
Historical Background

Britain and the United States have seen major waves of South Asian immigration since 1945. Both countries have, of course, always been nations of migrants. Britain has long had black and South Asian populations, yet – despite this rich history – the numbers of people arriving in the postwar period from South Asia and the Caribbean were unprecedented. This well-known historical process, which followed decolonisation in the migrants’ countries of origin, has dramatically altered the UK’s demographic configuration. According to the national census in 2001, Britain’s ‘minority ethnic’ population – composed mainly of British Asians and black Britons – increased by 53 per cent between 1991 and 2001, from 3 million to 4.6 million, with some 2.08 million people of South Asian descent registered in Great Britain.

As Dilip Hiro has shown, South Asians generally chose to emigrate to Britain for economic reasons, following the displacement brought about by Partition. They were responding to British demand for labour – doctors, nurses, and factory workers across industry – and they were able to move to the UK because they had British passports. Indeed, conditions were favourable for Indians and Pakistanis to move to Britain until 1962, when the first of a series of increasingly severe laws aimed at reducing immigration was passed. Hiro estimates that the numbers of South Asians in Britain ‘swelled from 7,500 in 1960 to 48,000 in 1961. And an almost equal number arrived during the first half of 1962.’ From the late 1960s, South Asians from East Africa also began arriving in Britain, and from the early 1970s, Bangladeshis from what had been East Pakistan.
While Britain adopted more draconian immigration laws, the United States relaxed the restrictive legislation which had generally ruled out South Asian emigration there. Indeed, America’s mid-twentieth-century increase in new arrivals from across Asia, as well as the Caribbean and Latin America, can be traced directly to its 1965 Immigration Act, which abolished the practice of quotas based on nationality, a system in operation since the 1924 National Origins Act and one designed to prohibit the entry of Asian immigrants. One of the effects of these changes to US legislation has been an increased Asian American presence. Estimated at 10 million in 1997, they are predicted to reach 40 million by 2050, which would amount to 10 per cent of the total US population; and according to the most recent US census of 2010, they are the fastest-growing population in the country. According to the previous US census in 2000, numbers of ‘Asian Indians’ came to 1.85 million, ‘Pakistanis’ to 209,273, and ‘other Asian’, which includes Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans, to 561,485. Such figures are strikingly similar to those of the UK – almost as though an even number of South Asians have emigrated to each country – but they clearly form a far smaller percentage of the US population in 2000 (281.4 million) than British Asians in relation to the UK’s demographic statistics in 2001: at 2.08 million, they formed 3½ per cent of the total population of 58.7 million.

As Vijay Prashad has noted, post-1965 South Asian immigrants in the US initially tended to be highly educated, often working as doctors, engineers, and scientists between 1965 and 1977, with some 83 per cent possessing advanced degrees. R. K. Narayan sees such immigrants as materially successful, but ‘lonely . . . gnawed by some vague discontent . . . In this individual India has lost an intellectual or expert; but . . . he has lost India too . . . a more serious loss in a final reckoning.’ Narayan’s negative and somewhat simplistic formula corresponds to a particular socio-economic profile and historical moment. In contrast to the educational and financial privilege which characterises the South Asian Americans he describes, arrivals since the mid-1980s have more often tended to be working-class, a phenomenon which has been explored by film-makers in particular.

The image persists, however, of a ‘brain drain’ of highly trained South Asians – and particularly Indians – arriving in America as foreign students or professionals and opting to stay, with the success of IT professionals in California’s Silicon Valley in the 1990s only reinforcing that stereotype. Perhaps this is because more South Asians continue to choose the United States over Britain for their higher education, to the extent that some British universities have publicly acknowledged that they are being left behind. An article in the Indian newspaper The Hindu from February 2006 estimates that in comparison with nearly 80,000 Indian students on
US campuses, there were only 17,000 in Britain. A number of reasons may, of course, account for this. With its greater number of universities and their state-of-the-art facilities, America is perhaps seen as more of a ‘market leader’ in education and – more saliently in this context – it offers far more scholarships to overseas students.

Above all, however, the United States is a global superpower in ways to which Britain can no longer lay claim. Kirin Narayan addresses this in her novel *Love, Stars, and All That* (1994), set in 1980s America (and discussed in Chapter 1 of this study), when she writes that:

>a map of the world extended in pale pastels . . . It was the world but not the familiar one that Gita knew from geography classes . . . In this, the United States displaced crested England at the centre. Golden and spacious, land of the free, the United States was flanked by two broad oceans. Canada offered salutations, and South America bowed to her feet. Bulky handmaidens, Asia, Africa, and Europe seemed to be bending toward her.

Moreover, in Sandip Roy’s short story, ‘The smells of home’ (1996), Savitri’s father tells her that whereas the US is ‘the richest country in the world’,

>Wordsworth’s England is long dead. In your grandfather’s time people would go to England for then . . . [it] still had power and glory. Now it is truly a nation of shopkeepers. And most of [them] . . . are Indian anyway.

At the same time, it remains an open question whether South Asians have flourished more – in economic, political, social, religious, and artistic terms – in the US or in the UK. Is it possible to argue, furthermore, that communities in one or the other nation have developed in more diverse and vibrant ways? Other questions persist, too, especially in relation to cultural production: for instance, how to explain the exponential rise of South Asian literary works in the Anglophone world since the 1970s or the greater number of South Asian women writers in America, but of South Asian men writing in Britain. Is it possible to identify a specific South Asian textual aesthetic – in terms of literary form and strategies – or to claim particular affiliations between writers? And why are certain authors more widely read, taught, and researched than others? This Introduction will consider general cultural traffic between South Asians in Britain and America before framing specific literary genealogies and the transatlantic choices made by writers. It will conclude by outlining the scope of this book and its scholarly rationale.
South Asian Atlantic Literature, 1970–2010

Comparing British Asians and South Asian Americans

Several commentators – generally American rather than British – have situated South Asian migration since the 1960s in transatlantic terms. Meena Alexander states in an interview, for example, that whereas many of the Indians who have come to America have been middle-class, the pattern of immigration in Britain has been more working-class.21 Sandhya Shukla argues that ‘the lack of a colonial past and the accessibility of national languages of inclusion in the United States construct . . . Indian Americans’ migrant subjectivities in ways that are distinct from their British counterparts’; in a similar vein, M. K. Chakrabarti has claimed that, unlike the US, Britain is characterised by ‘too much colonial complication’ to feel ‘entirely at ease with its own multiculturalism’.22

On the whole, in fact, mainstream Britain tends to come off worse than the United States in these comparisons, whether in specifically historical terms23 or in relation to the contemporary period, with South Asian American commentators portraying it, rather crudely, as essentially inimical to people of South Asian descent. Writing in the 1990s, Sheila Jasanoff contends that:

[as] a South Asian woman who has lived, studied and worked in America . . . for 40 years . . . [the] constant ambiguity [of ethnic difference] . . . has always attracted me about life in America. In other places where I have lived as an alien – for example, Britain and Germany – the line of ‘belonging’, like the lines of race, class and gender, is more rigid and less easy to cross.24

Another critic, Susan Koshy, suggests that traditionally the UK has been less welcoming to South Asians than America, because it has ‘little ideological space for nonwhite immigrants’.25 She is nevertheless careful to draw attention to the limits of South Asian inclusion in the United States. Rajini Srikanth has taken this idea further, displaying a markedly pessimistic, post-9/11 attitude to the issue of national belonging for Americans of South Asian descent.26

Extrapolating from British Asian and South Asian American literary accounts, Monika Fludernik argues that South Asians are more likely to flourish in America than the UK, where, she claims, ‘social unrest is endemic’.27 This interpretation of South Asian Atlantic politics is problematic, however, since it relies on an outdated contrast between an ahistorical, raceless American Dream – which fails to take into account either the United States’ troubled racial past or the complexities of its post-9/11 present – and a bleakly postcolonial and stereotypically racist Britain. On
the other hand, Feroza Jussawalla writes that for South Asians in both Britain and America in the late 1990s, ‘home’ tends to be ‘defined for them as their place of origin by their features, appearance, and accent. After twenty-three years in America, people still ask me, “Where are you from?”’.28 Within this transatlantic comparison, the US and the UK fare equally badly while, later in the same essay, Jussawalla contends that modern-day ‘Baboo’s who historically attempted to ‘(re)make themselves in the colonisers’ image’ are still kept in their place with ‘“no admission” to the club’ in either Britain or America.29

Striving for evenhandedness, she cites Farrukh Dhondy’s claim in 1988 that

Britain is a very stratified society. More so than America, I think . . . [and] Indian caste, religion and regionalism . . . [are] almost as stratified as . . . in Britain . . . The difference is . . . in India, nobody is brought up to believe they can move out of it . . . Whereas in Britain everybody believes in the Western dream . . . The class distinctions of Britain have been fluid since the fifties . . . one was ruled by a Conservative Party that has absolutely nothing in common with the Tories of the 20s. They had a grocer’s daughter who was virtually the Queen. A miner’s son is in charge of the Labour Party. (32–3)

Some twenty years on, the novelist Mohsin Hamid, who is Pakistani-born and has lived in both Britain and the United States, posits some key differences, post-9/11, between what he calls ‘the Pakistani American and the Pakistani British experience’. His main contention appears to be that in Britain, people of Pakistani descent are less socially integrated than their US counterparts but feel more able to express their political views.30

Within South Asian Atlantic literature since 1970, the vision which emerges is of two countries which are both racist, yet offer the promise of social mobility. This is not to deny the importance of continuing socio-economic differences between South Asians in Britain and the US. South Asian Americans remain highly educated – according to the 2000 census, over 63 per cent of Indian Americans and over 54 per cent of Pakistani Americans have a bachelor’s degree or more – and their levels of professional success are attested by similarly high figures: just under 60 per cent of Indian Americans and over 43 per cent of Pakistani Americans work in ‘management, professional and related’ occupations.31 Clearly, many are thriving economically, and the same cannot always be said for British Asians.32 It is, moreover, difficult to dispute the contention among American commentators that Britain has traditionally lacked a recognised immigrant mythology. Yet one could also argue that it is the
very complexities and difficulties of being South Asian in Britain which have allowed British Asians to carve out a firm cultural position for themselves: a position which is stronger in some ways than that of South Asian Americans.

Britain’s public policy of multiculturalism is often critiqued as outmoded and separatist, yet Koshy has pointed out that, from the 1980s onwards, it empowered black and Asian artists in Britain. She notes that public funding of multicultural projects encouraged the growth of a black identity in independent filmmaking, theatre, and literature. Black workshops like Retake and special programming on Channel 4 have been crucial to the emergence of filmmakers like Ahmad Jamal, Pratibha Parmar, and Gurinder Chadha.33

One wonders whether this multicultural approach has worked in favour of British Asian artists in ways that America’s traditional emphasis on cultural assimilation has not. The postcolonial dynamics associated with Britain, rather than America, may have resulted in further creative tension for British Asians through the need to shout louder because of direct histories of racism and imperialism. And whereas ‘Asian’ in the American context traditionally means ‘East Asian’, in Britain, ‘the long history of British involvement in the subcontinent and [South Asians’] significant numbers in the minority population have led to the popular conflation of Asian with South Asian identity’. 34 In other words, British Asians are exactly that – Britain’s ‘Asians’ – and, as we have seen, relative to the total population, there are far more of them in Britain than America. For these reasons, British Asians in many ways occupy a more prominent place in the British national consciousness than South Asian Americans do in US culture.

South Asian Cultural Traffic between Britain and America

Some critics have read the move from Britain to the US made by the Indian-born novelist Salman Rushdie in the late 1990s as exemplary of particular cultural flows within the South Asian diaspora.35 Thus Bruce King argues that

Rushdie and his main characters moving to New York was [sic] part of a process which was driven by the emergence of the United States as the world’s main power and its entrepreneurial capitalism as the source of global liberalisation. Significantly, to establish the fame and international credentials of its
Introduction

main characters, part of . . . [Hanif Kureishi’s 1990 novel] *Buddha of Suburbia* also takes place in New York.36

Several prominent British Asians – the actors Naveen Andrews and Parminder Nagra, for example – are also now based in the United States, while some important South Asian academics (for instance, Homi Bhabha) have made this move too. Such migration arguably confirms America’s greater cultural influence over Britain than vice versa, and this can be seen as part of a wider one-way traffic, especially in terms of racial politics.

Since the Civil Rights era, certain American discourses on race and ethnicity have heavily influenced Britain’s cultural vocabulary:37 the ideas behind the Black Power movement and the writings of James Baldwin, Malcolm X, and Angela Davis as models of anti-racist resistance in the UK; the immigrant model of Jewish America for British Asian (and also white British) writers and comedians; and even particular terms such as ‘white flight’, ‘white trash’, and ‘model minority’ which one encounters increasingly in discussions of race and class in the British context. America’s pervasive influence on the British Asian writer Hanif Kureishi, for instance, has been discussed by a number of commentators.38 The American-based critic Kwame Anthony Appiah in fact positions Kureishi’s second novel, *The Black Album* (1995), in direct relation to American culture:

The book’s other interest is its vision of the deepening penetration of British life by American culture . . . Kureishi belongs to a generation of English writers who seem to draw their sustenance from this side of the Atlantic. In an emblematic moment, Shahid imagines that an English country house is ‘the sort of place an English Gatsby would have chosen’ . . . For . . . Kureishi, even Englishness now exists only as a construct of the American imagination. The many literary and musical references are almost all to American works – with the odd gesture to an older Western high canon; even the jejune chronicling of sexual manoeuvres reads like an (admittedly unsuccessful) homage [sic] to Henry Miller or Philip Roth.39

Some commentators have connected America’s importance for British Asians with the lack of South Asian role models in the UK at a particular historical moment. In a review of Sarfraz Manzoor’s memoir, *Greetings from Bury Park: Race. Religion. Rock ‘n’Roll* (2007), the British Pakistani novelist Suhayl Saadi notes, for example, that Manzoor’s 1980s teenage obsession with the American musician Bruce Springsteen came from ‘the absence of Pakistani working-class heroes with whom he could identify’,40 for ‘Pakistani’, one might read ‘British Pakistani’ here. American music
continues to resonate for young British people across the racial spectrum and the impact of black American youth culture through musical forms such as rap and hip hop is particularly well recognised.

If one applies this idea of US cultural dominance to British Asians – and, more specifically, to British Asian artists – it will become apparent that the transatlantic cultural traffic which has flowed from American life does not take a South Asian diasporic form. Indeed, one might argue that in terms of popular culture, South Asia itself – in the form of Bollywood cinema – has exerted a far greater influence over British Asians than anything specifically South Asian American. Perhaps this is generational. South Asian American cultural production was, after all, only at a fledgling stage – and thus little known – when younger British Asian writers and artists were coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s. But if the American literary, cinematic, or musical role models available to British Asian artists were not South Asian ones, the reception of ‘minority’ writing in the United States in the 1970s did create conditions of reception which widened publishing opportunities for later British Asian writers. As Susheila Nasta has argued, ‘the enormous commercial popularity of Black Women’s writing as a saleable commodity in the USA . . . encouraged publishers to give space to the retrieval of black and Asian women’s histories in Britain, with a view to setting up a similar market in the UK’.41 Such classic Asian American works as Maxine Hong Kingston’s novel *The Woman Warrior* (1976) also belong to this discourse.

It would appear, then, that transatlantic cultural influences have generally operated in one direction – from the US to Britain – and that such influences have not been particularly South Asian. Yet British Asians have, to a certain extent, affected American culture – most specifically in its South Asian forms – through film and literature. In other words, a South Asian transatlanticism can be posited, and this study makes reference to cinema and television because these areas of cultural production have played an important role in the development of British Asian and South Asian American artistic expression. In the British context, they may even be said to explore ideas before literary works do: British Asian literature can appear to lag behind popular culture. At the very least, ideas about Asian Britain often find a wider audience through film and television, as Ruvani Ranasinha has observed.42 Cinematic works like Stephen Frears’s *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) or Damien O’Donnell’s *East is East* (1999) – scripted by Hanif Kureishi and Ayub Khan-Din respectively (and discussed in Chapter 3) – have arguably been more groundbreaking (and controversial) than any solely literary text.

One could argue that globally, films by and about British Asians have
also generated more popular and commercial interest in South Asian diasporic life than any South Asian American cinematic or televi
tual work has. Kureishi’s script for Laundrette, for instance, was nominated for British and American Academy Awards and won the 1986 New York Film Critics’ Circle Award for Best Screenplay; and although the film cost only £600,000 to make, it earned $15,000,000 worldwide.\textsuperscript{43} East is East and Gurinder Chadha’s Bend It Like Beckham (2002) were also international hits. South Asian American films, by contrast, have generally garnered less commercial success. It is revealing in this regard that, in a review of Krutin Patel’s low-budget American film \textit{ABCD} (1999), Trevor Johnston places it within a transatlantic framework when he argues that ‘this saga of second generation Indians in America sorting out their cultural identity is plain fare, compared with our own Hanif Kureishi and \textit{East is East}.\textsuperscript{44}

‘Plain fare’ does not do justice to the understated complexities of \textit{ABCD}, and British Asian cinema should not be reduced – either in this study or by film critics like Johnston – to Laundrette and East is East (or Bend It Like Beckham, for that matter). But it is intriguing that Johnston’s remarks rely on transatlantic comparisons. Such parallels may be simplistic – Johnston does not really prove how \textit{ABCD} might be viewed in relation to Laundrette or East is East beyond their most obvious thematic similarities – but they do show that the growth in British Asian artistic works has opened up a broader frame of specifically transatlantic diasporic reference. One of the lead actors in \textit{ABCD} has even drawn on this discourse himself. Faran Tahir, who plays Raj in the film, argues that it is

one of the first [films about South Asian Americans] . . . it’s an important story because there’s so much stuff that comes out of England about the experience of South Asians there, which is similar but not the same and . . . this [film] addresses the conflicts and the problems that South Asians confront . . . in this set-up, which is quite different.\textsuperscript{45}

That similar terms of reference are shared by British Asians has been revealed by Nagra in a recent interview.\textsuperscript{46} Such cultural traffic can also be traced in literary terms, as I will demonstrate at greater length in the next part of this discussion.

\textit{Literary Genealogies}

The idea of South Asian diasporic ‘anxieties of influence’ has been well rehearsed, particularly as it relates to V. S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie.\textsuperscript{47} Indeed, the intergenerational parallels which come to mind are supported
South Asian Atlantic Literature, 1970–2010

by writers themselves through the use of a familial language to refer to each other. Thus the South Asian American writer Meena Alexander thinks of these literary relationships in ‘generational terms’

because when I first came here [America], I would read the work of older writers: Bharati [Mukherjee] and others. And now I’m very interested in the work of younger South Asian artists . . . I come out of many traditions, and so I use the word ‘familial’ to think about diaspora, because you feel in a vibrant relationship with a community . . . the diaspora is very important to me emotionally. It’s saying, ‘You’re part of this wave, this group of people, all making art with language. You’re not alone’.48

Older writers clearly offer a model with which to argue as much as pay homage. In keeping with this paradigm, critics have traced particular lines of descent within South Asian diasporic writing: G. V. Desani, as well as V. S. Naipaul, in relation to Rushdie;49 Rushdie in connection with Kureishi;50 Naipaul and Rushdie vis-à-vis the South Asian American writer Bharati Mukherjee;51 and Kureishi’s impact on later British Asian writers.52 I will now discuss in more detail how these literary genealogies relate to Kureishi, Mukherjee, and a newer generation of South Asian diasporic writers, touching on the issue of transatlantic anxieties of influence, an area which remains under-explored in critical terms.

Amitava Kumar notes that when he asked Kureishi how he might be different from a writer like Naipaul . . . he began by talking of the similarities between his father and Naipaul’s father. Both men had an interest in education and in writing. Kureishi said, ‘They were fastidious men who wanted to be journalists, but they were bitter . . . failed men’. Then he outlined the differences between himself and Naipaul . . . He didn’t have Naipaul’s interest in India . . . Kureishi said of Naipaul, ‘He has a basically conservative sensibility, and I don’t mean politically . . . Also, I like women . . . and I’ve always been interested in sex and relationships between men and women’. Naipaul’s books fail, Kureishi said, because Naipaul ‘can’t write about relationships between men and women, and he can’t write about marriage, which seems to be the central institution of the West’.53

Despite Kureishi’s conscious desire to distance himself from Naipaul and his writerly concerns here, the older author refuses to disappear and in fact emerges twice in Kureishi’s family memoir My Ear at His Heart (2004): once when Kureishi’s cousin Nusrat meets Naipaul in Karachi and later when Kureishi himself visits Naipaul following the death of his father, Rafaushan
Kureishi. In *My Ear*, Kureishi’s verdict on Naipaul and his work remains as disparaging, however, as that offered in Kumar’s interview:

there was no Pop or bawdy in Naipaul’s work; he lacked [Philip] Roth’s sexual fizzle and 60s attitude; he seemed depressed, an out-of-place immigrant wandering through the postwar city unable to find a door he had the nerve to walk through. He was disappointed by everything he saw, determinedly so.54

In contrast to Kureishi’s dismissals of Naipaul, King has claimed that Naipaul’s work has been enabling for a later generation of Indian-born writers including Farrukh Dhondy and Amit Chaudhuri:

Naipaul . . . showed others . . . how to write significant fiction about the former colonies, people of colour, and hybridity without resorting to the clichés of European writing, and that it was possible to see the interest and problems of local life without nationalist stereotypes.55

In stylistic and thematic terms, Mukherjee might be added to this list of writers influenced by Naipaul, at least early on in her career. Returning to issues of writerly self-presentation to a greater extent than Kureishi, she has openly acknowledged Naipaul’s impact on her in a series of position pieces. Initially, she sees herself as ‘a pale and immature reflection’ of him,56 as she relies on a distinctly Naipaulian vocabulary to discuss exilic status. In later essays, however, she disavows Naipaul’s ‘state-of-the-art expatriation’, claiming that it has ceased to inspire her.57 Such statements arguably reveal more about the shifting contours of Mukherjee’s public self-fashioning than they do about the actual form and content of her work, which has continued to draw on tensions between ‘expatriation’ and ‘immigration’.58

As is well known, Rushdie has exerted a major influence on Indian writing in English and on the literature of the South Asian diaspora. In a sense, then, later writers cannot afford to ignore either him or his impact. Kureishi and Mukherjee have openly positioned themselves in relation to Rushdie – much as they have with Naipaul – while suggesting a complex mixture of influence, admiration, and ambivalence. Thus Kureishi has often recalled that it was Rushdie who encouraged him to write the novel which became *Buddha of Suburbia*.59 Similarly, *Black Album* draws inspiration from Rushdie, or rather from the tumultuous real-life events surrounding the reception of Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988). At the same time, Kureishi has emphasised the differences between Rushdie and himself, telling an interviewer that Rushdie’s
writing is not like my writing in any way . . . We see the world differently . . . It would have been fatal for me to try to write like him. When I read Midnight’s Children for the first time, I was seduced by it and I thought, This is a great way to write, but he’s from Bombay . . . and I’m from the [London] suburbs and I had the sense to realise that I couldn’t . . . be like him.60

Mukherjee’s strategy of both aligning herself with Rushdie, and separating herself from him, shows that (like Kureishi) she feels compelled to engage with him. She claims to ‘admire . . . Rushdie enormously’ and even devotes an entire essay to a discussion of his work;61 but, as a whole, this is a complicated debt rather than a straightforward act of literary homage.

One can also view South Asian Atlantic writing within the context of Jewish American literary models. Mukherjee has paid tribute to such older writers as Henry Roth and Bernard Malamud, and her own fiction can be linked in thematic terms and in its bid for vernacular experimentation to the particular American tradition of early twentieth-century immigrant assimilation narrative as practised by such authors as Mary Antin and Anzia Yezierska.62 We saw earlier that Appiah reads Black Album in relation to Philip Roth, and that Kureishi himself invokes Roth as a means of contextualising Naipaul. Kureishi has also compared the reception of Laundrette to that of Roth’s literary début, Goodbye Columbus (1959), and – as he has with Rushdie – often made reference to Roth’s professional support and advice early in his career, as has Alexander.63 Beyond Roth, Kureishi’s work demonstrates the influence of a series of other Jewish American writers, a point I have discussed elsewhere.64

What about the impact of Kureishi and Mukherjee on later writers? Kureishi’s role is in many ways easier to map. Although Ranasinha has shown that Dhondy blazed a trail for later British Asian writers,65 it is Kureishi who is more often regarded as a cultural pioneer by artists and critics: British Asian, black British, white British, and South Asian American. Sukhdev Sandhu argues that ‘if there is one figure who is responsible for dragging Asians in England into the spotlight it is Hanif Kureishi’, while Kumar has recalled that ‘when I read Kureishi, a whole generation of earlier writers who had written about race suddenly seemed dated – and old’.66 Vijay Mishra believes that Kureishi’s 1980s film scripts gave the diaspora not only images of its own self but also images that require high levels of proactive critical engagement in the first place. Moreover, these bodies are now exposed to general public consumption and are no longer
Introduction

commodities that circulate, like Bombay films, only in the diaspora itself . . . Kureishi’s films effectively began this process of engagement.67

A number of commentators have argued that when Kureishi appeared on the literary scene, his material – the lives of young British-born Asians, of mixed race or of entirely South Asian descent – was unprecedented. Randeep Ramesh has claimed, for instance, that Kureishi was the first writer to identify what he calls ‘the British Asian experience’, while Frears, the director of both Laundrette and the Kureishi-scripted film Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (1987), similarly believes that ‘nobody had ever written from that perspective before. It was astonishing because [Kureishi] got it so right. That someone could be . . . so confident about it, make the jokes, be on the inside.’68 This assumption that Laundrette is transparently mimetic of complex realities is problematic,69 as are the ideas that Kureishi was the first writer to address such themes and that a monolithic ‘British Asian experience’ exists. But it is difficult to argue with the notion that Kureishi’s work was instrumental in redressing the chronic under-representation of British Asians in all forms of cultural production in the 1980s. Indeed, Kureishi has himself recalled that when he was growing up in the 1960s, South Asian people simply did not appear on television; as he has put it, ‘Asian people were not seen as part of Britain.’70

Kureishi’s work has received international, mainstream acclaim: following the plaudits which greeted Laundrette, Buddha of Suburbia won the Whitbread Prize for best first novel and was translated into thirty languages. One could argue that these successes have altered the way the work of a later generation of British Asian authors has been received. Suhayl Saadi thanks Kureishi in the acknowledgements to his short fiction collection The Burning Mirror (2001), while Niven Govinden’s novel Graffiti My Soul (2006) seems remarkably similar to Buddha of Suburbia with its drug-taking, mixed-race, teenaged hero, resident in the home counties, whose father has left his mother for another woman. Govinden is even labelled ‘a modern-day Hanif Kureishi’ on the book’s cover: a mark of Kureishi’s ongoing importance in relation to younger writers.71 This creative impact has been felt transatlantically, too. The South Asian American novelist Jhumpa Lahiri has been quoted as saying that Buddha of Suburbia ‘opened up something for me: I thought here’s something I could do too’,72 and in Chapter 3, I argue that some of Lahiri’s recent work owes a debt to Laundrette. Another American writer of South Asian descent, Ameena Meer, thanks Kureishi in Bombay Talkie (1994), her novel of ethnic return to 1980s India (which I discuss in Chapter 2), for his creative courage and innovation;73 and she includes a character called Kureishi, along with
themes of miscegenation and alternative sexuality (already familiar from Kureishi’s early work), and a chapter entitled ‘The rainbow sign’, which is the name of Kureishi’s essay (itself a quotation from James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* [1963]) discussing his ‘roots’ trip to Pakistan in the early 1980s. Both Sandhu and Nasta have discussed Kureishi’s ‘paternal’ status for younger writers, and it is a mark of his cultural importance that this has transcended boundaries of nation, gender, and race.

Like Kureishi, Mukherjee has prolifically explored questions of nation and identity, in this case since the early 1970s, producing seven novels, two collections of short stories, two long works of non-fiction, and numerous essays and articles. Just as Kureishi has done, Mukherjee has claimed that when she began writing, there was an absence of South Asian diasporic models, especially within America; she has argued, furthermore, that American literature was lacking in stories about people like her. Indeed, she has said that the ‘urgent’ nature of her creative material – Indians in America – compelled her to commit these themes to paper as soon as she began writing seriously. Mukherjee is, in fact, no more the first South Asian American writer than Kureishi is the first chronicler of British Asian life. But, as several critics have noted, she ranks as the first major South Asian American literary voice. One can trace this to Mukherjee’s American reception: the breadth of publications in which she has been reviewed, interviewed, and anthologised; the prizes she has been awarded; and the canonical status accorded her through her prominence on university teaching syllabuses and as a subject of academic study.

Mukherjee’s views on South Asia and the United States – her Orientalist attitude towards India and her open enthusiasm for assimilation into the American mainstream – have often proved contentious. Kureishi has also courted controversy but, unlike Mukherjee, his screenwriting has made him a popular cultural figure rather than simply a literary one. In contrast to Kureishi, Mukherjee’s work, with its particular first-generation concerns, has less obviously influenced a later wave of writers, especially those who are US-born or raised. Indeed, one does not find more recent South Asian American writers acknowledging and thanking Mukherjee as they do Kureishi. Yet they cannot fail to be aware of her achievements; and her work has, like his, paved the way for the current flowering of South Asian literature in the US by helping to create a wider public appetite for it – and for writing by South Asian American women in particular.

It is difficult, for instance, to imagine Lahiri’s historic Pulitzer Prize win in 2000 for her literary début, *Interpreter of Maladies*, without thinking back to the literary breakthrough represented by Mukherjee’s novel *Jasmine* (1989). However problematic this latter work is, it gained an unpreceden-
edly wide readership for South Asian American writing and is still widely researched and taught. Just as Naipaul did for her, then, Mukherjee may have energised younger writers by providing them with a paradigm to challenge and reject. Some writers have more consciously recognised this process than others. Alexander, for instance, has recalled that, when she first lived in America, she

read . . . Mukherjee’s work carefully and it was very interesting to me. Through her, there was a particular kind of vision of what it meant to be American and it was useful . . . because she clarified . . . the possibility of living in America and being a writer and having a place in the society. But . . . she has this model of jettisoning the past . . . whereas for me, that doesn’t make sense at all; in fact I have, if anything, tried to remember.79

Kureishi has rightly observed that ‘there are as many versions [of life] in the Asian community as there are in any other community’. 80 But in a body of writing which is still relatively young, certain creative ‘versions’ have garnered higher levels of attention than others. Beyond Kureishi and Mukherjee, writers like Lahiri in the United States and Monica Ali and Meera Syal in Britain have taken on the mantle of representing South Asianness. As Ranasinha has noted, Syal is ‘one of Britain’s best-known Asians’.81 Indeed, she is often perceived by the white mainstream as a kind of official spokesperson for all things British Asian. Thanks to her many accomplishments – as writer, actor, comedian, and media personality – and because of her general visibility, it is often Syal’s account of British Asianness which is offered up for wider public consumption. Similarly, Ali’s bestselling novel Brick Lane (2003) has generated a disproportionate degree of interest at the expense of other works.82 At the same time, as with Kureishi and Mukherjee, the success enjoyed by these younger authors appears to be acting as an enabling force for newer British Asian and South Asian American writers.

Transatlantic Choices for South Asian Diasporic Writers

Kureishi ultimately rejects America for Britain (or rather London), while Mukherjee overtly discards Britain in favour of the US. In a 1993 interview, she recalls that ‘it was especially exciting to go to America because England . . . was associated with all that I had left behind. Because I had gone to school in England as a child I was aware of what it felt like to be a minority, and I knew I didn’t want that.’83 Her stance in some ways recalls that of the African American writer Frederick Douglass, for whom, as Paul
Giles has argued, American national identity is valorised by appropriating and then rejecting an image of Britain. 84 Both writers also make a point of eschewing South Asian countries (Pakistan for Kureishi, India in Mukherjee’s case).

Younger British Asian writers generally favour the UK over the US. Like Kureishi, their British birth means that they are invested in the place, however complex that position is, and America is not necessarily given serious consideration. Recent South Asian American authors prefer the United States to Britain but, in contrast to British Asian writing, their work engages with ideas of South Asianness in the two sites more explicitly. Alexander, for one, has discussed her predilection for the United States over Britain on a number of occasions. She suggests, in fact, that the US is more liberating for South Asian writers, arguing that her early poetry was

written in a very tight form . . . the tightness . . . was hurting me. It was something I’d learned from the British model – the kind of controlled language. Whereas one of the most exhilarating things about coming to America and writing poetry here is that it’s much more open about the possibilities of what a poem can be and I . . . find that wonderful as a writer. 85

Elsewhere Alexander has spoken of the strains imposed on South Asian writers by the British canonical tradition. 86 And speaking about North America more generally, the Sri Lankan Canadian novelist Michael Ondaatje has similarly recalled that

in Canada you felt you could do anything. I wouldn’t have been a writer if I’d stayed in England . . . [Canada] wasn’t like England, where you feel, what right do you have to do this because of John Donne and Sir Philip Sidney. England felt repressive in the 50s. 87

Mukherjee has also positioned her writing in this way, although rather more aggressively. 88 These visions of British literary culture as staid and disempowering are challenged, however, by the vigour of recent British Asian writing, which is in some ways more flexible than South Asian American literature through its greater thematic sweep, formal inventiveness, generic variety, and use of comedy. Such writers as Kureishi, Saadi, Ali, Hari Kunzru, and Nadeem Aslam do not appear to have felt constrained by British linguistic and canonical burdens, although one notes that Alexander, Ondaatje, and Mukherjee belong to an earlier, newly postcolonial generation: each one was born before 1952 (although Kureishi
was born not long afterwards, in 1954), each began life in South Asia, and each spent time in Britain before making the move to North America.

On the one hand, the presence of a worldwide South Asian diaspora is taken for granted in a number of literary texts, just as it is in such films as Mira Nair’s *Monsoon Wedding* (2002), where relatives from around the world arrive in Delhi for a family wedding, and in Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice* (2004). On the other hand, however, several South Asian American literary works go beyond the assumption of a global diaspora to ask whether life is better for South Asians in Britain or the United States, as I will discuss more fully in Chapter 1. Meanwhile, other writers pay little attention to the choice of America over Britain – or Britain over America – and in a number of these works, the US or UK are, in fact, bypassed altogether. In such cases, when either is referenced – as, for instance, England is by Lahiri when she draws on her own childhood experiences in Croydon – such moments are usually brief. But not all of these authors know both countries, and indeed, emigration to Britain or America does not necessarily entail any implied rejection of the other nation. Thus, for some of the real-life South Asian American figures in S. Mitra Kalita’s work of reportage, *Suburban Sahibs* (2003), it is simply a given that the US is the industrial economy *par excellence* and the obvious place to which one would emigrate, especially when family members are already there and significant South Asian settlement has taken place. On this latter point, British Asian communities can be viewed in similar fashion, in both fact and fiction.

To what extent, then, can one talk of South Asian Atlantic literature? As this study will argue, South Asian writers continue to draw strength from transnational – and specifically transatlantic – positions. We have already seen that, where they are invoked, transatlantic cultural flows operate on multiple levels for these writers. By pitting the US against the UK, national concerns can be further interrogated, concerns which are of particular relevance to diasporic peoples. Writers show that for South Asian migrants, it has sometimes been a choice between the UK and the US, despite the global reach of the South Asian diaspora. The decision to remain in Britain or America or to move between the two – and the ongoing, explicit sense of a transatlantic community of interests that this creates – thus provides an important discursive space in which to interrogate key thematic questions. When British Asian and South Asian American writers do not engage overtly with transatlantic issues, their works still correspond and speak to one another in a number of suggestive ways through aesthetic and ideological ‘parallelisms’; and the aim of this study is to explore the discursive possibilities and literary convergences encouraged by this growth in South Asian literature on both sides of the Atlantic.
A number of recent scholarly monographs have mapped literary expressions of changing South Asian migration and settlement in important ways. Yet Koshy’s 2002 article, ‘South Asians and the complex interstices of whiteness: Negotiating public sentiment in the United States and Britain’, represents a rare academic attempt to compare South Asians in Britain and America. Her article concerns South Asian Americans and British Asians in a media and legal, rather than a literary, context and indeed the transatlantic development of South Asian diasporic cultural production generally remains an under-explored area. Sandhya Shukla’s *India Abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Postwar America and England* (2003), which includes literature in its discussion; Monika Fludernik’s essay ‘Imagined communities as imaginary homelands: The South Asian diaspora in fiction’ (2003); and Gayatri Gopinath’s *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (2005), which ranges across film, fiction, and popular music, are in fact notable exceptions to this rule.

Although critics and reviewers are increasingly reading individual British Asian works alongside South Asian American ones, the growing discipline of transatlantic studies has seldom applied itself to patterns of Asian migration or literary responses to such demographic movement. Literary scholars working within this field – which examines ‘a geographic area, a location of material and economic exchange, and a metaphor for the transmission of aesthetic and ideological forms’ – have traditionally focused on works produced in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, as Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson has noted. This is not to suggest that current scholarship does not consider more recent literary works. Indeed, within explorations of an Anglophone Atlantic, contemporary British and American texts – produced by white and black (but not Asian) writers – increasingly provide grounds for comparison, as does the phenomenon of present-day literary figures who have left Britain for the US (and, less frequently, vice versa). Despite such a wealth of critical material within transatlantic studies, South Asian diasporic writing as an Atlantic literary phenomenon has been overlooked, while South Asia itself has occupied an understandably central position within studies of this body of writing. Although I acknowledge its centrality here (particularly in Chapter 2), I also seek to offer a more triangulated model, whereby South Asian ancestral space interacts with transatlantic networks and crossings.

An extended consideration of this œuvre in transatlantic terms is necessary in part because of the rapid growth in the primary literature itself, in part as a result of the critical acclaim many writers have received, and in...
part as a response to rising popular and academic interest in these works. South Asian Atlantic Literature therefore addresses this under-researched area by examining a representative range of works – across different genres, particularly prose forms (the novel, short fiction, essays, life-writing), but also referencing works of drama, and key films and television programmes – produced in America and Britain between 1970 and 2010, contending that this is where and when the modern explosion of South Asian immigrant literature has principally occurred. Fiction, in particular, remains the book’s chief focus because novels and short stories – rather than poetry or drama – are still the medium most often chosen by writers themselves.

If many of the issues discussed in recent and contemporary South Asian American literature bear a striking resemblance to those explored in British Asian writing, this points to the importance of reading such writing comparatively. Mark Stein has noted that literature increasingly transcends national boundaries both thematically and aesthetically, and in terms of its production and reception; he goes on to posit that unless authors and texts are studied within a comparative framework, writerly affiliations and intertextual connections across culture and ethnicity will remain hidden. In this study, I will consider the preferred formal and aesthetic modes of South Asian Atlantic authors, their use of intertextuality, and the persistence of particular ‘anxieties of influence’. By analysing the work of well-known writers, as well as those whose work has yet to receive proper scholarly attention, South Asian Atlantic Literature aims to make a useful contribution to several fields of inquiry: contemporary British and American literature; postcolonial literary studies; debates surrounding transnationalism, race, and ethnicity; and transatlantic, diaspora, and Asian American cultural studies.

The book is divided into four main chapters, which are organised thematically. The topics under discussion have been carefully selected as especially reflecting the concerns of transatlantic South Asian writing. In the first chapter, I consider questions of home and nation. Such ideas, a well-recognised feature of postcolonial debates, continue to be crucially important, both politically and culturally, to South Asian writers in Britain and America. Indeed, whether they are first- or second-generation, writers consistently use home to raise provocative questions about changing Western societies and the place of ethnic South Asians within them. If – as some critics have claimed – transnational status is taken for granted in much diasporic writing, how, then, can we account for the enduring significance of national identity for many of these writers? And how can home remain both an issue and not an issue for them? In Chapter 1, I intervene in existing postcolonial scholarship by rethinking the inherent
tensions of home as material and ideological space across a range of South Asian Atlantic texts, where the continuing resonances of this idea need to be further analysed and understood.

Chapter 2 addresses themes of travel and return by dealing with what happens when South Asian immigrants go back to the ancestral homeland. What political questions are raised by such ‘return-of-the-native’ moments, and to what extent is gender a factor? This chapter also interrogates the notion of travel and ‘return’ for a second generation which has never set foot in the South Asian motherland. Building on the examination of home and nation in Chapter 1, I consider the dialectical importance of these questions within diasporic literary works, where a precarious balance is often struck between how writers critique South Asia and their keen attention to the shortcomings of the adoptive nation. This is complex psychological territory, treated unsentimentally and comically by British Asian artists, whereas South Asian American writers and film-makers often use such themes to reflect with greater seriousness the sacred status of the ‘roots search’ in American culture. Despite the thematic prevalence of travel and return in recent works from either side of the Atlantic, this rich subject has yet to receive proper scholarly attention in studies of South Asian diasporic literature and film, an imbalance this chapter will seek to redress.

In Chapter 3, I focus on racial mixing. This is another surprisingly under-researched area in discussions of South Asian diasporic literature and cinema. Offering reasons for why so many of these writers explore either interracial relationships or the mixed-race subject (or both), this chapter extends the book’s consideration of national and cultural identity by analysing these ideas within a wide selection of texts from Britain and the US. It argues that, beyond autobiographical imperatives, a more radical and utopian project is at work, whereby writers use tropes of miscegenation in their bid to create brave new multiracial nations and rewrite the traditionally racist discourse associated with this issue. Showing that this interest in the progressive possibilities of racial mixing actually belongs to a much longer transatlantic tradition, the chapter also reveals the tensions and controversies surrounding this recurring theme in South Asian Atlantic literature.

Chapter 4 examines the repeated emphasis on food and eating across this body of writing, a topic which – on the basis of titles alone – has ostensibly become a tired means of depicting South Asian diasporic life. The notion that such material has itself become clichéd is, of course, more problematic. Following the book’s earlier discussions of national identity, domesticity, and race, this chapter proposes that the central cultural role traditionally played by South Asian foodways makes it dif-
Introduction

It is difficult for diasporic authors not to write about them. Exploring a series of culinary ‘parallelisms’ which appear throughout transatlantic South Asian literary works, I highlight some important distinctions between the treatment of food in British Asian and South Asian American texts. I contend, moreover, that if South Asian food is regarded as thematically familiar in an artistic context, it remains yet another under-examined aspect of academic work on South Asian diasporic literature as a whole, despite a wider scholarly interest in food. And I ask how food has come to be seen as stereotypical in South Asian cultural production and who perpetuates these putative clichés.

In the Conclusion to this study, I look at the future of British Asian and South Asian American literature. Situating this body of work within the context of genre, prize-giving, and the literary marketplace, I raise questions about how these works are read and received and suggest that, despite an exuberant range of new writing, a few individual works are still being made to appear representative, thereby inviting a disproportionate level of attention. The popularity of certain works at the expense of others can mean that particular, and in many ways familiar, ideas about the South Asian diaspora remain enshrined in British and American national consciousness. Such success arises to some extent, then, from a failure on the part of writers and publishers to move beyond the treatment of apparently familiar themes. At the same time, each mainstream success creates greater interest in – and potentially more nuanced awareness of – the complicated fabric of South Asian diasporic communities.

Returning to my earlier claim that after Kureishi’s Buddha of Suburbia, British Asian – rather than South Asian American – literature has had a greater international impact, the Conclusion asks whether this situation is now changing, thanks to the growing popularity and critical acclaim enjoyed by a new generation of South Asian writers in the United States. Although many authors in both nations are still published by small, little-known press, the recent appetite for South Asian cultural productions in both Britain and America appears, if anything, to be energising and encouraging other writers. This in turn is creating increasingly complex literary genealogies which move across class, gender, national, and ethnic boundaries but which also suggest that it is all the more important to understand this writing within a transnational – and transatlantic – frame.

NOTES

1. Fryer, Staying Power; Visram, Ayahs; and Visram, Asians.
2. See Fryer, Staying Power, pp. 372–86; and Hiro, Black British, pp. 120–5.
3. Such labels as ‘British Asian’ and ‘South Asian American’ are inevitably problematic, since they collapse the rich distinctions – ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic – between different communities. But in a UK context, ‘British Asian’ arguably has wider currency than other designations (for example, ‘South Asian British’), while ‘South Asian American’ – rather than, say, ‘Indian American’ – is the umbrella term in widest circulation in its own national setting. These terms – like ‘minority’, ‘second-generation’, ‘immigrant’, ‘non-white’, ‘ethnic’ – have been perceived as exclusionary and disempowering because they arise from the need of hegemonic white societies to maintain a centre and a periphery. At the same time, this study is concerned with the specifically South Asian nature of this body of writing and retains such markers for that reason. ‘South Asian’ is often critiqued as an imperfect designation, since it brings together people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepalese, and Bhutanese descent; see, for instance, Chakraborty, ‘Will the real South Asian’, p. 125. For want of a better general term, however, I will deploy ‘South Asian’ throughout this study – and in the transatlantic literary context as defined here, this will generally mean Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi, rather than Sri Lankan.

4. Data on ethnicity were not collected from Northern Ireland. The Chinese community in Britain numbered a much smaller 247,403 people and those categorised as ‘other Asian’ totalled 247,664. ‘Minority ethnic’ groups (including a further 677,117 people of ‘mixed’ ethnicity) amounted to just under 8 per cent of the overall population of 58,789,194. See n.a., ‘Ethnicity: Population size’. Information for the most recent UK census (2011) is currently being gathered and in any case falls outside the time period covered by this book.

5. Hiro, Black British, p. 121.


8. Bangladeshis have a far longer history in Britain than this would suggest; see Adams, Across Seven Seas; Visram, Ayahs; and Visram, Asians.

9. In the early twentieth century, South Asian migration to the United States was mainly confined to small numbers of Punjabi Sikh men who settled in California. See Mazumdar, ‘Race’, pp. 29–30; and Takaki, Strangers, pp. 294–314.


11. Takaki, Strangers, p. 493; and see Humes et al., Overview, pp. 4–5.

12. See Reeves and Bennett, We the People, p. 3. I am relying on this earlier report because a more detailed statistical breakdown of specific Asian groups in the US based on the most recent census data (of 2010) has yet to appear.


Introduction

16. See, for example, Mira Nair’s *Mississippi Masala* (1991); Richard Linklater’s *SubUrbia* (1996); and Ramin Bahrani’s *Man Push Cart* (2005).
18. See Suroor, ‘Chris Patten’; and compare Narayan, *Monsoon*, p. 137, where the UK is not even a consideration for ambitious Indians pursuing postgraduate study opportunities in the United States.
29. Ibid., p. 21.
31. Reeves and Bennett, *We the People*, pp. 14, 16.
32. See Modood et al., *Ethnic Minorities*. According to the report’s findings, 80 per cent of ‘Pakistanis and Bangladeshis . . . live in households with incomes below half the national average’, although it also notes that ‘African Asians . . . are more likely than whites to earn more than £500 a week . . . and Indian men are well-represented in professional and managerial occupations’; see n.a., ‘Landmark’.
34. Ibid., p. 39.
44. Johnston, review of *ABCD*, p. 3.
45. Patel et al., ‘Audio commentary’.
46. Thus she notes that ‘in England, it feels like there’s a lot more [cinematic
and televisual] material to be had . . . There were more British Indians . . . writing their own work and getting it made – instead of other people writing what they thought those experiences were. America still has some catching up to do in that regard’; quoted in Patterson, ‘I’ve had such a blast’; and compare Manzoor, ‘I get to sit’, where South Asian American actor and comedian Aasif Mandvi sees British television as a ‘decade ahead’ of the US in its representation of South Asians.

47. I refer, of course, to Harold Bloom’s well-known phrase to describe the sometimes agonistic relationship of younger writers to older and more established ones; see Bloom, Anxiety. For Naipaul’s impact on Rushdie, see, for example, Gorra, After Empire, pp. 144–8, 169–72; Nasta, Home Truths, pp. 9, 154–8; and Wood, ‘Enigmas’, pp. 77–92.

49. Gorra, After Empire, p. 136; Nasta, Home Truths, p. 140; Stein, Black British, p. 171.
50. Ranasinha, Hanif Kureishi, p. 87.
51. Alam, Bharati Mukherjee, p. 140.
52. Ranasinha, South Asian, p. 270.
56. Blaise and Mukherjee, Days and Nights, p. 299.
57. Mukherjee, Darkness, p. 2.
59. See, for example, Ashraf, ‘A conversation’.
60. Ibid.
62. The broader influence of Jewish America on South Asian American literature can be gauged by the recurrence of Jewish characters in such novels as Kirin Narayan’s Love, Stars, and All That (1994); Bapsi Sidhwa’s An American Brat (1994); and Meena Alexander’s Manhattan Music (1997).
64. See Maxey, ‘Life in the diaspora’, p. 24n.
69. Compare Ranasinha, South Asian, p. 237, where she asks ‘how can Frears (or anyone else) confer this authenticity?’
71. Govinden, Graffiti, front cover. Kureishi’s Buddha of Suburbia has, moreover, been used as a benchmark in reviews of other contemporary British Asian
writing; see, for instance, the Mojo review quoted on the back cover of Manzoor, Greetings. In this memoir, Manzoor feels the need to acknowledge the importance of both Rushdie and Kureishi, but goes on to argue that they were not role models for a young British Pakistani boy ‘who was not born into wealth and did not have a mixed-race heritage’; ibid., p. 171.

73. Meer, Bombay Talkie, n.p.
75. Stein writes that the black British novelist Diran Adebayo has ‘remarked that his writing has been enabled by . . . Hanif Kureishi’; see Stein, Black British, p. xv. Zadie Smith has also discussed the personal impact of his writing; see Donadio, ‘My beautiful London’.
78. Lahiri was the first Asian American and the first writer from a South Asian background to win a Pulitzer Prize in the fiction category.
80. Quoted in McCabe, ‘Hanif Kureishi’, p. 47.
81. Ranasinha, South Asian, p. 247.
84. Giles, Virtual Americas, p. 16.
85. Quoted in Tabios, Black Lightning, p. 207.
87. Quoted in Jaggi, ‘Soul’.
89. In Nair’s film, Britain’s absence as a point of departure or potential destination for Indian diasporic communities is noticeable. Family members are instead returning from, or planning to take up residence in, America, Australia, and Dubai. For a discussion of the film’s transnational politics, see Banerjee, ‘Traveling barbies’, pp. 448–70. In Nair’s Mississippi Masala, the Loha family’s fifteen years in Britain are effectively erased, both in narrative terms and, at the start of the film, by the extra-diegetic device of a camera moving over a map from Kampala, Uganda, as point of origin to the final destination of Greenwood, Mississippi, with Britain only briefly referenced on the way.
90. See Lahiri, Interpreter, pp. 173–4; Lahiri, Namesake, p. 212; and Lahiri, Unaccustomed, pp. 135–6, 144–7, 159–73.
91. I am, of course, adapting Paul Gilroy’s well-known phrase, ‘Black Atlantic’;
see Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*. At the same time, this study is not intended as another theoretical response to Gilroy’s influential work, but rather as a specifically literary study invoking aesthetic currents within a particular transatlantic framework. It is also not the first to reformulate Gilroy’s phrase and apply it to South Asian transnational currents; see, for example, Desai, *Beyond Bollywood*, pp. 2–3, 6, 24, 48, 55, where she deploys the term ‘Brown Atlantic’ as a way of considering South Asian diasporic cinema.

92. Such ‘parallelisms’ are defined as ‘two writers working on similar ideas, divided by a nation and an ocean’ in Beer and Bennett, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

93. Nelson, *Reworlding*; Innes, *A History*; Nasta, *Home Truths*; Sandhu, *London Calling*; Procter, * Dwelling Places*; Srikanth, *World Next Door*; Stein, *Black British*; Wong and Hassan, *Fiction of South Asians*; Ranasinha, *South Asian*; and Mishra, *Literature*. Such studies generally concern themselves either with Britain – and often ‘black’ Britain more widely – or America, although surprisingly few scholars have analysed South Asian American literature as a whole; and critics appear more interested in literary history and retrieval than in interpreting the contemporary moment. Mishra’s study does consider South Asian diasporic writing in transnational terms, but works with a smaller selection of (more canonical) authors than this book – notably Naipaul and Rushdie – and he devotes space to the Caribbean, Canada, and the Pacific rather than focusing on Britain and America. While ambitious and important, Mishra’s study thus offers a different emphasis and argument to mine.


95. Shukla, *India Abroad*; Fludernik, ‘Imagined communities’, pp. 261–85; Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*. Fludernik does little to develop her transatlantic comparisons, while her claim that British Asian writers present the UK more negatively than South Asian American authors depicting the US is a questionable one. Shukla’s historical and anthropological investigation is – like Desai’s *Beyond Bollywood* – unusual in its status as a book-length, scholarly work which considers South Asians in Britain and America comparatively, but it contains only one chapter on literature, which focuses on a few key writers rather than on South Asian Atlantic writing more widely. The transatlantic focus of Gopinath’s impressive study, meanwhile, compares South Asian cultural production in Britain with that of Canada to a greater extent than the US.

96. Two recent works in particular have been read alongside each other: Ali’s *Brick Lane* and Lahiri’s *Namesake*. For examples of comparative discussions of these novels, see Mishra, ‘Enigmas’, pp. 42–4; Kral, ‘Shaky ground’, pp. 65–76; and Dasgupta, ‘Locating “home”’, p. 80.


98. Macpherson, *Transatlantic*, p. 5. That this has largely been the focus of transatlantic literary studies is reflected in such journals as *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations*, *Atlantic Studies*, and, to a lesser extent, the more historically and politically orientated *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*. 


Introduction


100. Stein, *Black British*, pp. 17 and xv respectively.

101. In my choice of more well-known writers to discuss in the chapters which follow, I have included Naipaul and Rushdie, but deliberately focused on them less than other established authors, since they have received more scholarly attention than, for example, either Kureishi or Mukherjee.