband Anthony's London. In her review of the novel, Marie Gottschalk succinctly states that Gupta's novel 'meanders between Calcutta and England, between passion of first love and pain of a passionless marriage, between the familiar and the foreign, between happiness and despair' (49). Anthony and Moni meet and marry in Calcutta, and then they come to live together in England. Their life is, however, destabilised and troubled by Anthony's lust and sensuality. Therefore, Moni strives to return home with her six-year-old daughter as her marriage to Anthony breaks down. Homegoing becomes one of the most controversial topics interpreted by such critics as Shusha Guppy, Bidisha Banjeree and others, as symbolic of her longing and unbelonging: longing for home in Calcutta inability to belong in England.

Guppy believes in the meeting between peoples of the East and those of the West, but she reinstates a *Kiplingian* marital 'East-West divide' as she considers these marriages to be 'doomed'. The breakdown of Moni's marriage is thus overgeneralised to represent not simply Indian marriages but also all those of the east, as Guppy suggests. Leila Neti, however, draws on Bhabha's conceptions that migrant and diasporic encounters with the indigenous can originate a *Whitmanian* bridge 'merging of the two sides of the divide' (Neti 98; Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 19). Kipling and Whitman have expressed different viewpoints and notions about the possibility of the meeting and merging of the east and west: the former reject this possibility while the latter has called and foreseen globalisation coming, as I have demonstrated in the Introduction (section 2.1).

Such readings of this text by Guppy and Neti are linearity-based and position-obsessed with a horizontal conceptualisation<sup>3</sup>. In favour of theorising the diasporic's position between poles and cultures, they overlook the embedded meanings in psychological in-betweenness and juxtapositions between lust and disgust, sympathy and antipathy, and affection and aversion. According to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, disgust and beauty can never coexist (*Critique of Judgment* 116). He maintains that disgust is based on imagined, not necessarily real thoughts, and one always seeks distance from the object arousing this 'peculiar sensation' (*Critique of Judgment* 116). However, contrary to Kant's viewpoint on disgust, Sunetra Gupta's *Memories of Rain* show that disgust can demonstrate a desire for intimacy rather than for distance.

But what are the full features and roles of this 'gatekeeper' disgust (S. Miller)? Charles Darwin expands on Kant's brief description of disgust, stating that it is 'something offensive to the taste' (*The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* 256). He maintains that 'disgust is a sensation rather more distinct in its nature, and refers to something revolting, primarily in relation to the sense of taste, as actually perceived or vividly imagined; and secondarily to anything which causes a similar feeling, through the sense of smell, touch, and even of eyesight' (256). Disgust, he continues, can be characterised 'by a frown, and often by gestures as if to push away or to guard oneself against the offensive object' (*The Works of Charles Darwin, Volume 23* 256). The affect of disgust can help protect us, humans, from the bodily invasion of harmful and undesired objects, real or imagined, seeking to enter our bodies

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<sup>3</sup> See my demonstration in the introductory chapter: in section 4.2, I explain the conceptual problem and seek to illustrate further with figures 8 and 10. See also my alternative conceptualisation in section 5.1.

through any of our sensations. It is then manifested through physical and behavioural actions to stop or react to the offensive and unwanted object and keep ourselves away and safe.

Gupta's novel abounds with example disgust. For instance, when Moni's music teacher arrives that morning for a routine lesson of playing the harmonium and singing Tagore's song of rain, he shows his disgust at the view of the sleeping Moni's brother's friend, the Englishman Anthony. He 'picks his muddy way past the white man, [and] glances at him with disgust' (*MR* 9). The idea of Anthony being a 'white man' is referred to just before the teacher arrives when Moni's mother gives her permission to enter the room where Anthony is sleeping. She 'had allowed her to wander through the living room in her nightdress, which she would never have tolerated if any other friend of her brother's had been asleep on the moist floor, but he, this white man, was too remote to be a threat, there was no need for modesty' (*MR* 9). The idea of 'allowing' Moni to be close to this man (Anthony) and why he has not considered a threat is meaningful, and I will return to this point later in this chapter. I am now discussing the grounds of the music teacher's experience of disgust. Is he simply disgusted to see a man or a 'white man' sleeping?

In his commentary on Darwin's text, Philip Prodger contends that Darwin's description overlooks the cultural aspect of disgust. According to Prodger, 'there are two disgust expressions. Darwin described one, but not the best one — in terms of people of various cultures agreeing that disgust, not contempt, is being shown' (*The Works of Charles Darwin, Volume 23* 256). Kant's conception of disgust based on 'mere imagination' seems relevant here (*Critique of Judgment* 116). Tomkins's also seems right in his correlation between disgust and 'social norms' and 'racial prejudice' (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 235). He further explains the basis of disgust as a racially biased 'learned response' to difference backed up by

social conventions. In other words, the reason (object or quality) arousing the feeling of disgust is not always an intrinsic or ‘innate’ disgusting quality in the object of disgust. It can also be subjectively evoked because of learned social and cultural understanding and knowledge (235), regardless of its Lyotardian validity and ‘legitimacy’ (18), as discussed in section 3.6 of the introduction. That is, a sleeping man or ‘white man’ cannot logically be a real cause and object of disgust. Instead, this disgust experience here refers to its process of evolution: it must have been learned, and the racialised knowledge is questioned by Moni, who approaches the sleeping Anthony but feels no disgust. In other words, disgust is thus a source of information, not about the object (Anthony) but the subject (the music teacher). It seeks to maintain distance, not to preserve the body intact but alterity, difference and identity (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 235).

Tomkins sheds more light on the interpretation of shared disgust as an affirmation of belonging or as a ‘powerful source of cohesion and identity’ (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 248). He agrees with Freud that such feelings of disgust could signify unease and discomfort due to the decreasing distance between self and other, between them and us, which is between two spheres of belonging (248-49). He states that:

every group requires an enemy upon which to discharge its aggression [which] is more properly translated into the proposition that group cohesiveness and identity depends heavily on the sharing of a common object of contempt—those who are different from us, who do not understand us, to whom we would never permit membership, who, in short, disgust us. [...] The Cartesian formula is here transformed: ‘We are disgusted, therefore we exist’. (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 248–49)

Tomkins makes the relationship between disgust and identity clear and unequivocal: to belong or not to belong is whether members of a specific group are disgusted at the sight or proximity

of what is other and different. Forget logic and reason for now and just be disgusted! This is the implied and indirect message to Moni by the elder generations, guardians of the collective identity.

Moni and Anthony, however, fall in love and decide to marry against the wishes of her wider family and relatives. Her uncles and aunties protest at the marriage and ill-suited groom (21). As touched on earlier, Guppy reminds us of the symbolism of the wedding and of Kipling's 1889 poem 'The Ballad of East and West' in which he wrote, 'Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet' (245). Kipling's theory is voided by the actuality of the meeting and marriage, as Whitman foresaw in 1855 in his volume 'Leaves of Grass': 'The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage / The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near / The lands to be welded together' (6). Moni's elders show Kiplingian notions: the chasm is unbridgeable and the couple are therefore unmarriageable, they seem to argue (Neti 98; Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 19). Even though if such matches and marriage will be bridging the 'East-West divide' and bringing these others closer together, Moni's elders seem to be 'disgusted' at this prospect: the 'irate uncles, [and] their disgusted wives, hours of frantic weeping, a river of tears' (MR 21).

Winfried Menninghaus says, in *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, 'everything seems at risk in the experience of disgust. It is a state of alarm and emergency, an acute crisis of self-preservation in the face of an unassimilable otherness, a convulsive struggle, in which what is in question is, quite literally, whether 'to be or not to be'' (1). This is the exact and concise explanation of the elderly woman who found a 'tissue' in her Morrison's delivery and felt very 'disgusted' and therefore complained about this incident (Parker and Rodger). A tissue can only become disgusting when we know how it can harm our bodies that might not

cope with the threats the coronavirus poses. As Tomkins teaches us, learning and knowledge are of paramount importance (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 235). Biology here helps illustrate the more sophisticated abstract questions of social and cultural questions of disgust in terms of identity and belonging.

Furthermore, Anthony and Moni's relationship is mired with the colonial past (Brady). Moni's elders see him perhaps as a new 'coloniser,' according to Brady, and he seems to see Moni and India as a body to explore and colonise or possess. This reading is confirmed in the novel when it is highlighted that Anthony 'had come to this land, as his forefathers had done, with a conviction that all he wanted would be his' (*MR* 40). The idea of the colonial past is conjured up when 'he could not leave this putrefying city without her, that it would not be enough to cherish the beauty of their unconsummated passion' (38). This textual endorsement and evidence that Anthony is somehow following the steps of his colonial 'forefathers' provide a significant piece of evidence that the disgust is a psychological call for distance and rejection of recolonisation (*MR* 40). It is an uncannily invoked association to see the colonial past in Anthony, or the past in Moni, an association in which the role of history and knowledge or experience is clearly indispensable. The elders and relatives are equipped with this underpinning repertoire of historical knowledge and anticolonial convictions for their disgust to build upon and be activated in defence of the collective identity (Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 235, 248–49; Menninghaus 1; S. Miller; Colarossi).

As Tomkins contend, disgust is also a taught and learned experience that is passed down within families, communities and social groups via 'imitation' or 'identification' (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 420–22). The decreased distance with the *white man*, the husband-to-be Anthony, is not as disgusting to Moni as to her teacher, uncles, aunties and elders. Kant

claims that disgust (a desire for distance) and beauty ('deeply desired' according to Hofstadter and Kuhns) can never coexist (Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 116; Hofstadter and Kuhns xiv). However, Tomkins shows us that 'it is possible to be disgusted at attractive objects only under the condition that imitation of them, or increased closeness, or incorporation of them is also tabooed' (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 357). Thus, disgust that is supposed to express common bonds, identification and belonging lacks the distance required in Moni's case, which is, partly at least, attributed to her emotional attachment to Anthony who 'fascinated her', contrary to social expectations and prohibitions (Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 357; S. Gupta, *MR* 3).

Tomkins further explains that 'members of a minority group with whom contact is distant or minimal are a ready source of learned disgust' (420). As mentioned above, the absolute otherness and distance of Anthony's ethnicity or social group have been the reason and justification for Moni's mother to allow her to enter the room where he was asleep. She believes that 'he, this white man, was too remote to be a threat, there was no need for modesty' (*MR* 9). The 'threat' the mother is talking about here is related to gendered ethics. It is not socially and ethically accepted in many eastern societies for women to meet or be alone with men. Anthony is, however, 'too remote' (*MR* 9), for which same reason he is a 'ready source of learned disgust' (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 420). But against all social and psychological expectations, Moni does not conform to this knowledge: disgust is thus out of order, and belonging is in question. To be disgusted or not to be disgusted is now a question of identity and gendered belonging par excellence.

Anwar indicates that South Asian families living in Britain often disapprove of their children's full integration when this is at the expense of diluting their identity and culture

(Anwar, *Pakistanis in Britain* 141–42). This indicates that South Asian, and perhaps most Eastern families impose restrictions on their children lives in Britain, especially on their girls, who ‘are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively’ (Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* 45). Moni’s is perhaps a story of silent rebellion against these limitations and the general status quo. She seems to ask Lyotardian postmodern questions about the passed-down ‘narrative knowledge’ of her community and social group (Lyotard 17). As demonstrated in the introduction, section 3.6, Lyotard explains how non-scientific narrative knowledge, like cultures and social customs, legitimate itself by telling and retelling; ‘it is a strange brand of knowledge, you may say, that does not even make itself understood to the young men [and women] to whom it is addressed!’ (21). It is composed of prescriptive rules that have not scientific and logical explanation, a symbolic ‘bond’ and order with a set of unspoken but widely agreed conceptions and *Dos and Don'ts*, so to speak (Lyotard 25). But, when ‘judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables,’ Lyotard argues (xxiii).

As mentioned above, the older generation’s conservative desire to preserve the collective cultural identity and maintain the status quo often collides with the younger generation of women’s counter-desire for change, freedom of choice and belonging beyond the traumas and uncanny fears of the past. As Anwar states, ‘there is a conflict between continuity and change facing the young South Asians’ (*Pakistanis in Britain* 192). Moni’s experience seems to usher in change, 1) through failing to experience disgust and show and share the underpinning sense of a common counter-belonging, and 2) she does not only approach him and enjoy his proximity, but she also falls in love, and they get married and have a daughter who is six years old (*MR* 9, 17–18, 31).



This inter-generational conflict of liberal versus conservative modes of perceiving identity and change is present in fact and fiction, East and West. Yasmin Hussain points out that this debate is now a common thematic concern of the contemporary novel and a hot topic for debate. (15). In Britain, the older and younger generations' political attitudes are starkly different and divergent concerning such contemporary issues as deciding the future with Europe and Brexit. In 'How Britain Voted' (2016), Peter Moore shows that the older and less educated voted conservatively to leave while the younger and more educated voted to remain. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart discuss this same point further in their book *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (398), and so does James Hitchings-Hales in his 'The Age Gap: How the Old Defied the Young on Brexit and Trump' (2016). What such studies show is that the new generation has started to question and divorce the myths and misconceptions of the older generations' cultures. Furthermore, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, the new educated generation has also started to demand freedom and choice concerning such important personal decision as marriage, and the social values of arranged marriages seem to be gradually corroded (Pande 175; Bhopal 35)

These findings by Paskah Pande and Kalwant Bhopal are in line with Lyotard's argument when he ushers in that narrative and knowledge is losing grounds and are in 'crisis' (41). He maintains that 'Lamenting the "loss of meaning" in postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative' (Lyotard 41, 26). Moni does not fully uphold her community's shared social and cultural conceptions and values, and she embarks on a journey of re-mapping these narratives and thereby reconfiguring her own belongings. First, this takes place when she decides to marry Anthony and travels with him overseas to England, and second when she leaves Anthony and travels back to India, challenging her family's and community's gendered conceptions that a divorced woman, a

woman without a man, is ‘a new grief, that of a daughter rejected, a daughter spurned’ (*MR* 33). She pulls herself up to the challenge, and she becomes determined on ‘eclipsing them all’: Anthony, Anna (Anthony’s white mistress) and her own family and society (*MR* 24).

In his discussion of Meera Syal’s *Life* (Chapter 3), Dave Gunning points out the need for ‘the questioning of tradition and its tendency to essentialise an atavistic notion of identity’ (113). This is not only relevant to Syal’s novel but also to this text by Gupta, where the underlying conflict between conservative and unorthodox perspectives on identity is often non-confrontational. Moni’s story seems to tacitly and affectively question some sociocultural conceptions and deep-running identity politics: to belong or not to belong through affective manifestations. Her conceptions about identity and feelings of belonging seem to diverge from her community’s and larger family’s. As Muhammad Anwar and Rita Isaac et al., family plays an important role in the lives of South Asians, especially women, as will be further demonstrated in Chapter 6 (Anwar, *Pakistanis in Britain* 24; Isaac et al. 39). A family is a source of social, cultural and ethical values, but for many members, especially the new generation of women like Moni and many other women characters in the other texts selected, these values might be antifeminist, gendered and limiting.

Moni reflects upon her inability to flourish as a person or engage and socialise effectively with others after she marries Anthony and travels with him to London:

Had she been arrested in her development, remained the passive, attentive child, by crossing the seas to an unfamiliar country, where, despite her half-finished honors degree in English, she could not find the right words, the right expressions, to voice her opinions, to participate but in the most banal of conversations, or was she merely passive by nature, content to sit and listen?? (14)

Some writers like Shusha Guppy, Bidisha Banerjee and Leila Neti interpret such a statement as a nostalgic wish to go back home and the actual return to West Bengal at the end of the story as symbolic of the diasporan inability to belong, which creates a haunting desire to go back to an imaginary and idyllic home. Banerjee claims that ‘despite such agreement against the myth of return, in Sunetra Gupta’s novel, *Memories of Rain*, we see the protagonist returning to the city she had left ten years ago. For Moni, a spiritual return to her originary home is not enough. She must return in body to Calcutta, thus making her journey a circular rather than a linear one’ (Banerjee 1–2).

Banerjee’s reaching echoes Salman Rushdie’s statements in *Imaginary Homelands* where he says, ‘writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt’ (10). As demonstrated in the introduction, such readings are linear and position-obsessed that seek to objectify diasporans into homes, spatially or temporally. Moni’s return is conceived of as a sign of diasporic nostalgia to return home, a doomed desire to relive the past. Rushdie is not the only writer to have written about diaspora and diasporic nostalgia. Susheila Nasta, Muhammad Anwar, Robin Cohen and Yasmin Hussain, among others, have also done so. Nasta contends that “‘Home’ is not necessarily a real place but a mythical construct built on discontinuous fragments of memory and re-conceived in the imagination’ (9). Giles Mohan also contends in ‘Development and Displacement’ that “‘double consciousness’”, of being in a new place but connected to an “old” place, is central to the experience of diasporic communities’ (88). Avtar Brah’s *Cartographies of Diaspora* and Robin Cohen’s *Global Diasporas* underscore the difference between transnational migratory movements with diasporic experiences (see more in section 3.5 of the introduction).

However, neither the concept of diaspora nor that of displacement applies to Moni's story in Gupta's novel. Like the story of Debendranath Roy in her other novel, *A Sin of Colour*, Moni's experience lacks the qualifying prerequisites of diaspora and diasporic nostalgias: 1) 'settling down, about putting roots "elsewhere"' (*Cartographies of Diaspora* 179), and 2) upholding the same and 'shared cultural values' with her community (G. Mohan 88). Moni neither settled down in England nor did she show full identification and belonging to her community's community back home in India. On the contrary, Moni is in the process of challenging these very values that she is supposed to hold dear as an alleged diasporan returning to the very home of these cultural values. Therefore, the return does not seem to be nostalgic or in search of home as it was, but how she wants it to be. She does not return to her family's house in Calcutta where she was raised, but to the countryside of West Bengal to work in a school away from her family and her pre-migration social environment. This novel has deeper meanings; it does 'more than describe a distance, the world that they have left,' to borrow Rushdie's words (430); it is rather concerned with the new world and female being to be.

Whether we draw on the authorial diasporic voice seeking to 'open new doors' to identity and belonging beyond the romanticisation of home (Rushdie 430), or on Moni's troubled marital experience and separation, a feminist reading of being and belonging is a must. As Kavita Daiya suggests, it is important to investigate how diasporans 'forge and reshape their identities (16). Moni's multi-faceted journey from India to England, then back again once and for all with her six-year-old daughter, signifies a transgression of expectations. Having had suffered a great deal of Anthony's abuse and sensuality, Moni starts to plot her departure. She is disheartened for a moment when she thinks of the way her family would receive their divorced daughter: 'how could she ever go home, home to the wild grief of her parents, the snickers of the neighbors, her brother's pity, his smugness' (13).

This is clearly not a nostalgic statement and memory of home, but critical. It is not the home she desires to return to.

It is in her very distance from Calcutta that Moni decides not only to leave Anthony, but also to undertake a bold and proactive transgression of the gendered sociocultural norms and women's status quo (14). As I discuss in the introduction (sections 6.1-2), (un)belonging is an insightful experience of distance and proximity that gives rise to acts of (un)belonging. Bhabha refers to Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and *Midnight's Children* that represent the history of India and Pakistan after Partition in a refined artistic method that may indicate that 'the truest eye may now belong to the migrant's double vision' (*Location of Culture* 5). Such is the case with Gupta's novel. Moni herself is a transnational fictional traveller who, as Said says in praise of Erich Auerbach's work: 'it was precisely his distance from home – in all sense of that word – that made possible the superb undertaking of *Mimesis*' (6). When Moni's negativity and withdrawnness are juxtaposed with Anna's confidence and boldness, Moni's 'passive' nature and need to change become visible and tangible to her. Jealousy and Anthony's negligence make her more determined to accomplish her mission, stating, 'his soul shall taste the sadness of her might' (8).

In Kristevan terms, Moni's transgression not simply of locality but also of women's times. In a flashback to her first meeting with Anthony in her parents' house in Calcutta, one can notice that her existence or presence was too insignificant for her brother to 'bother to introduce her' to Anthony (1). She is 'summoned' (2) and 'ordered' to do such tasks as to 'spread the clean sheets on her brother's bed', and she would passively 'nod' (6). Her brother 'had moulded her, told her what to read, how to appreciate it, taken her with him to plays and films, the right films, forbidden her to accompany her girlfriends to the trashy commercial

films' (12). As mentioned earlier, Moni is only 'allowed' to be around Anthony because he is 'too remote' being a 'white man' (9). These textual examples indicate the status of a woman in the social context in question: subjugated, snubbed, and shaped by a patriarchal andro-centric social and cultural environment.

On the other hand, while she is 'jerked awake' by her mother, the 'sleeping form' of her brother exasperates her. 'Let the boy sleep,' says her father (8). That is why, when the doctor breaks the news of her pregnancy, she prays for it to be a son because 'somehow a son would be a true synthesis of herself with him, an embodiment of their union, a daughter was an extension of herself, a daughter would not be his, a daughter would be hers alone' (18). Thus, by the time she moved to England, she had been accustomed to her assigned role, to the reduced woman's status being a 'shadow' at home and 'among her brother's friends' (MR 13). This state of being is replicated in her English husband's evenings with his friends in an uncanny but authentic resurfacing of the past homemade gender roles that were being questioned by Moni earlier. Her personhood is atrophied in the first place.

Thus, she looks vulnerable to Anthony, who represents both the colonial and androcentric desire for appropriation. He first 'longed deeply to drink of her existence, and in the years that had passed since, she had watched that desire fade' (MR 179), but as Marylin Dell Brady says, 'Anthony is the Colonizer, seeing in Moni what is lacking in himself. He has loved his image of her, not the real woman'. Therefore, such highly evocative and charged statements by Moni as the need to become 'whole again' and have the 'dignity of being that she seeks' (MR 24) provokes the inquisitive mind to enquire about the nature of the *being* sought. As argued above, Moni's journey eastwards is not a typical nostalgic attempt to reconnect with past homes, nor is it simply in quest of personal freedom of choice.

As Margaret McLaren argues, it is limiting and confining for women to simply seek ‘equality [...] rationality, autonomy, or choice’ (6); Julia Kristeva deems the endeavour ‘reactionary’ because women would sacrifice and lose their feminine subjectivity and seek ‘effacing of difference in their hectic quest for participating in the economic or socio-political male-dominant *Linear* history’ (12, 18, 33). Furthermore, the fact that Moni takes her six-year-old daughter along is a significant gesture that implies her intent to retain the archetypal role of reproduction and perpetuating the human race — her ‘Monumental’ role, according to Kristeva — and the routine and recurrent activities such as childminding, mothering, and household work — the ‘Cyclical’ role, in Kristevan words (12, 18, 33). In addition, Moni has already been working in the public library with her friend Lilian in England and cannot be travelling back to simply undertake a profession in teaching in West Bengal (*MR* 54, 64).

A Kristevan feminist reading finds the text journeying into a ‘*signifying space*, a both corporeal and desiring mental space’ typical of the multifaceted third-generational feminism ushered in and elaborated by her ‘Women’s Time’ (33). Kristeva’s first generation seeks ‘linear’ participation represented in socio-political and economic terms and driven by liberalistic values of equality, free will and choice; the second abandons these ideals and reclaims the prototypical and ‘cyclical’ motherly routines as well as the ‘monumental’ perpetuating function of sexuality, childbirth, reproduction and female subjectivity and difference, while the third-generation feminist movement is outlined by Kristeva and heralded as *Linear*, *Cyclical* and *Monumental* (33), which is what, it is argued here, Moni’s story represents.

According to Spinoza, lust is ‘desire and love in matters of sexual intercourse’ (*Improvement* 186); it is, William Shakespeare also says it in his Sonnet 129, ‘rude, cruel, not

to trust' (329). To Anthony, Moni and Anna are sexually and symbolically juxtaposed as antithetical Others but concentrically contrasted with Anthony's centre of narcissism and lust. It is thus possible to talk here of macro- versus micro- othering taking place within the inter-dependent, the inter-sexual relationship between the one male 'Subject' and the two female 'Objects' (Lauretis 153; de Beauvoir 362, 642). In *The Second Sex*, Du Beauvoir maintains that a woman's 'narcissism, as a rule, disappears at the time of sexual maturity. Instead of a woman's being a passive object for her lover as for herself, there is a basic confusion in her eroticism. In a complex impulse, she aspires to the glorification of her body through the homage of the males to whom this body is destined' (362). In Gupta's novel, the narcissistic and Anthony-centred sexual objectification of Anna (the mistress) and Moni (the wife) is driven by androcentric lust; the female bodies are colonised by Anthony, 'the coloniser' (Brady). Unlike Brady, I am also using colonisation in a gendered context if one is somehow able to associate colonisation, figuratively speaking, with sexism. If Moni is a journey of discovery and subjugation, Anna is a body for sexual gratification and objectification for Anthony (S. Gupta, *MR* 49–61); both are needed as discerned in this excerpt from the text:

perhaps she [Moni] was what really held them together, Anna and himself, without her, there, would be no substance to their relationship, he remembers a night, drenched with lavender, in the hills of Provence, where, among the olive groves, he had first kissed Anna's warm lips, he remembers his sad exhilaration grappling with an emotion long forgotten, an emotion that is there but in faint wisps, on the winding path back to the rented cottage he is divided between an excruciating guilt and insane desire to preserve the passion that having climaxed in that one painful kiss seems now to be melting away. In the distance, he can hear Moni singing, she sits by the window, her song drifting towards them with the spiced winds, her foreign lament,



was it joyful, it was her song that had hypnotized them then infused them with a gentle sustained lust, that was, perhaps, their doom. (11)

Moni ponders upon her reduced and atrophied personhood and womanhood and discovers she has not ever ‘ventured to take her destiny into her own hands, not a single decision, in ten years, she has never made any arrangements other than for dinner parties, other than getting a baby-sitter’ (*MR* 23). Her patronising husband, like her brother and her community in Calcutta, wants her being and belonging to revolve around men’s desires and needs. The two patriarchal systems (spousal and familial) both manipulate her and try to distance her from her own social circles of friends, such as Lilian, with whom Moni works in a public library (*MR* 64–66). Mary Lago rightly observes in her review of the novel that ‘Moni’s life is controlled by others until she leaves London’ (445). But the idea of taking hold of her future, planning her departure, her uprising against oppression, finally becomes the dynamic force that fuels her desire to see herself, as she says, ‘eclipsing them all, now, there was a woman, there was everything she aspired to be, and planning her departure, she feels a strange kinship with herself, feels that she finally become worthy of her respect’ ((24). This climatic moment and revelation, the story’s denouement of self-discovery and self-reclamation, represent ‘an explosion of an ego lacking narcissistic gratification’ as Kristeva puts it (25)

This joyous epiphany in Moni’s journey to the being and belonging she aspires to has been aesthetically drawn by Gupta, empowered by her authorial and insightful (un)belonging to the same sociocultural environment as an insider outside as demonstrated in the introduction (section 6.1). Furthermore, the ‘dynamic’ nature of cultural identity, the ‘never complete, always in process’ belonging, to use Stuart Hall’s words is what makes possible Moni’s story of resurrection and uprising against double-edged prejudices and subjugation by family and

husband (Hall, 'Culture, Identity and Diaspora' 222; Graves-Brown et al. 1). In other words, Moni's pursuit of the woman she likes to be is bound to transcend Anthony's colonial lust and her society's gendered social and cultural norms and beliefs. Transcendence will certainly be disgusted and ethically and politically considered a daring transgression of the boundaries set for her by the social *big brothers*, or 'significant others,' to use Hall's words ('The Question of Cultural Identity' 275).

Hall presents three conceptualisations of identity: 1) the 'Enlightenment subject,' 2) the 'sociological subject,' and 3) the 'post-modern subject' ('The Question of Cultural Identity' 275). The 'Enlightenment subject,' according to Hall, is 'fully centred, unified individual' with an 'inner core' or identity while the idea of the 'sociological subject,' like in Moni's case, 'was formed in relation to "significant others", who mediated to the subject the values, meanings and symbols — the culture — of the worlds he/she inhabited' ('The Question of Cultural Identity' 275). In the context of Gupta's novel, this applies to Moni, who is 'moulded' and shaped into the sort of being her 'significant others' of family, husband and wider community deem acceptable (S. Gupta, *MR* 12; Hall et al. 275). Anthony does not only like her exotic otherness but also her vulnerability, which is a product of some gendered and sexist androcentric aspects of her social and cultural identity, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter.

Thus, this story represents a quest for unbelonging to a twofold objectifying 'symbolic contract' to use Kristeva's words (21). For Moni to achieve the *being* she aspires to, she is to defy the deified. In other words, she needs to transgress the double sexual and narcissistic

*othering* by Anthony and the expected male-dominant sociocultural ‘contract’<sup>4</sup> back home when she returns. First, it is exacerbating for her that her husband Anthony is complacent to with his sensual relationship with the green-eyed English blonde Anna; he has ‘come to terms with his infidelity,’ and he begs Moni ‘to accept it, to reconcile the poetry of his passion for Anna with his deep affection for her and her child’ (11). To actualise the *wholeness* and personhood she wants, Moni needs to fight a double war; that is, to challenge Anthony’s *lust* and confront and transgress the *disgust* of her family and androcentric community once she is back.

An example of the Lyotardian social and cultural ‘narratives’ that Moni faces is the conception that a woman with no male protection, without a man, cannot be safe and happy, which lacks the logical ‘legitimation’ and justification (Lyotard 27; S. Gupta, *MR* 24). The idea of a woman without a man triggers in Moni an image or, in her words, ‘a sense of desiccation that she had always associated with women without men, a concept that had terrified her’ (*MR* 24). Lyotard explains in detail the ‘language games’ implemented by the narrative knowledge such as this sexist conception that life without men is not safe or worth living without men (Lyotard 18–27; S. Gupta, *MR* 24). As Jane Duran states in *Worlds of Knowing: Global Feminist Epistemologies* that ‘most of the protection and most of that which is deemed to be traditional has to do with gender and the subordinate status of women’ (39). Identity is thus interlinked with ‘politics,’ as Joh Tomlinson maintains (161), and also with affect given the variety of affective experiences involved such as disgust or the sense of trepidation and fear Moni feels at the approaching time of the birth of her new self and being, without a husband,

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<sup>4</sup> The term ‘contract’ in this context has been extensively used in Kristeva’s ‘Women’s Time’ (1988) but it is supposedly coined by the famous French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau in seminal 1762 book, *The Social Contract*.

without a man, when she leaves Anthony and travels to India to start a new life alone with her daughter.

Moni's story is related Rekha Waheed's Maya in Chapter 6 through the commonality of the female struggle against the 'illegitimacy' of the gendered social and cultural narratives. Maya is a 28-year-old single girl, who is also often reminded of her status and spinsterhood and that she needs a man. The reiterated and recurring idea of women's insecurity without men is reminiscent of the gendered attitudes involved in the task to punctuate this sentence: 'Woman without her man is nothing' (McMillan 41). According to Sue MacMillan's *Easy Peasy English*, most men indeed punctuated the sentences as 'Woman, without her man, is nothing' while women would be expected to punctuate it as 'Woman: without her, man is nothing' (41). In fact, women such as Moni (Chapter 1), Reba and Srimati (Chapter 2), Tanya, Sunita and Chila (Chapter 4), Nazneen and Hasina (Chapter 5) and Maya and Tanya (Chapter 6) reject the sexist woman-is-nothing-without-a-man conception with counter-narratives. Perhaps when Moni contends that Anthony will 'taste the of her might' and proverbs 'life without wife is like fifty without five' ('English Proverbs').

This might be humorous, but proverbs play an integral part of Lyotard's language games are used to perpetuate narratives (22). Language is used to justify itself by itself through telling and retelling, a process of 'self-legitimation' in which proverbs play a powerful role in moulding people's conceptions and inscribing the specific and socioculturally symbolic codes of the collective group identities (9, 47, 49). As Lyotard says, 'consider the form of popular sayings, proverbs, and maxims: they are like little splinters of potential narratives, or molds of old ones, which have continued to circulate on certain levels

of the contemporary social edifice. In their prosody can be recognized the mark of that strange temporalization that jars the golden rule of our knowledge: “never forget.” (Lyotard 22).

Thus, Moni is determined to challenge these norms, to un-belong to them and re-belong the true and independent woman in herself following her the example of her aunt who had also suffered from an oppressive marital experience but survived it and rebuilt her own personal and professional life as a headteacher:

Perhaps she would take up a post at some small village school, like her aunt, who had escaped the tortures of a cruel marriage in her tiny, whitewashed headmistress’ office, shaded by squat mango trees. Tortured by her husband’s family for the small dowry she had brought, she had walked out, in her bare feet, onto the baking Calcutta pavements, the melting asphalt, one rancid afternoon, she had appeared at her parents’ home, like a stubborn ghost, and for five painful years she lived there, almost as a servant, struggling through college, until one bright morning, she had quietly laid a carbon copy of her appointment letter on her father’s desk, packed her few belongings, and left. In remote, rural Bengal, a two-hour cycle rickshaw ride from an obscure train station, she had climbed from the ranks of a junior teacher to headmistress at the village school. (24)

The destination of her journey, being her birthplace home, is not of much diasporic or nostalgic significance to Mary Lago. It is simply a familiar place to Moni, according to Lago, who contends stating, ‘at the end of the novel, Moni buys plane tickets and flees with her daughter to India because she has nowhere else to go, full of misgivings but needing a familiar place’ (445).

Moni's aunt's desire for self-protection from her husband's family's oppression and torture creates a chance for her to embark upon an exciting adventure of self-discovery and fulfilment, a remarkable undertaking that is replicated in Moni's case regardless of the latter's crossborder journey and inter-ethnic marriage. As demonstrated above, she ushers in and represents the third of Kristevan women's time or generations. Her rebellion against Anthony and her community's expectations and social contract opens up new horizons of being 1) 'whole again;' 2) a woman worth of 'her own respect;' 3) being able to participate in history and socioeconomic life as a teacher, and 4) keep raise her daughter in West Bengal while she continues to work. She embarks on a mission of autonomy and independence to amend and build her life as a South Asian Bengali woman. This is story is more concerned with transgression and transcendence (as discussed in the introduction, section 3.6) than in the transnational journey per se, more in crossing and transgressing the boundaries of cultural identities and gendered power relations and oppression than in crossing physical borders.

To conclude this chapter, I will reiterate the key points and findings of this discussion of lust and disgust. By foregrounding Moni's own story, from her point of view, this discussion seeks to break the linearity and argue for a diasporic-centred relationship between East and West, no matter what we conceive of Moni's experience —whether an immigrant, migrant or otherwise, regardless. This reading has shown that diasporic interpretations of this text lack in depth and insight. It is critically simplistic to regurgitate theories of diaspora and nostalgia to interpret all journeys of return to the birthplace location are examples of longing and a quest of rebelonging to homes of the past (as detailed in section 3.5). Hence, this line of inquiry adopted by Shusha Guppy and Bidisha Banjeree seems to overestimate the importance of Moni's eastward journey. Instead of focusing on Moni's subjective aspirations and personal struggles

against objectification, such readings seem to be obsessed with the spatial linear positioning of diasporans between homes and locations, as I illustrate in section 4 of the introduction.

As also demonstrated in the earlier paragraphs of this chapter, drawing on Tomkins' pioneering research and other writers' work, disgust is not simply a call distance and self-protection against extra-bodily threats, but it is also an indirect expression and identification with one's social group's collective identity. Disgust has been associated with racial prejudice and psychological articulation of social and cultural identity and difference. To disgust is to belong to a shared common identity and identify with its fellow members of that community in face of the intrusion of others. Moni's failure to share the feelings of disgust towards Anthony has three meanings, according to Tomkins: 1) Any relationship and match with Anthony, 'the white man' is disapproved by her community; 2) the consummation of the love with marriage is like a desired but socially forbidden fruit to her, as she is to Anthony; and 3) Moni does not fully uphold the embedded values of her community's cultural identity (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 235, 248–49).

These inferences have led me to delve deeper into Moni's story of love, lust and disgust. Anthony's journey eastwards to India is not without the symbolic meanings of the British colonial past. As Guppy maintains, Anthony is a 'coloniser' who could not leave India without the woman he passionately desires to possess (S. Gupta, *MR* 40). In England, Moni continues a life on the peripheries of patronising and dehumanising men through Anthony's 'infidelity' and sexual affairs with Anna (S. Gupta, *MR* 44). Thus, she one day decides to be 'whole again' as a woman, regardless of any limitations of social and cultural identities (24). She thus rewrites her being and belonging and challenges the narratives of her society's gendered identity politics and norms that conceive of women as secondary to men, unable to lead a life of their own.

Allegorically speaking, there is are such sexist narratives that imply men are number one while men are nothing without them, like the zero in the ten. This is integral to Lyotard's discussion of the language games of narrative knowledge that seek to self-legitimise itself through proverbs and story-telling (9–18). But Moni's does challenge and change such misconceptions by reclaiming herself and planning to rebuild her life with her daughter in West Bengal away from Anthony and her family.



## Chapter 2: Distress and Dejection in Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* (1995)

Unlike Walt Whitman's journey to India in 'Leaves of Grass' (1870) and E. M. Forster's in *A Passage to India* (1929), Debendranath Roy's (Deben's) fictional passage in Gupta's second novel *A Sin of Colour* (1999) is reversed as he travels from Calcutta to Oxford in pursuit of a career in academia. Following the example of *Memories of Rain* and its protagonist Moni's experience, the inter-continental cross-border journey recurs with Deben and his niece Niharika. But again, as demonstrated earlier in Chapter 1, the journey per se is not a primary source of meaning as some writers like Joel Kuorti argue. Rather, as Bruce King points out, this novel is concerned with the 'obsessions, traps, and illusions of desire' ('Review of SC' 584); it 'expounds on the mysteries of the human heart,' according to Jeff Zalesi (67). This chapter explores these mysteries and seeks to uncover new meanings embedded in the realm of women's affects and emotions. I will specifically investigate women's feelings of distress, sadness or unhappiness to find out their relationships of cause and effect relationships with the broader social and cultural antifeminist values and women's sense of belonging and identity.

This discourse about feelings, affects and emotions is in fact an aesthetical undertaking, according to Sigmund Freud who maintains in *The Uncanny* that aesthetics is not only concerned with beauty but also with 'the qualities of our feeling' (123). In *Aesthetics*, the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel says that 'feeling is the indefinite dull region of the spirit; what is felt remains enveloped in the form of the most abstract individual subjectivity' (32). Hegel is perhaps right to suggest the elusiveness, ambiguity and person-specificity of human feelings but he seems to imply that they are confined to a person's inner world and that their meaning is hard to decode. But as demonstrated in section 6.3 of the

introduction, Tomkins's affect theory shows that we can certainly elicit insightful meanings from the various affective experiences, which have clearer bodily manifestations and meanings than emotional states. As Sally Panalp also argues in *Communicating Emotion*, feelings are revealing; they can 'uncover implicit values' and causal subtexts that originate them (191). In section 6.3 of the introduction, I point out the differences between emotions (involves 'memory'), feelings ('awareness') and affects ('unmodulated physiological reactions' ('Prologue' xiv). Tomkins draws on the natural biological reactions to enunciate his pioneering affect theory as a separate field of knowledge with big insights into our social lives.

King compares the novel to a 'complex house of mirrors' ('Review of SC' 584), which invokes the concept of 'affect-mirroring' where people, especially children and parents, empathise with each other's feelings and imitate their affects (Holodynski and Friedlmeier 110). As Prinz says in his *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (2004), our emotions are 'typically elicited by external events' (3), which stresses the causal relationship between various inner feelings and emotions and their causes and interconnections with the outside world. The 'sin' in Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*, indicates transgression of boundaries and invokes negative ethical connotations, but when 'of colour,' it opens new perspectives and possibilities for meaning and debate. So what sort of sins is Gupta referring to in this text? To describe an ethically wrong act as colourful and perhaps beautiful implies can be an embedded questioning of a given ethical code one or others are supposed to adhere to. As morality is an integral part of the social and cultural identity, embracing or problematising what is deemed wrong is perhaps a sign of women's attempt to reconsider and redefine identity and the social code of ethics and morality, as will be discussed and demonstrated in this chapter.

Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* involves multiple stories within its larger story. These stories are concerned with the events and development of a few main characters: Deben; his mother Neerupama Srimati, his brother's wife Reba, his niece Niharika (Reba's daughter). Deben's mother Srimati Neerupama Roy moves from North to West Bengal after her marriage to Deben's father Indranath Roy in Calcutta. She is the local doctor's most beautiful and intelligent girl. She excels at school and plans to continue her studies, but her 'father was reluctant that she should leave home unless to become a suitable man's wife' (SC 8). Upon her marriage, she leaves her 'beloved home' and is sent to Calucatta along with a servant boy (SC 142). Later that servant becomes her accomplice against her husband's family's prejudices. He hides the post her family sends to her from North Bengal, and she would 'lock herself in the bathroom to read them and weep with homesickness' (SC 143). The above paragraph does not only provide descriptive details about the text; it points out significant points from Neerupama's story: 1) the oxymoron of being homesick at home. 2) a woman stripped of the right to self-determination, access to higher or further education and later participation in the social and economic life; 3) crying as an expression of unhappiness.

It is vital to analyse and understand the reasons and meanings of Neerupama's weeping, which would also elucidate and illustrate the first two points. According to Tomkins, the first thing humans do upon coming to life is to send out a 'cry of distress' (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 3). In the case of a baby, it is undoubtedly physical pain and distress that causes the cry. But for adults, crying is more sophisticated, and as various physical and psychological factors are involved. In this respect, Tomkins agrees with Darwin that 'crying expresses suffering "both bodily pain and mental distress"' (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 5). In a similar vein, Ad Vingerhoets argues, 'the shedding of emotional tears is not just a symptom or sign of sadness and/or other emotions. Rather, very complex behavior that is under the influence of

biological, psychological, and sociocultural forces' (2). Thus, it doesn't suffice to say that the act of a woman's crying means she is unhappy or distressed. This experience has far-reaching meanings and implications, psychological and sociocultural, as Tomkins and Vingerhoets unequivocally state (Vingerhoets 2; Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 5).

As discussed in section 6.3 of the introductory chapter, Gregg and Siegworth echo Spinozan affective refrain 'to affect or be affected' when they state that affects (distress is one of which) indicate an 'encounter' in which a party has the power to influence another that is that will be impacted because an affect stems from an '*inbetween-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon' (Gregg and Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader* 1; Spinoza, *Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* 212; Massumi, 'Pleasures of Philosophy' xvi). If crying indicates distress, and distress as an affect denotes an equation of cause and effect, then it follows that distress as an effect is transitive, transcending itself, to point out to specific reasons, which are clearly social and cultural in Neerupama's case (Vingerhoets 2). Neerupama is not only prevented from continuing her education but also from seeing her family. Home in general, or the marital home in specific, is in effect not simply a hostland, but an exile where one has duties towards the husband and husband's family but no rights<sup>5</sup>.

In 'The Family: A Matriarchal Institution,' Mary Kenny says, 'In the canon of contemporary feminism, the Family is usually seen as an oppressive, patriarchal institution maliciously designed to make women miserable' (28). Neerupama's distress is, therefore, a biopsychological response to the prejudices of an antifeminist patriarchal society; that is, the

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<sup>5</sup> This idea of unhomey homes recurs in many novels in this selection. I have touched on this idea in the previous chapter (Chapter 1) but will enlarge on it in Chapter 5: 'Interest and Homeliness in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*'.

physical or biological bodily manifestation of the distress affect represent the tip of the iceberg while the sexist social practices and their pre-manifest (affective) psychological impact constitute the bottom of the that iceberg, as it were. As Kenny suggests, some eastern societies and their diasporic communities overseas are often built upon gendered and antifeminist sociocultural norms and value systems, which is epitomised by the authority of the family<sup>6</sup>.

This novel by Gupta echoes Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* (2016) as it raises similar questions about women's status quo and the possibilities of change. As Ahmed indicates, some prejudicial social practices and expectations are deep-rooted within the social and cultural belief systems like fossils that are difficult to change. Ahmed contends that feminism in daily life is to find ethical answers to intractable situations and relationships of inequality and injustice to women, and methods to stand by these women who are often the victims of these 'social systems' and their 'histories that have become concrete, histories that have become as solid as walls' (*Living a Feminist Life* 1). Such a statement by Ahmed indicates the ossified nature of anti-woman norms and practices and the challenges facing diasporic feminism striving for change home or overseas. The difficulty stem from the controversy of having to break down the whole values system and dissect the holistic social and cultural identity, in which gender and women constitute an integral part.

The shared challenge Ahmed and Gupta face here is dealing with fossilized conceptions and gendered sociocultural norms about. In other words, this can be illustrated in terms of mother Nature and palaeontology. The OED describes a fossil as a substance being 'unchanged

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<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 6 ('Fear and Family in Rekha Waheed's *The A-Z Guide to Arranged Marriage*'), I will discuss the role of the family in the lives of South Asian women (Bengalis in this novel) in more detail.

by surrounding alterations' and 'belonging to a previous period or era,' which is exactly what Ahmed wants to say about some gendered social ideologies and practices that do not keep pace with change. For example, the modernity and change suggested by the technological development represented in the novel contrast with the unchanging social and cultural conceptions of the role of women in some Eastern societies. So while the gatekeeper (the servant given to Neerupama upon her marriage) reflects on the big technological changes and how the 'old transistor radio' has developed into a small radio, she contemplates the commentator's role: 'He had never dreamt in the wildest of his dreams that he would possess a radio someday and that it would be small enough for him to hold in one hand'; Neerupama however 'who would sit entranced by the commentator's voice. It made her head reel to think that it came from so far away, she would try and imagine where he was, what he saw while he spoke for all of Bengal to hear. She envied the great responsibility on his shoulders' (S. Gupta, *SC* 172).

Aguiar argues that technological developments have helped to infuse new ideas and transnational horizons into 'fundamental traditions' ('Arranged Marriage' 183). This idea is also reiterated by Lyotard, who argues that due to these huge technological advances starting since in the latter half the twentieth century, 'the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age'; furthermore, Lyotard adds, the 'the miniaturizations and commercialization of machines is already changing the way in which learning is acquired, classified, made available, and exploited' (3–4). The moment when the Radio presenter addresses the whole nation through that small device symbolises an aspect of 'the transformation of knowledge and its effects on public power' (7). The envy Neerupama shows is perhaps a sign of the beginning of the disintegration of the patriarchal culture and authority.

To illustrate, Neerupama's envy of the Radio presenter's job indicates her desire to undertake such privileged roles. The word 'envied' means 'to feel displeasure and ill-will at the superiority of (another person) in happiness, success, reputation, or the possession of anything desirable; to regard with discontent another's possession of (some superior advantage which one would like to have for oneself)' (OED, 'Envy, v.'). Clearly, Neerupama apparently contemplates a role in the history-making of her nation in the linear life of socio-political influence. She shows signs of the early existential and suffragist feminist demands of 'economic, political, and professional equality' as per the first generation of feminists illustrated in Kristeva's *Women's Time* (21).

Bethke Elshtain's *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* discusses women's political aspirations, pointing out that it is dangerous for feminists to use anti-Suffragist arguments that women are by nature born to look after their family and children while men are there to govern, rule and decide the trajectory of history because reiterating such statements help to promote the claim that 'man and woman are different in essence and hence must have separate spheres of activity' (230). Furthermore, the game Neerupama pretends to play with the gatekeeper signifies her yearning for freedom and self-fulfilment: 'Here now is the Slave Coast, she said, where they will catch you and put you on board a ship to America, and there you will live without your freedom, as the possession of a family, you will never be able to run away' (172-73). This far-fetched picture of being enslaved by and to a family represents a significant analogy between the abuse of women after marriage and the historical slavery in America, 'a country conceived in freedom but based in slavery,' where 'the severest restrictions on the chances of a slave becoming free' were imposed, according to Philip D. Morgan (54).

Michael Lambek argues in his *The Ethical Condition: Essays on Action, Person, and Value* that ‘Any discussion of human freedom sits in an interesting place between what is and what ought to be, which is what some consider the true realm of the ethical. What ‘is’ is the realm of fact, the way the world is now; what ‘ought to be’ is the realm of value, as we imagine something better’ (4). Thus, feminist questions of women’s freedom have ethical as well as psychological dimensions. The textual pictures of women struggling with social and cultural limitations and yearning for freedom could be considered not only descriptive but also prescriptive of change. Lambek’s ‘ought to be’ is a call for change represented in the text by the explicit and sometimes embedded voice for freedom and the rights of the Indian woman (4).

John Stuart Mill maintains in his *Subjection of Women* that any restriction on personal freedom of will and choice will necessarily and proportionately reduce an individual’s happiness and value of life; ‘Every restraint on the freedom of conduct,’ Mill states, ‘dries up *pro tanto* the principal fountain of happiness, and leaves the species less rich, to an inappreciable degree, in all that makes life valuable to the individual human being’ (188). Consequently, the feelings and affects of distress, melancholy and unhappiness necessarily indicate social and cultural injustices and lack of freedom. Catherine E. Ross states in her *Social Causes of Psychological Distress* that ‘The despair these people feel is deeply personal. Their problems are deeply social.’ She goes on to add, ‘More than that, it is the despair that identifies the social facts as social problems. [...] Sociology springs from humanistic empathy and concern as much as from scholarly and scientific curiosity’ (1–2). Jessica A. Leveto expresses a similar view that happiness ‘is inherently social’ (628).



Highlighting the crucial social aspect of human life and the impact of societies on the individual is not at all an original modern thought. A human being, according to Aristotle, is a ‘social’ and ‘political animal’ (4). Jean-Jacques Rousseau also says ‘the social contract is the basis of every civil society’ (625). In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler goes further to argue that, not only happiness or dejection are social, but also the body:

The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own. The struggles for a less oppressive social world for the otherwise gendered and for sexual minorities of all kinds, is precisely to underscore the value of being beside oneself, of being a porous boundary, given over to others, finding oneself in a trajectory of desire in which one is taken out of oneself, and resituated irreversibly in a field of others in which one is not the presumptive center. (21, 25)

As indicated in Gupta’s novel, Neerupama is clearly unhappy and ‘restless’ because, as part of her marital symbolic contract of subordination to her husband’s family, she is to seek her mother-in-law’s permission and ‘blessing’ to go out of the house to visit her family or do her exams (SC 44). However, her leave is often rejected she misses her exams because a relative is expected to visit that day (44). Neerupama ‘cursed herself for having come to ask her blessings at all’ and then wept ‘bitterly’ (44). As Butler says, a woman’s body is a social property, her freedoms are curtailed further after marriage, and she becomes an object of her husband’s possession. This loss of freedom and choice and limitation breed feelings of distress and dejection.

Neerupama's daughter-in-law Reba (Deben's brother's wife), shares the same experiences as her mother-in-law. When Niharika travels to Oxford and meets Rosemary Faraday, she realises, through an insightful experience of (un)belonging, that her mother Reba, unlike Mrs Faraday, sought to avoid the 'rituals of womanhood ... to reinvent herself in her music, and somehow had failed' (*SC* 104-05). Reba's romanticism and 'morbid dedication to her art' show her unhappiness with her gender role and, by extension, with her belonging to the social culture in question (*SC* 54). When Deben visits her during her confinement at her family's house for the duration of her birth, as per the social norms, he says that he:

suddenly realises how lonely she must feel within the walls of his home, how sad the prospect of returning to her husband's home' [...]. He felt that she had filled her life with many things and yet not filled it at all, that within her was a vast empty space, sacred and untouchable, for she had found nothing yet that was worthy of inhabiting it, despite all her knowledge and her wisdom, and all her rich and tender links to the dead and the living, she had found nothing to adorn these recesses, and in scenting their starkness, he felt as if he were gazing upon the cavernous ruins of a great city. (*SC* 18)

The text draws a surrealist psycho-aesthetic picture in which the affective or psychological is enmeshed with the effective that lies in the factual world outside the self. The ubiquitous sense of unease, distress and sadness calls the critical mind to investigate the reasons behind such negative affective and emotional states. Why is Reba unhappy about returning to her husband's house? Why does she feel such a void or vacuum in her inner world? Why has Neerupama locked herself in the bathroom of her husband's mansion and 'sobbed bitterly' (*SC* 44)? Such psychic and affective states of despair, distress and unhappiness do indeed have a link with the causal extra-psychic social and cultural worlds and environments, as Mill, Ross and Leveto assert (Mill 188; Leveto 628; C. E. Ross 1-2). As the story unfolds, it is clear that

the patronisation and objectification of women is key to the understanding of their affective and emotional states.

Antoinette Burton raises a potential counterargument that the European feminist voices against claimed antifeminist practices in East or South Asia are imperialist rather than humanist in nature. In her *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture*, she maintains that ‘the pathos of feminist narratives about Indian women—whom they depicted as helpless, unemancipated, and trapped in zenana existence—made the body of the Eastern female the object of humanitarian concern and, [...], a pretext for feminist imperial intervention’ (65). In adopting an affective subjective approach (as demonstrated in section 5.2 of the introduction), I am foregrounding an objective research-evidenced account of the South Asian women’s emotional experiences and point of view, which cannot be Eurocentric or imperialist. It is women’s voice.

Niharika, Deben’s niece who follows his steps to Oxford to pursue her studies in England, compares her mother, Reba, with her friend Daniel’s mother. In hindsight, she realises that her aesthetic engagement with music, art and singing is a technique to hide her deep-down distress and unhappiness with the womanhood her patriarchal community dictates. Niharika says:

There was in her a particular sense of satisfaction with life that Niharika had never found in either her mother or in Jennifer, a treacly gravity that was profoundly connected to the rituals of womanhood that engirdled her, and from which she would never think to escape, while her mother had tried so hard, it seemed to Niharika, to run away, to reinvent herself in her music, and somewhere had failed. (SC 104–05)

Niharika's English friend Daniel's mother, Rosemary Faraday, looks quite content and happy with her status quo and the woman she is. According to the OED, *to escape* means 'to gain one's liberty by flight; to get free from detention or control, or from an oppressive or irksome condition' and *to flee* means 'to run away from or as from danger; to take flight; to try to escape or seek safety by flight.' Reba apparently seeks to run away from the oppression, injustices and loss of freedom of will and choice through music, art and aesthetic decoration of her house. Reba's arranged marriage to a man she does not seem adds to her struggles with her secret love to Deben. This aesthetical luxury she indulges herself in, singing, decorating the house and playing the musical instruments, turns out to be a defensive mechanism, a way of coexisting with unfavourable and oppressive *homegrown* realities. Burton's critique that this sort of feminist discourse is of imperialist ends is not only untenable but also blind to the emotions and feelings of the very women in question, which constitute a primary and authentic source of meaning.

When Deben travels to Oxford and meets Jennifer, the landlady's granddaughter, and his wife-to-be, she asks him about a picture of his mother, Neerupama, on his desk, saying:

And who is she? asked Jennifer, of the one other photograph he kept in open view upon his desk.

My mother, he replied.

She looks sad, observed Jennifer.

She was sad, he confirmed, although I never knew it, not until just before she died.

And how did you know it then? she asked.

And he told her of his mother's madness, how it had started with small things, faint emulations of her daughter-in-law's habits, [...].

Like Reba, she ordered paintings on silk, and jewellery boxes of Kashmiri craftwork.

(SC 7)

In their *Sociology of Emotions*, social theorists Jonathon H. Turner and Jan E. Stets argue for a link between emotions and identity, between the internal and external perceptions and meanings of one's own identity. When both images of identity conform through behaviours and actions, happiness and positive feelings emerge, and vice versa. They contend that 'the hallmark of the identity process is that the meanings held in one's identity standard are congruent with the ongoing meanings of the self in the situation. When an interruption occurs, identity standard meanings become discrepant with self-in-situation meanings, and negative emotion is experienced' (127). The reason why Neerupama strives to imitate Reba is apparently that the latter's behaviours and aesthetic actions are deemed more feminine. Indranath compares Reba with his wife Neerupama, saying, 'Here was a woman, he felt, who was engaged with the world, in her own small ways, as a woman should be, here was a woman who radiated grace' (14).

The woman-identity standard as set by the patriarchal Indian society in Gupta's novel seems to be incongruent with Neerupama's actions and behaviours; the 'discrepancy' Turner and Stets speak about seems to be one of the reasons of the negative emotions Neerupama shows (127). They maintain that it is 'the lack of congruence between meanings and perceptions that generates negative emotions, and, by implication, it is congruence that produces positive emotions' (127). The absence of conformity or the 'interruption' between the conceptional standard and actuality of the woman identity generates negative emotions and distress (127). The self, as Turner says, is 'a cognitive and emotional force in human interaction'(103). Therefore, the negative affective reactions to the 'feedback' others provide on one's identity represents internal and external conceptions. Indranath's conception of

womanhood and femininity as an essence to have or not to have, or as a representation of a homogenous monolithic image, is exactly what Kristeva seeks to challenge with the third generation of feminists she ushers in her 'Women's Time'. This third generation combines the symbolic (sociocultural) and the sexual (physiological) contracts 'in order to try to discover, first, the specificity of the female, and then, in the end, that of each individual woman' (21). The comparison implies a standard identity quality or core quality all women are expected to have to qualify for *woman* and *feminine*, which would in effect negate any heterogeneity and personal difference of the women in question and their variable social and cultural environments, possibilities and limitations.

The question of woman recurs through the selection of novels in this thesis. What is a woman? How could a woman be more feminine than another? Indranath Roy's comparison between his wife and his newly married daughter-in-law Reba upon her first arrival in Mandalay, the name of the mansion where the family lives in Calcutta, poses many controversial points as stated in this excerpt from Gupta's text:

Reba came into the household, quiet and dignified, and yet so much of a feminine presence than his wife, who more and more had retreated into the shadowed corners of herself, each day a little paler, like a faded mosaic, [...]. Reba, he felt, was no less composed than her mother-in-law, but hummed with temperate womanly energy, transforming her corner of the great house into a region of easy beauty, with flowerpots on the balcony, and framed Moghul miniatures on the walls. Her tiny kitchen was always kept so prettily, stocked with meticulous jars of spices and dried fruits, her gleaming vessels carefully piled with layers of muslin in between. [ . . . ] Here was a woman, he felt, who was engaged with the world, in her own small ways, as a woman should be, here was a woman who radiated grace, while his wife only dwelt within her own

luminosity, drawing inwards the music that should have streamed forth from her, sucking into herself the harmony of her movements that had drawn him to her, that summer day, so many years ago, when he had watched her walking home from school through the dust, her head bent, her books clasped to her bosom, her black braid swinging gently upon her back. (SC 14)

Indranath Roy seems to have an imaginative definition or standard for womanhood and femininity, which makes possible his comparisons. His controversial statement ‘as a woman should be’ is not only a patronising but it is also part of the ethical and political narratives of the gendered metanarrative of the collective social and cultural identity. This ‘should be’ is not different from Lambek’s ‘ought to’ that concerns, as he says, ‘the realm of value, as we imagine something better’ (4). As Lyotard says, these gendered narratives seem to ‘determine criteria of competence [of womanhood] and/or illustrate how they are to be applied. They thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture’ (23). The embedded Lyotardian message in Gupta’s novel is to question and challenge the ‘legitimacy’ of these narratives and sexist conceptions that have a big impact on women’s happiness and wellbeing (23). Lyotard maintains that such conventional social and cultural ‘knowledge’ (definition of woman) lack’s ‘legitimacy’ because women must be the subject and object of this knowledge so that it is becomes legitimate; ‘knowledge,’ Lyotard argues, ‘has no final legitimacy outside of serving the goals envisioned by the practical subject [women], the autonomous collectivity’ (36).

On another occasion, Reba is described to have ‘her head covered and her eyes lowered as befitted a young bride’ (SC 18). Simone De Beauvoir says in *The Second Sex* that women ‘are exhorted to be women, remain women, become women. It would appear, then, that every

female human being is not necessarily a woman; to be so considered, she must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity' (13). De Beauvoir in fact, humorously questions those views that femininity is at risk even though that at least half of the world population is constituted of women (13). While men, according to De Beauvoir, have a sense of pride in being male, the term female sounds 'derogatory' because 'it imprisons her in her sex' (35). She goes on to add that 'woman' arouses a sense of 'uneasy hostility' in men (35). Indranath judges Reba and Neerupama in terms of a form of womanhood he imagines and prescribes, an androcentric version in which woman revolves around man, the centre, producing an uncomfortable sense of antagonism whether women in the actual world acquiesce to or refuse men's definition of themselves.

He sets Indranath seems to be critical of his wife's change and withdrawnness, but he is blind to the reasons of the very gradual change he criticises: 'more and more retreated' and 'each day a little paler' (*SC* 14). He also retells the patriarchal sociocultural narrative of what a woman is and should do: to engage in the world in her 'own small ways, as a woman should be' — the sexist 'small ways' a man would approve of (*SC* 14). The constraints and limitations implied in the 'small ways,' the 'corner' and the 'tiny kitchen' Indranath Roy designates as spaces for women echo the sense of 'imprisonment' de Beauvoir talks about (*SC* 14; DeBeauvoir 35). The Indian woman in this novel (Neerupama and Reba) are clearly detained and incarcerated by the concept of womanhood imposed by men.

When Niharika travels to Oxford and her mother Reba visits her, she (Reba) realises that 'never before was it clearer to her how small were the kingdoms over which her mother had been granted dominion, a petty patch of waterside in this foreign land, the limited society of her peers in Calcutta, the narrow halls of her husband's home' (*SC* 102–03). Nira Yuval-



Davis raises an interesting point when she refers to the comparison Claudia Koontz makes between the mottos prescribed for men and women in the Hitler Youth movement in her book *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (1968). For girls, Yuval-Davis says, the order was ‘Be Faithful, Be Pure, Be German!’ but, on the other hand, for boys, it was ‘Live Faithfully, Fight Bravely, and Die Laughing!’ That is, according to Yuval-Davis, ‘Boys heard the command to act; girls to be’ (196). In a similar vein, Reba tells her daughter Niharika that her two boys ‘were an event in the family’s history, [whereas] you were simply mine’ (SC 79).

Nevertheless, as Yuval-Davis says, ‘women especially are often required to carry this ‘burden of representation’, as they are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity’s identity and honour, both personally and collectively’ (*Gender and Nation* 45). In Gupta’s first novel *Memories of Rain*, Moni’s father’s only request for her marriage to the Englishman Anthony to go ahead is to have her wedding ‘done the traditional way’ because apparently, as Yuval-Davis argues, women do not represent themselves only but also the identity of the whole group they belong to (MR 8). This is a ‘burden’ and not a privilege, which is a cause of unhappiness and distress due to limitations on their freedom in the name of the collective identity.

Let’s re-reconsider the nature of aesthetic forms of engagement with the world Indranath thinks women ‘should’ adopt to be ‘more feminine’ (SC 14). For Indranath, his presumed capacity to determine the size of a woman’s interaction with the world (in ‘small ways’) signifies a taken-for-granted sense of superiority. But the nature of those forms described is as meaningful as the size suggested. Let’s contemplate a list of words and phrases quoted in the excerpt above:

a) *'like a faded mosaic,' 'easy beauty,' 'flowerpots,' 'framed Moghul miniatures,' 'radiated grace,' and 'music' (14).*

b) *'kitchen was also kept prettily,' 'jars of spices and dried fruits,' 'gleaming vessels carefully piled,' 'most delicious of savouries for their tea,' 'bake cakes' (14).*

Clearly, the implied method for a woman to be more feminine is to be more appealing to a man, to satisfy him and gratify his senses by material means (food and sex) as well as immaterial (beauty and music). This outstanding segregation of roles between men and women is reiterated by many feminist writers. For instance, in *Genre Fission: A New Discourse Practice for Culture Studies*, Marleen Barr contends that 'patriarchal gazes are communication games which deny power to women [...] Prostitutes, and all women, satisfy the male eye and are degraded by the male eye. Prostitutes, and all women, are slaves who serve the patriarchal gaze' (77). Such objectification of women is conducive to unhappiness and dejection, which is manifested through affects of distress and crying.

When Deben visits Reba in her father's house where she stays to give birth as per social norm, he remembers the first time he 'had first set eyes upon her, three years ago, when he had come to pass judgement on her suitability as a bride for his elder brother' (15). This textually sketched picture of a social gathering to assess a girl as a future brother/son's wife is culturally known 'bride-viewing' or 'seeing the girl' as will be discussed further in Chapter 6 (Aguilar, 'Arranged Marriage' 182–83). This particular action of viewing or seeing reinvokes Barr's concept of authoritarian 'patriarchal gazes' that 'deny power to women' and downgrade them, symbolically, to 'slaves,' according to Barr (77). By doing so, and in the name of social and cultural norms, this gaze takes no account or consideration of women's feelings, ambitions and free will, which echoes Thomas Martin's juxtaposition of 'men/we subject' versus 'women/them object' (135). The implicit meaning is that 'humanity is male and man defines

woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being,' as de Beauvoir puts it (16).

Thus, the controversial statement 'as a woman should be' is not simply patriarchal and anti-feminist because it seeks to dictate women's role, but it is also ethic-based because it is concerned with an imagined world of subjective 'value' and image of femininity presented as an absolute objective truth (Lambek 4). Butler also argues that 'the particular sociality that belongs to bodily life, to sexual life, and to becoming gendered [...] establishes a field of ethical enmeshment with others and a sense of disorientation for the first-person, that is, the perspective of the ego' (21, 25). This ethical and gendered socio-political entanglement for the Indian women in this novel often falls prey to patriarchal Machiavellianism as men seek perpetuation of their power and dominance and continuous satisfaction of androcentric sexual desires using social, cultural and ethical arguments (SC 42, 9, 25, 51, 185). Women are subjugated to a social contract, which has been used in ethical and political discourses since Socrates, who, according to Celeste Friend, used 'a social contract argument to explain to Crito why he must remain in prison and accept the death penalty' (IEP). Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau expand and support this seminal theory of the social contract, according to Celeste Friend. The unjust sociocultural contract and even the patriarchal 'sexual contract' as explained in Carole Pateman's *Sexual Contract* (2014), seems to be the reason behind women's negative emotions, distress, dejection and unhappiness.

According to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Philosophy of the Mind*, 'Happiness is the mere abstract and merely imagined universality of things desired' (*Philosophy of Mind* 92). In other words, there must be actual objects of desire whose fulfilment, possession, or acquisition generates positive feelings of satisfaction, content and happiness. However, the

main female characters in this novel seem to struggle with thwarted desires in love and life, which accounts for the general sense of melancholy in the text. Neerupama and Reba both have no freedom of will to decide their marital, social and professional lives in a patriarchal community. The former (Neerupama) is first forced to marry as a child (SC 142). Then she suffers a great deal from her husband's family, who prevent her from continuing her education or even visiting her family (SC 142). Likewise, the latter (Reba) shows no fewer signs of sadness and distress and a 'grand vein of unhappiness that ran through her' as she struggles with a marriage without love and love without marriage (SC 161). According to the OED definition, the positive meanings of partnership, union and unison of marriage are not applicable to the matrimonial relationships in this novel as the female partners struggle with distress and bitterness.

The text is abundant with examples and words that indicate negative emotions and affect such as 'sobbed bitterly' (9,44), 'sad' and 'sadly' (7, 18, 45), and 'retreated' (14). Women are also often withdrawn and indifferent. For instance, Neerupama 'who had once vowed to devote her life to the struggle to free her country from the yoke of imperialism, now felt that the fate of the world was of no consequence to her at all' (SC 45). These feelings show thwarted desires for freedom. Free will and engagement in the social and economic life of the society, which Kristeva calls participation in the 'linear' history, a participation that compliments the other roles in childbirth ('monumental' duty) and routine tasks such as childminding ('cyclical' role) (17). Hegel contends that freedom and happiness are inseparable; he believes in free will and 'choice that gives itself an end in Happiness' (*Hegel's Introduction to the System* 173). As discussed earlier, Indian women in the novel lack freedom: Neerupama is forced to leave college for marriage, and Reba's seems to be in love with Deben and her marriage is arranged and not of her choice. As Butler argues, women's bodies are social

property, not fully theirs (21, 25). This lack of freedom, this subjugation and objectification, as Hegel suggests, is the grounds for distress and unhappiness.

As will be discussed further in Chapter 5, home in which one lacks freedom of will, choice and self-determination is no longer ‘as a place of safety and nurture,’ according to Wendy Webster; it is rather ‘a main site of oppression for women’ (ix). The idea of *being at home* is juxtaposed with the more important *feeling at home*, which does make the meaning of home not only controversial but also further problematises the ‘dynamic’ concepts of belonging and identity, according to Yuval-Davis (‘Belonging’ 199). She underscores the positive meanings of belonging that is, as she says, ‘about emotional (or even ontological) attachment, about feeling ‘at home’’ (‘Belonging’ 197). (*Outside Belongings* 24). Thus, as women in this text are not free or happy, and the emotional connection with the home is therefore and necessarily weaker, it follows that a silent and deep-rooted sense of unbelonging becomes a logical and reasonable inference to make. As mentioned in the introduction (section 6.3), Sliwinska points out the identity does not always mirror belonging (287). These women’s externally ascribed belonging is at least partially and psychologically lacking, incomplete, or undesired; they seek to belong to other homes, real or imagined, where fulfilment and happiness is possible, which uncannily creates the oxymoron of being away at home and entangles the feelings of the Freudian ‘homely’ and ‘unhomely’ (126–28).

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and identity, according to Yuval-Davis ('Belonging' 199). She underscores the positive meanings of belonging that is, as she says, 'about emotional (or even ontological) attachment, about feeling 'at home'' ('Belonging' 197). In a similar vein, Elspeth Probyn contends that belonging is not simply a passive feeling or a fixed state that is politically and externally ascribed to individuals, but it comprises an active and positive 'desire' or 'wish to belong' (*Outside Belongings* 24). Thus, as women in this text are not free or happy, and the emotional connection with the home is therefore and necessarily weaker, it follows that a silent and deep-rooted sense of unbelonging becomes a logical and reasonable inference to make. As mentioned in the introduction (section 6.3), Sliwinska points out the identity does not always mirror belonging (287). These women's externally ascribed belonging is at least partially and psychologically lacking, incomplete, or undesired; they seek to belong to other homes, real or imagined, where fulfilment and happiness is possible, which uncannily creates the oxymoron of being away at home and entangles the feelings of the Freudian 'homely' and 'unhomely' (126–28).

An effective narrative technique Gupta also uses to describe women's unhappiness, repression and distress is the intertextual reference to Greek mythology. For example, Niharika asks her mother Reba to perform as Medea who 'slit the throats of her children' and the latter plays the role so well. Niharika notes that her mother Reba's performance and movements are 'movements of a woman stunned beyond reason by the failure of love, for it had seemed to her then that it resonated too closely with the grand vein of unhappiness that ran through her mother's life' (161). Niharika observes that her mother's distress or 'anxiety' is because of the sacrifices she makes to protect herself from the 'the vagaries of a man's heart' (161). According to Luke Roman and Monica Roman's *Encyclopaedia of Greek and Roman Mythology*, Medea is the princess of Colchis and King Aetes' daughter and granddaughter of Helios, the god of

the son (305). She is believed to have abandoned her father and family to help a Greek man called Jason, who afterwards betrays her (306). Roman and Roman add that ‘Jason successfully brings back the object of his quest [Medea] to Greece, but he also brings back a foreign woman who will wreak havoc in Greece [...] Then, after painful hesitation in Euripides’ version, Medea kills her children to maximize Jason’s pain and to prevent her enemies from triumphing over her by mistreating or harming her children’ (306).

In myth, fact and fiction, women seem to be abused and oppressed. Neerupama, in turn, is described as ‘withdrawn from it [the world] into unfathomable depths of her own. Between him and her private kingdom was a wall of terrifying silence’ (12). What is more meaningful than the ‘wall’ and the distance or lack of communication implied is the telling contrast between ‘him’ and her ‘private kingdom,’ between the distant and masculine unknown entity and the vast and unexplored ocean-like territories she rules over (12). One of the most relevant and interesting OED definition of the word *kingdom* is that of ‘a sphere, area, or place in which a person has authority or power.’ Clearly, there is an implied link between the senses of autonomy (‘kingdom’), privacy (‘private’) and vulnerability (‘terrifying’). Furthermore, the numerous references to the ‘unfathomable depths’ and ‘underwater kingdoms’ (SC 12, 103, 174) as well as to figures of Greek mythology such as Creon and Tiresias (SC 189–91) show a potential intertextual symbolism of Neerupama being the nymph Amphitrite who suffers a great deal from Poseidon, the god of the sea and earthquakes; ‘when Poseidon first courted her, Amphitrite fled from him. Poseidon sent all the sea creatures in pursuit of her. [...] Other accounts of the origins of the marriage show a darker side to the sea gods nature, saying that Poseidon carried the nymph off, raped her. and made her his wife against her will’ (Cavendish 1144).

The similarity in this novel between men as gods and women as objects of desire is prominent. Another vivid intertextual example is Niharika's description of her mother Reba as an elegant and charismatic woman whose 'fragrance swept across their faces like the wrath of god (66). This reminds us of Sophocles' *Oedipus The King of Thebes* and the plague that afflicts the whole city because of the sins that Oedipus had committed (Roman and Roman 366). In Reba's (and Deben's) case, it is apparently the silent and thwarted love that is the plague, so to speak, that brings the eventual downfall of Mandalay like a divine Oedipal curse. According to *Oedipus The King of Thebes*, Oedipus is thrown away as a baby by his mother, Queen Jocasta and his father King Laius of Thebes, because the seer foretells that he will kill his father. He is found by the sea by a man from the neighbouring city of Corinth and decides to give him to the King and Queen of Corinth who have no children, so Oedipus becomes the prince of Corinth. When Oedipus hears that he will kill his father (the adopting King of Corinth), he leaves for Thebes but on his way, he kills his real father King Laius.

In Thebes he solves the riddle and helps rid the Thebans of the Sphinx. The Thebans then make him their King and he marries the Queen, his real mother, which fulfils the prophecy. They have also four children, Oedipus's brothers and children. The sins committed by Oedipus cause a plague in the city and Teiresias, the blind seer, finally confronts Oedipus with his prophetic knowledge about Oedipus's sins, stating:

Behold the brother-father of his own  
Children, the seed, the sower and the sown.  
Shame to his mother's blood, and to his sire  
Son, murderer, incest-worker. (Sophocles 27)

The chorus then sings a song about the yet-unconfirmed killer of the ex-King of Thebes, which echoes the sense of rage in Gupta's text; it says, 'That the wrath of the world go seek for the



man whom no man knows. [...] / Rage in his heart, and rage across his way' (27–28). The word in Gupta's novel, 'like the wrath of god' (66) resonates with Sophocles's 'rage' and 'wrath' (27). As Tomkins argues, affects of anger and rage are closely related to distress in terms of the similarity of the causes and triggering factors that induce these affective reactions; in his words, he says that 'Since we believe that anger—rage is an affect which is innately activated by the same type of stimulation as is distress—anguish, except that it is a somewhat higher level of density of neural stimulation which is involved, it easily happens that distress itself, experienced unrelieved for some time can produce sufficient increment of stimulation to innately activate anger' (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 64). This means that the feelings of distress, dejection and unhappiness ('under the skin') erupt outside the body and manifest as anger (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 687).

'If there is no further punishment for the expression of anger,' Tomkins also says, 'then this sequence may be telescoped so that the beginning of the distress cry becomes the learned activator of anger' (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 64). However, this is not the case in terms of women's ability to express anger when they are distressed, so they resort to tears, according to Tomkins who adds saying, 'if one were to interfere with or inhibit the anger, these individuals should suddenly find themselves with a strong impulse to cry' (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 64). The persistent thwarting or marginalisation of women's desires and dreams is a key point of discussion in this chapter and perhaps the whole thesis; it is the cause of distress and dejection and the inhibition of expressing their anger at the community's patronisation and indifference to their hopes, aspirations and feelings triggers their tears. After all, Tomkins defines distress as 'the affect of suffering, making of the world a vale of tears' (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 687). Thus, if belonging is all about positive feelings, emotional connections and a sense of inclusion, according to Yuval-Davis ('Belonging' 197),

and also wishing and willing to be part of a given group or community according to Probyn (*Outside Belongings* 24), we can conclude that the female Indian women in this novel show as alienating and intractable sense unbelonging, or at least (un)belonging to connote a partial state of belonging and unbelonging. This condition is not so far fully articulated and debated in current literature and knowledge, and this study is a necessary intervention to help the existent women's voice be heard and spotlight their call out for a reformation of the gendered social and cultural identity. The signs of modernity and shown at the end of the novel and Niharika's choice not to return to Calcutta to marry Rahul but to disappear with her lover Daniel in the Cherwell tends to symbolise the trajectory of change and the eventual freedom of will and choice sought for love and marriage (SC 215–19).

To sum up, this chapter addresses and explores the social, cultural and psychological dimensions of feelings and affects. As Freud points out, this undertaking is not only social and cultural or feminist but also aesthetic because it is also concerned with the meanings and manifestations of women's feelings of distress, dejection and unhappiness (123). This discussion starts with King's and Jeff Zalesi's quick and shallow hints to the emotional and affective aspects of Gupta's novel, but it has articulated and explored these feelings and affects in detail and has developed a deeper understanding of the causal workings and thus the feminist and social implications. Contrary to Hegel's suggestion about the 'indefinite'-ness of the emotional realm and its confinement to one's internal world (32), I have established a form of affective transitivity, that is, the capacity of affects and feelings to transcend the self and denote relationships with external social phenomenal and problems, especially the gendered social and cultural transactions. This transcending of the inner to the outer and social causing and affecting events and phenomena has been endorsed by many writers and theorists such as, in addition to Tomkins, Nathanson, Vingerhoets, Prinz, Ross and Leveto. According to many psychologists

and writers such as Silvan Tomkins, Sara Ahmed, Ad Vingerhoets, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigwort, affects are in fact effects caused, not states that just happen.

The analysis of Neerupama's act of crying and shedding, upon her marriage and moving out to live with her husband in his luxurious mansion has indicated social and cultural meanings and influences, which also echoes the Spinozan's mantra of affection 'to affect or be affected' (Vingerhoets 2; Gregg and Seigworth 1; Spinoza 212; Massumi xvi). In Neerupama's case, she is negatively affected by a patronising husband and her husband's family who compare her to Reba, her daughter-in-law and disregard her desires and ambitions to complete her education and contribute to the wider (8, 142). As Kenny points, the family thus becomes a site of oppression and subjugation of women (28). The feelings of unhappiness and despair are not therefore, simply personal, but they point out 'social' problems and prejudices (Ross 1-2; Leveto 628). This feminist conception of the family as a sexist androcentric authority echoes Ahmad's *Living a Feminist Life* that reiterates the ossification of gendered sociocultural ideologies that underpin and illegitimately justify certain norms and practices in given communities and social contexts (Ahmad 1; Lyotard 8-41). The social practice of 'bride-viewing' is an example of the subjugation of women to a judgemental patriarchal gaze, if not objectification of her being and body (Aguiar 183-82; Barr 77). Thus, with Ahmed, Kristeva, de Beauvoir and Butler, feminism in this chapter meets and conflates in aims and interests with the sceptic Lyotardian postmodernism that questions the validity and justifiability of women's gendered roles (*to feed, please and serve*) and the definition of woman (Ahmed 1; Kristeva ; Butler 21-25; de Beauvoir 13, 35; Lambek 4; Elshtain 230).

Women's negative feelings of distress, dejection and unhappiness have been argued to be the result of two processes. First, they are the effects of the cause: the curtailment and limitation, not to say the complete absence, of women's freedom and self-determination by

patrons and patriarchal matrons (as is the case with Neerupama and her husband's family) and by the sexist androcentric social institution of marriage that disregards women's emotions and desires (as is the case with Reba's wedding), according to Mill (188). Second, the lack of conformity between the personal (inner) and social (outer) identities, according to Turner and Stets, produces negative feelings of unhappiness (Turner and Stets 127). On the other hand, the conformity and agreement between the internal and external images of women's identities evoke positive feelings of belonging and happiness (127). Thus, unlike the Englishwoman Rosemary Faraday, Reba seeks to flee the constraints and 'rituals of womanhood,' Niharika observes (104-05). That is, she is discontent with her community's definition of woman and designation of her limited roles within the walls of men's houses, a father or a husband.

Gupta's references to Greek mythology in the novel when stressing women's rage and anger at the status quo has invoked an interesting intertextual association with the Oedipal experience and sins reinvented in Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*. We learn from Tomkins that anger and is related to distress and in fact the suppression and the inhibition of anger results in crying and shedding of tears (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 687). Thus, this gives us insight into the meaning and significance of Neerupama's episode of crying referred to at the beginning of this chapter and many other examples in the text (*SC* 143). Tears thus signify that women are torn between the desire to express and the need to suppress: to express their anger at their dehumanising status quo and the need to suppress that desire due to an oppressive patriarchal culture that inhibits women's ability and express themselves freely and voice their rejection of certain practices and norms. Tears are therefore signs of a silent call for change, a change and questioning of these gendered narratives and sexist prejudices. As Hegel associates between desires thwarted and happiness lost, arguing that happiness is the totality of 'things desired, unhappiness must necessarily imply a general state of rejection and loss of things undesired

(*Philosophy of Mind* 99). The absence of the positive feelings of happiness will, in turn, negate the feelings of belonging given that belonging, as Yuval-Davis and Probyn argue, involves internal feelings of being included and desiring and appreciating the inclusion and social connection to a given group or community (Yuval-Davis, 'Belonging' 199; Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 24). In a word, women's distress and dejection in this novel do thus support a trilateral interconnection between gender, affect and belonging.

### Chapter 3: Pride and Prejudice in Meera Syal's *Anita And Me* (1996)

The title 'Pride and Prejudice' might remind you of Jane Austen's 1813 romantic novel *Pride and Prejudice* (16 December 1775 – 18 July 1817). According to Robert C. Fox, almost all the events of the story are concerned with bringing the two main protagonists in the novel together by the removal of the barriers caused by Darcy's pride and Elizabeth's prejudice (185). Meera Syal's debut novel *Anita and Me* (1996) might be primarily concerned with 'questions of belonging,' as Shweta Kushal and Evangeline Manickam say (87), but pride and prejudice are key to understanding the novel, I will argue in this chapter. Like the author Meera Syal, the main character Anita Kumar is also a second-generation immigrant born in the West Midlands of England to Punjabi Indian parents (Proctor). Syal studied English and Drama at the University of Manchester, and, in addition to writing, she works in acting and journalism. The autobiographical associations between Meera and Meena are tangible and visible in the setting of the events of the story that take place in a small village in the Midlands whose people work in mining, according to Proctor and Syal's novel.

The nine-year-old Meena grows up in a small Punjabi family within a white English community in the 1960s. The events take place in a critical moment of Meena's early childhood and psychological development. She tries to strike compromises between her family's expectations on the one hand and those of her English white peers on the other. Many reviews of the novel adopt conventional readings of identity as Meena is claimed to struggle between cultural identities and belongings<sup>7</sup>. Kushal and Manickam, for instance, claim the novel is concerned with a 'conflict that creates a rift in the self of the individual [due to the] yawning gap between the culture of the community to which they belong and the world in which they

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<sup>7</sup> See section 3.4 (Schizophrenic Inbetweeners) for more details on this debate.

live' (87). For Rosellen Brown, the text is also considered to be 'preoccupied with ... conflicts of a child of a minority culture facing the temptations and losses that come with living far from one's (or one's family's) homeland' (7). Furthermore, in her 'Siting Speech' Leila Neti draws on Homi Bhabha's 'DisseminNation' to theorise a form of in-between belonging that is claimed to bridge the gap between cultures, or, in Leila's words, of 'cosmopolitan migrants who stand at the fault line between the foreign and the familiar, who move ever closer to the potential merging of the two sides of the divide'<sup>8</sup> (98). These two perspectives on Meena's claimed unbelonging<sup>9</sup> (chasm and/or bridge) show a conventional understanding of diasporic belonging as linear and intransitive, that is, concerned with self-referential dilemmas and passive bipolar positions<sup>10</sup>. In this chapter, (un)belonging is argued to be a proud affective reaction to external prejudices and racism in the outside world: pride is thus a counterforce that resists and rejects racial discrimination and prejudice.

In his review of the novel, Bruce King maintains that Syal's *Anita and Me* is a text 'cleverly combining, and often inverting, many formulas' (*Review of AM* 373). King does not fully explain this statement, and it, therefore, raises more questions than those it seeks to answer. In this chapter, I will illustrate how the text challenges and 'inverts' traditional conceptions about diasporic belonging and identity (*Review of AM* 373). Does Meena really suffer from a crisis trying unsuccessfully to compromise between, and come to terms with, disparate poles of (un)belongings as Kushal and Manickan, Rosellen and Neti argue? As discussed in section 4.1, Floya Anthias shows in her 'Evaluating "Diaspora": Beyond Ethnicity' the shortcomings of

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<sup>8</sup> See section 3.6 (Cosmopolitans and Chameleons) where I critique such theories.

<sup>9</sup> As defined and demonstrated in section 6 of the introduction.

<sup>10</sup> As demonstrated in sections 3.3, 3.6 and 4.2. See also my alternative conceptualisation in section 5.

diaspora as an analytical tool of varied diasporic experiences because it tends to underrepresent ‘the relationship between forms of exclusion, and indeed differentiated inclusion’; hence, Anthias calls for further investigation of the varied hues and aspects of the trope of belonging and unbelonging (12).

Thus, one might view Meena’s endeavours to be part of Anita’s gang, the Wenches Brigade, and the adventurous white children’s world as an internal conflict and inability to belong (unbelonging). However, upon fully exploring the subtexts of such desires and attempts, a different interpretation transpires. Indeed, Meena says, ‘for some reason, I wanted to shed my body like a snake slithering out of its skin and emerge reborn, pink and unrecognisable’ (146). She is keen to belong to Anita’s world, but it is uncritical to interpret such an experience as simply a form of self-contained and self-evolved experience of unbelonging. Such a reading would ‘reproduce’ the text through ‘a respectful doubling commentary,’ in Derridean words (159). To read ‘against the grain,’ as Terry Eagleton suggests, one might ask whether Meena wants to be white for the sake of whiteness or for another purpose? In fact, she provides clues as to why she wishes to change her colour, which can be revealingly cross-referenced with Hanif Kureishi’s strikingly similar childhood experiences. Kureishi says in his *My Beautiful Laundrette and Rainbow Sign*, ‘I tried to deny my Pakistani self. I was ashamed. It was a curse, and I wanted to be rid of it. I wanted to be like everyone else. I read with understanding a story of a black boy who, when he noticed that burnt skin turned white, jumped into a bath of boiling water (9).

In the background of Meena’s ‘shed my body’ and Kureishi’s ‘deny my Pakistani self’ lies, not an inner conflict, but a logical justification. Their shocking desires seem to obfuscate the reasons, which are to be ‘unrecognisable’ (Syal, *AM* 146) and ‘like everyone else’ (Kureishi



9). As Panikos Panayi says, a culture of racial discrimination was ‘pervasive’ in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s (200–01). That is, Meena’s and Kureishi’s wishes neither represent a denial of one’s identity nor schizophrenic selves torn apart between uncompromisable expectations. They in fact point out at extra-personal social and political realities and environments that cause such desires for a transcendental defensive mechanism that could transform them into chameleons capable of changing their colour and ward off racial prejudice<sup>11</sup>.

In ‘The Politics of Passing,’ Elaine K. Ginsberg considers identity to be prone to much inequality because it is ‘socially constructed’ (1). Society is what assigns and prescribes identities, irrespective of belonging that may or may not conform. Thus, to overcome the injustices accompanying these socially enforced identities, one might need to assume guises of (un)belonging (1). For example, Ginsberg refers to slavery in the US in 1836 where a slave could ‘pass out of slavery’ and the discriminatory system that foregrounds his ‘“African blood’ — invisible on the surface of the body — over the obviously dominant and visible heritage that would cause a ‘stranger’ to assume Kenney [‘slave's name] is both white and free’ (1). ‘Thus, Kenney’s creation of a new ‘white’ identity — that is his ‘passing’ — was a transgression not only of legal boundaries (that is from slave to free man) but also of cultural boundaries as well’ (1). In a similar vein, Meena’s experience of (un)belonging in *Anita and Me*, as I am going to illustrate below, reveal the attempt to transgress unjust racial prejudices and conceptions in the British society (inter-ethnic) whereas, interestingly, Syal’s *Life Is Not All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, women seek to transgress patriarchal norms and sexism within the diasporic community in Britain (intra-ethnic).

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<sup>11</sup> Read more about racial discrimination and chameleonism in section 3.2 and 3.6 of the introduction.

Many writers and critics such as Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, Homi K. Bhabha, Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi refer to racism and discrimination in Britain in the latter half of the twentieth century. Castles and Miller argue in *The Age of Migration* that ‘racism is a threat, not only to the immigrants but also to the democratic institutions and social order’ (14). Bhabha also refers to institutional racism and ‘the failures and limits of democratic representation’ (*Location of Culture* xvii). Rushdie argues for ‘an abyss’ or ‘rift’ in British society that is ‘getting wider’ (10). Castles and Miller maintain that ‘racism may be defined as the process whereby social groups categorise other groups as different or inferior, on the basis of phenotypical or cultural markers’ (34). In *Racism*, the French writer Albert Memmi points out that ‘racist thinking focuses on biological differences, whether real or presumed’ (190). The keyword reiterated here is *difference*, which is also crucial to understanding Syal’s *Anita and Me*.

Mr Ormerod makes false connections based on imagined and homogenised others. ‘You could see it in his face, he’d made the connection, Africa was abroad, we were from abroad,’ Meena says of Mr Ormerod, a shopkeeper in Tollington where Meena and her family live, the only non-white family in this village (*AM* 21). The Kumars’ English neighbour Deirdre also calls her dog ‘Nigger! Nigger! Here, darling! Come to mummy’ (*AM* 90). Daljit is infuriated to know the name Deirdre has chosen such an offensive name for her ‘stupid dog’ (*AM* 90, 235, 238). However, Shaym’s composure is remarkable; his unexpected reaction stands out. He even ‘laughed uproariously,’ saying to his wife, ‘they don’t know it is an insult! ...You remember when we went into that paint shop, they had a colour called Nigger Brown and you complained? The shopkeeper was most apologetic ...You ask any man on the street to tell the difference between us and a Jamaican fellow, he will still see us as the same colour, Daljit.’ (*AM* 90). Syal portrays an ironical paradox where the racial imagination draws upon difference to establish

stereotypes that are blind to difference, which is a form of ignorance. With pride and self-composure, Shyam looks down at the ignorance of such racists who cannot explain what they themselves say. For example, Sam Lowbridge is left dumbfounded and unable to comprehend the implications of his own words said to the Indian Bank manager, ‘Yow don’t know what we want! None of yow lot!’ (192). When challenged by Meena, he feels ‘confused’ and maintains that he has meant the ‘others’, not Meena (192, 313, 314). However, she retorts that ‘I *am* the others, Sam. You did mean me’ (314). Sam is speechless, unable to respond and explain the difference between Meena and his imaginary Other.

As Joshua Glasgow maintains in ‘Racism as Disrespect,’ ‘racism can be subtle or overt, it can be intentional or unintentional, and it can be conscious or unconscious’ (64). Syal’s text shows important examples of subconscious workings of racism. When the white boys of Tollington gather around Anita, Meena observes sadly, ‘I might as well have been invisible’ (AM 105). Meena’s sense of alienation and unbelonging is tangible here. However, it is important to investigate the transitivity of such feelings and their implications. The word ‘invisible’ is key here. How could a nine-year-old be ‘*Invisible*’? This observation stands out and resonates with David Shaffer and Katherine Kip’s *Development Psychology* (2010), in which they discuss ‘peers as agents of socialisation’ (613). Shaffer and Kip highlight two influential social circles that impact children’s psychological development: elders (including one’s family) and peers (613). Due to the ‘lopsided’ power balance in the former circle, it is ‘equal’ in the latter; hence, according to Shaffer and Kip, peer relationships ‘may contribute as much or even more to a child’s or adolescent’s development as adults do’ (613). Meena’s thoughts as she flees the ‘mafia’ of mother and Auntie’s ‘communal policing’ to spend time with Anita may be interpreted within this context; ‘there was never fear or censure or recoil in those green, cool eyes, only the recognition of a kindred spirit,’ Meena says about her company

with Anita (150). Shaffer and Kip also propose ‘sociometric techniques’ that categorise children into five groups: 1) ‘popular children,’ 2) ‘rejected children,’ 3) ‘controversial children,’ 4) ‘average status children’ and 5) ‘neglected children,’ like Meena, who are neither liked nor disliked and ‘seem almost *invisible* to their peers’ (618). Consequently, Meena’s *invisibility* can be interpreted in social and racial terms, not the *belong-or-not-to-belong* interpretations and their claimed hypothetical crises of identity.

Current reviews of the novel do not go beyond observing the psychological phenomenon of Meena’s unbelonging as an intrapersonal state and problem, but this chapter is concerned with the archaeology of cause and effect that bring about such states of being and belonging. Racism draws on ‘biological difference’ (Memmi 191) and ‘cultural markers’ to classify other social groups as ‘different or inferior’ (Castles et al. 34). The Bank Manager and Meena are treated differently despite their shared Indian identity. The former is subjugated to violent and offensive ‘bashing’ at the hands of Sam and his gang (277), while the latter (Meena) is simply left to linger ‘invisible’ on the peripheries of their intimate world (105). This can be explained in Glasgow’s description of racism as ‘conscious or unconscious (64). In Meena’s case, the exclusion is silent and subconscious. In *The Uncanny*, Sigmund Freud refers to the German psychiatrist Ernst Anton Jentsch’s illustration of the uncanny as objects that lie in between life and death, absence and presence, or between a ‘real person or an automaton’ (135). In *Strange Encounters*, Sara Ahmed calls them ‘aliens’ who can ‘get inside our heads: they may infiltrate us; they may even *appear as (like) humans*’ (*Strange Encounters* 4). This inbetweenness of these others arouses ‘doubt’ and uncertainty and hence ‘uncanny effects’ (135).

Likewise, Meena seems to be an uncanny object lingering between the known and the unknown, between the 'familiar' and the 'unfamiliar', in Freud's words (124, 125). She is neither fully included in nor entirely excluded from her white peers' gangs. She lingers in a liminal space in between, but, as she says, nobody cares about her presence. They let her hang around and loiter unnoticed and marginalised on the periphery of their close and cosy social circles. Her presence is thus a cause for an uncanny feeling that 'evokes fear and dread' (123). Therefore, Sam cannot explain the difference between her and the 'others' such as the Indian Bank Manager and the 'lot' who, he says, are unwelcome in Tollington and Britain (192, 313, 314). Meena's reiteration of 'I am the others Sam' brings this question of Meena's identity back to the surface and forefront of Sam's consciousness. Freud maintains that 'The frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns' (147). Hence, his speechlessness might not only be due to the ignorance of racial thinking but also due to the uncanny feelings aroused by Meena's confrontation. Meena also says, in reference to her peers' exclusion of her, 'Since joining Anita's gang, I had become more suspicious of how the familiar could turn into the unknown . . . and how many strangers did indeed live amongst us' (173). Meena experiences such feelings when she discovers the dark and unfamiliar within the familiar faces of Anita, Sam, Deirdre and Mr Ormerod (123). Therefore, the uncanniness in this experience is double; Meena is both disillusioned and frightened at the revelation that the known can turn unfamiliar. Likewise, Sam and Anita's gang subconsciously find Meena both familiar and unfamiliar, known and unknown. That's why Sam could not articulate the difference between Meena and the others. He could not defend the vanity of his unconscious racial thinking about the uncanny object that lingers in the in between distance and intimacy.

Syal's challenges the imagined superiority of racial thinking with humour. Freud's also refers to 'magic, sorcery, [and] the omnipotence of thoughts' and 'recurrence' (145, 149). He

maintains that repetition can be used to ‘produce a sense of the comic’ (153). Witchcraft and foretelling along with the verbal repetition of words attempting to create a sense of uncanny fear fail to do so to Meena. ‘The mad soothsayer in Frankie Howerd’s [1969 British comedy] *Up Pompeii*’ [...] began every entrance with the litany, ‘Woe! Woe! And thrice Woe!’ (56). However, the intended sense of fear has not been created. It is, as Meena explains, ‘because *Wo Wo* was our family Punjabi euphemism for shit ... The first time I’d heard the soothsayer’s lament I’d said, ‘I think she must have constipation!’ which made my papa laugh proudly and my mother hide her smile under an expression of distaste’ (AM 56). In this instance, humour, which characterises most of Syal’s works, draws upon an inter-lingual aesthetic. It does not simply imply bilingual *knowledge* of the ‘signifier’ but also *distance* and *unbelonging* to the ‘signified,’ to borrow Saussurean terms (*Writings in General Linguistics* 235).

In other words, the (ostensibly) stable semantic system is destabilised and turned dysfunctional by the very knowledge of the other linguistic possibility. Thereby, the meanings contained within the sound code /wəv/ such as fear, ‘grief, pity, regret, disappointment, or concern’ are lost to Meena by the very virtue of *unbelonging* to the semantic signified of the English *woe* (OED). This inter-lingual pun derives from oscillation in the grey hyphenated break between the *Anglo-* and *Punjabi* referents, between what Meena herself call the ‘double entendre; the gap between what is said and what is thought, what is stated and what is implied (10). Only an omniscient knowledge or *double belonging* to both semantic possibilities and processes of signification could generate such a humorous experience and aesthetical wordplay effect.

This humorous pun using the word *woe* is accompanied by a strange remark downplayed in the background. Her father, Shyam, is described to laugh ‘proudly’ (56). But

what is Shyam precisely *proud* of? The OED defines pride as ‘a high, esp. an excessively high, opinion of one’s own worth or importance which gives rise to a feeling or attitude of superiority over others; inordinate self-esteem.’ Likewise, in *Morality: Its Nature and Justification*, Bernard Gert maintains that one could ‘take pride in one’s abilities, work, family, or country’ (349). Hence, a proud person must be proud of *something*: an achievement, an accomplishment, or a success to instigate and justify this high emotional affective response. In this context, is it not inappropriate and, maybe, ironic for Shyam to pride himself on his daughter’s failure to tell the English from the Punjabi? Is he simply glad she can draw conclusions and express herself in good English? Or, does it suffice as a pride-stimulating achievement for a child to entertain their parents with inadvertent wordplay?

Shyam is a first-generation immigrant who migrated with his wife Daljit to postwar Britain after the turmoil of Partition. They are vocal and proud of their identity. When Meena asks her father whether he fought the ‘Jerries’ in the Second World War like Anita’s father Mr Roberto Worrall (*AM* 17), he laughed and said, ‘No, beti, ... it was not really our war. We were fighting different battles’ (Syal, *AM* 70). The demarcating *our* and *we* imply *their* and *them*, which indicates a sense of belonging to Indian-ness and its history of Raj and Partition, rather than Britishness and its history and war against Nazi Germany. Shyam is an educated first-generation immigrant who is keen on preserving his Indian cultural identity. As Meena says, ‘out of nowhere, papa said, “You really must learn Punjabi, Meena”’ (*AM* 205). He also teaches her to sing in Hindi (*‘Yeh Raat Yeh Chandari Phir Kahan, Sun Ja Dil Ki Daastan’*) being a skilful singer and performer of Punjabi and Hindi ‘*ghazal*’ songs, which are about romance and platonic love he often sings in the social gatherings called ‘*mehfils*’ (*AM* 72, 82, 98, 214). So, he is a proud Indian who cannot simply take pride in Meena’s lingual inbetweenness, which

undermines the skilful achievement, the object of pride. Therefore, there must be a different interpretation.

It might appear an exaggeration to build a critique on this seemingly unimportant word ('proudly'). But this casual remark has served to initiate an enquiry into the reasons that could have triggered this affective experience and sense of high self-esteem in an (ostensibly) inappropriate context by considering other uses of the term in the text. An in-depth investigation of its textual appearance produces interesting evidence as follows:

- 1) Meena's father is characterised as a proud Indian who inherited her grandfather 'Dadaji's pride' (11, 81).
- 2) 'With pride,' mother and Aunties share the duties of 'policing' Meena and keeping her on the right path (30-31).
- 3) Daljit 'proudly' tells Meena about the Englishwoman Glenys's bad taste and habits (56).
- 4) Daljit 'proudly' tells Meena about Hindu tolerance and the peaceful coexistence in India (92).
- 5) Daljit 'proudly' tells Meena about Sikhs' disapproval of the 'caste system' (94).
- 6) With 'excitement and pride, Meena's family received the news of Miss India Rita Farrier winning 'the Miss World contest' (166).
- 7) Daljit 'proudly' informs Anita of the name of the food 'matter-paneer' always sounding ready and 'happy to educate the sad English palate' (253).
- 8) Daljit 'beamed proudly' breaking the news of Shyam's promotion to her daughter (259).
- 9) Meena is 'so proud' of her important and successful dad (260).
- 10) 'Proud, like parents,' Harinder P. Singh and his wife of the Big House watch silently their fellow Punjabi family making a successful life in Tollington (319).
- 11) In turn, a mutual and 'curious wash of pride' cover Shyam and Daljit as they read Mr



Singh's letter written in Hindi and revealing for the first time that the Cambridge law graduate from the Punjab Harindar P. Singh is himself the owner and 'the boss of the Big House' as well as vast areas of land in Tollington (316, 323).

- 12) Lastly, Meena's dream of joining 'the posh girls' grammar school,' and of seeing her 'parents wiping tears away' of happiness and pride comes true (136, 321).

This consistent reference to pride should not be considered as mere coincidence or insignificant. The discourse of pride is not in any way a new thing. The concept of *'megalopsychia* (sometimes translated 'pride' or 'greatness' of soul' or 'magnanimity') is an important virtue to Aristotle, who calls it an 'adornment of the virtues' (Curzer 6). But what might an affective experience of pride imply in the context of postcolonial diasporic unbelonging? In his *The Multisite Nation*, Michel S. Laguerre maintains that 'a flourishing homeland would be an object of diasporic pride' (32). In a similar vein, the Kumars, Meena and her family in the text, receive the news of Miss India Rita Farrier winning 'the Miss World contest' with utmost 'excitement and pride' (166). In his *Affect Imagery Consciousness: Volume I: The Positive Affects*, Silvan Tomkins points out that the 'affect system is not as simple a signal system as the drive system' (*Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 23); he rightly recommends that 'the instigator of the affect is [to be] correctly identified' so as to better understand the workings of the affective experiences and their meanings. Consider what exactly triggers the feeling of pride the Kumars show. As Michel Laguerre says, it is a deep sense of belonging and affiliation with the homeland Miss India represents (32; S. Gupta, *SC* 32). As Amitava Kumar indicates, it is 'Rita Farrier, the reigning Miss India, winning the Miss World Contest' who made that unlikely moment possible for 'a brown face [to appear] on the telly' in the 1960s Britain (138). Furthermore, according to Tanuja Solanki (2000), 'Rita Farrier Powell, who became the first Miss World from India in 1966, says that back then India was

viewed as an outsider'(n.p.). Moving from the presumed peripheries to the spotlight of achievement and self-fulfilment, from an imagined subordinate status to an equal position, is a proud accomplishment not just for the individual in question but for other members of that culture.

The collective sense of pride Miss India's rise to fame causes in Indian consciousness is comparable to Mr Harinder P. Singh's achievement in the novel. The luxurious Big House and the identity of its owner remain a mystery until the end of the story. Just before they move out of Tollington, the Kumars receive a letter 'written in astrological symbols, all half moons and flying dots like comets,' that is written in Hindi (322). With 'a curious wash of pride and betrayal sweeping over them,' Meena's parents inform her that 'an Indian gentleman lives in the Big House, Meena. Isn't that amazing?' (323). Mr Singh is not only a self-made Indian who owns vast areas of land around Tollington, but he is also of 'a workman's face and philosopher's eyes' (317). This description evokes that of Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikh 'Prophet of Peace' who, as Karam Singh Raju states, is 'a great philosopher, an enlightened poet and above all an unprecedented spiritual leader' (10). Guru Gabind Singh, Raju maintains, 'lived with Indian cultural values' (10). Hence, Mr Singh seems to epitomise Indianness. The act of writing his letter in Hindi is symbolic and shows his reverence for this language. When Meena first meets him, she is shocked to hear him speaking in Punjabi: '*Chup Kar Kure, Thahar Jao Ik Minut! Get me a torch, Mireille.*' (317). Then Meena says, 'My miracle was complete. The Big House boss was an Indian man, as Indian as my father, and he spoke Punjabi with a village twang' (317). Mr Singh's special achievements trigger a sense of pride in his fellow countrymen. His name and features seem to symbolise Guru Gobind Singh as they both revere Indian cultural values and the use of language is an integral part of any culture.

As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's maintains, 'the choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe' (4). The novel is replete with Punjabi and Hindi words. For example, Sunil Meena's one-year-old brother's words represent the bilingual hybridisation of the new generation: 'Pider . . . eat . . . good . . . aja . . . chaat! ... Na-mi-naa . . . papa . . . mama ...Meen-ee . . . ' (264). Sunil's lingual microcosm reflects the larger macrocosm of the status quo of the text as well as the wider diasporic communities it represents. This emphatic linguistic use and continuous contracts of languages with what is foreign to them, as Neti points out (98), is not without significance. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, language 'is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture' (13). He believes that 'culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next' (15). Hence, if language *carries* and helps *generate* and *perpetuate* culture, which — Thiong'o maintains — 'embodies those moral, ethical and aesthetic values,' and if 'values are the basis of a people's identity, their sense of particularity,' as he also contends (13–15), it should follow then that *using* language is an ethical act and duty of upholding those values and collective cultural identity in which diasporans must pride themselves on doing, given that 'all they often share 'an emotional allegiance to the 'old homeland' and its culture (G. Weiss 60). To further illustrate, if, according to Thiong'o, language is the generator, perpetuator, store and transmitter of cultures with all their ethical and aesthetical codes of symbolic signification, Shyam and Mr Singh's use of Hindi and Punjabi is an ethical as well as an aesthetical act (*aesthetical*); they are, in practice, *preserving* and *perpetuating* their culture and cultural values through language.

According to Braziel and Mannur, diasporans also tend to ‘retain a collective memory’ of their home countries (‘Diaspora’ 165). For them, it seems to be a moral act of loyalty to keep ties with their homelands (G. Weiss 60; Huyssen 165). That is, the obligation to remember home and cherish home cultures governs the home-diasporan relationship like a predominant ethical rule whose application and preservation is considered an achievement to pride oneself in. Shyam’s treasuring of the photos of relative and places back in India can be explained in this context. However, Meena, being a second-generation (G2) diasporan, seems to be more distanced and liberated from that expectation or *home ethic*, as it were; hence, she is more critical of those expectations. ‘Sat in front of photos from India,’ she is told about people and places she has never seen ‘as if committing them to memory would make up for not being with them,’ she says (30).

Meena also speculates on her father’s statement that they will take Nanima home’ which made her feel ‘strange that he used ‘home’ so naturally, did that mean that everything surrounding us was merely our temporary lodgings?’ (263). First-generation (G1) diasporans seem to act like the guardians and predecessors of an implicitly and subconsciously agreed ethical contract (or call it an *order* or *code*) of shared values and emotions, as demonstrated above. ‘Unlike their parents who do not question their identity,’ Kalwant Bhopal says, ‘these [second- and third-generation] women see their identities in diverse ways: they see themselves as British, as Asian and as Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi. There is no longer the either/or choices about identity available to these women; instead, they have the option of combining differing identities’ (37). To Meena, England is home but home to her parents is India. This echoes the idea of home discussed in Chapter 5 when the same debate recurs between Chanu and his daughter Shehana. First-generation immigrants feel pride if they succeed in preserving and passing it to their successors. Gert points out that ‘the emotions most closely related to the

virtuous answer are pride and shame' (349). Meena's mother and her Aunties assume the duties of 'communal policing' as they reproach Meena for her 'misdemeanours' and for going astray off the right path of belonging and the social and cultural values and narratives of the shared group identity being guarded and passed on (retold, as Lyotard suggests); therefore, it is 'a moral marathon [for them], and they took up the baton with pride' (30, 31, 117). The diasporic feeling of pride points out at an ethical code, a sociocultural set of virtues and ideals that are being upheld and cherished whether it is through winning an international context, speaking a mother tongue language or otherwise.

Raja Roa's 'Language and Spirit' discusses the 'alien'-ness of language and its 'emotional' use, which can be cross-referenced with Neti's and Weiss's arguments introduced earlier on. Roa speculates on the use of the English language by Indians, saying, 'One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own' (296). He then points out that even though English is not quite 'alien,' it is 'not our emotional language,' he says (296). When Meena's Nanima (grandmother) visits from India, so many Aunties, Uncles and friends gather at their house in Tollington to see her and listen to her outlandish tales; 'her audience was there not because of what she said but because of who she was, a beloved parent, a familiar symbol [that] reminded them of their own mothers' (AM 201). Like singing in Hindi and Punjabi, Nanima is a highly revered cultural symbol that represents *values* and *emotions* to Meena's parents and all first-generation diasporans of Aunties and Uncles. She transcends herself to represent a shared past and common values.

During her visit, parents, Aunties and Uncles are all carried away by Nanaima's presence and spirit; Meena felt ashamed as they flocked to the street and 'began reclaiming the Tollington night in big Indian portions, guffawing Punjabi over fences and hedges, wafting

curried vegetable smells through tight-mouthed letterboxes, sprinkling notes from old Hindi movie songs over jagged rooftops,' (AM 203–04). For Meena, it was an uncanny moment of shameful but hopeful 'defiance' and self-exposure; she notes that 'it felt so strange to hear Punjabi under the stars. It was an indoor language to me, an almost guilty secret which the Elders would only share away from prying English eyes and ears' (203). However, 'when they wanted to say something intimate, personal, about feelings as opposed to acquisitions, they switched to Punjabi' (203). This excerpt correlates strongly with Roa's speculations about the psychological and emotional use of *home languages*. Language does not only *carry* culture, values and history, as shown earlier, but it also *represents* emotions (*ethos* and *pathos*).

\_\_\_\_\_ Meena's communication with the new fortune teller at the Fete shows a sense of belonging rooted in the nuanced 'qualities of our feeling,' to use Freud's words (123). She calls the woman a 'Mysterious Stranger' who made her feel both 'nervous' and uncannily willing to 'trust her' because 'she looked Indian' the way she dressed (184). This is another indication of Meena's subconscious workings of her identity. Those deep-rooted feelings of belonging are externalised through a desire to trust. On the other hand, the soothsayer reads Meena's fortune as if looking 'right through my eyes like a telescope,' Meena says (185). In his discussion of the 'double' in his *The Uncanny*, Freud refers to 'telepathy' and 'the spontaneous transmission of mental processes ... so that the one becomes co-owner of the other's knowledge, emotions and experience' (141–42). The fortune teller's language (make-believe prophecies) about Meena's 'Success,' 'bad influence' and 'Soon you will have to choose' do uncannily come true (185); Meena successfully passes her exams and eventually regrets the bad company she kept with Anita and her gang, saying, 'I hated Anita for speaking to me all those years' (321).

She also chooses proud, rather than concealed, belonging to herself and the ethnic

identity she has been running away from to fit in an unwelcoming racialised milieu: my body, Meena says, ‘fitted me to perfection and was all mine’ (326). The woman’s confidence and capacity to foretell Meena’s future stems from her diasporic experience, not Freudian telepathy or supernatural powers. Meena recalls the previous English soothsayer Mrs Goodyear who makes *safe* predictions that she will have a husband ‘coloured, like yourself’; when she tells her that she will make lovely ‘a home for your husband and five children,’ Meena humorously points out that ‘She must have read that in the paper, that we all bred like rabbits’ (182-183). In a similar vein, the Asian soothsayer who arouses Freudian feelings of the ‘homely’ and ‘unhomely’ (125, 148), derives her knowledge from a diasporic code of history relived, trajectories followed, and emotions, values and virtues shared and cherished.

As uncannily prophesied, Meena’s dream of joining ‘the posh girls’ grammar school’ and of seeing her ‘parents wiping tears away’ of happiness and pride comes true (136, 321, 328). It is a proud achievement that is best looked at in line with other accomplishments by Indians foregrounded in the novel and juxtaposed with the failures of some white people of Tollington who struggle to even get social stability or acceptance in their own homeland and their own ‘village’ (216). Shyam is a proud Punjabi who inherited her own father ‘Dadaji’s pride’ (11, 81). His wife Daljit is described to have ‘beamed proudly’ breaking the news of his promotion to Meena (259), who, in turn, feels ‘so proud’ of her father’s professional success (260). This might appear to be an exaggerated inventory of professional successes and proud experiences of pride that run through from grandparents to grandchildren.

As noted earlier, pride is an Aristotelian virtue (Curzer 6), as well as a sublime uplifting feeling stemming from a collective cultural identity proudly belong to. Daljit ‘proudly’ tells Meena about ‘the virtues of Sikhism’ (94) and ‘Hindu tolerance’ (92). The Kumars did ‘mark

Jesus' birthday' and back home 'so many religions happily coexisted in India – Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism and especially Islam [...], mama told me proudly' (92). However, on the other hand, when it comes to celebrating Diwali in postwar Britain, 'Everyone's indifference had stunned me,' Meena says. Daljit also tells her neighbour, 'today was Diwali – "Our Christmas, Mrs Worrall"' (91). However, the latter does not seem to have any idea what Diwali is. She translated it to her as equivalent to Christmas, 'not wanting to go into huge detail about the Hindu Festival of Light' (91). From Mrs Worrall's perspective, the Englishwoman who gives her dog the racist name 'Nigger' is either ignorant, indifferent, or unwilling to see identity beyond the peelings of skin. 'Today is our Christmas' is reiterated many times in the text like a refrain (91, 98, 99). This repetition is reminiscent of another statement Meena reiterates at the end of the novel, which is 'I Have An Exam Tomorrow' (310, 315), while her peer Anita and her sister Tracy are neither successful at school nor happy at home.

The text provides a picture that humorously illustrates and proudly celebrates the dichotomy of sociocultural values, history and familial bonds between the broken and dysfunctional English family (the Rutters') and the successful, connected and caring Indian family (the Kumars'). Daljit tells Meena 'proudly' about the Englishwoman Mrs Glenys Lowbridge's bad taste of attire and habits of smoking that affected her look and aged her too early (56). Furthermore, when her neighbour Deirdre runs away with a butcher and leaves her children behind with a cruel father (247, 250), the Kumars invite Anita and her sister and, while together on the dining table, Daljit 'proudly' informs Anita of the name of the food 'matter-paneer,' always sounding ready and 'happy to educate the sad English palate' (253). In other words, the novel celebrates and, at times, overstates the Kumar family's culture, great skills, professional achievements, and strong and stable social lives. On the other hand, the native



English people's culture is playfully understated; their families and social bonds are described as broken and disjointed; their children as lost and traumatised; and they are downgraded to acceptance-seekers unbelonging to Tollington, their own village (216).

The novel moves scenes, as if in accordance with what King calls 'television film conventions' (King 374), between the Kumars' Indian microcosm to the English macrocosm. It paints a picture of difference and provides a detailed account of the regular social meetings of the '*mehfils*' that constitute an important recurrent motif. Shyam Kumar is the usual host and 'principal performer' of these special gatherings, as Daniel Neuman demonstrates in *The Life of Music in North India: The Organization of an Artistic Tradition* (71). *Mehfils*, he also states, 'provides a most satisfying kind of musical event, for musicians and listeners alike' (71). In these 'intimate' and 'relaxed' meetings, 'the listeners sit on the floor, creating an intimate gathering of connoisseurs.(71), as Meena herself describes them; 'The front room was full of my uncles and aunties, all sitting cross-legged on the white floor sheet. Mama was handing round starters of kebabs and chutney whilst papa leafed through his tattered notebook containing ghazal lyrics, deep in conversation with Uncle Tendon, who cradled his tabla like a child' (109-110). Then they suddenly turn to Meena: "'Ah Meena beti!' they called out as one, and I did the round of namastes and kisses, smiling through the lipstick assaults and the over-hard cheek pinching as my suit was praised and tweaked, my stomach tickled and jabbed, my educational achievements listed and admired, until I felt I was drowning in a sea of rustling saris, clinking gold jewellery and warm, brown, overpowering flesh'. (110). *Mehfils* may be equivalent to 'chamber music' (Neuman 71), which 'was introduced in the seventeenth century by the theorist Marco Scacchi' (Radice 1). However, the contrast in the novel seems notable between meeting and parting, in and between communities and within families, between the

intimate and the distant, the affectionate and the 'cruel' (AM 308). Hence, themes of (un)belonging are only a façade for deeper discourses and meanings.

To conclude, the discussion of various textual references to pride and the ethical and aesthetical use of language and home has uncovered important meanings about the sub-textual social and cultural values for diasporic identity and belonging. As Floya Anthias suggests, this discussion goes beyond the conventional approaches of diaspora theories that deem the Kumar family's experience to be lost in between cultures or as conjunction merging the poles of East and West as those demonstrated earlier in this chapter by Kushal and Manickan, Rosellen Brown and Leila Neti. Using a kind of interdisciplinary approach drawing on psychology, affective theory, language, as well as social and cultural theory, different outcomes and perspectives have transpired. Kushal, Manickan and Brown's claims about the identity crises of diasporans struggling between cultures contrasts strikingly with my analysis. The uncanny and subconscious (indirect) racism in Meena's case with her white Tollington peers interestingly refutes their interpretations. Furthermore, it has pointed out the social problems and racial discrimination

Furthermore, my reading has pointed out the social problems that underlie the ostensible feelings of unbelonging such as the culture of racial discrimination and social prejudices, which can be either conscious or unconscious racism. Syal has succeeded, as this chapter has demonstrated, in turning the racial inferior-superior equation upside down by exposing its void, vanity and ignorance. The relationship between pride and belonging has been demonstrated in the text using home languages and the proud celebration of the various events and symbols of the home culture. Raja Roa and wa Thiong'o's notions on language have been key to this discussion of the unequivocal role of language in the preservation and perpetuation

of cultures and values. Thus, the social and cultural interplay between the form (language) and feeling, or between affect and effect has shown new meanings about belonging and identity.

## Chapter 4: Shame and Change in Meera Syal's *Life Is Not All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999)

'Shame on you,' tweeted the MP David Lammy on July 4<sup>th</sup> 2019 to criticise the MEP Ann Widdecombe for her speech in the European parliament in which she compares Britain leaving the European Union to slaves rising against their masters (Beresford; Boffey). As Thomas J. Scheff says, 'adults are virtually always in a state of either pride or shame' (399). But Lammy's call for Widdecombe to be ashamed of her action may or may not trigger the affect of shame; it is an act of shaming. Her act of speech, which supports a political change, may or may may not be shameful at all to her and others, depending on one's politics. Further, as Lynd Helen Merrell says in *On Shame and the Search for Identity*, 'to be shameless is to be insensible to one's self' and 'incorrigible,' that is beyond change (23). In this chapter, I will argue that shame, shaming and change intersect and overlap with identity and belonging in Meera Syal's novel *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999), which reveals uncharted trajectories of gendered and racialised identity politics and ethics.

As Bruce King says, Syal's *Life* is based on the lives and aspirations of three Indian women, Sunita, Chila and Tania as they 'transition from rebellious youths, embarrassed by their elders, to early adulthood in a chaotic contemporary England' ('Review of Life' 598). Tania is a modern and educated Punjabi young woman who rebels against the Indian social norms, leaves her family and lives with the Englishman Martin. She then starts a successful career in journalism and filmmaking. Chila, on the other hand, is a good-hearted and very simple Punjabi woman who follows the traditional Indian norms of her family and marries Deepak, a successful Indian businessman. Sunita, however, lingers in between the binary extremities of Tania and Chila. She starts with a conventional marriage, but she later rebels against her husband and transforms into Tania's modern-style free British Asian woman. The

embarrassment and transitioning King refers to is key to my argument because it invokes a sense of shame coupled with an implicit inter-generational conflict regarding the change.

Literary studies of shame are not something new. Barry Sheils and Julie Walsh's *Shame and Modern Writing* (2018), J. Brooks Bouson *Embodied Shame: Uncovering Female Shame in Contemporary Women's Writings* (2010), and Timothy Bewes's *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (2010) are just a few examples of the growing academic interest in the trope of shame. According to Elspeth Probyn, the word *shame* is etymologically derived from the Goth 'Scham' which refers to the act of 'covering the face' (Probyn, *Blush* 131). Tomkins stresses the paradoxicality of shame which involves 'increasing facial communication,' on the one hand, and 'the wish to reduce facial visibility,' on the other (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 120). He defines shame as 'the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation, striking deep into the heart of the human being and felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul' (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 687). That is, shame and shaming are quite different: the former is felt (an inner and productive feeling); the latter is forced (external judgement or authority asking one to be ashamed, to see the unethical act committed and *change*), as Probyn demonstrated in her 'Productive Faces of Shame' (325).

Tomkins maintains that shame has no intrinsic and unchanging meaning in itself: its meaning stems from its social and cultural dimensions, its interconnections with culture and social life ('Shame' 134). In his words, he says, 'if one were to trace the varying meanings of the word "shame" over the past few thousand years, one would illuminate the rich textures of the varieties of cultural *mentalité* rather than find this primary human feeling to be a fundamental invariant' ('Shame' 134). Shame and guilt are defined as 'self-conscious emotions, implying self-reflection and self-evaluation' (Miceli and Castelfranchi 710). The

moment of shame can thus be one that invites a reappraisal of the deepest conceptions and perceptions about various social positions and interpersonal relationships. It is thereby a potential moment of change. It is interesting how shame evolves from the act of hiding one's face into an affect that could reveal answers about one's interests, hopes and aspirations. (Probyn, *Blush* ix-x). Thus, shame and change are again interlinked, whether it is to do with the affect of shame (changing self) or shaming (changing other).

As an act of political shaming, on February 28, 2014, Nigel Farage, the then UKIP party leader claimed in his party's spring conference speech that immigration turned areas in the UK into 'a foreign land' and therefore change, according to him, was urgently needed (Sparrow). Syal starts her second novel *Life Is Not All Ha Hee Ha Hee* (1999) with references to the changing urban landscape of East London's Leyton town and then moves on to describe the significant demographical changes and hybridisation and their far-reaching implications. 'Pigeons shook their heads, sneezing, blinking away the icy specks, claws skittering on the unfamiliar roof which had once been the reassuring flat red tiles of the methodist church and was now a gleaming minaret, topped by a metal sickle moon. The moon at midday, dark snow and nowhere to perch. No wonder they said Coo' (9-10). Syal clearly hints to the impact of immigration on Britain in late modernity, which has socially and culturally reshaped the British society, as discussed in sections 3.1-3 of the introduction (King, 'Review of Life' 9-10). This is unequivocally indicated on the text when the ownership of the London's East End warehouse changes and 'the Offenbach Brothers' sign went down, and the Wahaab Brothers sign went up' (*Life* 155).

The French philosopher and linguist Ferdinand de Saussure says that 'time changes all things' (*Course in General Linguistics* 77). As Syal implies at the beginning *Life*, time seems

to have changed Britain<sup>12</sup> (9-10). In addition to references to the changing landscape of Leyton such as the ‘new roads’ and ‘emporiums’ (9), Syal’s text shows signs of postmodern change that is represented by the ongoing automation and digitisation of information, knowledge and communication (9, 35, 98). ‘Computerisation’ is directly referred to seventeen times in Syal’s novel (*Life* 35, 64, 72, 77, 85, 106, 126, 128, 147, 175, 186, 199, 219, 231, 240, 301). As discussed in the introductory chapter (section 6.3), Lyotard also addresses the idea of the ‘computerisation of society’ and its impact on the dissemination and ‘transformation of knowledge’ in our contemporary age (7, 8, 67). That is, the phenomenal technological revolution has reshaped many aspects of our lives, our including social and cultural conceptions, because cultures and ‘narrative knowledge’ is no longer immune to criticism and challenge, or idolised in its local bubble, so to speak (34).

Lyotard questions the processes of the ‘legitimation’ of the various conceptions of cultures, theories and ideologies that claim universal representation of heterogeneous realities; he maintains that ‘the right to decide what is true is not independent of the right to decide what is just, [...] they both stem from the same perspective, the same “choice” if you will’ (8). As discussed in section 3.6 of the introduction, Lyotard questions the rules and standards that govern various ‘totalising’ and reductive (meta)narratives of knowledge (the specifics of who, how and why sets these rules), which applies to social and cultural collective identities as concerns this discussion (6–36). He defines postmodernism as ‘incredulity towards metanarratives,’ which represents an attitude of doubt, uncertainty and disbelief that questions the taken-for-granted authority of these (meta)narratives (xxiv). Syal’s novel is concerned with two narratives evolving from the immigrant experience: racism (in the macrocosm of British

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<sup>12</sup> See section 3.1-3 of the introduction.

society) and sexism (within the microcosm of diasporic communities). The novel is thus bound to expose the underpinning conceptions and void by humour and shaming both, the racists and patriarchs.

The question of identity and belonging resurfaces on various occasions in Syal's text. Pigeons are described to 'coo', which can be a nostalgic sound indicating 'a call of alarm' made by pigeons 'to attract mates or to defend their territory,' ('Why Do Pigeons Coo?'). This is the discourse with which Syal chooses to start her novel *Life*, an anti-immigrant rhetoric calling upon Britons to rise and 'claim Britain back'<sup>13</sup>, the pre-'lapsarian' Britain in its good shape before the arrival of diasporan and the fall of Britain as a monocultural and all-white society (Rushdie 15). When the old Englishman sees Deepak's 'baraat,' which is the traditional 'wedding procession' according to Gregory D. Booth (63), he is taken aback, saying, 'bleedin hell' (*Life* 11, 12). 'Swamped, thought the old man; someone said that once, we'll be swamped by them. [...] It's silent and gentle, so gradual that you hardly notice it at all until you look up and see that everything's different. "Like snow," he said, out loud' (*Life* 11). This statement is in line with right-wing politicians in the UK, America and across Europe.

However, Syal's sense of humour and satirical critique dilutes and overrides the tension described in the beholders: 'Other neighbours had gathered at windows and doorways, the children giggling behind bunched fingers, their elders, flint-faced, guarding their stone-clad kingdoms warily, in case bhangra-ing in bollock-freezing weather was infectious. (10). The serious and gloomy adult English men and women watching the procession of the wedding

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<sup>13</sup> The inverted commas do not indicate a direct quote here, but a 'scare quote' to point out a controversial idea (MacMillan).



ceremony are juxtaposed with the carefree and cheerful Indians celebrating it. The reference to the 'flint-faced' guarding their 'stone-clad kingdom' seems to indicate the rejection of the change or status quo of Britain as a multicultural society. As touched on above, they seem to yearn for Britain as an ossified and unchanging monocultural and mono-ethnic space (as discussed in section 3.1-3 of the introduction). Furthermore, the scene of Deepak's *baraat* along with the references and juxtapositions of the 'brown skin,' 'Christmas tree,' the 'turban' and the man's shouting 'Brrrr-aaaa! Bu-le, bu-le bu-le!' symbolise the hybrid and multicultural space in which the events of the story unfold (10). Against this backdrop of macrocosmic tensions, the intra-diasporic gendered and inter-generational negotiations take place, which seems to be the main concern of this novel.

Deepak's parents are described to be pleased and relieved when their son 'confirmed his choice of bride. A Punjabi girl! They had almost wept with relief' (12). Their response echoes that of Meena's parents and aunties in the earlier novel *Anita and Me* when they, for example, ask her to learn Punjabi (*AM* 205). The older generation's clear concerns are related to the preservation of the motherland's Indian identity in a postmodern society of myriad social and conceptual uncertainties and opportunities for change, which is often opposed by the patriarchal elder generation of diasporic communities. In her early days, and unlike her parents, Meena is not that proud of Indianness; in fact, she says that 'before Nanima [grandmother] arrived, this urge to reinvent myself, I could now see, was driven purely by shame, the shame I felt when we "did" India at school, [...]. I always came bottom in history' (*AM* 211). In her pursuit of peer acceptance and to avoid the conscious and unconscious racial prejudices, Meena adopts a chameleonic form of (un)belonging and seeks to distance herself from her Indian

identity<sup>14</sup>. In *The Many Faces of Shame*, Donald L. Nathanson restates Helen Block Lewis's notions that 'both shame and guilt are affects that serve to repair lost affectionate bonds, and that they are inherently social affects' (*Many Faces* 9). Thus, shame here indicates Meena's interest in and desire for inclusion and proximity, to maintain a relationship with her peers and white British environment, which necessarily entails some sort of change and distance from Indianness; this is often disapproved by her family, the microcosm of her Indian (Punjabi) belonging, which implies bipolar negotiations (British-Indian).

However, Tania's feelings of shame in Syal's *Life* go beyond acceptance seeking. Tania is a bright and smart Punjabi young woman living in London and having a successful career in media. At the beginning of the story, when she attends the wedding ceremonies of her friend Chila and Deepak, she is exacerbated that the ceremony does not run according to planned time. 'Indian time. Look at the appointed hour and add another two for good measure,' Tania says (*Life* 15). This incident reminded her of those occasions when she used to go with her family to the cinema or to visit some relatives, and they arrive late. 'She would bring up the rear, mute with shame at her clan's inevitable late entrance' (*Life* 15). Heidi L. Maibom maintains that 'shame is a painful emotion concerned with failure to live up to certain standards, norms, or ideals' (566). The standard in question is concerned primarily with *time*, from which the concept or quality of punctuality evolves. Matilda Fletcher goes further and calls punctuality a 'virtue' (49). To Tania's disappointment, her father's attitude does not conform to those criteria; "So what if the food's cold/ the park shuts in ten minutes /the film has started?" her father would boom. "Nobody minds, hah?" Tania minded so much she got

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<sup>14</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3 and in section 6.3 of the introduction.

migraines' (*Life* 15).

The 'legitimacy' of the rhetoric of these 'standards and ideals' is exactly what Lyotard is most critical of (8). Lyotard questions the authority of the West as the creator and 'legislator' of such narratives of science (time measured in Tania's case) and morality or virtuosity (punctuality) (Fletcher 49; Lyotard 8). 'Legitimation,' according to Lyotard, is 'the process by which a legislator is authorized to promulgate such a law as a norm' or 'to prescribe the stated conditions' that a statement is scientific and authentic or justified knowledge (8). That is, time and punctuality can be questioned in postmodern Lyotardian terms because the perception of time varies between societies: 'a line of sequential events versus cyclical and repetitive,' according to Michale Minkov (215). Samuel L. Macey also differentiates between two types of time in different societies: 'clock time versus event time' (149). He explains that 'in "event time," activities begin and end by mutual consensus—when "the time seems right." Under "clock time," the time on the clock dictates beginnings and endings' (149). Minkov links punctuality to the industrialisation and computerisation of societies; he contends that 'punctuality cannot exist in a preindustrial society as it makes sense only when technological processes are involved. You do not have to be out in the field and start plowing at exactly 5:30 AM, because 5:16 or 5:42 would do just as well' (214). Tania does feel ashamed that her father does not show the quality of 'punctuality' in 'clocked time'; however, he may be punctual from the 'event time' point of view, to use Macey's words (149). Punctuality and the shame the lack of punctuality causes then should not be measured only by invariable standards from a single point of view, which often stems from 'the "choice" called the Occident,' in Lyotard's words (8).

Tania's feelings of shame have further implications about her sense of identity and the trajectory of her belonging. In *The Self in Self-Conscious Emotions: A Cognitive Appraisal Approach*, Jessica L. Tracy and Richard W. Robins maintain that shame does 'promote appeasement and avoidance behaviours after a social transgression' (6). Nathanson also stressed the notion of 'avoidance' in his conceptualisation of 'the compass of shame' which also includes 'withdrawal,' 'attacking self' and 'attacking other' (*Shame Affect*). In a similar vein, Tomkins reiterates, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, that 'shame is the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation' (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 687). That is, Tania's shame implies a desire for distance from her father, who transgresses the criteria of clocked-time punctuality that she seeks to uphold. Her shame also contrasts with belonging, which shows a sense of underpinning feelings of unbelonging, because belonging is a positive desire and 'longing' for inclusion (Bell 1), or a 'wish to belong' (Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 24). Viki Bell restates Elspeth Probyn's understanding of belonging as having an 'affective dimension – not just being, but longing' and 'the yearning implied' in the definition of belonging (1). In fact, Tania does indeed leave her father's house and lives with the Englishman Martin until the end of the story when she visits him (her father) on his deathbed.

As Lynd Helen Merrell says in her *On Shame and the Search for Identity*, 'shame interrupts any unquestioning, unaware sense of oneself' (20). That is, shame unsettles and destabilises one's taken-for-granted being and belongings (selfhood and relationships with others). I would also say here that this shame affect's workings are like the Lyotardian postmodernist attitude that calls upon our questioning intellectual faculties to test and challenge the authenticity of theories, conceptions and cultures (Lyotard 8–37). Shame is, however an internal alert about one's diminished selfhood and endangered connections with cherished others (Tracy and Robins 6; Nathanson, *Shame Affect*; Nathanson, 'Prologue' 687). Merrell

also argues that the ‘experiences of shame if confronted full in the face may throw an unexpected light on who one is and point the way toward who one may become. Fully faced, shame may become not primarily something to be covered, but a positive experience of revelation’ (20). That is, according to Merrell, shame has the capacity to illuminate and disillusion the ashamed about one’s own potentialities of interests, connections and (un)belongings (20). In a similar vein, Maibom says that the subject of shame ‘feels watched and exposed. As a result, she feels bad about the person that she is’ (566). Thus, Tania’s experience of shame, which is often conceived of in negative terms (Probyn, *Blush* ix), turns out to be an important moment of revelation and betrayal as it shows her implicit sense of belonging.

Maibom maintains that shame is a ‘heteronomous’ affect, that is, a ‘profoundly social emotion uniquely sensitive to the opinion of social others’ (566). The word *heteronomous* means ‘subject to an external law: opposed to *autonomous*’ (OED, ‘Heteronomous, Adj.’). The social and cultural rules shame is subject to belong to the West (Britain) rather than the East (India). Tania is clearly unhappy with aspects of her Indian identity; hence, she becomes aware of her unbelonging and the desire to redefine her identity and reconfigure (un)belongings. At Chila’s wedding ceremony, ‘she closed her eyes as the priest began another mantra, willing the familiar words to take her back in time and get rid of the small voice that chanted in time with the distant finger bells, the voice that said, You don’t belong’ (*Life* 15–16). Shame is thus a visceral intrapersonal feeling that can raise one’s awareness about sophisticated undercover workings of one’s (un)belongings; Tania’s experience of shame reveals her reverence of non-Punjabi Indian standards and alternatives of being; her belonging is, therefore ‘affected’ by those new horizons, the ‘affecting’ new Anglo-zone of belonging (Massumi, ‘Pleasures of Philosophy’ xvi; Spinoza, *Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* 212). This experience

seems uncanny to Tania as she resorts to the ‘familiar’ words of the priest’s mantra to send her currently unbelonging selfhood back to the time when she did belong; by doing so, she hopes to overcome the change that has already taken place, the change that is distancing and unacceptable in the most symbolic and traditional event, a wedding ceremony that challenges and upsets the very Englishmen’s realm and sense of untouched white cultural identity.

The idea of the changing sense of self-identity in Tania’s case from belonging to a form of unbelonging to, unease with or alienation from her Punjabi Indian community is implied in her wish to be transposed into the past when she did belong (*Life* 15–16). This conjures up the idea of a changing landscape of the diasporic self-identity, to abandon and adopt, or lose and gain, attachments and belongings as specific features of the collective plural self-identity, which is what happens in Tania’s case. As discussed in section 4.2 and section 5.1 in the introductory chapter, the vertical conceptualisation of belonging indicates judgement of the changing phenomenon and sense of belonging, while the horizontal seeks to mainly signify a position that oscillates between poles of belonging. It is important to understand these conceptual and theoretical perspectives that are common in discourses of identity and belonging, but this thesis does not endorse these points of views but seeks to critique them. They are not only limiting and reductive but also liable to many racial and gendered prejudices.

It is commendable that Tania and many women characters seek to redefine their being and to belong through self-determined compromises between their dual identities and multiple (un)belongings. By doing so or desiring it —consciously or unconsciously, they liberate themselves of the limiting linear and bipolar two-dimensional understanding of diasporic

identities and belonging<sup>15</sup> (position-based and judgement-based conceptualisations), and thereby they reclaim or seek to reclaim the free and happy woman in themselves, whether implicitly like Reba and Neerupama (Chapter 2) and Nazneen (Chapter 5), or explicitly like Moni (Chapter 1), Tania (Chapter 4) and Maya (Chapter 6). But in some cases, diasporans, like Tania, enact false and offensive judgements (over-generalisations) in an overreaction to limitations of her own community's social and cultural identity. In line and conformity with previously arrived at inferences using her shame affect, Tania reiterates her desire for distance and her self-flagellating offending claims that her father 'succeeded in making us ashamed of who we were Smelly Pakis hanging around hotel foyers' (*Life* 144). Thus, some women, in their legitimate and rightful strive for equality and autonomy and freedom of constraints and limitations of racist and/or sexist judgements of identity and belonging, recoil into the same rhetoric about the community they seek to unbelong to. In Chapter 6, Rekha Waheed is also very critical of practising what one seeks to preach (to preach specificity, difference and choice but practice nonsensical and misrepresentations of the totality of a given identity or community one are supposed to question in limited contexts and by way of a targeted constructive deconstruction and criticism).

In Chapter 6, I refer to the real-life example of Ayaan Hirsi Ali (a Dutch-American feminist of Somali origins) who makes overgeneralisations on arranged marriages as being all forced and on Islamic societies as being all oppressive and retrogressive to modernise, drawing on her experience of arranged marriage in a limited context, according to Ralph Grillo (80); a

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<sup>15</sup> Identity and belonging are replete with varied meanings and significations that is beyond the scope of this chapter or perhaps the whole thesis to capture fully, but it is important to point out the potentialities of meaning in terms of diasporics' (especially diasporic women's) own sense of identity (self-identity) as juxtaposed with her external image seen by others in the outside world, whether it is own community or the wider British society.

limited subjective experience and point of view cannot reasonably provide enough evidence and proof to infer a totalised and over-homogenised conclusions or authentic representations of different and greatly diversified societies, communities and even families within those communities and larger societies that might be unscientific and non-justifiable knowledge to loosely associate together with a false commonality of identity, social, cultural or religious; thus, in her books *Infidel*, *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations* and *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*, Ali does not provide ‘scientific knowledge’ in response to limited and targeted narratives of women’s oppressive experiences but a counter-narrative, a reaction of ‘totalising’ and false ‘narrative knowledge’ that endorses such claims that all Muslims and Islam do not ‘permit democracy and human rights’ (Lyotard 8–37; A. H. Ali, *Infidel* 217). This is not, however, a reactive attack or defence of a given identity, culture or religion, but a proactive criticism of an approach of producing false narratives and representing as valid knowledge, as Lyotard demonstrates in his book *The Postmodern Condition*. Thus, Tania’s offending words about being ‘smelly Pakis’ or Hirsi’s unjustifiable totalising narratives commodify identities and replace them back on a linear track (bipolar and two-dimensional, which produces hollow and nonsensical narratives of place and judgements of good and bad, or black and white.

Hirsi’s argument that the ‘religious-cultural identity of Muslims’ is characterised with key ideas of ‘shame’ and ‘honour’ or a ‘patriarchal mentality and culture of shame,’ is right in some, but not all, contexts (*The Caged Virgin* 39). To claim that Rekha Waheed’s Islam in Bangladesh or the Bangladeshi community in Britain (Chapter 6) is the same as the Turkish version, the Malaysian, the Saudi Arabian, or the Somali (Hirsi’s case) is a form of ignorant generalisation. This applies to the critique and conclusions of this thesis as regards the notion of women’s oppression: they should be understood in limited contexts if they are to be



projected to real life; it is not claimed to represent exhaustive realities and universal knowledge in fact, nor in fiction. Sexism and the oppression of women, which is a key concern of this thesis, is an experience that is not limited to a single identity and a sociocultural or geographical space, being it Eastern, or more specifically, (British) Asian, Indian and/or Bengali. But Hirsi contends that forced marriages and the idea of shaming women for having sex outside marriage or losing virginity is only limited to a single culture or religion (Islam), wondering:

Should Islam embark on a period of enlightenment and modernization? Does Islam need a Voltaire to call Muslims to break free of superstition, to use their minds and not their emotions, to take note, as he did in the 1800s, that “Nothing can be more contrary to religion and the clergy than reason and common sense.” [...] Is there an enlightened Muslim man or woman who can stand with Voltaire and say, “To think of virginity as a virtue—and not a barrier that separates ignorance from knowledge—is an infantile superstition”? (*The Caged Virgin* 27)

There is limited space in this Chapter and thesis to address all the points raised by Hirsi in the quote above, but I will discuss three of her ideas: ‘modernisation,’ ‘virginity’ and ‘reason’ (*The Caged Virgin* 27). First, there is, according to Lyotard, no reason and justification in enacting false narratives and claims that the whole varied members and different nations of a given religious group do not use their brains but their feelings! To fight the oppression of women and sexist narratives is a just cause and a reasonable battle, but to fight back ignorance (the misconceptions and false knowledge sexism is based on) with ignorance (making unjustifiable and unreasonable overgeneralisations) is, again, to practice what you preach against; this is not outrageous, but lamentable. To claim that virginity is an Islamic moral value is somehow like claiming that freedom is only a British value rather than a human

value. A Few years ago, I attended a teacher training day in one of London's colleges. The speaker handed out a list of the British values that we, the teachers, are to promote; one of the attendees, a European, protested those values as being not only British, but core human values, or at least Western, if you like. Thus, the values of virginity and freedom, agree or disagree with them in principle or in practice, are not limited to specific locations, cultures or religions; claiming that they are without justification is not legitimate knowledge but worthless opinion.

According to Lesley Parry and Jan Hayes, there is Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism are all in agreement about forbidding sex outside marriage and the value of chastity (virginity). Kathleen Coyle points out that most Christian theology scholars believe in the 'perpetual virginity of Mary' as an epitome of the Christian values of chastity and purity (28). Dr Mahabala Shetty also points out the virtues of the Hindu traditions of arranged marriages and warns against the immorality of sex outside marriage, drawing on Hindu traditions (1-4, 79-80). He states that 'casual sex is not an Eastern tradition' (80). He adds, saying, 'a woman's virginity is synonymous with a high degree of character and virtue. She is expected to be a virgin prior to marriage. Almost all unmarried women in India are believed to be virgins (79). As Michael Kaufman also says, 'Judaism does not sanction sexual activity which lacks the long-term covenant of marriage. Sexual relations within the marital structure are desirable and beautiful; unchaste behavior and sexual relations outside marriage are forbidden by Judaism as offenses against God and man. Judaism thus prohibits both premarital and extramarital promiscuity' (136). Shetty calls upon 'the girls of the West,' warning them to abstain from premarital sex, saying that they must 'think very hard and change for the better. They need to change ASAP' (80). Ali, however, singles out one religion or cultural identity for the biased and blind attack, which is, allegorically speaking, like attacking the Independent Newspaper for a frontpage headline that appears on the frontpages of almost

all other British and world newspapers, like praising or telling off one student when all the whole group have got their answers right or wrong. I am sorry, Ali, this logic is not at all ‘reason’ as you claim, but rather *treason* against your own common sense. Voltaire may not be able to help. This is said in defence of reason and knowledge, not religion per se. Ali’s father who tries to force her to marry a relative against her wishes before her running away to the Netherlands (individual practices), cannot represent the totality and collectivity of the social and cultural identity he claims to share and follow, as will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

Furthermore, Ali’s idea of ‘modernisation’ implies a renewal, a change that is deemed good. To modernise, to make modern and better is a controversial concept that is based on language and language games, in the Saussurean sense, can (re)shape and rewrite reality (Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* 20; Barry 43). In fact, Tania (a successful and self-made journalist) highlights this role of language when she reports how, on her second day at university, her university tutor lectured about objectivity in journalism. When first attending a warzone, he addresses his students, ‘Where’s your first location? When you get there, where do you first point the camera? Where the bomb lands, or where it dropped from? What do you say to accompany the visuals? Hooray for our lads, the freedom fighters, or boo to the barbarian terrorists?’ (*Life* 138). As Lyotard argues, ‘to speak is to fight, in the sense of playing [language games]’ (9). The problem of narrative knowledge, like that of identity and cultures, is that it is imprisoned in a vertical linear polarity; it is based on opinions and political judgements rather than on evidence and reason. Thus, change in the domains of cultural and religious identities and can be considered a progression or retrogression, a rise or fall; it is a controversial debate that can be prone to a variety of social and political games that might serve the unscientific purpose of the perpetuation of biased narratives, no the production of evidenced knowledge.

Ali is like Tania, who is too ashamed of her identity and origins, the one she seeks to rightfully choose to unbelong to but fall into the rhetoric of self-flagellating offending speech. Tania describes her own father as a ‘man who never got off the factory floor long enough to see the sky, whose idea of haute couture was Crimplene trousers with the crease already sewn in, whose every effort to better himself just succeeded in making us ashamed of who we were Smelly Pakis hanging around hotel foyers’ (*Life* 144). Tania’s reaction echoes Ali’s negative description of her father and her experience of avoiding a forced marriage: ‘In 1992,’ she says, ‘I escaped to the Netherlands, fleeing the marriage my father arranged for me to a fellow clan member in Canada. Despite my fierce protestations, my father refused to change his mind. On my way to Canada, in Germany, I seized the opportunity to run away from my family and escaped to Holland’ (*The Caged Virgin* 83).

Tania, like Ali, also leaves her family and lives with Martin. Ali, like Tania, is also reminded by her family and cultural constraints that she must be a ‘good’ woman, like her friend Chila (Syal, *Life* 134; A. H. Ali, *The Caged Virgin* xi). However, both women reverse the judgement equation and judge their own families and identities. Her references to her father, the first-generation humble labourer, is reminiscent of the history of postwar migration of mainly low-skilled South Asians to Britain (Maxey 217; Hussain 19). Most importantly, the historicity of the linguistic signs (‘factory,’ ‘haute couture,’ ‘Crimplene,’ and ‘Pakis’) clearly implies classism, fashion, race, consumerism and a progression to a postmodernist society. Elizabeth Wilson maintains in her ‘Fashion and Postmodernism’ that the predominance of the ‘era of *haute couture*’ can be related to modernism (431). The expensive and luxury brand of ‘Haute couture’ is contrasted here with cheap and ‘Crimplene’ to signify social status, class and eventually race in Tania’s case. As Fredric Jameson says in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, such ‘modernist styles thereby become postmodernist

codes' that have evolved into 'the badges of affirmation of ethnic, gender, race, religious, and class-factional adhesion,' which is a political development and phenomenon (17). Thus, according to Jameson, 'parody' (copying with a true artistic purpose) turns into 'pastiche' (fake copy of the original, 'simulacrum' or copying for the sake of copying) (17). In this instance, Tania's shame seeks change and unbelonging through imitation and adoption of Western time. Her self-flagellation ('smelly Pakis') falls to the same perspectival language game she spoke about ('barbarian') as lack of change on her family's side, at least in appearance and practice of Western virtues and time, is something she is ashamed of and seeks to distance herself from. As such, shame shows that identities and belongings seem to be chameleonic, imitative and 'pastiche' in our contemporary postmodernist and globalised world.

Furthermore, shame brings to light controversial politicised ethical questions and judgements, as Elspeth Probyn et al. point out (324). The ethical questions raised by the workings of shame are to be addressed with due care, lest one might unwittingly fall into the practice of 'shaming' and preaching (Probyn et al. 324–25). In 'Shame,' Tomkins contends that 'one can be "ashamed" of *either* being inferior or being immoral and of striving either to overcome inferiority or immorality' ('Shame' 135). But is it immoral to turn up late after the movie has started or to wear an old pair of trousers? Probably not. So what is Tania ashamed of? Unlike the Kumar's family in *Anita and Me*, Tania is clearly not proud of some aspects her who she and her family are, of her identity. She apparently feels that it is somehow of inferior status to that of the social others shame pre-requires to exist as an affect (Maibom 566). But how could we differentiate between inferiority-based and immorality-based experiences of shame? There are actually no easy answers to this question because, like shame, ethics is as multi-faceted and multi-dimensional (social, cultural, and political), according to Wayne Booth (8–12).

Ethics, virtues and ethos are interlinked. According to Booth, *ethics* is concerned with ‘any strengthening or weakening of a “virtue,” including those that you or I would consider immoral; [because] a given virtue can be employed viciously’ (10). By *virtue*, he refers to ‘the whole range of human “powers,” “strengths,” “capacities,” or “habits of behaviour.”’ (10). It is a womanly virtue in *Life* and other novels in this collection for women (Sunita, Chila, Meena and Tania’s mother) to be meek and submissive to their men, like Reba in Gupta’s *A Sin of Colour* in Chapter 2, whose lowering of her eyes and the head is described to have ‘befitted a young bride’ (SC 18). As de Beauvoir says, women often reminded ‘to be women, remain women, become women’ (13). That is, man define woman and determines the morality of their behaviour according to a set of ethical criteria they decide. Tania, however, questions the meekness and submissiveness of her mother and friend Meena when in the presence of their men. She also seeks to analyse and diagnose the reasons for women’s surprising change of attitude. For example, Tania’s mother applauds her husband needlessly and for deeds that he does not do, saying, ‘Such a brilliant move, husband-ji. Thusi acha badh kithe ...’ (*Life* 145). The use of Punjabi to a non-Punjabi speaker will have no purpose other than to give the text an identity, a specification of the overarching domain in question. Furthermore, Meena, who ‘sacked three of her staff and organised a buy-out of a rival firm in her lunch hour,’ is apologises meekly to her husband for his own fault and inability to use the iron: ‘If any of her colleagues had dismissed her, patronized her, ordered her, spoken to her the way the man she loves spoke to her then, she’d have wiped the floor with their battered carcasses. Instead, Meena smiled and said sorry’ (*Life* 147).

Tania refers this change in women’s behaviour to shame. She says, ‘I’ve seen enough to recognize it for what it is: our collective shameful secret. We meet the world head up, head on, we meet our men and we bow down gratefully, cling to compromise like a lover who

promises all will be well if we don't make trouble. We hear our mothers' voices and heed them, to make up for all the other imagined transgressions in our lives. (*Life* 147). The imbalanced power relations between men and women in some (diasporic) South Asian communities conjures up social, cultural and political problems of gendered inequality, sexism and patriarchy (*Life* 147; W. C. Booth 8–12). As Tania suggests, women seem to submit and acquiesce to the status quo as a means of compensation for the 'imagined transgressions' they may have committed (*Life* 147). As transgression preresquires the existence of a transgressed, this must be a social or cultural narrative of values and virtues, which are often passed down and 'force-fed' to a South Asian woman 'as a matter of survival' or 'defence against the corruption outside our front door,' as Tania says (*Life* 146). This indicates that *change* is forbidden and bad that will necessarily incur *shame*, that is, 'being shamed by others for deviating from the right path, the *virtue* or the *ethos* of the community, which stands for the 'collection of habitual characteristics' of the group that some daring women seek to break from and change (W. C. Booth 8; Probyn et al. 325). Tania's rejection of those ethicised gendered narratives and taboos is signified in her implication that what is transgressed and disobeyed is in fact 'imagined' misconceptions and unjustifiable sociocultural narratives (*Life* 147).

As Booth says, those very gendered limitations and taboos represent important social and cultural virtues that are integral to the ethos of many Eastern societies, the questioning of which is thought to be on the rise (*Life* 147; W. C. Booth 8–12; Lyotard xxiv). The imprisoning 'metanarrative' of gender inequality and 'gender apartheid' is being challenged (A. H. Ali, *The Caged Virgin* 15; Lyotard xxiv, 26). Women seek to change and challenge the dehumanising androcentric space, which is described as the 'fatherhusbandworkplace,' in Tania's words (*Life* 15). As Ali says, 'because I was born a woman, I could never become an adult. I would always

be a minor, my decisions made for me. I would always be a unit in a vast beehive' (*Infidel* 187). This is to give credit to Ali's attack of the culture of patronisation of girls and women in many social and cultural contexts, a culture that persists into the twenty-first century. In those settings, the family, as discussed in Chapter 6, or the collective sociocultural identity, seem to have much at stake in women's behaviour, practice, speech and even appearance and apparel. Tania's mother insists that Tania buys new dresses for the summer season weddings lest she might 'shame the family by wearing last year's fashions' (*Life* 41).

When Chila challenges her mother about privileging her brother over herself, the mother is 'afraid that Chila might utter words that would shatter the fragile throne upon which she sat,' afraid that Chila might open up on her 'yet unspoken misery' (*Life* 202). Chila's unhappiness reminds us of Gupta's characters in the first chapter. Chila had 'her dupatta heavy on her shoulders, the yoke of ages, transparent as air, heavier than iron, a woman's modesty symbolized by a scrap of silk, *izzat* a mere textbook term up until now, a family's honour is carried by its daughters' (*Life* 202). The word *izzat* is an Urdu word that is derived from the Arabic *izzah*, which means 'Honour, reputation, credit, prestige' (OED). Clearly, as Yuval-Davis says, women 'are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour' (*Gender and Nation* 45). The position of women as representative of a whole family or community is paradoxically incongruous with the insignificant status and the treatment that they often receive in the relevant social settings in question, which often privilege men as Chila suggests (*Life* 202).

Even Chila, the simple and traditional young woman in Syal's *Life*, questions the androcentricity of her family and culture, saying to her mother, who prepares a special food for her (being pregnant and expectant): "'Who? The little prince in here?' Chila shouted,



prodding her belly. ‘Or the waste-of-space little girl?’” (*Life* 200). Chila is so keen to know the sex of the baby and therefore she goes to have a scan at the hospital, saying, “I just want to know so I can . . . be ready”, she tells Sunita. ““If it’s a girl, she’ll be all mine. If it’s a boy . . .” and she wouldn't say much after that' (*Life* 229). A boy would ‘carry on the family name proudly’ and, as Chila’s mother says, ‘you worry more for girls. With boys it’s . . . just easier’ (*Life* 229). The nurse at the hospital refuses to let Chila know the gender of her baby. When Chila and Sunita protest the nurse says that ““Well, you see” — she blushed — “with our... Asian ladies, we tend not to reveal the sex. It’s just, we had a number of the ladies afterwards requesting ... terminations, when they found out they were carrying girls”” (*Life* 229). After Sunita’s complaint and the intervention and apologies of an Indian doctor at the hospital, the scan is done and Chila is informed that it’s a boy. Putting the clear and unacceptable racial discrimination aside, what this experience also shows is a state of sexist infamy and knowledge that is being overgeneralised as a racial stereotype. This is reminiscent of Ali’s overreaction to her personal and limited experiences to produce false stereotypical and totalising knowledge, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

It is wrong to stereotype and stigmatise all South Asians for gendered infamy caused by some or most communities. This said, it should not stop us, readers and critics, from diagnosing the problem, exposing the shallow, sexist mentality and inhuman practices, and supporting change. For example, the guards of patriarchal cultures, men and old women, often feel sad for the birth of daughters; they think that having or giving birth to daughters, rather than sons, is like a curse. In Chapter 5, Hamid is disinterested in the new arrival, his daughter Nazneen indicates the culture and mentality in question. An old lady curses a friend of Tania’s saying, ““May she only bear daughters, the hair-dyed hussy!”” (That last bit is what I actually heard an old woman spit at one of my mates in Stratford Shopping Centre. Sad really, because

that old woman must have been someone's daughter once upon a time.)' (*Life* 28). Daughters cause a sense of shame and sadness; sons trigger a sense of pride and happiness. Many Eastern societies are infamous for this. Hence, daughters are also described by some Asian parents in the novel as 'bus tickets' they hand over to 'strangers' (*Life* 14).

Lyotard refers to the role of language, especially that of such adages and sayings, as conveyors of narrative knowledge, stating that 'popular sayings, proverbs, and maxims: they are like little splinters of potential narratives, [...] that jars the golden rule of our knowledge: "never forget,"' (22). I believe that the development of antifeminist rhetoric into offensive curses in this novel ('May she only bear daughters') is integral to the ossified androcentric culture, plays a similar language game of unquestioned perpetuation and legitimation to that of proverbs, according to Lyotard's postmodern theory of the status of knowledge (Syal, *Life* 28; Lyotard 22–23). In *Life*, Syal uses an interesting and meaningful intertextual reference to the Australian feminist writer Germaine Greer, who contends in *The Whole Woman* that 'femaleness' is sometimes equated with 'inferiority,' which in this respect has something in common with shame, as demonstrated above (Greer, *The Whole Woman* 2; Syal, *Life* 228; Tomkins, 'Shame' 135). This perception seems to persist in some Eastern and South Asian social settings, but many diasporic writers as Gupta, Syal, Ali and Waheed, among many others, strive to challenge and change the status quo of women in the South Asian community. It is crippling and more resistant to change to preserve preservation of such androcentric, and patriarchal ideology is misunderstood as guarding and perpetuating the collective social and cultural identity; patriarchy is thus an ossified part of the group identity, and any act of change is mistaken as a question of everyone's being and belonging.

While Sunita gives her little daughter a peaceful bath, she wonders whether she would, one day in the future when she grows up, 'rebel against whatever I stand for,' Sunita says (Syal, *Life* 243–44). Syal's intertextual reference to Greer's book *The Female Eunuch* (1970) is a sign of endorsement of her feminist theory (Greer, *The Whole Woman* 1–2; Syal, *Life* 228). Greer belongs to the second wave of feminists who do not only call for gender 'equality' between men and women but for the 'liberation' of women, which is not dissimilar to a battle of decolonisation and rebellion, according to Greer (*Female Eunuch* 1). She contends that 'Liberation struggles are not about assimilation but about asserting difference, endowing that difference with dignity and prestige, and insisting on it as a condition of self-definition and self-determination. The aim of women's liberation is to do as much for female people as has been done for colonized nations' (1). In her wedding ceremonies, Chila is conscious of the patriarchal gaze that is ready to shame if she is ever heedless to a symbolic social code of good manners for women, which she does not believe in. Therefore, she walks with her 'head bowed submissively' and walks the 'walk of everyone's mothers on all their weddings, meekly, shyly, reluctantly towards matrimony' Tania and Sunita, Chila's close friends, watch the drama unfold as they hear the audience say, 'You see, how nicely she walks behind him? She will follow his lead in life. That is good' (*Life* 13–14). The approval of Chila's walking 'behind' her husband-to-be and claiming that it is 'good' shows the political use of language and the controversial association between morality and the androcentric sociocultural conceptions that underpin the patriarchal practices which is what Syal and Greer seek to expose and reject.

A man's 'good' might well be a woman's 'bad' (Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* 20; Barry 43; *Life* 138). Tomkin's links the act of 'bowing' one's head with being 'vulnerable in a quite unique way' (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 132). Thus, it follows

that what is conceived of as ‘good’ is the practice and manifestation of female vulnerability and subjugation, which is renamed and encoded in social and cultural terms. Clearly, this is a protected value that is passed from mothers to daughters and therefore is integral to the ethos of a given society, the questioning of which, as Booth says, would put the family’s and the relevant community’s cultural identity, *izzat* and honour at an imagined risk of extinction (8–10). Tania’s reference to the ‘imagined transgressions’ which includes doing the ‘dirty thing’ (having sex outside marriage) connotes endorsement of women’s freedom and rejection of the ethico-political equation: women’s vulnerability and lack of freedom or choice is ‘good’ (*Life* 13, 14, 147).

She

seems to agree with Jonathon, her work colleague and manager, ‘that choosing whom you love is the most political decision you can make. It was for all of us. We three girls managed the oft-quoted juggling act until it was time to find a man’ (*Life* 148). A woman’s relationship with a man is thus a social and political matter. With a similar touch of humour to Syal’s storytelling, Greer’s writes about men’s domination over women and the fake equality in sexual freedom. ‘The sexuality that has been freed’, she says, ‘is male sexuality which is fixated on penetration. [...] The penetree, regardless of sex, cannot rule, OK? Not in prison, not in the army, not in business, not in the suburbs. The person on the receiving end is – fucked, finished, unserviceable, degraded’ (*The Whole Woman* 7). The phallus is symbolically referred to as a symbol or a ‘weapon’ of domination in Syal’s novel and in Greer’s *The Female Eunuch*; Beroze, a South Asian barrister in family law, says, ‘They expect us to worship at the shrine of their mighty weapon’ (*Life* 166), and in a similar vein, Greer says ‘The penis is conceived as a weapon and its action upon women is understood to be somehow

destructive and hurtful' (*Female Eunuch* 317). Women are thus expected to acquiesce to their colonisers (men and women's elder guardians of the patriarchal regime) and accept the status quo. The social and cultural codes of practice and moral standards are therefore politically inscribed and have no basis in reason.

Greer's support of the liberation of women, rather than equality per se, echoes Seema's experience in the novel (*The Whole Woman* 7). The Indian married couple Seema and Raj attend Akash's psychotherapy clinic to find solutions to their spousal disagreements and problems. Seema (like Chila, Sunita and all 'good' South Asian women in the story) says, 'I've already had enough practice at being a good girl and keeping quiet and I've got lots more years to live and I'm scared of wasting them and I don't have any more time to wait until my husband gets kinder or sexier or . . . better' (104). Greer advises that women should not back up and accept to meet mid-way before the realisation of their liberation, a full change of the status quo. She demands that a woman:

must fight the guilt of failure in an impossible set-up, and examine the set-up. She must ignore interested descriptions of her health, her morality and her sexuality, and assess them all for herself. [...] She must not allow herself to be ridiculed and baffled by arguments with her husband, or to be blackmailed by his innocence of his part in her plight and his magnanimity in offering to meet her half-way in any 'reasonable' suggestion. Essentially she must recapture her own will and her own goals, and the energy to use them. (*Female Eunuch* 323)

Shaming women for demanding freedom, autonomy and full realisation of potential and desires seems to be a sheer political process that is often void of ethical grounds in fact and reason. Women have started to react to the unfairness and injustices of their position in the social and cultural contexts in question. Seema is tired of being 'good' (104); Chila, the most conventional

woman, says that ‘there’s too many people’s minds to change’ but women should start with themselves first, according to her (233); Tania already ‘broke loose from her traditional moorings and drifted into an uncharted ocean with her English man and snappy Soho job’ (18).

As Greer suggest, the liberation (or the change of women’s status quo) does not mean full denial of one’s identity but a targeted reformation and redefinition of specific features of one’s dual and dynamic identity and belonging. Syal’s Tania refers to the idea of a ‘coconut identity,’ which is, she Tania explains, ‘white on the inside, brown on the outside’ (*Life* 147). In Chapter 6, Waheed’s Maya disapproves of the idea of a ‘coconut identity’ (*A-Z* 12); Syal’s Tania however, seems to approve of it as a concept of epitomising a dual sense of belonging. As discussed in section 4.2, the idea of the duality of diasporic identities (the so-called in-between belonging) causes the conceptual problem (misconception) of moving linearly between two opposing poles of belonging. To illustrate, I used the allegory of the communicating vessels where belonging to one end is conceived of as unbelonging to the other, as per the racist and patriarchal sexist ideologies. Thus, linear conceptions of diasporic bipolar (un)belongings evoke vertical or horizontal notions of the dynamic identities and belonging (position-based and/or judgement-based<sup>16</sup>), which leads to the understanding that belonging moves from the problem of ossification to the problem of identity and belonging ‘under erasure’ (‘sous rature’) in Derridean words, where one faces the ethical and political judgements of good or bad, moral or immoral, shame or pride, and so on.

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<sup>16</sup> Position-based and Judgement-based conceptions of diasporic belonging is further demonstrated in section 4.2 of the introductory chapter.

As proposed in section 5.1 in the introduction, the solution is to conceive of diasporic identities and (un)belongings as three-dimensional and non-polar, centred on the R vertex of the REW interconnections (Diasporic, East and West), rather than on the linear bipolar position that breeds prejudicial and biased judgements and limitations of racist and sexist nature. Tania declares a new form of belonging and identity that she prides herself in; thus, she ushers in an era of proud change of dynamic identities rather than the culture of shame and shaming, staying, 'see how I combine this bindi with that leather jacket and make a bold statement about my duality? [...] Watch how I glide effortlessly from old paths to new pastures, creating a new culture as I walk on virgin snow! And then it was time to cut the crap and own up to who we really were' (*Life* 148). The proud, cheerful and happy tone of Tania's declaration of statement is tangible and can be juxtaposed with other oppressed and distressed women in this thesis (Chapter 3 and 5, for example). The remarkable and outstanding difference in the degree of happiness and excitement about one's being a woman and belonging as a (British) Asian between, for instance, Tania and Chila in this novel, or between Tania and Reba or Neerupama in Chapter 3, or Nazneen in Chapter 5, can be explained in affective terms of shaming and the social and cultural constraints dictated by the collective group identity, because, as John Bradshaw says, 'shame monitors excitement and pleasure' (16). Hence, this thesis seeks to foreground women's covertly or explicitly expressed call for rejecting and exposing the culture of shaming change and ushering in a free, happy and proud self-determined form of plural and multiple identities and belongings centred on and envisaged by the diasporic (woman) as its subject, rather than the other (racist or sexist).

Thus, Tania's aim is then to belong to a different hybrid culture and thereby reshape her self-customised and envisaged identity as a British Asian woman. But for women to fulfil

the process of their transformation and liberation, it is a prerequisite that men also do change and reconfigure their habits, culture and disown their patriarchal narratives. Akash successfully diagnoses the problem when he advises Seem and Raj, who attend his clinic, for psychotherapist help and support. Akash, who shares the same origins and belong to the same social and cultural environment as Raj, shows empathy and understanding of the couple's problem. He addresses Raj asking him to 'unlearn' specific patriarchal elements of his cultural identity:

'These are the hardest habits to break,' Akash continued, managing a reassuring smile. 'The old ones. All men have to contend with the example set by their fathers. But for us, we are also having to reassess our cultural habits, too.' [...]. 'It is extremely hard, having to dismantle your belief system. Because we ... you are not only having to question your attitudes as a man, but more specifically, as an Asian man. It can seem like you're losing, everything that makes you you but we all know, at least I hope we do after two months together, that we are also the generation that can change things, redefine what being Asian and male or Asian and female, means, without losing pride in who we are. Because culture evolves and changes, just like human beings.' (103)

*(Life 103)*

As Terry A. Maroney says, 'what is learned can sometimes be unlearned' (Maroney 87). In a similar vein, Akash is asking Raj to redefine his identity and unbelong to specific patriarchal features of his social and cultural identity, which is what most women in this novel and thesis seek to do. As Kalwant Bhopal says in 'Identity, empathy and 'otherness': Asian women, education and dowries in the UK,' 'Identities are constantly changing and fluid and Asian women do not see themselves as belonging to a set of permanent groups, just as their



identities are constantly being negotiated, their belonging to certain groups is also being negotiated' (36). The insights, cultural knowledge and advice Akash provides to Raj shows a good diagnosis of the problems and the solutions. It is, however, one of Syal's aesthetic techniques to point out the shocking irony that Akash has similar problems of his own with his wife Sunita. That is, Akash is exactly preaching what he himself does not practise. This shows that the problem is not simply that of knowledge and awareness but one that denotes deeper social and cultural tensions of power, interests and androcentric desires to maintain control, objectification and dehumanisation of women. This is often done through a biased and politicised code of sexist ethics that seeks to uphold and maintain the linear judgement-based conceptualisations of identities, which is not different from the racist thinking (as discussed in chapter 3).

To sum up, Seema, Sunita, Chila and Tania seem to reject the patriarchal practice of shaming women for their desires for freedom, autonomy and self-determination, for their aspiration to redefine their identity and (un)belongings. Tania, Sunita and Chila, the three British Indian (Punjabi) friends living in London, epitomise the different possibilities of the Indian and South Asian diasporic woman living in London. Chila tends to acquiesce and submit throughout to the social expectations of her community; Tania abandons her family and leads a life of her own choosing with her English boyfriend Martin adopting a job in journalism that is claimed to transgress some social and cultural reservations in the novel, and Sunita shows a dynamic character as she moves from a conventional Chila that obeys those rules and expectations to a modern Tania that transgresses them. Sunita rejects the shaming politics and ethical criteria dictated by the collective identity that imprisons women within that static and limiting identity.

Thus, those women who publicly rebel against or unhappily submit to (implicitly reject) the traditional conceptions of identity seem to be subjugated to a narrative of linear and polar belongings that engender reductive sexist conceptions of position and judgement. I have therefore discussed shame and change against the backdrop of an embedded overarching linear-versus-non-linear conceptualisation of diasporic identities and (un)belongings as shown in figures 12, 13, and 15. My alternative non-linear understanding of the changes of dynamic identities and belonging, as demonstrated in section 5 of the introduction, has helped to break down the linearity and polarity and re-centre the debate on the subject of belonging (diasporic woman), rather than on its imagined position and claimed judgemental value. Shaming is thus voided of its biased value system and narratives as the woman is the centre of her dual or plural identity and belonging.

According to Tomkins, Probyn, Nathanson, Maibom, Tracy and Robins, Merrel and Miceli and Castelfranchi among others cited above, shaming contrasts with shame; the latter is felt (an inner insightful feeling) while the former is forced (external judgement or authority asking one to be ashamed, to observe and see the immorality of one's acts, to refrain, stop and re-submit). Shame is not simply an affective experience of loss of face; it is a conceptual framework that maps one's paradoxical desires to hide one's face on the one hand and uphold, fix and maintain the relationship with the group one is too ashamed to face, the important social others. Thus, the affect of shame has functioned as an important conceptual and exegetical tool that has helped me to uncover important meanings about the affected person's interests, attachments, aspirations and (un)belongings (Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 120; *Blush* xi-x, 131) Shame also raises the affected individual's own self-awareness about one's hopes, connections and belongings (Maibom 566). Like guilt, shame represents a call for an insightful reappraisal of one's relationships and behaviours that might cause, affect or be

affected by shame (Miceli and Castelfranchi 710). Hence, As Tomkins and Maibom contend, shame is inseparable from its social and cultural environment (Maibom 566; Tomkins, 'Shame' 134)

So the shame affect uncovers a desire for belonging or unbelonging to a given social group, one's own or another, as is the case with Tania's experience in this chapter (Maibom 566). The dynamics and workings of the practice of shaming are quite different; shaming is an act of patronising censorship, and ethical judgement of diasporic women's behaviour and acts of belonging that are counterchecked against a set of sociocultural criteria and sexist narratives of right and wrong, good and bad, black and white. Thus, the gendered and judgemental word *good* dominates most of the novels in this selection, as is the case with Seema above. That women have ceased to show shame when committing the claimed, and so-called *bad* is a sign of change, challenge and transgression of the sexist narratives and the socially and politically prejudicial code of ethics and standards. In other words, as Lyotard suggests, the imposed ethical question implied in referring to free acts of being and belonging as transgressions of social and cultural mores is problematic and controversial; in fact, it is not a moral question per se but rather a political one that is preoccupied with power, interests and domination, whether in the field of international or interpersonal social politics, which gives rise and grounds to racist and sexist acts. These underpinning social, cultural and political conceptions belong to Lyotard's 'narrative knowledge' whose gradual corrosion and collapse is ushered in and heralded in his seminal book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.

## Chapter 5: Interest and Homeliness in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003)

In this chapter, I will further discuss the dynamics of (un)belonging and the workings of such related feelings of (un)homeliness through an analysis (dis)interest in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (BL 2003). Ali (born in 1967 in Dhaka) writes in 2003 about how and why she came from Tejgoan, Bangladesh (East Pakistan at the time) to England in 1970 when she was three years old, fleeing the Pakistani army and the streets of Tejgoan that 'belonged to the tanks' (*Where I'm Coming From*). She first fled the war in Bangladesh with her English mother and brother, and then their father followed them after running away to India wherefrom he could join the family in Britain. Ali's origins and the story of arrival signify the diasporic experiences and enrich the debate of (un)belonging. According to her, she is often asked interesting questions about home, identity and belonging, the notions which stand out in many of her novels. For example, the question of 'us' and 'them' is applied to in Ali's experience; she also writes in *Where I'm Coming From*:

the "two camp" split in my case brings me back to the idea of the periphery. How can I write about a community to which I do not truly belong? Perhaps, the answer is I can write about it because I do not truly belong. Growing up with an English mother and a Bengali father means never being an insider. Standing neither behind a closed door, nor in the thick of things, but rather in the shadow of the doorway, is a good place from which to observe.

Ali's thematic concerns seem to draw on her unique experience of (un)belonging qua an insightful dual experience being astride cultures and countries, as discussed in the introduction (section 6.1). Her problematised identity as interstitial, incomplete and partial has been also discussed earlier in the introductory chapter (section 3.2-6). Ali seems to face double

exclusion and critique based on her partial belonging (which is also partial unbelonging); she criticised as an outsider to Britishness as well as to Bengalianness (M. Ali, *Where I'm Coming From*). In *Contemporary British Fiction* (2017), Nick Bentley compares the reception of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) with that of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Both novels seem to have produced antagonistic sentiments, and they are denounced upon publication due to their controversial thematic concerns. Ali's *Brick Lane* starts with Nazneen's birth in Gouripur, Bangladesh and ends with her skiing with her two daughters Shehana and Bibi in London while her husband Chanu Ahmed is back home in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The novel is claimed to draw a negative picture of the Bangladeshi community in London's Tower Hamlets. Therefore, many members of this community rejected the novel as a false representation of their reality (Bentley 65). Patrick Sawyer's '*Brick Lane* Novel Is an Insult' (2003) clearly illustrates this standpoint stating that Ali has been accused of describing the East London Bangladeshi community in a 'shameful and despicable way'. As Bentley also says, the novel was repudiated as 'inaccurate, prejudicial and focused through a Westernized gaze' (Bentley 65).

This echoes Antoinette Burton's cynical views about British feminism that, according to her, seeks to disguise its Machiavellian and imperial ends in humanitarian concerns at Asian women's rights (64–65). In a similar vein, Clare Midgley's highlights the postcolonial feminist endeavours to free South Asian women from 'twin oppressive forces of colonial domination and indigenous patriarchal power' (13). British feminists, she claims, tend often proclaim themselves as 'as the saviours of victimized Indian women, women who were given no space to speak for themselves' (13). Hence, the answer to Gayatri Spivak's question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' is negative according to Midgley, who also adds that, 'unequal power structures inherent in colonialism rendered impossible cross-cultural interchanges

between British and Indian women based on mutual respect rather than assumptions of western superiority' (13). A counterargument is that Ali and the other women writers selected for this thesis stand astride 'us' and 'them' of the 'two camp' divide that Ali talks about above. Arguably, these female writers belong to a postcolonial school of thought and it is not logical to claim that they represent an imperial (neo)colonial ideology. Furthermore, the subjective approach adopted in this thesis foregrounds the South Asian women's won affective and subjective voice. In other words, this is not to give them a voice, but to make their voice heard.

The questions of what your interests are and whether you feel interested in something are not about the same thing. The word *interest* can refer to one's hobbies and likes rather than specifically highlighting the internal 'feeling' and affect of being interested (OED, 'Interest, n.'). Interests thus function as contributors to or activators of the positive responses of happiness and enjoyment, but they are not articulated as affective responses *per se* as presented by Tomkins, who considers the positive interest-excitement affect to be the 'most seriously neglected' among affects (*Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 337). He maintains that, in general, consciousness has altogether been overlooked and the importance of affect has been 'grossly underestimated' (*Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 3–5, 337–38, 340). Both Tomkins and Nathanson contend that Freud's psychoanalytic theory fails to account for or correctly understand the affect of interest as there is no excitement to Freud but sexual (Nathanson, *Many Faces* 17; Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 3–5).

Instances of the (dis)interested affect abound in this debut novel *Brick Lane* (2003) by Ali and the other novels in this thesis. The very moment of Nazneen's birth is, for example, received with a noticeable lack of interest or excitement by her father Hamid. When his wife Rupban informs him that the new-born baby is a girl, he responds with "'Never mind. [...] What

can you do?” and then goes away’ (*BL* 3). As Tomkins shows, interest is often marked with a curiosity gaze, a desire to pay close attention or to ‘look’ and ‘listen,’ because any act of *doing*, according to Tomkins, requires a state of *being* interested (*Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 337, 342). Therefore, this point of interlinkage between *doing* and *being* is bound to trigger an interdisciplinary discourse not only related to the internal psychological and affective field, but also to a wide range of external contexts the affected is responding to, social, cultural, political, economic and so on. In the previous chapters, I have illustrated how shame and pride can reveal one’s aspirations, hopes, interests and thereby shows uncharted trajectories of (un)belonging and identity. It has been demonstrated that in particular, shame and interest are somehow interrelated. In Tomkins’s words, ‘the innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy’ (143). That is, Nathanson explains, shame needs prior interest to work, and when it is activated, it only decreases interest but does not negate it altogether (Nathanson, *Many Faces* 53).

Hamid responds to the news that the baby is a girl with ‘Never mind’ and ‘What can you do?’ (*BL* 3). The *doing* Hamid is talking about (regardless of the possibility) refers to *something* as implied in his disinterested remark. But what is the referent of the ‘what,’ the object of the *doing* that is impossible or beyond his wife’s control? It is *that* nothing that creates the tangible sense of disinterest and despair, which is namely and clearly the baby’s gender that is the question of Hamid’s concern given the inability to do *something* about. This is however not surprising given the prevalent male culture that privileges men over women in many Eastern societies, communities and sociocultural settings. In her book *Endangered Daughters: Discrimination and Development in Asia* (2000), Elizabeth Croll discusses and argues for the increasing ‘discrimination against daughters’ in South Asia (1). As Navtej K. Purewal says in *Son Preference: Sex Selection, Gender and Culture in South Asia*, this

‘ideology of son preference’ pervades South Asian and most Eastern communities (119). Furthermore, the ‘female foeticide’ that Purewal refers to resonates with Chila’s story in Meera Syal’s *Life* when the nurse refuses to do the scan lest she might terminate her pregnancy if the baby is a daughter (*Life* 230). When Chila and her friend Sunita protests about the presumed ‘policy’ and wonders why they are treated differently to the white British lady Sally, who had already done the same scan at the same hospital, the nurse explains that they are worried that she might abort if it is not a son, as many South Asian women do (*Life* 230). Sunita protests saying, ‘It’s the bloody fathers you need to be re-educating, not harassing pregnant women who come in here expecting support!’ (*Life* 230). Thus, a woman’s home (as a place of birth and/or origins) becomes an infamous symbol of gendered attitudes and conceptions.

Home is in fact a sophisticated and controversial concept of varied meanings. Avtar Brah refers to the reconceptualization of home and diasporic identities in an age of ‘new technologies and rapid communications’ (191). The ‘homing desire’ in an era of globalisation and computerised knowledge is manifested through the affective experiences of interest and disinterest in Ali’s *Brick Lane*; ‘ON HIS COMPUTER, Chanu could access the entire world. “Anything,” he said [to his wife and two daughters]. “Anything you want to see. Just tell me and I’ll find it”’ (143). According to Brah, the digital and technological developments have had a far-reaching influence, but the uncertainty persists and meanings of symbiotic signs are largely affected by subjective criteria (192). She argues that that ‘the effects are not totally predictable, for there can be many and varied readings of the same image. The same image can elicit a diversity of meanings, signalling the effects of personal biography and cultural context on processes of meaning production’ (192).



The first thing that Nazneen and Chanu do after purchasing the computer is to go back, virtually speaking, to Bangladesh. “I’d like to see kadam again,” said Nazneen. He [Chanu] held up a finger. “So you shall.” He jabbed away. “I am typing it in. Key words: Flowers of Bangladesh.” (143). This moment of metaphysical return is marked with an outstanding interest-excitement affect that reveals the ‘homing desire’ not to return to a physical location, but to a ‘mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination,’ to use Avtar Brah’s words (*Cartographies of Diaspora* 188–89). those very images of the Kadam flowers (Ikabir) decorating the computer’s display screen mean different things to Chanu and Nazneen (first-generation immigrants) on the one hand, and their daughters Shehana and Bibi (second-generation) on the other:

‘Kadam,’ said Nazneen’ with noticeable excitement, but ‘Bor-ing,’ sang Shahana, in English. Chanu remained calm. ‘Bangla2000 web site. Who wants to take a look?’ Bibi stepped closer to her father. But he was waiting for Shahana. Nazneen put her hand on Shahana’s arm. ‘Go on, girl,’ she whispered. Shahana did not budge. ‘Take a little look.’ ‘No. It’s bor-ing.’ Chanu jumped up and turned round in one movement so that the dining chair toppled. His cheeks quivered. ‘Too boring for the memsahib?’ (143).

As Roland Barthes puts it, an image is a ‘re-presentation’ or ‘resurrection’ of meaningful experiences, and an image of home, as Brah says, would be ‘mediated as it is by memories’ (Barthes 29; Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora* 190). This picture of the Kadam flower is indeed a ‘signifier’ that is charged with many ‘signifieds’ in which Chanu and Nazneen are very interested (Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* 67; Barthes 32, 44, 51). The message is in fact ‘connoted’ and ‘connotation is not necessarily immediately graspable’ (19). That is, he adds, ‘the photograph is not only perceived, received, but it is also read’ (19). The Kadam tree or Kadam flower symbolises home because it is native to Bangladesh and the

Indian Subcontinent, and it is deeply associated with South Asian cultures, ‘religious and mythological’ (Ikabir; Swaminathan and Kochhar 234). But to read and decode these signs and infer the implicit meanings requires ‘cultural knowledge’ and an engaged intellectual act of thinking that is in turn dependent on the support of the interest-excitement affect, according to Tomkins (Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 324; Barthes 35). ‘To think,’ Tomkins adds, ‘as to engage in any other human activity, one must care, one must be excited, must be continually rewarded. There is no human competence which can be achieved in the absence of a sustaining interest, and the development of cognitive competence is peculiarly vulnerable to anomie’ (*Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 343).

The parents’ call on Shehana to ‘look,’ according to Tomkins, is in fact a demand that she be interested (like they are) because the very act of sustained looking is a sign of interest (*Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 337). Shehana’s attitude is, however, negative as she is too disinterested to look and too dissociated with the place to be interested. Looking thus becomes an act of reading the signified subtext messages and cultural connotations, an act of identification and belonging (Barthes 35). As offspring and children represent a continuation of the self and its identity, Chanu is clearly crossed with Shehana because she shows ennui and disbelonging while he is enjoying the ecstasy and excitement of virtual re-belonging, as it were. This experience echoes Syal’s *Anita and Me* when the father Shyam asks Meena to learn Punjabi: ‘You really must learn Punjabi, Meena,’ he demands (199). As demonstrated in Chapter 3, language is used to signify belonging and represent the identity, the preservation and perpetuation of which is a responsibility that seems to rest on the shoulders of the elder first generations (G1), while the second generations (G2) are clearly not that interested. Therefore, when Chanu makes the arrangements to return to Bangladesh, Shehana runs away from her family’s house and forces her parents to change their plans. So Chanu returns alone

and the two daughters, Shehana and Bibi, remain with their mother Nazneen. When Chanu phones his family in London, Nazneen asks how it is back *home*, and Chanu says ‘one cannot step in the river twice’ (366), which reinvokes Brah’s conception of diasporic desires and Wilson’s discussion of Kimberly Smith’s ‘nostalgic longing’ which should not mean a ‘desire to return to the past’ because a return to the past is not possible (J. L. Wilson 27; Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora* 189).

The diasporic nostalgic imagination tends to draw an idyllic image of home, but Nazneen is aware of the difficulties her family and daughters would face in Bangladesh if they return, which is why she decides to stay with her daughters in London. Furthermore, women’s memories and experiences in the home or ‘place of origin’ in Brah’s words, are ‘differently shaped by gender relations’ (*Cartographies of Diaspora* 190). As Jennifer L. Solotaroff and Rohini Prabha Pande argue in *Violence against Women and Girls: Lessons from South Asia* (2014), women in the Subcontinent are often subjected to violence and are abused in a variety of ways at different stages of their lives (xxvi). Violence can be physical, as in Hasina’s or her friend Monju’s case in this novel, or mainly psychological and emotional as in Rubpan’s and Nazneen’s cases, as will be discussed in the next paragraphs. Unlike her elder sister Nazneen who submissively accepts the marriage her father arranges for her, Hasina challenges her patriarchal community and elopes with a young man from the village called Malek in search of love and free choice (*BL* 9). Her father Hamid ‘ground his teeth and an axe [...] cursing his whore-pig daughter whose head would be severed the moment she came crawling back’ (*BL* 5). She later runs away again from Malek and moves to Dhaka because it transpires that he often beats her and she, unlike her mother and sister, is determined to seek change saying, ‘*I am not waiting around suffering around*’ (*BL* 112).

Hasina, however, lives in a state of uncertainty, being neither married nor divorced, so she cannot marry or start a new relationship unless Malek agrees to the divorce. She wonders about her situation saying, *'Maybe my husband divorce me after some time. Is it possible get divorce and no one tell you about it?'* (112-113). As 'a beautiful young girl, alone in Dhaka,' Hasina will not be safe without 'protection' by a man such the a landlord Mr Choudhury (145, 111, 114). Chanu thinks 'She will be under his protection' and Hasina herself reiterates this notion of male protection saying, *'I under his protection'* (45, 114). However, when the rumours spread by fellow factory workers that Hasina is having affairs with men at the workplace reach the landlord Mr Choudhury, he comes banging at her door in the middle of the night and breaks in, shouts at her and beats her. But in the middle of this terrible experience, she seems also concerned *'that everyone can hear'* because the 'shame on self' and stigma would be an additional burden (116). She writes to her sister how she feels after being raped by Mr Choudhury, saying, *'Then he take off trousers. I say nothing I do nothing and then it done and he sit in the chair. He ask me to rub feet and I do it. He tell me not to cry and I stop. He ask if it he who taking care of me and I say yes it him. This is what happen and afterward I cry. All the time I thinking my life cursed. God have given me life but he has curse it'* (BL 116). This experience does not only show the dehumanisation of Hasina who stand for the oppressed woman, but also raises an important question the about women's missing feelings of *at-home-ness* at home and whether home should still be called *home*.

As Bell Hooks puts it, 'Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference' (148). Home is thus an empowering positive experience of insight and development, psychologically and mentally. This is, however, not the case with most of the examples of South Asian women in this and other novels under discussion in this thesis. When

Hasina's friend Monju (who is married off when she is only thirteen years old) opposes the husband's wish to sell her newborn baby, he 'throw[s] acid on the baby of seven only days' (BL 243–44). Furthermore, as Hasina writes in her letter to her sister Nazneen in London, Monju's husband's 'Brother and sister hold tight and husband pour acid over [Monju's] head face and body' (BL 159–96) Evelyn Beilenson's book *Home Is Where Your Mom Is* interestingly invokes such positive emotions and qualities associated with home and motherhood as 'affection,' according to the OED (OED, 'Mother, n.'). In addition, Byron Miller's *Spaces of Contention: Spatialities and Social Movements*, there are three 'elements of home' — 'familiarity,' 'haven' and 'heaven':

1. *Familiarity*: 'Knowing the place'.
2. *Haven*: *secure, safe, comfortable, private and exclusive*: Physical/material safety; mentally safe/predictable; Place for retreat, relaxation, intimacy and domesticity.
3. *Heaven*: *public identity and exclusivity*: A public place where one can be, express and realize oneself; where one feels free and independent. (73)

Hasina lives in Bangladesh but, like Nazneen, she 'could not simply go home' (BL 37). She is simultaneously and paradoxically at home but in exile. If home is a peaceful place of physical and psychological sense of familiarity, security and inclusion, a place in which one is supposed to feel safe, happy, and free (Duyvendak 27; McGavin 124; B. Miller 70–72), it should follow that such women like Hasina's (and Monju's) feelings of unsafety, misery and unhappiness can negate the at-home feeling and indicate a state of unbelonging and unhomeliness. Psychologically and affectively speaking, they are not home if one judges the meaning of their horrible experiences against Miller's three-dimensional concept of home ('Familiarity,' 'Haven, and 'Heaven' — say the FHH criteria). As Anastasia Christou puts it in *Narratives of Place, Culture and Identity*, 'the ethnic place is perceived but not necessarily

experienced as home' (83). For such simple and abused women as Rubpan, Monju and Hasina, who have never crossed the borders, home's 'heaven' and 'haven' are not inherent to home but determined by their fate and androcentric society (B. Miller 73). Therefore, after several attempts to achieve freedom, change and fulfilment, Hasina fails in her endeavours, given the overwhelming power of her patriarchal community. She attributes her failure to a divine 'curse' and the predestined trajectory 'He' (God) has predetermined for her (*BL* 116). She resorts to her mother's ways of attributing her suffering and agonies to 'Fate,' 'God,' or 'Allah,' words that are used abundantly in the text (239 times), which is clearly an outstanding theme that needs further and separate discussions. But as far as this thesis is concerned, to search for reasons and explanations of women's suffering in the realm of the divine and metaphysical leads to a negative sense of submission and perpetuation of sexist narratives of gender-based inequality and injustices.

Rubpan, Nazneen and Hasina's mother, says that man or male is God's chosen gender; 'If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men,' she says (*BL* 53). She does not articulate those questions she refers. Silence seems to be used in lieu of words and questions. Rubpan cries and tells her sister that they 'will suffer in silence' and, she repeats the word melancholically, 'in silence' (*BL* 70). In a similar vein, Chila in Syal's *Life* reiterates the notion of silence and the tangible disinterest in having daughters when she says, 'If it's a girl, she'll be all mine. If it's a boy . . .' (229). The meanings implied in these instances of silence are perhaps more telling than what is said because, as Bernard P. Dauenhauer says, silence is a 'positive phenomenon' and it is 'polyvalent in respect to its emotional impact' (10, 23, 27). Gusdorf claims in his *Speaking (La Parole)* that great people would not 'accuse language of being constitutionally insufficient [... but would] struggle with language and reduce it to obedience' and express 'the inexpressible' (Gusdorf 88). Dauenhauer is right to criticise

Gusdorf's claims as 'too simplistic to be adequate to the phenomenon [of silence]' (24). According to Graham Turner's *The Power of Silence: The Riches That Lie Within*, silence is sometimes 'a better communicator than the spoken or written word' (38). According to Dauenhauer, silence is not only a 'positive' but also a 'conscious activity' (10).

Clearly, such stream-of-consciousness writers as Sunetra Gupta do believe in the positivity of silence. Gupta tends to describe it as 'a penetrating embarrassed silence,' one that has the capacity to 'fall' and have a life and geography as a 'heart of a deep tropical silence' (*MR* 140, 178, 181). Dauenhauer illustrates his understanding of silence, stating that 'silence is 1) a deliberate human performance. But 2) it cannot be completely performed by an individual acting alone. It involves 3) a yielding following upon the awareness of finitude and awe. The yielding involved in silence is peculiar in that 4) it is a yielding which binds and joins' (26). In both cases of Rubpan and her sister, and Chila and her friend Sunita, silence is a meaningful conscious practice signifying their surrendering and submission to, as Dauenhauer puts it, 'a power which [they] cannot control. And this yielding is concretely experienced as finitude and awe' (26). But what is the implicit superior authority that can make these women surrender and feel restricted, fearful and tearful? Furthermore, why is nobody interested in finding the reasons behind or the solution for this womanly suffering, apart from an inquisitive little daughter (Nazneen) who expresses a sense of certainty regarding her interpretation of her mother's and auntie's suffering and weeping (as also discussed in Chapter 1). Nazneen observes their incidents of melancholic crying and sad weeping, stating that 'It was something to do with being a woman, of that much she was sure' (*BL* 70). It is because they were women that they suffer and cry; Nazneen has no doubts about her conclusion.

Nazneen was keen to find out more about being a woman as ‘she looked forward to that day. She longed to be enriched by this hardship, to cast off her childish baggy pants and long shirt and begin to wear this suffering that was as rich and layered and deeply coloured as the saris which enfolded Amma’s troubled bones’ (*BL* 70). Her mother’s silence connotes imbalanced and gendered power relationships, an overwhelming and irresistible god-like force that determines an ostensibly unchangeable status quo; the suffering is therefore appearing inescapable. As discussed in Chapter 1, women’s distress, dejection and unhappiness, and the deeper social problems of gender inequality and women’s oppression is indicated by women’s suffering and crying in silence; they often ‘wept so long and so hard,’ as Nazneen observes (*BL* 70). In *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, Cheryl Glenn proclaims that ‘silence and silencing’ make ‘the central problem of our collective, feminist project’ (1). These experiences of silence are therefore bound to trigger uncanny feelings and renegotiations of ‘homeliness’ and ‘unhomeliness’, to use Freud’s words (127, 129, 134, 148, 151). On the one hand, it does ‘bind’ the women together in a ‘homely’ closeness in experiencing and assimilating their ‘finitude,’ limitations and suffering, and, on the other hand, it distances and alienates them from that ‘power’ and ‘source’ of their fear (Dauenhauer 26; Freud 127). Thus, the claimed divine privileges men enjoy and the God-predetermined meanings of man and woman are clearly a symptom of the Lyotardian ‘metanarratives’ Ali, and the other South Asian women writers in this thesis seek to challenge and change. The imbalanced and unequal power relationship between men and women in Ali’s South Asian context is silencing and terrifying to these women. Silence is thus a potent means of speech, an uncanny form of metalanguage that reveals strata of power that foreclose the full expression of self and aspirations.

Nazneen’s dreams of being a woman come true soon by the age of eighteen when her father arranges her marriage to Chanu Ahmed, a forty-year-old Bengali man from Dhaka living



in London's Tower Hamlets. Unlike her sister Hasina, Nazneen follows the example of her mother, and she submissively and appreciatively concedes to the marriage:

when her father asked if she would like to see a photograph of the man she would marry the following month, Nazneen shook her head and replied, 'Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma.' [. . .] The man she would marry was old. At least forty years old. He had a face like a frog. They would marry and he would take her back to England with him. (BL 5)

The Arranged marriage is a hot and controversial topic that stands out in Chapter 6 in my discussion of Rekha Waheed's novels *The A-Z Guide to Arranged Marriage* (2005). Mary Stopes-Roe and Raymond Cochrane write in *Citizens of this Country: The Asian-British* (1990) that many South Asians associate the practice of arranged marriage with the social and cultural values and 'principles' such marriages are built on (40). Many South Asians, they find out, seem to strongly believe in these values and principles even though they are not clear and ambiguous to them (40). This idea echoes Lyotard's concept of the questionable and unjustifiable knowledge that "does not even make itself understood to the young men to whom it is addressed" (21).

Nazneen is generally a submissive woman who 'submitted to her father and married her husband; [and later] she submitted to her husband' (BL 218). She reiterates the word 'good' but *being good* to her is clearly limited to and exemplified by her mother ('like Amma') whose practice of being a woman and mother transmits the unquestioned narrative values of goodness to her daughter through passivism and weeping. She sets an example for her daughter, a pacemaker as a listener. According to Lyotard, listening is an act; it is doing through listening, it is assenting to and perpetuating through internalisation and reception; he contends that 'people are only that which actualizes the narratives: once again, they do this not on by

recounting them, but also by listening to them and recounting themselves through them' (23). She acquiesces to the prejudicial gender-based socio-cultural narratives and gender codes of being and meaning. In other words, those gendered social and cultural norms and narratives (or definitions of man and woman) permeate the deeper layers of social consciousness like something 'taken in with the mother's milk,' in Stopes-Roe and Cochrane's words (40).

As illustrated earlier, silence focuses on subjects that engage actively and positively in its enunciation and mutual appreciation and evaluation. This constitutes a subjective perceptual process that can eventually lead to the revelation of the awful silencing power, which in turn requires objects of repression to acquiesce and, even better, to accept and adopt the symbolic order. Many women do not only accept but adopt androcentric and patriarchal conceptions as patriarchal guardians of a metanarrative of female subjugation and oppression, oblivious of its legitimacy of such metanarratives or their own womanhood being the object. I will list a few of these examples from Ali's novel and other novels in the selection, which show a paradoxical irony of women's involvement in guarding and continuing antiwoman narratives:

- 1) Nazneen happily accepts and appreciates the arranged marriage (*BL* 5).
- 2) Hasina says 'I pray for son' or 'God take care and give you more sons' (*BL* 12, 105).
- 3) Hasina says: 'I pray Malek's mother forgive the "crime" of our marriage' (*BL* 12).
- 4) The sister-in-law helps her brother to torment Monju (*BL* 195).  
     'it is her husband who have done this with his brother and sister' (159, 196).
- 5) An old lady in Syal's *Life* curses a young woman with an ill-meant wish saying, 'May she only bear daughters, the hair-dyed hussy!' (*Life* 28).
- 6) The mother-in-law in *Gupta's A Sin of Colour* agonises Neerupama and prevents her from attending her exams or seeing her family (*SC* 44, 142).

- 7) In Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*, giving birth to sons is always described in positive terms 'blessed' (11) and positive emotions 'very pleased' (45).
- 8) In Gupta's *Memories of Rain*, Moni hopes that she gives birth to a son, not a daughter because, she believes, 'a son would be a true synthesis of herself with him, an embodiment of their union, a daughter was an extension of herself, a daughter would not be his, a daughter would be hers alone' (18).

These examples show is an intricate sociocultural phenomenon where women are at once the oppressed and oppressor, the colonised and coloniser. Navtej K. Purewal explains this sophisticated point and argues that that women are not only part of this 'social milieu' but also 'active agents,' which is 'a symptom of the elevated status that women who collude with the patriarchal project can come to attain in their lives once they have committed themselves to a certain degree of loyalty to the status quo of the patriarchal family' (119). These women are thus unwittingly complicit in their own oppression and in the continuation of their own subjugation by means of acting as guardians and agents of a patriarchal culture that is dependent on their oppression and the suppression of their own interests, aspiration and hopes of self-fulfilment and freedom.

The references to culture and the idea of internalisation (or imposition) of its values invoke Seema's response in Syal's *Life* when she hears the word *culture*. Upon hearing the word 'culture' from Akash, she retorts, 'If you mention culture one more time, I might just throw up' (*Life* 104). Seema's warning of an imminent act of vomiting does necessarily imply an earlier undesired intake (or forceful input). In his book *The Psychology of Shame: Theory and Treatment of Shame-Based Syndromes*, Gershen Kaufman maintains that 'the purge cycle, vomiting, represents the affect of disgust experienced directly on the level of the hunger drive

and experienced overtly in action' (130). Induced vomiting, he adds, is a technique to which some people like 'bulimics frequently resort in order to purge themselves of the shameful food they so shamelessly devoured' (130). But in Seema's case, the intake is clearly not food enforced upon the body to assimilate, but a set of social and cultural values and limitations she is forced to believe in and blindly follow, regardless of her will, wishes or interests. In *The cultural politics of emotion*, Sara Ahmed maintains that 'to be disgusted is, after all, *to be affected by what one has rejected*' (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 86). As discussed in Chapter 4, Paul Rozin and April E. Fallon also define disgust as 'rejection which is characterised by revulsion' of any 'incorporation of offensive objects' or even things just associated with the real object of disgust (23–24).

Therefore, Seema's disgust is a clear indication of the rejection of a set of cultural values and limitations. In Tomkin's words, Seema's disgust indicates her keenness to 'maximise the distance' between herself and the patriarchal cultural practices she is disgusted by (*Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 128). Kaufman suggests self-disgust following a 'shameful' intake has such a strong and 'bursting effect' as vomiting (rejection and reversal) that leads to one being 'purged, cleansed, [or] even purified' (130). According to Seema, the offensive/abusive aspects of her culture seem to be the cause of her disgust/suffering and the rejection or rebellion that follows. Seema struggles with, in her words, 'years of being shouted at . . . and ignored' (*Life* 102). Therefore, Akash asks Raj to 'unlearn' such dehumanising patriarchal habits, saying, 'You told us how you grew up basically watching your father bellow at your mother and, as she never complained, you assumed this was normal behaviour' (*Life* 102–03). This statement does not only illustrate the underpinning of affect formation, the negative psychological accumulations and emotions induced (as opposed to just happening) by unfavourable external contexts, but it also redirects and reconnects with the previously

discussed point of how women can sometimes become (consciously or otherwise, through active or passive engagement) complicit in the patriarchal project and self-oppression. Through passive acceptance of the status quo (by listening passively to the narratives), they become the 'normal', the narrative is created and perpetuated through women's contributions of silence (Lyotard 23).

Another provoking motif that recurs abundantly throughout this text of Ali's, but also runs through the whole selected collection: it is the description of women as 'good' and 'saintly' as in the following examples:

- 1) Seema protesting to Askash: 'I could end up like my mother. I'm supposed to because everyone says she's a saint, but she's sixty-three and I'm thirty-three, and I've already had enough practice at being a good girl and keeping quiet' (Syal, *Life* 104).
- 2) Chanu talking on the telephone with his family in Bangladesh about his wife: 'What's more, she is a good worker. Cleaning and cooking and all that. The only complaint I could make is she can't put my files in order, because she has no English. I don't complain though. As I say, a girl from the village: totally unspoilt.' (M. Ali, *BL* 10).
- 3) Again, Chanu speaking about Nazneen: 'When I married her, I said: she is a good worker. Girl from the village. Unspoilt' (*BL* 148).
- 4) Hamid talking to his daughters, Hasina and Nazneen about his wife, Rubpan: 'your mother is naturally a saint. She comes from a family of saints' (*BL* 4).
- 5) Nazneen thinking about her mother Rubpan: 'Just *wait and see, that's all we can do*. How often she had heard those words. Amma always wiped away her tears with those words. [...] She cried because crying was called for, but she accepted it, whatever it was. "Such a saint," Abba said' (*BL* 27).

- 6) Hamid speaking to his daughters: “Your mother is a saint,” said Abba. “Don’t forget that she comes from a family of saints.” He got up and walked away, and he held himself straighter than any man. He did not come back for three days’ (BL 53).
- 7) Nazneen is like her mother: ‘Did she act, in short, like her mother? A saint?’ (95)
- 8) Hasina writing to her sister Nazneen: *You remember what Abba use to call? “A saint she come from family of saints.” He go to other women. He want to take other wife but she give threat to kill own self. My husband tell me. Everyone know it but us. Tears will come but I tell the truth.* (BL 110).
- 9) Abba laughed and said, ‘Naturally she is upset. She comes from a family of saints.’ (BL 157).
- 10) ‘Better wear your training shoes, then,’ said Nazneen. And to Bibi, slack-jawed and watching, she said, ‘Your grandmother was also a saint.’ (BL 267).

This list of textual important textual quotes clearly shows an outstanding narrative of gendered and politicised patriarchally-imposed ethics as implied in the ‘language games’ of ‘good’ and ‘saintly’ (Lyotard 25; M. Ali, *BL* 27, 53, 95, 110, 148). According to Roger Chapman, to venture into a ‘moralistic either/or sensibility’ is to declare ‘cultural wars,’ which is a civil cultural war in the context of this thesis (Chapman xxvii). These above-mentioned words ‘good,’ ‘saint,’ and ‘unspoilt’ do contrast with *bad*, *sinful* and *spoilt*, which poses very controversial ethico-political questions (ethical and political):

- 1) How could a woman be good or bad, saintly or sinful, and spoilt/unspoilt?
- 2) Why should a woman be good/bad, saintly/sinful, spoilt/unspoilt?
- 3) Who decides the criteria that determine such states of being?
- 4) How to guarantee the objectivity and ethicality of the criteria?
- 5) Why is this moralistic discourse always addressed to women, not men?

- 6) Who gave men, and not women, the right to inscribe such ethical rules and criteria?
- 7) Are they fair to women? Can they change them? How and why is it difficult?

As Sunita says in Syal's *Life*, 'stoicism in the face of extreme pain is expected of the good wife' (*Life* 210). Cultures and religions are no more than tools of enforcement, justification and perpetuation of unjustifiable discourses and practices, as Lyotard suggests. This illustrates the external contexts of force-feeding, of imposition, or forced disinterested intake, whose accumulations eventually result in the 'bursting effect' of *disgorge and purge*, so to speak, as in Seema's example (G. Kaufman 130). I am not claiming to provide exhaustive and final answers to the questions above; this might not be possible due to the limitations of scope and time, but they are intended as provocative questions to stir the inquisitive minds into thinking of the vastness of the social, cultural, political and ethical dimensions of the question at hand.

But how do Hasina, Rubpan and Nazneen respond to their unjust patriarchal communities in Ali's *Brick Lane*? When Hasina runs away with Malek, she writes to her sister saying, 'I pray Malek's mother forgive the "crime" of our marriage' (*BL* 12). Hasina uses the word 'crime' in inverted commas, which clearly reveals her rejection of the ethical meaning that language is deployed to designate and underscore. The use of inverted commas shows that the designation is 'inaccurate or unacceptable,' according to the Collins Dictionary (Collins). This implicit denunciation of the social and cultural values and limitations echoes Tania's response in Syal's *Life* when she refers to some socially forbidden affairs as 'imagined transgressions' (*Life* 147). Despite the numerous differences in the social environments and circumstances, the diasporic experience and education between Syal's Tania and Ali's Hasina both share the same attitude and express the same viewpoint. They are adamant women of free will and their actions speak louder than their words. Unlike her mother, Hasina is 'not simply following her fate'; she has 'kicked against fate' (9). When Chanu travels to Bangladesh, he

says that, despite all past experiences, she is ‘unbroken’ and she repeats the so-called ‘crime’ and elopes again with another man (*BL* 366).

In stark contrast with Hasina (and Tania in Syal’s *Life*), Rubpan is passive like many other women characters in this collection (e.g. Neerupama and Reba in Gupta’s *A Sin of Colour* and Chila in Syal’s *Life*). Her following statements about the role of fate in her suffering shows a sense of despair, unhappiness and dejection:

- 1) ‘We must not stand in the way of Fate. Whatever happens, I accept it’ (*BL* 3).
- 2) ‘If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men’ (*BL* 53).
- 3) ‘I don’t want anything from this life [...] I ask for nothing. I expect nothing’ (*BL* 70).
- 4) ‘What can I do? I have been put on this earth to suffer.’<sup>296</sup>

Clearly, her lack of interest in almost anything reveals her distress<sup>17</sup> and have a negative impact on her psychological and physical wellbeing, according to Tomkins (*Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 342). Tomkins contends that the positive affect of interest and excitement helps ‘support the necessary and the possible’ in terms of one’s needs and perceptions (342). In other words, he explains, if this affect diminishes or is absent(ed) in a way that the ‘drives lacked such support, the individual would care neither to eat nor to mate’ (342). This would, according to Tomkins, significantly impact upon one’s ability to maintain the essential and necessary drive functions (hunger and sex) required for self-preservation and reproduction (342). The loss of interest can also impair one’s perceptual and cognitive capacities, which can result in a ‘state similar to the plight of the psychotic depressive’ (342). Furthermore, one’s ‘acquaintance with objects would be grossly impoverished with the further consequences of lack of commitment to the world’ and the inability ‘to develop perceptually’ (432). Thus, this clearly shows and

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<sup>17</sup> See also Chapter 1: Distress and Dejection in Sunetra Gupta’s *Memories of Rain*.



establishes that the connection between interest and wellbeing as lack of interest has the capacity to damage the brain, according to Tomkins (432). He unequivocally says, ‘absence of the affective support of interest would jeopardize intellectual development no less than destruction of brain tissue’ (Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 343). If the ‘brain tissue’ is damaged or destroyed, the consequences will no doubt be dire on the individual’s cognitive and mental faculty.

In fact, Rubpan’s mental health does deteriorates in the story when she eventually goes mad but she is claimed to be ‘possessed by an evil jinni’ (*BL* 269). ‘For days at a time she did not speak. Worst of all, at the jinni’s bidding, Amma began attacking her own husband, stabbing wildly at his eyes with bamboo sticks that she spent hours on end whittling to a fine point’ (*BL* 269). The word *jinn* is a collective noun that comes from the Arabic word جنّ that is pronounced similarly as /dʒɪn/, and it means ‘demons (invisible beings, either harmful or helpful, that interfere with the lives of mortals)’ (Wehr 164). The realm of *Jinn* pertains to the metaphysical in the Quran, and for which a whole *sura* (section or part) is allocated. *Jinn* is described to affect and interfere with human actions, behaviour and state of mind: ‘We said to the angels, “Bow down to Adam.” So they bowed down, except for Satan. He was of the jinn, and he defied the command of his Lord’ (Translated by Itani 301). Satan, as described in the Quran, can ‘whisper’ and ‘control’ man (Translated by Itani 44, 173, 301, 326, 581). The story of Adam is not peculiar to Islam and it is also highlighted in the Christian tradition. For example, when Adam and Eve break God’s order ‘Thou shall not eat thereof [from the Tree],’ Eve, ‘with shame,’ confesses ‘The serpent me beguil’d, and I eat’; thereafter, God pronounces his judgement onto them saying, ‘Curs’d is the ground for thy sake; thou in sorrow / Shalt eat thereof all the days of thy life’ (Milton 215–16). This is not however to ascribe Rubpan’s madness to the metaphysical or to explain it away in religious terms, but rather to provide a

contextualisation of how the metaphysical, supernatural or religious is, wittingly or otherwise, used out of its specific contexts to play roles in the social and cultural life.

In *A Gender Lens on Religion*, Avishai et al. refer to the ‘the gendered nature of many religious institutions and practices ‘and to ‘religion as a patriarchal institution’ (7). Avishai et al., however are not perhaps accurate as religions or religious texts have a multiplicity of meanings and readings, and it might be too simplistic and reductive to declare singular and final interpretations drawing on personal subjective and political viewpoints; meaning might thus not be immanent in the text. Religions, and especially Islam, have been a hot and controversial site of non-ending love-versus-hate and feminist-versus-antifeminist debates. But I believe that the problem is in men, not in books; in the mind that interprets, not in scripts. In a similar vein, when Hamid decides to call the *fakir* (dervish) to expel the *jinni* (individual demon) from Rubpan’s body, he tries to explain her psychotic illness away in religious and metaphysical terms, which absolves him from any potential responsibility and complicity in causing her crisis. The *fakir*, who is an ‘impressive sight’ with a beard ‘at least twenty inches long,’ arrives to Rubpan’s rescue and shouts, “‘Oh, evil jinni, leave that woman’s body! By the command of Allah, leave her. Sky! Water! Air! Fire!’” He paused for a moment and added “‘Earth!’” for good measure. “‘Torment her no longer.’” (*BL* 296–97). The exorcism show ends in an ironic and humorous manner when the servant boy, who is supposed to help the *fakir* exorcise the *jinni* to be transferred to him, overreacts to the *fakir*’s play and attacks him. The ‘holy witch doctor’ struggles and shouts, ‘He’s faking’ and ‘Somebody stop him’ (298). “‘Don’t blame the boy,” called someone from the audience. “‘You put the jinni on him’” (299) However, the *fakir* could not say that the boy is faking but he must continue to act that the boy has been really possessed by the claimed *jinni* that they have just transferred from Rubpan onto the boy. The boy uses this opportunity to attack the *fakir* who cannot reveal the reality to the

crowd who watch this unfold. 'It was dangerous ground for the fakir. At stake was this week's only income (and expenses had already been incurred), his pride, his desire to bash the boy's brains out, and his reputation' (299). Ali is clearly critiquing some cultural aspects that are used and practised to further abuse women and enhance men's unquestioned social and cultural privileges.

But if exorcism is not the solution to Rubpan's psychotic illness, what is? Ronald R. Fieve correctly argues that 'emotions play a role in many illnesses' (166). As Tomkins also says, 'Without interest, the development of thinking and the conceptual apparatus would be seriously impaired' (*Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 434). The loss of interest is a major sign used to diagnose a wide range of psychological illnesses. Rubpan in this novel by Ali and Neerupama in Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*, both show symptoms of affective disorders such as the 'bipolar disorder,' which is characterised by 'periods of depression and periods of mania' (Ellis). Another type of affective disorders is the 'depressive disorder' whose symptoms, according to the International Society for Affective Disorders (ISAD), include 'feelings of sadness, loss of interest in normally pleasurable activities (anhedonia), changes in appetite and sleep, loss of energy, and problems with concentration and decision-making'. This applies to Rubpan, who is often unhappy, distressed, sad, tearful and depressed; the reason remains implicit, ambiguous and unspoken until late in the story:

'Don't cry, Amma,' said Hasina, and kissed her with pomegranate lips.

'Your mother is a saint,' said Abba. 'Don't forget that she comes from a family of saints.' He got up and walked away, and he held himself straighter than any man. He did not come back for three days.

'Where does Abba go?' asked Nazneen. Amma looked towards the heavens [addressing God]. 'Look! Now my child is asking where he goes.' Nazneen looked up too. [...] Amma

hugged her fiercely. She took Nazneen's wide face between her two palms and spoke to her: 'If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men.' 53

Some clarity and answers come from Hasina when she writes to her sister Nazneen saying, '*You remember what Abba use to call? "A saint she come from family of saints." He go to other women. He want to take other wife but she give threat to kill own self. My husband tell me. Everyone know it but us. Tears will come but I tell the truth*' (BL 110). Rubpan's madness is not dissimilar to Neerupama's in Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* when her husband wonders why his wife is 'retreated into the shadowed corners of herself' and is so 'indifferent to the workings of the world without' (SC 13–14). In reflective hindsight, Indranath confesses his own fault saying, 'Still, some part of him suspected that he had stifled something within her, and in 1951, he made a last vain attempt to rekindle her spirits by taking her on a trip to Europe' (SC 12). Tomkins links the sustenance of interest and curiosity in humans and animals with freedom and the absence of limitations, saying, 'A domesticated animal such as the cat, once it has thoroughly explored its environment and if restricted to this environment, loses its characteristic curiosity and spends much of its adult life sleeping. Interest is not only necessary a support of perception but of the state of wakefulness' (*Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 343). The restriction and repression the husbands exercise on their women can perhaps, in the light of Tomkins's theory, explain why they have become withdrawn, depressed and eventually mad before passing away.

Nazneen, the 'unspoilt girl' that comes 'from the village,' is not, however, a static character that is always passive like her mother; she is a dynamic one that shows noticeable changes. (BL 9). She progresses from an observer of the ice-skaters on TV to an ice-skater herself. 'The exotic televised image of Torvill and Dean' sticks in her mind and becomes an

obsession (Gorra). Chanu is not however so different from the other patriarchs. He describes Nazneen as a children-box, saying: ‘Hips are a bit narrow but wide enough, I think, to carry children. All things considered, I am satisfied’ (*BL* 9–10). As Sanchita Islam (2003) says, ‘His treatment of Nazneen fits into the patriarchal views that women should be mute, subordinate and stagnant’. The silencing and subordination Islam talks about invoke the sociological concept of the ‘*herrschaft*’ which is a ‘structure of superordination and subordination, of leaders and led, rulers and ruled; it is based on a variety of motives and of means of enforcement (Weber 62). When Nazneen asks Chanu if she could go with Razia to learn English at the college, he responds with ‘Well, perhaps’ and carries on reading his book. When she repeats her question, he says, ‘there’s no need’ and ‘You’re going to become a mother soon’ (*BL* 51, 138). Being a mother does not justify his rejection. On the contrary, there is more need for a mother to learn the language. But apparently, to perpetuate subordination, Chanu behaves like a coloniser who conceives of the knowledgeable colonised as a danger to its existence because, as Frantz Fanon says, ‘mastery of language affords remarkable power’ (18). Thus, self-centred Chanu is disinterested in Nazneen concerns, interests, and hopes of personal development. His definition of ‘unspoilt’ could well include being unable to access that power language and knowledge can give.

Thus, Nazneen starts to revolt against Chanu’s domination. ‘All her chores, peasants in his princely kingdom, rebelled in turn—small insurrections, designed to destroy the state from within’ (*BL* 40). Furthermore, ‘it was her heart that was ablaze, with mutiny’ (*BL* 40). Her sexual relationship with Karim is another form of rebellion, which gives her extraordinary power: ‘She submitted to her father and married her husband; she submitted to her husband. And now she gave herself to a power greater than these two, and she felt herself helpless before it’ but ‘the power was inside her, that she was its creator’ (218). Chanu’s return that actualises

at the end of the story implies many symbolic meanings. Its incompleteness signifies that there is never a full return and realisation of full belonging for a diasporan as Chanu himself admits that ‘one cannot step in the river twice’ (366). It is not clearly mentioned whether he comes back to London, but this is clear that he is what happens next. His telephone calls with his family in London is symbolic of the inseverable links with the hostland. His return to Bangladesh and the reference to the river echoes another similar experience in Syal’s life when Deepak tries to kidnap his newly born baby boy from his mother and runs away with him to the airport to return to India. Tania, the mother’s close friend, stops him by throwing his passport in the River Thames (321). The passport is thus a symbol of one’s identity, and the aim of the attempted return is to reclaim that identity and belonging and all the lost privileges, exemptions and freedoms a man can fully enjoy back home.

The act of throwing away the passport in the river does stop not only Deepak’s potential cross-border movement but also symbolises women’s outcry for a disjunction with and unbelonging to the patriarchal aspects of home culture. The running river waters here signify the no-return point; it means that change and reformation of one’s identity and belongings have taken or must take place. Syal reiterates this point when Akash addresses Raj and Seema, stating that, as South Asians, ‘[we should] redefine what being Asian and male or Asian and female, means, without losing pride in who we are’ (103). Raj is encouraged to ‘unlearn’ patronising habits and practices to enable his wife to feel valued and prosper (103). In Ali’s *Brick Lane*, Nazeen accomplishes the change when she embraces that internal call to reclaim her power as a woman who could not only become an independent mother of two daughters but also support the family financially with sewing. The simple, quiet and passive village girl’s strong interest in ice-skating that has always seemed a far-fetched obsession she watches on TV becomes a reality when she becomes the ice-skater herself, a sari-wearing ice-skater, free

from all limitations. Once it occurred to her that ‘if she changed her clothes her entire life would change, [. . .] that clothes, not fate, made her life. And if the moment had lasted, she would have ripped the sari off and torn it to shreds’ (201). Clearly, it is not clothes that will make the difference, but her strong will to embrace the power within her, her belief in her abilities and her value as a free woman.

To sum up, the affective analysis of interest and feelings of homeliness in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* in this chapter shows meanings that conform with those inferred in the other chapters. Women are characterised with a remarkable lack of interest, which impacts on their wellbeing and happiness as women struggle with the consequential sense of dejection and despair or, more importantly, with the reasons and sources stemming from the patronising androcentric social and cultural environments they live in. The battle is not an easy and straightforward one having to deal with ossified sexist ideologies embedded within the collective social and cultural identity. Nazneen, for example, is not allowed by her husband Chanu to learn English, which is a question of power as Fanon argues; a good woman is thus a powerless one (M. Ali, *BL* 51, 138; Fanon 18). The reception of Ali's *Brick Lane*, as discussed above, demonstrates the controversy of the difficult undertaking of critiquing and seeking to change sociocultural conceptions and practices governed by ethical and political criteria of the collective identity.

*Brick Lane* has been compared to Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* for criticising those antifeminist and woman-dehumanising social problems, according to Bentley and Sawyer. The counterargument is that the novel misrepresents the South Asian community in Britain and back in Bangladesh, with some people problematising Ali's dual belonging as double unbelonging, incomplete belonging and hence lacking authenticity (M. Ali, *Where I'm Coming*

*From*). Other writers such as Burton and Midgley have also been cynical about the imperialist and colonialist ends of the western feminisms addressing the oppression of South Asian women (Burton 64–65; Midgley 13). This chapter, and the whole thesis, seeks to move beyond polar debates of east and west, here and there, and colonial and postcolonial; it gains its authenticity and impartiality from the fact that it largely starts from and draws on the South Asian subject's subjective and affective point of view.

Interest has been key to the above discussion of the antifemale ideology of privileging men and preferring boys to daughters in many Eastern and South Asian androcentric societies and social contexts in the East or abroad (Croll 1; Purewal 199). This has been indicated by Hamid's response of disinterest when Nazneen is first born (*BL* 3). The social exclusion and disinterest in having daughters is later manifested in terms of social objectification and dehumanisation of women who in turn show a lack of interest that have a clear impact on their happiness and wellbeing, as is the case with Rubpan in Ali's *Brick Lane* and Neerupama in Gupta's *A Sin of Colour*, who both have psychotic illnesses and go mad before passing away. In this novel, Rubpan's psychotic illness is interpreted by her community in religious and metaphysical terms to ward off criticism of anti-women patriarchal practices. This discussion draws on the affective theory of interest and excitement and the affective disorders, I have demonstrated the impact of emotions on one's psychological health, emotions that are caused by deeper social problems and manifested affectively. I have demonstrated that the loss of interest can negatively affect one's ability to do meet one's physical needs or develop perceptually (Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 434; Ellis; *Affective Disorders: Types, Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Treatments ISAD*). The outcome of the analysis is that loss of interest in Rubpan's and Neerupama's case that has caused a psychological problem that is



scientifically called 'bipolar disorder' or 'affective disorder,' rather than being possessed by jinn. This condition denotes the real reasons of sexist prejudices, oppression and constraints on women's freedom and ability to self-express.

The references to the contemporary developments in digital communication and the 'computerisation of knowledge' has been key to the discussion of home as a place *in* memory, and as a sign of the changing attitudes towards the patriarchal cultural knowledge and sexist narratives, at least the implicit voices questioning the justifiability of gender-biased ideas and practices. When the Ahmeds buy the computer and connect it to the worldwide web, the first thing they do is to return home virtually to Bangladesh by searching for the kadam flowers. (*BL* 143). This symbolises the parents' desire to return home, a desire not shared by their teenage and second-generation daughters (*BL* 143). Home has thus been argued to be, as Brah puts it, a 'mythic place of desire' (Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora* 188–89; J. L. Wilson 27). The images of the kadam flowers, as Barthes suggests, are replete with social and cultural meanings that are reconstructed through memory (Barthes 29, 32, 44, 51; Saussure, *Writings in General Linguistics* 67). The act of interpreting the images, according to Tomkins, needs and preresquires the presence of interest and excitement, which is the case with the parents (Chanu and Naznee) but not their daughters (Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Positive Affects* 337, 343). That is, images of the kadam flower do not mean the same to all members of the family, first and second generations; the meaning is different, and so is the affective reactions. The process of interpretation and the affective reaction are interrelated and interdependent; they are also in turn associated with memory, the site of past homes lost.

Home has been problematised in this chapter and studied from the perspective of homeliness and feeling at home, rather than being in home as place of birth. As Brah suggests,

home experiences are different and gender-based; women are also often discriminated against, as Solotaroff and Pande argue (xxvi). Thus, given the lacking positive feelings and meanings of home (FHH: 'familiarity,' 'Heaven' and 'Haven,' according to Miller), Hasina, her mother Rubpan and her friend Monju are argued to be only physically there, in the place of birth, but mentally and psychologically in exile, when it comes to their feelings of happiness, homeliness, safety and the sense of inclusion (Duyvendak 27; McGavin 124; B. Miller 70–72). The feelings of unhappiness and the lack of freedom at home, the patriarchal place of birth, are indicated by silence which can communicate meanings that are beyond words (Dauenhauer 24; G. Turner 10). It is concluded that silence is a powerful mode of expression, a metalanguage that transgresses the social and cultural constraints to denote and expose the limiting power that forecloses the explicit expression with words, the man-domination and sexist prejudices against women embedded within the tissue of the collective sociocultural identity.

This novel also shows a noteworthy postmodernist sign that indicates and ushers in, according to Lyotard, the corrosion of those patriarchal and sexist narratives. The big developments in information technology, communication media and the 'computerisation of knowledge' seem to threaten the continuity of gender-biased rhetoric of values and sexist definitions of 'good woman' dictated by men and the guardians of the patriarchal regime of the social and cultural group identity. These changing and moving grounds have been connoted and inferred in my discussion above of intertextual references to the affective process of disgust as an unwanted cultural intake followed by an act of vomiting, 'bursting,' casting off and rejection (G. Kaufman 130; Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 86; Rozin and Fallon 23–24; Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Negative Affects* 128). This trajectory or trend of is symbolised by Nazneen's remarkable transformation, independence and rebellion against her status quo. Moreover, her sister Hasina does not succumb elopes twice in search for love and

freedom. Many questions, inspired by Lyotard's influential discussion of the state of knowledge, remain not fully answered in this chapter due to may limitations, but they clearly endorse the conclusion regarding women's desires for freedom, happiness and self-determination, their desire to be and feel at home.

## **Chapter 6: Fear and Family in Rekha Waheed's *The A-Z Guide To Arranged Marriage* (2005)**

As Isaak M. Marks says, 'man is born with innate fear responses' (69). Fear is an affective mechanism that is designed to help humans, and animals avoid dangers that threaten life (Izard 281; Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 929–32; Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* 289–90; Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 62–64; Fanon 113–14; Massumi, 'The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat' 53; Kekes 555). Such reactions are positive and instinctive, but they can become negative, mythic and illogical when governed by gendered social and cultural misconceptions. As Deleuze and Guattari write, sometimes one 'experiences a fear worse than that of annihilation,' that is, one might be more fearful of fear (the feeling) than of the threat (1000). In this chapter (on 'Fear and Family'), I will explore some gender-biased and fear-based norms and conceptions (sexist myths) that feed on various ethical and political narratives of the sociocultural identity. As argued in this thesis, the questioning and exposure of these gendered misconceptions will necessarily imply a controversial undertaking of challenging the social and cultural rules and criteria that govern the identity of a given community or society. Thus, it is argued that fear, gender, identity and belonging are interlinked and inter-affected. Family in this chapter is used in its larger and symbolic meaning; it means family, community and the larger social context with all its norms, customs and traditions. The discussion will also refer to women's use of irony and satire as an indirect aesthetical response to the mythic fears and misconceptions governing and defining what a woman is or can and should do, even in very personal matters such as marriage.

Rekha Waheed is a British Bengali novelist, born in Shepherd's Bush, West London, in 1975 to parents of Bangladeshi origin (Joshi; Longrigg). She did an MSc in Economics at

SOAS, University of London, and then worked as a business consultant while she continued writing (Joshi). In an interview in *The Asian Writer* with Farhana Shaikh, Rekha Waheed introduces herself as a ‘modern Muslim woman from Brit-Bengali background who hopes to change the stereotypes and misconceptions about Asian women in the cosmopolitan world’ (*Interview*). She maintains that literature and novels, in particular, constitute ‘a bridge into new cultures, lifestyles and experiences,’ criticising the status quo of British Asian fiction because it tends to ‘demonise Asian lifestyles, faiths and traditions,’ as Waheed puts it (*Interview*). ‘I’m proud to say,’ she states, ‘that we now have Maya Malik who brings a whole new world of traditions, expectations and mishaps to the mainstream’ (Waheed, *Interview*). Maya Malik is the main character and protagonist of Waheed’s *The A-Z Guide to Arranged Marriage*. She resembles in many ways Meera Syal’s Tania in *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee*. The city-savvy trio Maya, Tanya and Sakina can be compared in many ways and aspects to Syal’s Tania, Sunita and Chila. They are a group of British Asian female friends living in London and struggling with and against the conventional social and cultural norms of their communities. Maya introduces as a ‘Maya Malik, and I’m a twenty-eight year old SLAAG. That would be the ‘Single Lonely Aging Asian Girl’ brand. And if there’s one thing worse than a slag in the British Bengali community, it’s a SLAAG’ (A-Z 1).

As Dr Mahabala Shetty says, arranged marriage is not a modern social phenomenon but an old one dating thousands of years, at least two millennia BC (3). In ‘Matrimonials: A Variation of Arranged Marriages’, Rajagopal Ryali refers to George Johnson’s 1843 travelogue in which Johnson talks about Indian marriages foregrounding the shared aspects and resemblances between Hindus and Romans in terms of pre-marital practices and conventions as the concept of seeing the bride and bridegroom by members of their families and community exists in both traditions (6). In Indian mythology, the gathering for the process of husband

selection is called '*Swayamvara*' (N. L. Gupta 111–12; Shetty 3; kapur 666). According to Shetty, there are two forms of marriage in Indian mythology: 'Swayamvara' and 'Gandharva vivaha' (3). He explains that 'in Sanskrit "Swayam" denotes self. "Vara" means the groom. "Swayamvara" is an arranged process, whereas "Gandharva vivaha" is a form of love marriage' (3).

An example of '*Swayamvara*' (arranged marriage) in the Indian Hindu legend of *Ramayana* is King Janaka's daughter's marriage where King Janaka invites suitable princes of similar social and royal backgrounds to attempt winning his daughter's hand in marriage by successfully completing an almost impossible task that needs exceptional skills and abilities. The task set to win Princess Sita is to show everyone how to use '*Shivadhanush*' (Lord Shiva's huge and heavy gold bow). When everyone fails and turns away in shame, *Rama*, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, easily lifts the bow and even breaks it while trying to string it, which is a superb deed that wins him King Janaka's daughter Princess Sita to the amazement and cheering of the audience (N. L. Gupta 111–12; Shetty 3; kapur 666). On the other hand, '*Gandharva vivaha*' marriages, contrary to *Swayamvara*, does not follow the conventional marriage norms of olden and mythological Indian traditions (Shetty 3). It is not based on parental arrangement but rather based on the idea of personal choice and love marriage where the couple run away together and marry secretly. They, however, get their marriage witnessed and approved by the 'Gandharvas' who represent the ultimate authority being the 'powers associated with God' (Shetty 3). Such a marriage is therefore deemed a done deal and 'set in stone' once one has 'cleared it with the heavens' (Shetty 4).

As Marian Aguiar argues in 'Arranged Marriage: Cultural Regeneration in Transnational South Asian Popular Culture,' the concept of 'arranged marriage' is a variable

and not easy to reduce to a single and exhaustive definition (181-82). He highlights the common features of arranged marriages such as ‘the match being brokered by elder relatives/and or a match-maker,’ ‘brideviewing’ and ‘most famously, the bride and groom not meeting until the wedding’ (Aguiar 181-82). In a similar vein, Allendorf and Pandian illustrate this further, stating that ‘in arranged marriages, parents customarily choose a spouse based on the caste/ethnicity, religion, and social and economic standing of prospective spouses and their family, and there is little or no contact between the prospective spouses prior to marriage’ (Allendorf and Pandian 435). But the fact that a marriage is arranged by one’s family members and friends does not automatically and completely negate choice and make it a ‘forced’ marriage, which is a conceptual ‘slippage’ between ‘forced’ and ‘arranged’ criticised by Ralph Grillo in ‘Marriages, arranged and forced: The UK debate’ (80). Ralph Grillo contends that arranged marriages should not be equated with forced marriages as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Dutch-American feminist of Somali origins, often does (80).

In her books *Infidel* and *The Caged Virgin*, Ali talks about her experiences escaping the enforcement of a marriage arranged by her father and fleeing, on her way to join her husband-to-be in Canada, to the Netherlands where she seeks asylum and starts writing her memoirs about her experiences to empower and liberate women. When Ali asks her father how he thought, 'on the basis of one minute,' that she was 'compatible' with the bridegroom, he argues that he knows his family and 'lineage' and that 'he has a job in Canada, he does not chew *qat*, he is clean and a conscientious worker, he is strong. I am giving you to him to ensure your safety' (*Infidel* 147). He adds that everything is already set up, and he will accept no objection from her to his 'choice of a husband' as ‘everything is all arranged,' her father tells her (174). It dawns on Ali that 'Nobody tied me up. I was not shackled. I was not forced at gunpoint. But I had no realistic way out.' (174). When she tells her father that she will not attend the ‘*nikah*’

(the wedding ceremony), 'all he said was, "You're not required." Legally, that is true. By now, my father was the center of attention.' (174). David Bradley maintains that 'As hazardous as an ethnocentric approach is a monolithic view of all South Asian communities in this country and their marriage practices. Adaptation of the institution of the arranged marriage may be overlooked, or the assumption made that there is no scope at all for personal choice either here or in a country of origin' (46).

In 'Arranged Marriage: Cultural Regeneration in Transnational South Asian Popular Culture,' Aguiar maintains that arranged marriage 'has become an object of fascination in the West, a point of revulsion, outrage, curiosity and even envy' ('Arranged Marriage: Cultural Regeneration in Transnational South Asian Popular Culture' 181). Aguiar refers to Vikram Seth's 1349-page novel *A Suitable Boy* (1993) that narrates the story of 'a mother's search for a husband for her daughter' and he maintains that such novels as Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, seek to 'explore the nature of assimilation' through narratives on arranged marriage (Aguir 181-82). The family, parents and elders are indeed the epicentres of arranged marriage, as Ali says (174). But Ali's experience of escaping a forced marriage does not epitomise and account for the whole range of sociocultural varieties and complexities of the arranged marriage phenomenon as she claims.

It is understandable why Ali writes with such acuity of tone and tendency to make overgeneralisations, painting heterogeneous Muslim, Eastern and African societies with a single brush. Fadumo, her fellow Somalian whom she meets in the Netherlands to enquire about seeking asylum and escaping the marriage, disagrees with Ali and argues that 'arranged marriages were best. An arranged marriage within the family with your father's blessing: that



was the best destiny' (190). Ali continues her story in *Infidel* and says, 'Fadumo was horrified and asked me, pleaded with me, not to do it [escape]' and 'hurt the honor of the whole clan' (190). Clearly, the idea of marriage and family is closely linked and associated with ethics and identity (Bradley 46).

As Aguiar also says, arranged marriage is a 'continuing practice' in the West (182). In "'I Arranged My Own Marriage": Arranged Marriages and Post-colonial Feminism', Raksha Pande states that 'The rights of immigrant women and their choices in relation to marriage have become a cause for concern for Western governments and organisations who see arranged marriages as an extension of patriarchy where women have no say in whom they marry' (172). But Devyani Prabhat, referring to Benedict Anderson's work 'imagined communities,' contends in his book *Britishness, Belonging and Citizenship: Experiencing Nationality Law*, that 'the "imagined community" of the British state is one that consists of the majority ethnic citizenry and its values. Time and again, speeches by prominent politicians remind everyone that this is a "Christian national" or that British values do not permit certain cultural practices' (15). He maintains that liberal values such as 'individual liberty and democratic equality' are not limited to Britishness; he questions how 'Majoritarian values become proxy values for all [ ... and] are identified and consolidated as belonging to "us", whereas the values held by "them" attach to ethnic minorities present in the UK and observable as rarities' (15).

As discussed in Chapter 5, Stopes-Roe and Cochrane maintain in *Citizens of this Country: The Asian-British* that many South Asians accept arranged marriages because of the values and 'principles' these marriages are based upon (40). Shetty's book epitomises this standpoint that seeks to foreground the values and positive aspects of arranged marriage. He argues that these marriages tend to be 'long lasting because of the core values' (xii, 1–4, 70–

80). According to Shetty, virginity is 'the highest moral virtue of an unmarried woman' (81). 'For most Indian women, virginity may be the most cherished physical possession. Virginity guarantees her chaste character at present and her fidelity in the future, as she will not be comparing her husband to her past lover since there was none,' he states (79). He concludes that 'arranged marriage is conceptually more advanced, more spiritual and more meaningful. These days, the West is experiencing spiritual disintegration, and everything seems to be temporary, including marital relationships' (3). Therefore, Shetty calls upon 'girls of the west' to 'change to the better' and 'change ASAP' (80).

While Shetty maintains that 75 per cent of Indians have not yet been 'polluted' and therefore 'remain untouched' (80), but he admits that the far-reaching influence of globalisation and media communication has caused an 'erosion in the value system' (79). Keera Allendorf and Roshan K. Pandian's 'The Decline of Arranged Marriage? Marital Change and Continuity in India' shows that there is a decline in the arranged marriage tradition in India. 'Spouse Choice' is now more aligned towards the western style of love marriage. Kalwant Bhopal's very useful studies show that educated women do not follow this tradition, while less educated ones consider it as a form of identity. Second-generation women are also in the process of redefinition. Referring to a 1995 study in South Asia, Shetty says it shows that that the 'erosion has happened, and it is on the upswing' (79). As Keera Allendorf and Roshan K. Pandian also say in their 'The Decline of Arranged Marriage? Marital Change and Continuity in India':

Modernization theory predicted that the great diversity of family behaviors found in non-Western countries would converge toward the Western nuclear model under the influence of industrialization and urbanization. Following this prediction, arranged marriage—a practice found largely in Asia and Africa in which parents and other family

members select their children's spouses—was expected to be replaced by Western-style marriage, in which young people choose their own spouses. (Allendorf and Pandian 435)

When Maya is first introduced to the bridegroom Dr Shah, a brain surgeon who has just arrived with his family for 'brideviewing,' to use Aguiar's words (\*\*), she tells him that 'I hate these introductions too. I don't know what could be worse than choosing your life partner after one conversation' (36). This does not only show and confirm the swing away from conventional practices of arranged marriages, but it also foregrounds a remarkable discrepancy between what the educated and/or second-generation British Asians really want and aspire to and what they do in reality; they are getting there facing one another in a conventional arranged introduction they both dislike, a situation which epitomises a social irony and indicates a sort of limitations on individual freedom and obligation the symbolic social code of practice continues to dictate. I am not referring to forced marriages here where the parents' or family's choice of spouse is enforced under threat and violence upon the girl (and rarely the man) as in Ali's experience. Arranged marriage is a more varied and sophisticated social phenomenon that allows a limited degree of choice and a shackled uncanny individual freedom as most of Maya's marriage proposals show.

Waheed's take on arranged marriages is more interesting and sophisticated than some of Ali's reactive and homogenising views. Waheed's novel is an intervention that somehow resembles the Pakistani Nashra Balagamwala, who also fled to the US to avoid a forced marriage and designed a board game called 'Arranged!' (M. Mohan; Balagamwala). According to Megha Mohan, 'Balagamwala's board game, *Arranged!*, is far from an advert for an arranged marriage. Its central character is a matchmaker, "auntie" eagerly trying to chase down three

girls while they attempt to outwit her and delay marriage'. Balabamwala states that 'People in the West often confuse arranged marriages with forced marriages [...] They go by a lot of what they see in the press. The acid attacks. The so-called honour killings. The complete absence of choice. My game was not meant to be part of that dialogue' (M. Mohan). This view echoes with Waheed's novel and her main character Maya who is a proud, educated, and witty British Bengali Muslim girl who cleverly averts many arranged marriages and eventually succeeds in winning the man she loves, announcing her own marriage proposal in an unconventional way and in front of a large audience, saying 'Jhanghir Khan, will you marry me?' (A-Z 141). The crux of the matter does not simply lie in the end, in breaking all conventions and transcending all social and cultural norms of her family and community, but also in the journey to this happy end. Like Balagamwala's game, it non-didactically teaches, raises awareness and entertains, unlike Ali's self-centric books.

In the very beginning of the novel, the twenty-year-old Maya Malik describes herself as a 'SLAAG' which, she adds, stands for the 'brand' of the 'Single Lonely Aging Asian Girl,' the worst social status for a girl in the British Bengali community, according to Maya (A-Z 1). She continues to say, 'my biggest fear isn't being overlooked for promotion to Lead Consultant with Chambers Scott Wilfred International. It's the realisation that I have to find a husband from a diminishing stock of eligible bachelors that increasingly consists of mommy's boys, closet gays, and the emotionally disturbed' (A-Z 1). In her later conversation with her brother Taj, on the way to the cinema, they talk about Raz, Taj's friend's marriage, and Maya finds out that Raz is not marrying his girlfriend Tina, but 'he's going back home to marry some pure honey his parents have found for him,' according to Taj (18). Maya feels angry and wonders, 'Why . . . why would he do that? What was wrong with Tina? Aren't there enough Bengali girls here for him to choose from?' (18). Taj contends to Maya that most Bengali girls in Britain

(the West) 'put out', but Maya's 'look of outrage made Taj reconsider his words' stating to his sister 'good girls like you scare guys into thinking they won't live up to high standards ...' (18). This self-introduction and later conversation between the brother (Taj) and his sister (Maya) are significant because it concisely outlines the thematic concerns and expectations and sets out the scene and backdrop for this interesting story. What stands out is the references to the 'brand,' 'fear', and 'outrage', as well as the underlying critical sense of critical humour (1, 18).

According to Charles Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, the word 'fear' is 'derived from what is sudden and dangerous' while the word 'terror' is used to denote 'extreme fear' especially when the 'imagination is more particularly concerned' (*The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* 289–90). In his seminal and multi-volume *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, Tomkins enlarges on the physiological manifestations of the fear-terror affect and points out the physical reactions that, according to him, Darwin has overlooked, stating that 'Darwin properly includes autonomic and skin responses as well as motor responses. He should also have included the cry of terror, the raising and drawing together of the eyebrows, the tensing of the lower eyelid as well as opening of the eyes, the stretching of the lips back as well as the opening of the mouth' (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 932). Michael Blumethal maintains that the biggest human fears are caused by 'the inevitable —death, separation, loss, loneliness' (16). Tomkins argues against 'Freud's distinction between fear as conscious and anxiety as unconscious,' stating that 'anxiety has become a weasel word, meaning all things to all men' (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 932). He maintains that the affect is the same whether one is aware of the object of fear or not; furthermore, he adds, the 'intense form of fear now known as anxiety be replaced by the word *terror*' (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 932). The affective reactions of fear when facing

real or imagined potential threats and dangers is a natural response to protect self and preserve life.

In *The Psychology of Emotions*, Carroll E. Izard states that 'fear is the emotion many people dread the most' (Izard 281; Osho 3). Hence, it is no wonder why fear is often used as a 'deterrent' and as 'a means (or perhaps even *the* means) of social control,' as Crawford et al argue in their book *Emotion and Gender: Constructing Meaning from Memory* (92). In fact, behavioural theories contend that the fear of something is a more powerful and influential tool of 'behaviour change' than the real object of fear or 'the punishment itself' (92). This idea is echoed in Osho's book *Fear: Understanding and Accepting the Insecurities of Life* where it is pointed out that 'People are more afraid of fear than of anything else because the very existence of fear shakes your foundations' (3). Therefore, fear has not only been implemented in justice systems and schools but also in the domains of politics and warfare (Crawford et al. 92). In British politics, the phrase 'project fear' has often been used to argue for Brexit and against its potential disadvantages and economic risks (J. Ross).

This phrase, which belongs to Rob Shorthouse, the Communications Director for the Better Together campaign in the Scottish referendum, was first meant, according to Jamie Ross, as 'an office in-joke that got out of hand and is now being used to criticise the Remain campaign.' As Ross also say, the Remain campaign in the Scottish Referendum was described by Nicola Sturgeon, the first minister of Scotland, as 'fear-based' and, in a similar vein, the current British prime minister and the 'figurehead' of the Leave campaign argued that Remainers are 'agents of project fear'. So Remainers, who argue against the UK leaving the European Union drawing on such potential risks and disadvantages as the likely weakening of the country's economy, national security, and political influence, are accused of

scaremongering and spreading fear to change people's opinion and achieve political gains. On the other hand, Brexiteers and right-wing politicians tend to use immigration as a scaremongering tool to change people's views and reach the Machiavellian end they seek. This discourse, as you notice, looks at the transmission of fear from the outside to the inside, an affect that is intended to be driven in, internalised. The transmitter's ends are apparently not difficult to discern. However, in the realm of social and cultural politics, vision is not that clear.

As Izard argues, almost all experiences of fear share the perception of 'a threat to our security and safety' (281). In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed analyses the fear affect in a quote from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, where a boy misreads the black man's trembling from cold as rage and tells his mother: 'Mama, the nigger's going to eat me' (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 62–64; Fanon 113–14) As Ahmed concludes, fear is 'concerned with the preservation not simply of 'me', but also 'us', or 'what is', or 'life as we know it', or even 'life itself' (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 64). So when people are afraid of things, they tend to flee to protect themselves; that is, they seek to recognise and avoid the source of fear (the 'threat' or danger), which is a natural human response to any threat to one's life and being (Izard 281; Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 929–32; Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* 289–90). In this light, Maya's 'biggest fear' is supposed to indicate that she is terrified of something she conceives of as a threat, something that is 'sudden and dangerous' (Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* 289–90). As Kekes says, 'fear is a warning of the physical, psychological, or social dangers we believe we face' (555). Maya's following statements demonstrate the wider social context of her declared 'biggest fear' when she says: 'The Bengali community has consigned me to the spinster league, the bitch called Age will continue to whore for Time and I will pay extortionate Fitness First gym fees to bribe Age to buy me Time's favour. [...]. I'm

going to find me a husband, at any cost, using any means and that includes having arranged introductions.’ (A-Z 1). The question is whether this fear is real and justifiable. As Kekes also says, ‘fear may or may not be reasonable. It is reasonable if it is a response to real danger and its strength is commensurate with the danger, neither excessive nor deficient’ (556). According to Maya, it is in fact the ‘community’ that now classifies her as a ‘spinster,’ ‘the aging unmarried girl (A-Z 1), but these sociocultural judgements of being beyond the age of marriage and the relevant criteria of the threat involved are questionable and may not be ‘reasonable’ (Kekes 556).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the word ‘spinster’ means ‘a woman (or, rarely, a man) who spins, *esp.* one who practises spinning as a regular occupation’ (‘Spinster, n.’). Douglas Harper’s Online Etymology Dictionary Online (OED) shows that this original meaning of the word ‘spinster’ as ‘a female spinner of thread’ goes back to the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century (Harper). The Oxford English Dictionary and the Online Etymology Dictionary both show that, from 1719, ‘spinster’ has been the designation of ‘a woman still unmarried’ and ‘beyond the usual age for marriage’ (OED, ‘Spinster, n.’; Harper). ‘Unmarried women were supposed to occupy themselves with spinning,’ hence the association between the act of spinning and a girl’s marital status (Harper). There are two questions to raise here. First, who determines the taken-for-granted ‘usual age of marriage’ and thereby the age of being ‘beyond’ it? Second, why is celibacy or the so-called ‘spinsterhood’ a source of fear to Maya and perhaps millions of Eastern girls, and not to other people and clergy who decide to abstain from marriage and sex?

Maya states that it is ‘the Bengali community who now labels her as a ‘spinster,’ which is an unequivocal specification of the social and cultural transmitter of fear via the spinsterhood



scaremonger; that is, these conceptions about the age of marriage and the age of beyond are limited to specific communities and are not necessarily shared within the diverse British society this given community is part of. According to many critics and writers, the cultural practices concerning marriage as a social norm inscribed within the larger social orders of families and communities constitute an integral part of the collective and individual identities and values (Bradley 46; Stopes-Roe and Cochrane 40; Shetty xii, 1–4, 70–80). Hence, the socially transmitted alert message and urgent invitation for Maya to be afraid calls into collaboration the ostensibly unquestionable sense of her Bengali identity, as conceived of by its guardians, being elders, family or men. Maya's reaction, therefore, is necessary of gendered, social and cultural psychological significance. The key questions are therefore 1) how this imagined undivided and unchanging sense of unilateral belonging reacts, 2) whether it cooperates as expected in the invocation of fear, and 3) what implied negotiations it manifests in terms of the dual British-Asian belongings that create the plurality of her individual identity.

To address the question of the reality of Maya's fear and its implications, I will provide some more contextual examples from Waheed's novel *A-Z*, listing a selection of quotes to refer to them in the following analytical paragraphs and clear some myths and imagined fears:

- 1) Maya's 'biggest fear,' she says, 'is the realisation that I have to find a husband from a diminishing stock of eligible bachelors that increasingly consists of mommy's boys, closet gays, and the emotionally disturbed' (1).
- 2) Abu Ahmad's mother, who comes along to the Malik's for a marriage proposal, says that it is 'to be travelling alone' is actually 'worrying for a woman' (4).
- 3) Maya is feeling 'a heady mixture of fear, pressure and anticipation' as she walks behind her sister Ayesha to the living room to be introduced to Dr Shah Akbar, the suitor, in a conventional bride seeing meeting (36).

- 4) When Maya calls Jhanghir for advice regarding the recent marriage proposal from Dr Shah, the brain surgeon, he asks why she does not give herself a chance and consider him, now that she is 'hitting 30,' and wonders if she is 'scared' having to 'make a serious decision' or is 'commitment phobic' (35).
- 5) Following her father receives the news about 'the Akbars' rejection of the alaaap,' Maya feels the desire to 'hoot with delight at the relief of finding freedom from indecision, fear and ultimately compromise'. The father breaks the news with uncontrollable laughter after his phone call with the Akbars that Uncle Rahim Akbar was hospitalised right after the visit to see Maya and apparently she 'gave him a heart attack with her talk of independence'; but Maya's mother contends 'rising in anger' that this notoriety 'will ruin her!' because nobody 'will want a girl who could kill her in-laws' (44).
- 6) Maya's previous college friend, the accountant Salek Joynal Uddin (Joy), a Bengali homosexual, is 'terrified of coming out' and letting his family and community know about his sexual orientation (66).
- 7) When Maya tells her friend Sakina that she will 'try one more time to change things for the better' between herself and the man she loves (107), and that she is 'going to New York to win Jhanghir back' (106), she feels determined but also 'terrified of what I had to do' (107).
- 8) Maya's work colleague in the office, the white Englishwoman Clare, tells her: 'I'm terrified Maya, I'm terrified of being vulnerable to him again [Joe, her partner]' (200).

As Darwin and Tomkins, among other theorists and writers, maintain, fear indicates a threat (real or imagined) to the things one cherishes most in life, if not to say life itself (Izard 281; Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 929–32; Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* 289–90; Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 62–64; Fanon 113–14; Massumi, ‘The Future Birth of the Affective Fact: The Political Ontology of Threat’ 53; Kekes 555). One naturally flees to safety as the bear-threat-flight studies show (Green 127; Watt and Stewart 1, 10; DeJesus 33). The (bug)bear in Maya’s case is not real but imagined and socially constructed through the conventions and gendered norms pertaining to sociocultural group identity. It is not only unreal but it is also, I am arguing, ‘not reasonable’ (Kekes 556). As W. (Wilfred) Trotter argues in *In Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War*, people’s actions and behaviours are greatly affected by the group, the community, or the ‘herd instinct,’ to borrow his words (130–48). Maya seems to be resisting a ‘herd impulse’ to be carried out and flees with the group without even knowing, recognising and understanding the reality of the threat (Trotter 31). It is instinctive rather than thoughtful. In the following paragraphs, I will address and critique many sexist myths that seem to cause unreasonable fear.

The first myth is that is concerning and fearful for women to travel alone. When Abu Ahmad’s mother and Auntie Jaya state that it is fearful and ‘worrying’ for a woman to travel from one country to another by herself, their concern or fears embody Trotter’s idea of the ‘herd impulse’ that is triggered by the instinctive and shared knowledge of the group, what Lyotard calls ‘narrative knowledge’ (Trotter 31; Lyotard 28). When Auntie Jaya states, ‘Nobody knows what can happen’ (if a girl/woman travel alone), it indicates that the fear they talk about is instinctive and unreasonable; it is unspecified, the unknown. Maya, however, represents women’s struggle against the expectations of her social group’s identity rules (to feel, react and do as expected and prescribed). She sarcastically speaks of Auntie Jaya’s words,

saying that she spoke in a way ‘as if she was more than aware of the untold adventures of the travelling executive’ (4). This shows that the full unwavering belonging to collective social and cultural identity requires instinctive and unquestioning obedience of a mutually agreed code or mythology of rules, social, political, ethical and psychological.

The second gendered myth, embedded and imbibed into the cultural identity of Maya’s community, is that of being a ‘spinster’ by or even sometimes before the age of twenty-eight. Even though she is ‘hitting 30’ as the man she loves, Jhanghir says to her, encouraging her to consider Dr Shah, she replies with pride ‘so what if he’s a doctor? A surgeon even! Just because I’m 28, it doesn’t mean I’m going to accept a look good on paper doctor ...’ (36). This statement clearly shows Maya’s rejection of the socioculturally constructed *spinster myth*, which is expected to invalidate the consequential fear at the prospect of approaching the source of fear, the time-based threat, a number indicating a girl’s age. Thus, the *bear-threat-flight* does not seem to work instinctively with Maya, and this signifies a deviation from the expected and prescribed path of belonging. The bear (Maya’s age) is thus discovered to be a bugbear, a human creation, a fake copy of the real bear. The threat is therefore dispelled as an illusion and invalidated, and finally, there is no flight or flocking away with the group but moving with reason and freedom against the grain.

Hence, Maya refuses to ‘compromise’ on her dreams, wishes, real choices and love (A-Z 44). She humorously describes the so-called spinsters as a ‘brand’ (1), and their community as the ‘All Star Spinster Federation’, which has a lower social status and contrasts with the higher ‘Married League’ (131). This does not mean that married women enjoy any privileges or a high social status in the family or community. The experience of Abu Ahmad’s marriage proposal does show not only her exposure and rejection of the *bugbear-threat-instinctive-flight*

equation (marry any being a spinster), but also the future of some girls who do just that, without a thoughtful choice. They will be housemaids, confined to the kitchen, a 'brand' of objects, to use Maya's word (1); she adds saying:

My designer-clad sensibilities rioted in outrage [ . . . ] The impostors were making their way to my home with the intent of transforming me into a paan-chewing housewife with no colour co-ordinated dress sense Suddenly, I realised I couldn't leave my perfect family to join that brood of shameless penny pinchers. I raced downstairs to convince my parents not to answer the door, to pretend that we weren't home, to pretend that we'd emigrated once and for all. (2)

The third is the idea of women's choice in arranged marriages. Maya states that 'having to' choose from a group of undesired men is the last thing she wishes to do, an abhorrent idea that terrifies her (1). 'Having' shows the existence of obligation, pressure, and must-do demands. Again, it is clearly her family or larger community that is putting pressure upon Maya to get married and make an urgent and family-managed choice as soon as possible. It is a form of sugar-coated patronisation, an oxymoron: to force someone to make a free choice. An arranged marriage might not be the same as forced marriage, but it nevertheless hides behind the sham choice. It tactically distances itself away from the label 'forced', but the degree of free will and freedom of choice is limited. This is not to provide final and universal decrees on how free or forced such marriages are. This requires more space and time than possible in this thesis as individual experiences vary. For example, Ayaan Hirsi Ali's experience differs from her friend Fadumo as described in Ali's *Infidel*. One is content; the other is disgusted. But, at least in Waheed's *A-Z*, Maya rejects the idea of arranged or assisted marriage, contending that 'give me my freedom [ . . . ] I will not compromise on my soul mate for life' (6). She indicates

that: there is no real choice in obligation, in the 'having to'. Otherwise, it is, for many girls, allegorically speaking, like euthanasia when one is searching for life.

Fourth, Waheed seems to critique the idea of bride judgement and invert it in practice. In her first *alaap*, Maya expects Abu Ahmad to be the promised 'scrummy' and 'super confident man' who 'could fill a pair of CK boxers like Markie Wahlberg and have a taste for sophisticated living' (1). She is, however, disillusioned. In 'Rewind: Before Bieber, There Was Marky Mark for Calvin Klein,' Ann-Christine Diaz writes that Mark Wahlberg is 'incredibly naturally charming' as Calvin Klein Senior VP Neil Kraft explains how Wahlberg posed in a CK marketing campaign before the age of Social Media. According to Mr Kraft, unlike Justin Bieber nowadays, 'he appealed to women, he appealed to gay men, and he appealed to men who wanted to be him' (Diaz). The ironic situation where a promised Markie Wahlberg turns out to be a 'penny-pincher' critiques and satirises the ability of conventional arranged marriages to take into consideration women's desires. Furthermore, it turns the subject-object equation of judgement upside down: Maya is now the one who judges and satirises her suitors and their families, which is not the norm or the purpose of the so-called 'bride-viewing' (Aguar 182).

Maya takes the opportunity of the *alaaps* to launch a poignant critique and commentary of arranged marriages and the state of (un)belongings of the Bengali community in the UK, defining her own being and belonging in the process. So she riots against their wish, she says, of 'transforming me to a paan-chewing housewife with no sense of co-ordinated dress sense' (2). Therefore, she decides that this 'brood of shameless penny pinchers' will not be her future family, stating 'I raced downstairs to convince my parents not to answer the door, to pretend that we weren't home, to pretend that we'd emigrated once and for all' (2). The transformation

indicates a change and juxtaposition between two types of women, the second of which is unacceptable to her, being an eat-and-feed house-confined woman with no understanding of the sophistication of life and taste. When she races downstairs to ask her parents not to open the door signifies no at-home-ness or oneness with such patriarchs and the desired emigration, moving away from one place to another, indicates the differences of time, taste and place.

*Paan* is a popular after-meal 'savoury snack' in South Asia (Mannur 217). 'It is made by folding dried fruits, nuts and pastes into a betel leaf, a member of the pepper family' (Hirshon). Bengalis have *paan*, which is of various types of betel leaves, as a 'mouth freshener' or to help indigestion. 'Bengalis entertain their guests at the end of a meal by serving *paan*' (Chakrabarti and Chakrabarti 345). The rejection of this ritual of Subcontinental Bengali food culture (*paan* chewing) can symbolise a form of unbelonging, a desire to reshape her identity as a Bengali British sassy woman, the Devil's-cake café chats addict, not the 'paan-chewing housewife' (15). (A. F. Smith 345; Waheed, *A-Z* 2, 15). Maya's obviously is not simply talking about *paan* per se, but the confinement and limitation as suggested by the juxtaposition of these two food rituals (the averted and the desired). This symbolic association is further asserted by Abu Ahmad's question to Maya, 'So Maya, do you plan to work after you get married,' trying to assess Maya's 'levels of ambition,' and, as Maya adds, 'by default whether or not I'd make a neglectful wife' (4). According to the Abu's, working women are not good wives and mothers, and (as demonstrated earlier on) Jaya criticises Maya for travelling alone. 'By yourself' means without a man (4). A woman is deemed of a lesser status than a man, someone that needs masculine protection from an unfamiliar and unknown source of uncanny fear, because, as Abu Ahmad's mother claims, 'nobody knows what can happen' (4).

Fifth, fear of family is noteworthy in this novel. As Muhammad Anwar says, ‘family plays an important role in the lives of South Asians’ (*Pakistanis in Britain* 24); Rita Isaac et al. echo Anwar as they reiterate the major role of families and extended families in the East; according to them, there is ‘rich values of respect for elders, parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts and strong family ties’ in India and South Asia (39). However, the positive and strong relationship between members of the family, small or extended, as Syal refers to and celebrates in Chapter 3, sometimes breeds a limiting sense of fear that shackles the individual, especially women, with expectations and gender-biased standards for women to be checked against. For example, Jana and Hana, Maya’s twin sisters, who ‘both are model beautiful, practise medicine and, with doctors for husbands, have the ultimate status symbol in the community’, are ordered by their mother to prepare their younger sister Maya for another arranged wedding proposal (1-2). Maya is asked to ‘put on a decent shalwaar kameez’ and, as she says, ‘my entire kandan had turned up for this promising alaap’ (2). What stands out in these quotes is the emphasis on decency, social status, and the important role of the extended family and larger community.

Thus, the boundaries between the personal or private and the public spheres are blurred even when it comes to choosing one’s partner, which creates a sense of unease, intimidation and an uncanny fear of being (mis)judged, having one’s future life determined in a short meeting, or having one’s reputation further blemished. Thus, to compare, for example, between Maya’s and Clare’s fears shows that the former’s affective experience is more social and cultural than personal or interpersonal between herself and her suitor, while in the latter’s case, Clare’s fear is bilateral between herself and her partner. 1) Maya feels ‘a heady mixture of fear, pressure and anticipation’ as she is ‘lead’ by her sister Ayesha to the living room to be introduced to Dr Shah Akbar in the presence of their families (36), whereas 2) Maya’s friend Clare, a white Englishwoman, states that she is ‘terrified of being vulnerable’ to Joe, her partner



(200). Clare's fear, unlike Maya's, has a fixed singular source and reason related to a relationship with one individual, while in Maya's case, it is complex and multi-dimensional pertaining to a plurality of social and cultural referents; the family and larger community play a big role in Maya's affective experiences and fears. In both cases, however, the woman is the subject of fear, the one who experiences this negative affect caused by men and/or patriarchal societies.

The most ironic arranged *alaap* in this novel is perhaps Salek Joynal Uddin's (Joy's) proposal. Maya travels all the way from London to her aunt Kala's house in Brighton, where the *alaap* meeting is arranged to take place by Kala. They wait for Joy's family for many hours until the arrival of Joy and his family and through all the formalities and social etiquettes of the *alaap* when, ironically, Maya knows that Joy is homosexual. She tells her brother Samir-bhai that she remembers him from university time when they worked together at Waterstones. 'Joy, Gay Joy, that's what we used to call him,' she says in protest to the arranged *alaap* when she recognises him from his biographical information and photo. She protests, saying, 'You want me to marry someone who everyone will end up calling "Campman"?' but Ayesha 'failed to appreciate my fears,' she adds (66). As their parents and elders do not even know 'what being a gay meant,' they decide to 'pass over an *alaap*' (66). As Maya says, Joy is 'probably terrified of coming out! It's not exactly the easiest revelation to make to your mom and the Bengali community...' (66). It is not simply a matter of passing over a marriage proposal but also passing between identities to avoid fear.

Thus, in this *alaap*, one can notice the interconnections between sexual identity, belonging and the affect of fear. As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble*, the discourse of identity entails 'a discussion of gender identity' because people 'become intelligible through

becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility' (22). Maya speaks to her brother Samir-bhai about Joy's sexual identity, but being homosexual seems as if beyond Samir-bhai ability or willingness to understand. 'You know, "gay". I repeated, holding a limp wrist against my side. But he stared at me blankly. "You know, gay, same-sex oriented, homo..." she says to her brother (66). Then Ayesha asks him, 'Which part of "he's gay" you don't understand?' (66). But what strikes Maya is not Joy's sexuality; 'the problem wasn't that Joy was gay,' she says, 'it was that they didn't know how to explain to our parents what being gay meant and why that was a good reason to pass over an *alaap*' (66). She adds, saying, 'my parents had no clue what being gay was' (67).

When later Maya and Joy are alone, Maya confronts him about the proposal and his sexuality that is kept secret and they have the following dialogue:

"You haven't told them, have you? You haven't come out?" He shook his head and looked utterly miserable. "How long are you going to do this...?"

"You think I enjoy doing this?" Joy asked with incredulity. "Do you realise how hard it is..."

"I don't and I can't begin to imagine how difficult this is for you. Joy. But what you're doing is wrong, you're misleading our families and that's not fair."

"It's not fair on me either Maya. I didn't choose to be this way."

"But you can choose how you deal with it." I sounded unsympathetic but Joy needed to hear this. "And what you choose to be is between you and Allah."

"I'm trying to do the right thing by my family." The admission struck a chord with me.

"I'm not wise or learned enough to give you advice Joy, but I know enough to tell you that duping a girl into a marriage of convenience is

wrong."

"What choice do I have?" Joy looked defeated and I smiled at him.

"I read the uncertainty in his eyes and knew he feared how much I would reveal to the elders."

"I'm trying to be the right thing by my family." (77)

Clearly, Maya and Joy are both seeking to meet and satisfy their family's expectations and their community's social and cultural norms and conceptions of what is 'right'. Thus, agreeing to go through this meeting without direct enforcement does not mean that they have or are practising real and free choice. The irony of the meeting is very meaningful and indicates what I am arguing for: fear of family, family asset of social, cultural, political and ethical criteria and restrictions. This example is reminiscent of Elaine K. Ginsberg's idea of 'passing' and chameleonic identities, as discussed earlier in the introductory chapter (1). Joy adopts a different sexual identity to pass within their communities as meeting the standards expected. Despite their 'conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility', to use Butler's words, they, in fact, demonstrate an embedded desire to disagree and unbelong to certain norms and limitations, a desire to be 'come out' and be 'intelligible' (A-Z 77; Butler 22). Thus, as Butler says, 'the "coherence" and "continuity" of "the person" are not logical or analytical features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility' (23). Butler continues to say:

Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (23).

Furthermore, the imagined and ostensibly 'self-identical' identities, obliged conformity with sociocultural standards and practices, and the lack of coherence between internal and external identities demonstrate that free will is shackled and the only indicator this thesis resort to is the realm of the psyche, that of feelings, emotions and affects in which an individual still probably retains free will and freedom of expression. In some Asian and especially Muslim communities, homosexuality is a taboo, 'a Western disease,' as Andrew K. T. Yip says (19). This is, however, more cultural than religious, as Judaism and Christianity, as David F. Greenberg and Marcia H. Bystryn argue in 'Christian Intolerance of Homosexuality' (515). The irony of the situation in which Maya and Joy find themselves shows a stark divorce between feelings, desires and aspirations on the one hand and actual and schizophrenic actions and practices on the other. Irony as such becomes a narrative tool to critique this divorce as a social problem. Maya can empathise with Joy because she is in love with Jhanghir but is having to go through various arranged proposals to satisfy her family and social expectations. These alaaps become rich material for social and cultural enquiry.

Clearly, Maya encourages Joy to 'come out' and face his fears. This echoes Catrice Williams' experience of challenging her own fears as a nursing student having to deal with an HIV patient. As she says in 'Facing Fear,' despite her tutors' 'reassurances that universal precautions and common sense would be safeguards, but fear outruled knowledge' (72CCC). This statement tends to support Izard's, Osho's, and Crawford et al.'s findings of fear as a behaviour changer because people are afraid of fear more than the object of fear (Izard 281; Osho 3; Crawford et al. 92). Williams provides a very good real-life example of how to face and overcome one's fears. She explains how she and her fellow nurses were too fearful of being infected with AIDS having to deal with the HIV patient to the extent that the patient and HIV became the same. The patient, Mr Thompson's response was very aggressive. As Williams says, 'he reacted in the way that they expected. 'You brand me hostile, I'll be hostile', Mr

Thompson said, bitterly' (72CCC). Williams says she was 'terrified' when she knew that he was assigned to her; 'it was horrible – he threw urine and feces at their faces, he fought, tried to bite, threatened and yelled loudly constantly' (72CCC-72DDD). The moment Williams challenges her fears and faces them is a moment of big change and revelation. When Mr Thompson shouts, 'I'm a human, not a disease' it occurs to Williams that something must be done:

I decided to enter the room, smiling, with no battle gear. I did this. I addressed him by name, introduced myself, and stuck out my hand to shake his. I explained to him why we had entered the room as we did. The change in him was almost immediate. He explained that he was angry that people acted as though if he breathed on them, they would die. I spoke with him and did what was needed, I learned the reason for his behavior. He was 29 years old, and his family did not accept his homosexuality or his illness. [ . . . ] He was lonely, depressed and dying. (72DDD)

Williams maintains that such an experience and encounter with one's own fears has the potential to change lives (72DDD). In a similar vein, Maya advises Joy of coming out and challenging his fears of having a different sexual identity, which is exactly what she does herself conspicuously at the end of the story in proposing to her soulmate in front of everyone (A-Z 77, 141; Williams 72). Coming out, facing fear and sociocultural conceptions will perforce necessitate dealing with identity questions and re-identifying with the true heartfelt belongings, the internal-external 'coherence' and 'self-identification' to use Butler's words (22-23).

When Maya meets Bilal Bakr, a 35-year-old Bengali barrister of Chiswick, at the Lebanese restaurant Marhabah, the key controversial points that arise and disrupt the meeting are concerned with (un)belongings and the negative ‘coconut’ identity Bilal shows, which has already been touched on in Chapter 4 (12). Bilal and Tania have bitter and ironic exchanges about Bangladesh, Bengalis and the Bengali community in West London while having their dinner of hummus, bamieh, shish touk and lamb shwarma at Marhabah (meaning ‘Hello’ in Arabic) (11-12). When Maya asks Bilal where he is from, he says, ‘Medway Village. Berkshire’ and this, according to Maya, is ‘the first sign of a Bengali coconut, [...] ‘to think they originate from England’ (12). Bilal goes further implying denial of his origins when he refers to Bengalis as ‘them’ when he says that he only gets to deal with them when ‘bailing them from jail’ (12). Maya sarcastically retorts, ‘I hope that doesn’t include your family and friends’ (12). Then the exchange becomes more awkward and sarcastic:

Maybe I should take more walks, you know bump into one of them!" The novelty of the idea left Bilal beaming.

“One of them?" He seemed confused by my question and I wondered at which point he forgot that he was one of us.

‘Well, maybe I could get to know one of them well enough to hire them to cook and clean for me. That’d be a way to get a few of them off benefits!" Very few things in life put me off my food, but this particular ignoramus did.

“I’m sure they’ll be queuing up for the privilege!" He missed the sarcasm and laughed in agreement. (A-Z 13–14)

Maya is clearly very angry with Bilal’s vanity and ignorance; she reiterates that ‘Bilal was an “ignoramus”, both ignorant and an arsehole, and I didn’t want to keep trying to connect with him anymore’ (12). She finally confronts him and challenges his stereotypical conceptions with

the abrupt question “‘Why are you here. Bilal?’ [...] ‘I don't understand why you're considering a Bengali girl for marriage when you judge British Bengalis so badly.’” (14).

The meeting between Maya and Bilal echoes Butler's idea of the lack of conformity and coherence of identities. The denial of sexual identity and orientation in Joy's case can be compared to Bilal's denial of his own origins and Bengali community but, paradoxically, looking for a Bengali wife. To Waheed's Maya, being of a coconut identity implies an unappreciated denial of one's origins and original identity. On the other hand, in Meera Syal's *Life*, Tania celebrates her dual identity. She is often asked in her job interviews about her racial experiences as an Indian woman because her interviewers seem keen to know 'whether I'm the genuine article (oppressed Asian woman who has suffered), as opposed to the pretend coconut (white on the inside, brown on the outside, too well off and well-spoken to be considered truly ethnic)' (*Life* 144). Maya and Bilal, however, agree that only 'confused Bengalis out there who would take it [being a 'coconut'] as a compliment' (14).

Maya is clearly outraged and angry with Bilal that she calls him an 'ignoramus' (12, 13). In *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*, Carol Tavaris provides an interesting example of a man called Arnold and his mistress Jane who gets angry because of his carelessness and leaving the bathroom in a mess when they stay together for a few days while his wife is away (17–19). Tavaris asks 'Why is this woman angry?' He lists many possible explanations of Jane's anger, but he points out that 'Your judgment about why Jane was so angry with Arnold, and whether she should be angry, will depend on your age, sex, marital status, and politics' (18). In other words, Tavaris suggests that one's explanation is a matter of perspective and viewpoint. Thus, the evaluation of Maya's anger with Bilal and Amma's anger with Maya, her daughter, depending on our politics and standpoints, but the meaning and significance of the affective

experience draws on its contexts and environments (12, 13, 44). For example, Maya's mother's angry reaction contrasts with her father's laughing response when they hear that Uncle Rahim Akbar has had a heart attack straight after their bride-viewing visit to see Maya as a potential bride for his son Dr Shah. Maya's father breaks the news with a bout of laughter that Maya has almost caused Dr Shah's father, Uncle Rahim Akbhar, 'a heart attaches with her talk about independence' (44). Maya was so pleased that the *alaap* has failed as her fears of having to make compromises have been dispelled; however, her mother argued, 'rising in anger,' that this infamy of (as autonomy and freedom-seeking woman) 'will ruin her!' as nobody in the community 'will want a girl who could kill her in-laws' (with that speech about women's rights) (44). In this single instance, one can notice fear deflated, laughter uncontrolled, and anger 'rising' in contrast (12, 13, 44). It is indeed a matter of varied perspectives and politics as Tavaris says (18).

In 'Understanding Anger,' Bill Cosgrave provides a positive account of anger. By foregrounding the cognitive, moral and psychological advantages of this feeling. He maintains that 'one's feelings have a cognitive element that gives one insight' and that anger 'contributes to our emotional and moral welfare in significant ways' (488). One can sometimes be 'morally right' to be angry because, as Cosgrave argues, 'anger or anger-motivated activity may be said to be righteous or rational' at times (488). Anger is thus not always in contradiction with reason and ethics, but rather it might support or originate in them. As Tomkins also argues, anger can be 'magnified' when it is activated along with, or later coupled with, another affect, as is the case when 'damage arouses both shame and anger, [and] limitation arouses both distress and anger' (*Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 752). To Maya, the expected limitation imposed on women's ability to travel alone, and shaming her for doing so without male protection and accompaniment causes her logical angry 'tone' and an 'assertively' articulated 'crisp' reply



that stopped her suitors in their tracks (5). According to Cosgrave, anger plays a major role in being proactive and taking the initiative to ‘defending oneself and one’s values’ (483). Like Tomkins, he reiterates the link between anger and norms and values (Cosgrave 481; Tomkins 755).

The equation between anger and values demonstrates that Maya’s anger is value-based to defend a principle. In the first instance, she is angry with shaming and limitation, and this implies a feminist value of freedom of choice and liberating women from patriarchal conceptions common in her community’s culture. This reminds us of the story of Seema and Raj, which was discussed and referred to in the previous two chapters (Chapters 4 and 5). In Maya’s second experience of anger, she defends Bengalis and the Bengali community she belongs to against Bilal’s denial of unbelonging and stereotypical views. This might ostensibly appear a paradoxical attitude or even a schizophrenic oscillation between identities, but the reality is, however, quite the opposite. Indeed, Maya shows a delicate and refined standpoint that supports constructive and targeted reappraisal of specific features of one’s own identity, values and belongings. Those targeted and questioned values are themselves what arouse Maya’s mother’s anger and fear that Maya may have transgressed and, in the process, incurred the social stigma of offending her suitors with her ‘talk of independence’ (44).

Judging women and wives as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ is an ethical problematisation of ‘spouse choice’ that recurs in this selection of novels (Allendorf and Pandian 441). That is, women are the object of a patriarchal gaze and ethical judgement throughout this text and other texts selected. For example, Rabindranath Roy in Gupta’s *A Sin of Colour*, Raj, Deepak and Akash in Syal’s *Life*, Chanu, Hamid and Mr Choudhury in Ali’s *Brick Lane*, and many men and families in Waheed’s *A-Z* all practise a gender-biased ethical judgement of women. Textual

examples of this abound in this novel. For instance, when Maya asks her brother Taj whether Naz, his friend, is marrying Tina, the Bengali girl he used to date in London, Taj looks ‘spluttered in disbelief and says in a bout of laughter:

“Please! He's going back home to marry some pure honey his parents have found for him!” I couldn't see what was so funny.

“Why... why would he do that? What was wrong with Tina? Aren't there enough Bengali girls here for him to choose from?”

“I hate to tell you this sis, but there aren't that many Bengali girls here that don't put out.” My look of outrage made Taj reconsider his words.

"And good girls like you scare guys into thinking they won't live up to high standards..."

"So they opt out. and go pick the prettiest of the crop back in Sylhet?" I felt Tina's pain, and I felt personality slighted. (18).

The exaggerated description of brides back home as ‘pure honey’ and the androcentric fears of British Bengali women not up to that standard of purity explains Maya’s outrage of the status quo that she seeks to satirise ridicule and change (18). This narrative of ‘standards’ that women cannot keep up to is ambiguous and inexplicable, as is the meaning of femininity discussed earlier in Chapter 2. As Lyotard says, this narrative knowledge comprising the sociocultural criteria of the ‘good’ and ‘pure’ ‘is a strange brand of knowledge, you may say, that does not even make itself understood to the young men to whom it is addressed!’ (21). Taj does not say what the nature of these ‘standards’ is, and it is left for textual analysis and literary criticism to uncover and articulate those unspoken rules of good womanhood. As also discussed in Chapter 2, de Beauvoir questions the idea of being or remaining a woman in *The Second Sex* as if, she sarcastically says, not all females were neither women nor feminine (13). The

questioning of the ambiguous meaning of woman and femininity is integral to the cultural narratives of the cultural identity.

But unlike Bilal, Maya seeks a targeted reformation of identity. Her encounter with Bilal signifies belonging in the face of full denial and renunciation of origins. Despite her own critiques and satirical accounts of the gender-biased practices and social norms, to challenge Bilal for denying his origins and identity shows her balanced views regarding specific identity changes that she seeks, a reconfiguration of specific cultural elements, a reformation, rather than a full revolution. To have a coconut identity, brown from the outside and white inside is thus offending and disapproved of (A-Z 14). In reference to the judgemental vertical conceptualisation of identity (figures 8-11), it is falling rather than rising to have a ‘coconut identity’ (A-Z 14). Taj’s statement ‘Why settle for easy girls with no morals when you can have a fair, pretty untouched honey?’ reminds us of Monica Ali’s Chanu in *Brick Lane*, who —upon his wedding and travelling back to London —is heard talking with his family over the phone about Nazneen and describing her as ‘an unspoilt girl. From the village’ (BL 9). Ali’s ‘unspoilt’ and Waheed’s ‘untouched’ or ‘pure’ point out strikingly similar ideas. Women of the diasporic community are therefore considered as touched and spoilt when they cross the borders; the touching here is related to identity, to transgress the limitations of the home cultural identity, rather than the act of crossing the borders. By crossing the borders, women seem to accomplish a transformation of sorts. The journey to the west is therefore and ironically and satirically, implies touching, spoiling and impurity of women; men are ironically immune to this process. Certainly, this is not what Ali and Waheed believe in; it is clearly the opposite that they seek to expose as ‘folly’ and ‘vice’ via irony and satire (Clark 30; Pollard 11).

The ethicising of bride choice and the subjugation of women to gendered and androcentric double standards is mocked and satirised not only in Waheed's *A-Z* or Syal's *Life*, but also in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. In *Satire*, Arthur Pollard maintains that the satirist is an insider-outsider 'minority figure' but not a 'declared outcast' (12). This is perhaps a reasonable description of the women who enunciate potent feminist satire of the social and cultural gendering of identity: they live on the margins, occupying a borderline position, both inside and outside culture and given identity, trying to usher in change. Take, for example, the fakir figure in Ali's *Brick Lane* (BL 296–97). Ali satirises the fakir by the exposure of his vanity and weakness, as opposed to his ostensible halo of strength, pompous grandeur and godliness. The supposedly uncanny and grandiose presence of the huge figure of the fakir with that long beard turns out to be funny (BL 296–97). Ali has the audacity and daring to venture and embarks upon a critique of symbols of society's religious identity and how religion is sometimes abused to the disadvantage of women and the benefit of men. In *Studies of Literary Modes*, Arthur Melville Clark, satire 'swings backwards and forwards, on an ellipse about the two foci of the satiric universe, the exposure of folly and the castigation of vice; it fluctuates between the flippant and the earnest, the completely trivial and the heavily didactic' (30). The uncanny feeling of fear aroused by the practice of exorcism and the conjuring up of supernatural powers and devils is invalidated by the deflation satire involves (Clark 30). Hasina and Nazneen live on the margins of their community, subordinate and 'subaltern,' to borrow Spivak's word, and so are the authors of these novels: they are both inside and outside a given culture and identity.

The crucial point to make here is that to critique and satirise must not be misconceived or equated with denial or rejection of roots and identity. Satirists might be called traitors, anti-society and social cohesion, or even threats to the national and social security of communities and countries. It is, however, only a game of politics, interests and power. The end of satire is

to teach, develop and change for the better, as Clark suggests (30). I see that as an ethico-aesthetical form of re-belonging, to reinvent and reshape one's identity: it is ethical because it implies an attempt to challenge ossified social and cultural fallacies, and aesthetic because it redirects such negative affects of anger and fear in a literary and constructive way. When Maya visits her family in Bangladesh, she says that she 'missed' life in Britain, which shows a dual and double belonging (131). Gupta's Reba reinvents her dejection and unhappiness in music and art, and so does Maya, who wins an art competition and, in that prize giving a party, she takes the opportunity while on the podium receiving her prize to propose to Jhanghir in the most unconventional way, saying 'Jhanghir Khan, will you marry me?' (241).

In Pollard's words, 'satire is always acutely conscious of the difference between what things are [the fallacious reality] and what they ought to be,' that is, between the status quo of misconceptions and fallacies and truth, between the continuation of the status quo and change (12). In patriarchal contexts, satirist women writers do in fact constitute a 'minority' in face of an androcentric universe (Pollard 12). Pollard is right to stress satire's role in the exposure of vanity when he maintains that the satirist does not 'exalt' but 'deflates' (12). Certainly, Maya's reference to Joy's sister-in-law being 'recently-imported' from Bangladesh is not simply meant for humour or a statement about the objectification of women as goods being 'imported'; rather, it is a technique to expose the social folly and bring about change. The change in question is a reconfiguration of diasporic women's social and cultural identity, which is 'based on their past experiences and future practices' and represented by 'complex affiliations with both British and Asian cultures, and in this sense, their identities are constantly changing, and constantly being negotiated,' as Kalwant puts it (37).

To sum up, identity is an abstract theory; it is exercised in daily life through our affects that are indeed reactions representing our values, belonging and profound convictions. In general, this chapter has discussed how fear and family relations and gendered norms interconnect with identity and belonging. Arranged marriage has been key to this chapter on Waheed's *A-Z*. The Viewpoints vary on this social practice vary depending on one's politics and social and cultural background. For example, Dr Shetty maintains that arranged marriage, a social phenomenon dating back at least two thousand years BC (3), is the solution to today's Western social problems; therefore, he advises, Western girls must embrace it in place of the sex-based love marriages, he says (80). Aguiar, on the other hand, points out that the specifics of social phenomenon vary according to given sociocultural contexts. Most arranged marriages however involve the so-called practice of 'brideviewing,' the help of friends and relatives, and the delayed contact between the bride and bridegroom until the wedding (181-82).

Waheed's *A-Z* is built on those key bride-seeing meetings, such as those with the families of Abu Ahmad, Bilal, Dr Shah among others. Out of obligation and reverence to her family, she ironically goes through embarrassing meetings fully aware that she would rather marry her soulmate Jhangir. While arranged marriage is not automatically labelled forced marriage, as Grillo argue, I have sought to expose the limited and false choice arranged marriages use to ward off 'forced'. On the other hand, Ayaan Hirsi Ali seems to build on her limited personal experience of forced marriage to jump to stereotypical generalisations of a very broad variety of societies and different communities, which reverts into similar unjustifiable narrative knowledge to the one she seeks to expose. But Balagamwala's and Weheed's critiques of the collective Bengali identity, the intergenerational conflicts, the gendered family relations, and identity politics is balanced, targeted and specific, which is commendable. Identity for them is plural and never black-and-white, as Ali sees it.

As Aguiar suggests, arranged marriage has drawn much academic interest and, given its importance to identity studies, it been debated for the insight it can provide about the integration of diasporans in the hostland (181-82). It concerns to Pande that the sociocultural practices and conceptions pertaining to arranged marriages are used to subjugate and oppress women who have no real freedom of choice, not only in the countries of origin but also in the hostlands (or new homelands) they have settled in (172). On the other hand, Devyani Prabhat attacks the idea of an imagined intact British community that is based on the culture of the majority, which contradicts the very liberal ideals and values of freedom Britishness is based upon (15). That is, Prabhat implies that the values arranged marriages draw upon for its life and continuity, as Stopes-Roe and Cochrane and Dr Shetty also argue (40; Shetty 1-4, 70-80), should be part of a collective sociocultural British identity (15). But anyway, the value system of arranged and traditional marriages, whether one supports or rejects, is now being gradually corroded, falling or at least in ongoing modification, given the intergenerational conflicts Allendorf and Pndian, and Kalwant Bhopal point out (79). Educated women also tend to reject arranged marriage and choose their own partners (36).

‘Fear and family’ in this chapter has been concerned with the meanings implied in the affective manifestations of fear as well as some related examples of anger, especially when these affects are aesthetically intertwined with and reinvented into satire and humour. Many seminal theorists and psychologist have written about fear and anger like Darwin, Freud and Tomkins. As discussed above, the fear-terror affect indicates a threat (‘real or imagined’) to the affected person’s safety, security, happiness or life (Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* 289–90; Tomkins, *Affect Imagery: Complete Edition* 932; Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 64; Blumenthal 16). Considering these meanings of the feeling and manifestation of fear, I have analysed such textual examples of fear as Maya’s

'biggest fear' at the very beginning of the novel (*A-Z* 1). It has been demonstrated that such affective experiences are related to gendered viewpoints and unevidenced conceptions, which give rise to groundless rather than reasonable fears. Marriageability, for example, is conceived of as time-based and gender-biased and women are asked to make compromises being chased by a socially and culturally constructed bugbear called age. The instinctive bear-threat-flee equation is invalidated when the bear is exposed as a bugbear, so to speak. The act of exposure and questioning has far-reaching reverberations and impact on the meanings of the individual's as well as the group's identity.

Furthermore, Maya's fears and anger are reinvented and redirected into irony and satire, which is an aesthetical representation of these negative affects and a tool to expose such social and cultural vice. Waheed's *A-Z* also shows that family, community or larger society are responsible for the creation and preservation of some gendered myths and practices and questionable narratives of fear such as travelling alone for women, spinsterhood, choice, choice in arranged marriages and woman-judgement marriage and life, and finally the limiting fear of family. This chapter also demonstrates how this text seeks to question these myths and practices, which are integral to the collective social and cultural identity. For example, the value system of arranged marriage is being challenged and gradually corroded. Since these values and norms are integral to identity, this analysis has also shown new trajectories and trends in the contemporary phenomenon of diasporic identities and belongings. Affect, gender and identity are clearly intertwined and closely related and relatable. This enmeshment shows that identity is being redefined and de-gendered to usher in gender equality, women's liberation and the rise of women's voices rejecting sexist conceptions and practices.



## Conclusion

The trope of identity in postwar Britain has drawn much academic interest, with renewed attention following the 1990 waves of immigration. Identity and belonging have been ever since a hot and controversial topic. But the identity that matters in this thesis, or perhaps at this time and age, is no longer the one captured by the biodata on our identity cards and passports, or the one ascribed to us by others in the outside world; the identity that matters most is rather one's own self-image, the internal and subjective sense of belonging. Designating identities and (un)belongings drawing on subjects' skin colour, gender, place of birth or abode, parental origins, dress code, food, cultural or a cultural norm or practice is a failing narrative, a reductive and misleading one, a narrative that can well be stereotypical and racial. Identity goes beyond appearances; it is an ideology on the one hand, and a feeling, empathy and identification outside borders and beyond limitations on the other; it is biology and psychology in the face of ideology, affect vis-à-vis ossified sociocultural beliefs, prejudicial misconceptions and uncontested patriarchal narratives of the collective identity. What matters is not an abstract theory of identity and belonging disconnected from practice, but the true sense of belonging, of feeling included, respected, valued and cherished, being man or woman, black, brown or white, no matter. This is how humanity rises above politics, and families and communities come closer stronger. This is not simply a thesis; it is a desire for change.

*A la mode de Spinozan* affects, this thesis is clearly affected and affecting, that is, provoked by the shortcomings in the current literature on the one hand and contributing to knowledge on the other. It is a reaction to the conceptual and methodological problems in the literature as outlined in the introduction. The six central debates on diasporic identities and

(un)belongings have been provocative because subjects of belonging and identity are objectified, and the difference is homogenised and thereby obliterated, be it sexual, social, cultural or otherwise. How could we speak of various and varied migratory experiences as diasporic for simply crossing the national borders and without a thorough analysis of the specifics of each experience? As *diasporic* is interchangeably used with *(im)migrant* and the latter with *refugee*, I have used *diasporic* lest language and its relevant concepts might lose their meaning and depth. For example, Moni's and Deben's experiences in Gupta's novels *Memories of Rain* and *A Sin of Colour*, respectively, are misread as diasporic and their journeys back home nostalgic, while in fact, they do not qualify for diaspora as theorised by such pioneering writers as Avtar Brah. Furthermore, *(un)belonging* has not only been used as an abbreviation of *belonging* and *unbelonging* but also as a plural concept of its own, a concept referring to an intricate dual act and affect. Thus, the question is not the *either-or* one of whether to belong or not to belong, but rather how to belong and unbelong at the same time; how to feel and enact (un)belongings in plural and global world of cultural identities.

The provocative question is thus how we can possibly initiate a discourse on identity without involving the subject of belonging. Is it not ironical for some diasporans to call for freedom in the street and oppress women at home? Would home still be considered *home* for the oppressed, the marginalised, the subaltern? It has been found out that it is not for Hasina and her mother, for Moni and Reba, and the latter's mother-in-law Neerupama as discussed in Chapter 5. The diasporic macrocosmic quest for equality and freedom in the wider British society should not obscure, cover up or de-prioritise diasporic women's desires and aspirations for liberation from sexist practices and norms within those same minority diasporic communities. Like charity, freedom of will, being and belonging also begin at home. These questions do not denote the fundamental problem per se but are symptoms of the real issue, the

twisted underpinning ideological envisagement, driven by self-interested and biased politics of identity and propaganda of abused Machiavellian ethics and language games. Yes, it is moving, affecting and provoking to see double standards and prejudicial narratives pass as absolute truths and disinterested moral values to dehumanise the human and objectify the subject. The current state of knowledge seems to be unable to cope and keep pace with the changing and sophisticated phenomena and politics of identity and belonging; it appears to be lacking in innovative interdisciplinary approaches and creative novel theories and viewpoints. Implementing the same postcolonial approaches and theories seems to regurgitate the same outcomes about different texts and variegated diasporic experiences, which is reductive, simplistic and sometimes outrageously false.

The key underpinning issue, the larger and overarching problem, is a conceptual and methodological one pertaining to the linear understanding of identities and belonging. The linearised understanding results in horizontal and vertical perspectives; the former underscores a static position or a progression between poles and zones of identification, while the latter foregrounds an external evaluation, a judgemental gaze typical of racists or sexists. Hence, dehumanisation prerequisites de-linearisation of the conceptualisations and workings of identities and (un)belongings, which is an overarching embedded mission. This thesis embarks and builds upon to critique and revoke position-based and judgement-based conceptualisations within and across communities, countries and societies. Diasporans are often objectified and homogenised as a collective other, as an object in relation to significant and more important subjects as centres of the discourse, be it Britishness, Indianness, Bengalianness, inbetweenness, or the position itself in a given location between poles and spaces of belonging and identification linearly imagined and conceived of.

As outlined in the literature review, diasporans are not the subject per se, the one that freely feels or enacts (un)belonging; diasporans as subjects of identity seem to be an underestimated and understudied topic, not to mention women who are twice marginalised, in the macrocosm of British society as well as within the microcosm of the diasporic community itself, as demonstrated for example in chapters 2 and 3. For diasporans, identities and belongings are either kindly given or forcefully taken, assigned and prescribed, criticised or moralised, and all such decrees and judgements come from the other's ivory tower in the outside world, the one external to the feeling subjective self. Diasporic women's voices here oscillate between obscured and obliterated in an already marginalised microcosm. British identity, both monocultural (exclusive) and multicultural (inclusive), has been the focal point of discussion, the met-asubject in the six main debates outlined in the introduction. Similarly, the position of the diasporic identity (rather than the diasporic figure per se) is problematised as the subject of the debate, envisaged linearly between two poles of identification, the British metasubject and the subaltern other, a position that is claimed and conceived of as stuck in between clashing and polar cultures, homes, times and places. Even in the discourse of cosmopolitan belonging, the celebration of chameleonic identities as cosmopolitan seems odd and self-contradictory when one deconstructs what chameleonism is and why it acts in a specific way or adopts false identities; it retrogresses to a discourse of exclusion and discrimination, rather than progresses to an ideal cosmopolitan and multicultural place. The ironic cosmoleonic belonging is an oxymoron that I seek to satire with a newly coin word to expose the contradiction. Furthermore, cosmopolitanism seems to be gender-biased; women's belonging, aspiration, desires and difference are underrepresented and ignored. The shortcomings and reductiveness here are the outcomes of old-fashioned interpretations using readymade theories. But are we not free to think and hypothesise otherwise, to unleash our

intellectual potential? That is what this thesis seeks to do despite the exceptional difficulties and numerous challenges.

Identity is plural, dynamic and fluid, rather than singular and fixed. The fluidity, dynamism and plurality of identity challenge the twisted conceptions of racists and sexists who conceive of identity as a singular entity or a singular collectively that moves and holistically backwards or forward, up or down (linearly). The racial thinking and imagination exposed in Syal's novels show that identity is deemed or desired to be static, and even when it changes and moves, it is thought to oscillate linearly between two absolute others (us and them, west and east, black and white) and be thus destined to fall or rise (vertical judgement-based conceptions), which produces the politicised ethical views of right. In a similar vein, the patriarchs and sexists (such as Chanu in Chapter 5) who condemn racism in British society ironically adopt the same linear conceptions of identity and belonging that foreclose change and freedom of belonging for diasporic women in the same community. Women are claimed to be good or bad, pure or spoilt, and belonging or unbelonging, which leads one to ask in protest: but what about (un)belonging of a plural, hybrid and multicultural identity? Can one not learn and unlearn, belong and unbelong, or simply (un)belong simultaneously? Syal's Tania and Waheed's Maya clearly and explicitly celebrate this amalgamation and the new possibilities they seek as British South Asian women in wider British society. By the de-linearisation of the conceptualisation of diasporic identities, new horizons and perspectives open up, and the objectified subject of belonging, as an act and affect, is reinstated as the centre, as a free subject, be it, man or woman.

Homogenising and objectifying the diversified subject of belonging is not simply antifeminist; it is antihuman in the first place; sexism and racism are perhaps side effects of an

ideological and stereotypical holistic viewpoint, for which service language is deployed and subjugated to create halos of sanctity, of untouchability, to inscribe a warning: THOU MUST NOT TAMPER WITH OR CHANGE; doing so will revoke your identity and invalidate your belonging. Such narratives of patriarchal and sexist cultural identities are to be questioned and challenged as every individual, man or woman, is or must be an autonomous subject of free will and choice. Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* has been an inspiration in this respect; it teaches us to use reason and scientific approaches to probe deeply into those groundless narratives and expose their void and vanity. Thus, the liberation of the oppressed, the dehumanised and the marginalised (especially women) starts perforce with the liberation of the mind of its shackles – social, cultural, ethical, ideological, psychological and political – with the exposure of vice and the Machiavellian ethicisation of the political and the biased immoral. In Chapter 6, for examples, the myths and fears associated with girls and women, with what they can and cannot do, should or should not do, as prescribed by the criteria of the conventional cultural identity, have been refuted. This demonstrates that there are many towers made of sand that we worship and idolise as buildings of eternal stone, but they collapse the moment we touch them with a questioning gaze. Language dominates the world, it coins realities and changes times, it frees and imprisons, and this thesis engages with knowledge with this full and unwavering conviction. It might have addressed a specific idea in a gendered and limited context, but our world is replete with fallacies unchecked and ideologies unquestioned; they still pass as truth.

Gendered identity politics and sexist (or racist) disbelonging constitute a surprisingly understudied area from an affective and subjective phenomenological point of view. The difference within difference is disregarded; the postcolonial voices foregrounding the rights to the cultural difference of the diasporic communities and minorities within the multicultural

British society are sometimes anti-difference (oxymoronic) when it comes to their own intra-community tensions and women's rights to freedoms of will, being and belonging. Most novels in the selection of texts discussed in this thesis refer to this point. For example, Chanu in Ali's *Brick Lane* boasts of being pro-education and anti-racism, but when his wife Nazneen decides to learn English, he prevents her from doing so; it is a question of power, of control, of an abused narrative knowledge of the good and bad, a question that lies at the heart of identity politics. His disinterest in or rejection of her desires to develop and revolve outside the orbits he draws is a sexist colonial desire, a desire for possession and perpetuation of those androcentric elements of the social and cultural home identity, the ones that privilege him as male. Thus. For men and women, identity is different, and so is home, which is far from being simply a physical place. Men seem to support the status quo of home (identity and culture) as a symbolic ethical code of practice, of being and belonging, a home that tends to privilege men and victimise woman in the name of preserving culture, social norms and identity. Therefore, to be selective in our attacks (anti-racism but pro-sexism) is unethical, non-scholarly and ironic; it is like preaching principles and values that one does not practise.

The aim of this thesis is neither to solve the problems of the world nor to claim a groundbreaking achievement. It is a humble contribution of an alternative point of view. It does provide some new insights and proposes a larger hypothetical re-conceptualisation of the tensions of diasporic identities and (un)belongings, but due to the limitation of scope, space and time, it only examines and discusses the gendered aspect of the cultural identity and the analyses in the body chapters seem to attest to and endorse the hypothesis made possible by the new perspective, the new approach. To reiterate, the problem is the two-dimensional linear understanding of identity and belonging, which prerequisites a vertical (|) or horizontal (—) backdrop, or let us say, a linear track upon which identities or belongings are superimposed,

assessed and judged; that is, the position (in or between poles of belonging, or between east and west) is given a value (backwards or forward, up or down, good or bad and so on). Hence, the question becomes no longer of identity and belonging but more of a question of ethics and politics. An alternative de-linearised three-dimensional re-conceptualisation (/\_) has been proposed in the introduction as a background against which the whole discussion of this thesis is conducted.

This conceptual and hypothetical understanding breaks the two-dimensional linearity by reinstating the diasporans as the centre and subject of their own belongings and identities. The result is a REW model that stands for diasporic, east and west, which is narrowed down to diasporic women, India/Bangladesh and Britain. The difference between linear and non-linear, or two-dimensional and three-dimensional perspectives is significant; the latter reinstates the individual (the diasporic woman in this thesis) as the subject of their identity and (un)belonging. This emphasis and foregrounding of subjectivity entail a phenomenological sympathy, a tool or an approach that helps delve into that subjectivity or emotional realm to externalise those person-specific points of view. Hence, Tomkins' affective theory comes to play and thereby, gender, affect and belonging interconnect and intersect to constitute an insightful GAB approach that has made possible this scholarly engagement.

It has been interesting to explore and discover the meanings and insights human affects can uncover as the Tomkinsian affect theory teaches us. Affect is thus the lens that helps one discern new meanings and realities of the troubled relationship between gender and identity, between men and women, between desires for change and rejection or resistance of change. Moni's disgust affect in Chapter 1, for example, shows an early sign of her implicit and deep-buried embryonic desire to forge a new belonging and identity that diverges from her



community's collective identity; this is confirmed when she rebels against her status quo, her husband and family alike, and redefines her being and belonging as a free and independent Indian woman. In Chapter 2, Neerupaman's and Reba's distress, dejection and tears denote gendered social problems of women's exclusion and objectification, of dreams, destroyed and desires lost, which contradicts with and invalidates the sense of belonging and homeliness. This same idea recurs in Chapter 5 as Rubpan loses hope and interest in the world and eventually gets mad like Gupta's Neerupama. Rubpan's daughter Hasina continues her struggles and agonies in an anti-woman androcentric environment, a home that feels like an exile.

The thematic concern in Chapter 3 is not the diasporic intra-community tensions but those with the wider British society of the 1960s and 1970s. This chapter demonstrates how the affect of pride foregrounds and celebrates the social and cultural difference and celebration of the Indian identity in the face of racial discrimination. The importance of this chapter (or text), which is the only one in the selection in which women are happy, included and respected, is that it conforms with the principles of individuality and specificity of diasporic experiences. This thesis upholds; it is a reminder and voice against any potential stereotypical generalisations about Indian or Bengali women being portrayed homogenously as oppressed and dehumanised by their communities. Chapter 4, 'shame and change,' is perhaps the heart of this thesis; the affects of shame and acts of shaming are closely related to identity and belonging; like disgust, the affect of shame can denote belonging and unbelonging. To be ashamed of something before someone indicates a desire to maintain bonds with the social others one is ashamed before, to share or seek a sense of intimacy and belonging to that social group. The same meanings of (un)belonging apply when one is not disgusted at a shared and common object of disgust. This affective disagreement with one's social group signals a voice of dissent, an implicit sense of unbelonging as is the case with Moni in Chapter 1. Thus, to be

or not to be ashamed, disgusted, distressed proud, angry and fearful is clearly a profound affective and the deeply subjective question of identity and (un)belonging.

Chapter 6 concludes the discussion with an attack against the baseless sexist myths and fears; fear is an affective mechanism designed to help humans and animals flee dangers to protect their lives from external threats. But the question in this chapter is not an actual bear, the real and tangible source of fear that is logical to flee, but the sexist bugbear or scarecrow, the unreasonable myths and fears and gendered narratives that feed on a metadiscourse of gender-biased code of ethics integral to the sociocultural identity. *A la mode de* Lyotard's critique of baseless narratives, these biased narratives have been deconstructed, satirised and refuted. Findings show that these fears, myths and sexist practices seem to be in a gradual decline, and many British Asian women have not only stopped believing in them but also started to attack and satirise them. Thus, this interdisciplinary approach of this thesis combining the three disciplines of affect theory, feminism and identity clearly show that affect, gender and belonging are closely inter-linked. That is, women's affective experiences are not simply a manifestation of static and self-contained emotional states but also (and more importantly) a representation of larger and wider social and cultural problems and contexts, of racial and patriarchal prejudices against women and diasporans in general. These prejudices are anchored in a metadiscourse of identity and belonging through which they are fuelled and justified. Like racists, patriarchs and sexists disregard the subjective experience of women, their affective realm that foregrounds their individuality, personhood and difference; the collective identity comes before women's belonging; the latter is always expected to follow, mirror and conform. By stressing the importance of affect the equation has been turned upside down; it starts with affect that shows the reality of women's belonging and the collective social and cultural identity

is expected to follow, to change, adapt and conform. That is, a woman's real sense of belonging comes first, and the group's identity should change and keep pace, not vice versa.

Women are thus in an ongoing battle for autonomy, independence, free will and choice to be and belong, to rewrite their identity and the meaning of British-Indianness or British-Bengaliness. The racists and sexists seem to fight on the same side of the conceptual war, the one that is linear and two-dimensional, while those fighting for freedom, self-determination, equality and difference seem to strive for a non-linear future. As discussed in the introduction, this thesis matters because of three interconnected aims: humanist (feminist), ethical and epistemological. It addresses the sociocultural feminist question of women's being free to be and belong, to be at home and at one with oneself, one's community and the wider British society in the outside world. Freedom is not only a word; it is a battle between right and wrong, a right given or taken with a revolution; it involves politics, ethics, sociology, culture and psychology. This thesis supports the cause of diasporic women's right to freedom of belonging by foregrounding their point of view, their voice and exposing the patriarchal counter-arguments, practices and politics which build on a sham narrative of identity ethics and myths. To support good social causes and change is an ethical and human duty for any writer; furthermore, to help clear some misconceptions and fight misinformation has an epistemological value, which is a noteworthy contribution to knowledge per se.

My participation is thus encapsulated by 1) the new interdisciplinary approach of affect, gender and belonging, 2) the extendable linear-versus-non-linear conceptualisation of identity and (un)belonging, and 3) the outcomes that reveal new meanings, trends and trajectories. Thus, this thesis constitutes a readymade stepping stone, a springboard for many potential future studies; extendibility is one of its key features. But in the larger scheme of things, this

contribution, whether deemed big or small, remains a humble addition to the world of knowledge, a drop in a sea, and only with a collective scholarly endeavour that the human community will be able to float, progress and prosper. Hence, it is vital to build on and constructively engage with and critique pre-existent work and research findings like these proposed in this thesis. Given the various challenges and limitations overcome, the ending of this thesis somehow resembles the endings of the women's stories in the novels discussed earlier in the six chapters. Moni flies back to India to stun everyone with the new woman in her; Niharika disappears with her boyfriend Daniel; Chila gives birth, and Tania throws Akash's passport in River Thames; Nazneen transcends her fears and limitations and skis freely with her daughters, sari-clad; and Maya surprises everyone, against all norms and expectations, proposes to the man she loves. These women reclaim their human right to freely be and belong, the socially and culturally obfuscated right to determine the trajectories of their lives and decide their own futures. This thesis has demonstrated how diasporic women are embroiled with a double fight for being and belonging because of their intricate position as women in a minority Indian or Bengali community within the larger macrocosm of the British society. Theirs is thus a quest for truth, reason and freedom beyond the limitations of cultural identity, and I think their voice has been heard.

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