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CHAPTER 3

BRAVE NEW WORLDS? MISCEGENATION IN SOUTH ASIAN ATLANTIC LITERATURE

Introduction

In 1952, Lord Beginner, the Trinidadian calypsonian, claimed that interracial marriages in Britain constituted a growing social movement. His song, ‘Mix up matrimony’, contends that:

- Mixed marriage is the fashion and the world is saying so
- Lovers choosing partners of every kind they know
- This is freedom from above
- . . . to grab the one they love . . .

The races are blending harmoniously
White and coloured people are binding neutrally
It doesn’t take no class to see how it come to pass
Coloured Britons are rising fast.¹

This commonsense paean to interracial love – which celebrates a British society and a global scenario in which ‘mixed marriage’ is normal, rather than especially forward-looking or transgressive – suggests that problematic social and political issues are simply not at stake. The logical conclusion of such a position is the idea that mixed-race people² (referenced by the phrase ‘coloured Britons’) are representative of this new national template – and even of a new world order.

In his critique of the same song, Ashley Dawson interprets the text in gendered and colonialist terms,³ since the proponents of this ‘mix up matrimony’ are African and Caribbean men marrying white women, a point made unmistakably through Lord Beginner’s reference elsewhere
in the same song to Seretse Kharma, ‘chief of the Bamangwato people in Bechuanaland, who was driven into exile for marrying a white woman’. Dawson reads ‘coloured Britons’ as black British immigrants, rather than their mixed-race children, and he sees the song as proposing a kind of naively felt tribute to Britain as the ‘mother country’ through its eager desire for assimilation through interracial matrimony. Indeed, the official sanctioning of such marriage, by national, even divine, authority, is implied through the phrase, ‘this is freedom from above’.

Dawson’s argument raises the important question of whether, in white-dominated societies such as the United States and Britain, interracial relationships have signalled assimilation into the mainstream – a rejection of ancestry, even a form of ‘selling out’, on the part of the person of colour – or radicalism through the crossing of sometimes rigidly policed racial lines. Although ‘race’ is often recognised as a social construction, it is clear that human beings rely on such racialised physical markers as skin, hair, and eyes in order to categorise each other and thus to negotiate the world. Such material classifications can be questioned and confused by the biological result of interracial partnerships: the racially mixed subject. In many ways, then, nothing exposes the continuing ideological power of ‘race’ – as well as the latent, persistent anxieties which underpin it as a concept – more than miscegenation. Does racial mixing therefore signal conservatism by reinscribing the whole premise of racial categories or does it remain a subversive, oppositional move?

Numbers of interracial marriages involving South Asians are still relatively low in Britain, while – according to the US census of 2000 – 293,754 South Asian Americans (out of a total of 2,195,518) are racially mixed. Regardless of the implications of official statistics – which appear to signal that South Asian miscegenation is commoner in the US than in the UK – racial mixing remains a powerful idea in South Asian diasporic cultural production: a liberatory means for the creative artist to imagine new physical and social possibilities in the bid to create brave new multiracial nations. Such artists’ reasons for exploring this subject can be autobiographical, too: they mine their own experience of interracial relationships or of being mixed-race. Thus such biracial British Asian writers as Hanif Kureishi and Ayub Khan-Din, and South Asian American literary figures such as Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, and Jhumpa Lahiri – all mothers of mixed-race children – consistently deploy tropes of miscegenation.

Following Salman Rushdie, Mukherjee has championed the ‘mongrelisation’ of Western societies, while Kureishi and Khan-Din have turned the mixed-race identity of their characters into a badge of pride,
thus rewriting the traditionally racist discourse of ‘half-caste’ and other derogatory terms associated with racially mixed people. Rejecting the negative ‘between worlds’ stereotype of the ‘tragic’ biracial subject – of which the American figure of the ‘tragic mulatto’ is a particularly well-known variant – such identities instead become a blueprint for new forms of British and American nationhood, in a manner which, in its paradoxical blend of the matter-of-fact and the radical, recalls the utopian vision of ‘Mix up matrimony’.

The literary and cinematic presentation of interracial relationships as a social panacea is nonetheless problematic, not least because of the assimilationist principles underwriting such treatments, which are generally reliant on a white party. Indeed, the recurring theme of miscegenation in recent, popular works by or about South Asians has generated controversy, particularly where artists themselves are mixed-race. Thus Yasmin Alibhai-Brown has attributed the success of Monica Ali’s novel *Brick Lane* (2003) to its author’s membership of ‘a new breed of preferred “ethnic” writers . . . mixed-race, au fait with Oxbridge, not too dark or troublingly alien’. Hari Kunzru and Zadie Smith, the latter a novelist of mixed Jamaican and white British parentage, are also included in this apparently elite literary club. Alibhai-Brown nevertheless praises Rushdie, who is Cambridge-educated, and the biracial Kureishi because their work apparently explores ‘transgressive ideas’. This shift into a discussion of the kind of material deployed by writers does not, however, disguise the implication behind Alibhai-Brown’s remarks: that, in a pigmentocratic sense, lighter-skinned British Asians are more likely to win favour from a white-dominated media establishment and publishing world. If this line of thinking is to be believed, then such industries are reinscribing old British colonial patterns in India whereby, for instance, paler-skinned Parsis and Anglo-Indians – the latter a specific mixed-race community with a long history – were favoured over darker-complexioned Indians, to whom they felt superior, and were rewarded with higher-ranking jobs. I will return to this question of modern-day pigmentocratic dynamics in the conclusion to this chapter.

Daniel Kim has argued that ‘a certain sense of racial “belatedness” . . . frames the attempts of Asian American writers to write themselves into a literary landscape largely shaded in black and white’. Ideas about miscegenation in both America and Britain have similarly been ‘shaded in black and white’, despite the long history of miscegenation in India itself; the presence of distinct interracial Indian communities in America; the growing numbers – and distinct history – of biracial South Asians in both countries; the well-established presence of mixed-race South Asian
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writers, particularly in Britain; and the enduring interest of transatlantic South Asian artists in racial mixing. And in spite of the increasing volume of Kureishi, Mukherjee, and Lahiri scholarship, and a burgeoning popular and academic interest in different forms of miscegenation in recent years, this subject remains surprisingly under-researched within discussions of South Asian diasporic literature and film.

Attempting to address such scholarly neglect, this chapter will extend the ideas of national and cultural identity considered in Chapters 1 and 2 by analysing the representation of interracial relationships and biracial people within a wide selection of recent South Asian Atlantic texts. It will examine the engagement by artists with the paradoxically utopian and dystopian ideas which traditionally characterise works about miscegenation to argue that this interest in the progressive – and alarming – possibilities of racial mixing belongs to a much longer transatlantic tradition, and that this aligns recent South Asian diasporic writing and cinema with older works by white, black, and East Asian creative artists in both countries.

Before tackling these questions, however, I will briefly establish a broader cultural context for miscegenation in the United States and Britain in order to identify more closely the particular handling of this subject in South Asian diasporic works. I will then analyse the differing treatment of interracial relationships within recent British Asian and South Asian American writing and film, before moving on to the theme of mixed-race identity. The chapter will thus distinguish between the particular social, historical, and ontological questions which relate to the racially mixed subject of South Asian descent and the ways in which writers and, to a lesser extent, film-makers use the separate, yet related, trope of the interracial relationship.

An Overview of Miscegenation in the United States and Britain

It is well documented that historically, interracial relationships and, in particular, people of mixed race were pathologised in Western societies. In the United States, these attitudes found expression through a raft of state laws prohibiting interracial marriage, although only where white people were involved. Although such legislation has never existed in Britain, the two nations overlap in their historical reliance on scientifically racist modes of thought and through the impact and legacy of such ‘theories’. These ideas include the claim that biracial children would represent a physically and mentally weaker ‘third race’; the specific associations of laziness, sexual promiscuity, disease, sterility, poverty, and homelessness with racially mixed people; and the connection between miscegenation
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and immorality, sometimes expressed in overtly religious terms. Prejudices concerning poverty and homelessness were sometimes fulfilled, since life prospects could indeed be bleaker for mixed-race people in Britain and America between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. And the popular link between miscegenation and illness, both physical and mental, was sometimes suggested by biracial people themselves. Thus the British-born, mixed-race Chinese North American writer Sui Sin Far (Edith Eaton), who died in 1914 at just forty-nine, argues in her autobiographical essay ‘Leaves from the mental portfolio of an Eurasian’ (1909) that her biracial status has led to intermittent ‘nervous sickness’ as the result of racism, social ostracism, sexual harassment, and economic insecurity.

The US has a much longer domestic tradition of miscegenation than Britain: from its well-known history of black–white mixing, particularly in the context of slavery, to Native American métissage to mestizo Latino peoples to biracial Asian Americans or hapas. Arguably, racial mixing remains more commonplace in America than Britain, which has a comparatively short history as a racially diverse, and indeed multiracial, society, and this may be why more academic work has appeared on miscegenation in the US context. At the same time, some British commentators have contended that the UK’s rapidly growing number of racially mixed people amounts to a higher proportion of the population than in the US.

But the very fact that in America, specific words – hapa, mestizo, métis – exist for different types of mixed-race people reveals the longevity and complexity of this national history. Indeed, as is well known, the term ‘miscegenation’ itself originates from the notion of black–white mixing in the United States although, perhaps unsurprisingly, this very issue of language is sensitive and problematic. For one thing, terms such as ‘miscegenation’, ‘racially mixed’, and ‘multiracial’ are polysemic and, as such, ambiguous. Should ‘miscegenation’ refer to interracial relationships or to those of mixed race or to both? Given its specific black/white American history, how easily can it be applied to different kinds of racial mixing? Some commentators have argued that ‘miscegenation’ is in any case both pejorative and outdated, part of the pathologising mentality outlined above. The word even begins on an unpromising note through ‘mis’, a prefix with implicitly negative connotations. ‘Racially mixed’ and ‘multiracial’ are used by commentators to refer to those from several racial backgrounds, yet one also hears such terms being deployed to suggest racial diversity and multiculturalism more generally.

Despite its inherently problematic nature, terminology to discuss this subject has also changed in positive ways with such terms as ‘biracial’, ‘racially mixed’, and ‘multiracial’ largely replacing the animalistic,
dehumanising language – for instance, ‘half-breed’ and ‘mongrel’ – traditionally applied to the mixed-race subject.26 ‘Half-caste’ – another widely used, derogatory, and now discredited term – is particularly relevant to my discussion since it refers originally to specifically Indian forms of miscegenation.27 Within the American context, ‘mulatto’, ‘quadroon’, and ‘octoroon’, which traditionally referred to black–white miscegenation, are now obsolete; they draw attention to the ‘ludicrous mathematics’ of miscegenation terminology28 and indeed, their numerical nature underscores the economic factors behind the usage by white slave-owners of such terms.

Other linguistic shifts have been less straightforwardly positive. Thus whereas ‘Anglo-Indian’ was still being used in the nineteenth century to mean a white British colonialist in India, with ‘Eurasian’ applied to a person of mixed white/South Asian (but also East or South-East Asian) heritage, ‘Eurasian’ has now fallen into disuse while ‘Anglo-Indian’ currently refers to an Indian from a particular white/South Asian background.29 Yet ‘Anglo-Indian’ is still misunderstood and its catachrestic usage is typical of the lexical uncertainties which surround discussions of racial mixing.30 These difficulties point in turn to language’s inherent limits in this regard. As Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell put it, quoting the Imperial Anglo-Indian Association, in their definition of ‘Eurasian’ in *Hobson-Jobson: The Anglo-Indian Dictionary* (1886): ‘no name has yet been found or coined which correctly represents this section. Eurasian certainly does not.’31

That such problems continue to attend the linguistic aspects of miscegenation is also reflected in the widespread use of a colour-coded vocabulary which draws on gastronomic imagery – for instance, ‘café-au-lait’, ‘mochaccino’, ‘cinnamon’ – to discuss racially mixed people. While not obviously pejorative in the manner of ‘half-caste’ or ‘mulatto’, such apparently glamorous language nonetheless risks objectifying mixed-race people because it implicitly exoticses and commodifies them: a ‘mochaccino’ is, after all, a popular drink available at high street coffee shops on both sides of the Atlantic.32 In the words of Leila Kamali: ‘isn’t there something deeply questionable about representing identity through food analogies, let alone grading skin tone as if it were a selection of paint swatches?’33 The detached nature of such language reveals the continued paradox of fascination and fear in relation to miscegenation, not least when that language is used by those who are not from a racially mixed background themselves.

The term ‘mixed-race’, popularised from the 1990s onwards by changes to the US and British censuses, is also important.34 Often used as a marker of self-identification by those who claim more than one racial her-
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itage, it is frequently synonymous with particular racial mixtures: notably black/white, particularly in the UK. Although ‘mixed-race’ has an ostensibly neutral ring to it, it immediately inscribes a status predicated on race: that is, an explicitly racialised position. Generally employed less than ‘mixed-race’, ‘biracial’ arguably has more positive connotations because, like ‘bilingual’ or ‘bicultural’, it seems to imply the best of both worlds, the benefits of two traditions, and its quasi-scientific note apparently strips it of the power to hurt. But it is also problematic since, like ‘mixed-race’, it foregrounds race. And it suggests two halves: a binary mathematical equation rather than a process of mixing in which combinations of genes may produce unpredictable results. Despite their shortcomings, however, such terms are indispensable in discussions of racial mixing – and a vast improvement on both the loaded, overtly racist language previously employed and the apparently benign, but nonetheless paternalistic, terms Kureishi has recalled from his childhood in 1960s Britain.

Whereas in previous eras, biracial people often played down their mixed origins and, if partly Caucasian, even tried to ‘pass’ as white, this situation has now been reversed, especially in a metropolitan context. Racially mixed people may even constitute a new mainstream in modern British and American cities. Indeed, it has become fashionable to be racially mixed. One positive stereotype to replace the historically negative ones is that multiracial people are more attractive and unusual than those who supposedly belong to only one racial group: a point sometimes perpetuated by the parents of racially mixed children. Positive clichés can, however, be a means of minimising complex realities and of obscuring or justifying the continued existence of more negative stereotypes. As Sander Gilman puts it, ‘the most negative stereotype always has an overtly positive counterweight’.

Mixed-race people may play up their alternative racial credentials precisely because they do evade strict categories. Thanks to the political progress made by the multiracial movement, principally in the US, those of mixed race living in traditionally white or white settler societies can now display pride in, rather than shame about, their non-white origins. Racially mixed people have of course long promoted themselves as the herald of a future which goes beyond strictly national or narrowly racialised identifications. The project of advocating such a future applies to everyone from Sui Sin Far in ‘Leaves from the mental portfolio’ to the white/black American author Danzy Senna in her debut novel Caucasia (1998), to the British-raised Filipina/Austrian musician Myleene Klass. This forms an almost millennialist language whose utopianism is the obverse of the apocalyptic predictions traditionally aimed at the racially
mixed subject in other quarters. Such a verdict is motivated by social defiance, self-interest, and the necessity for psychological self-preservation. But the visibility in the US of such racially mixed public figures as President Barack Obama, the Hollywood actress Halle Berry, the singer Mariah Carey, and the golfer Tiger Woods; and in the UK of a proportionately even larger number of well-known biracial sportspeople, actors, and musicians, would seem to endorse this notion of an increasingly multiracial ‘future’.46

As with Lord Beginner’s appeal to a global vision, discussions of miscegenation have both invited, and predicated themselves upon, a discourse of transnationalism. This may be why, as Bruce King has claimed, mixed-race British writers often prefer to write about places outside the UK.47 Biracial writers – from Sui Sin Far to the British Chinese novelist Timothy Mo – have often led lives characterised by mobility, whether enforced or voluntary. This point is underscored in recent transatlantic literature by or about South Asians, where such biracial protagonists as Jonathan in Kunzru’s novel The Impressionist (2002), and Raj in Naeem Murr’s novel The Perfect Man (2006), appear to move quite freely through places and situations thanks to the liminality afforded by their ostensibly indeterminate racial status. And in the context of literature and film, it is perhaps no surprise that critics have frequently read interracial relationships, and the racially mixed children they produce, as national and international allegories.48 This in turn makes miscegenation a particularly pertinent subject in relation to the transnationalism associated with diasporic communities and may explain why it underpins transatlantic South Asian writing in thematic terms.

Interracial Relationships in British Asian Writing

Immigrant Encounters from the Postwar to Contemporary Period

Miscegenation in British Asian literature follows a discernible historical and generational trajectory, starting with immigrants in the postwar era. The urban Britain of V. S. Naipaul’s The Mimic Men (1967) and Abdullah Hussein’s novel Émigré Journeys (2000) is largely dominated by male immigrants whose enforced bachelorhood, combined with the failure of 1950s Britain to welcome them and the imagined impermanence of their new lives, often leads to tawdry, fleeting carnal encounters, sometimes involving sex workers.49 In Mimic Men, Ralph’s interracial marriage to Sandra, a white British woman, meets with heavy disapproval from both
families; and even the registrar marrying the couple emanates ‘controlled reproof’. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the match does not last – ‘a textbook example of the ill-advised mixed marriage’ (42) – and it culminates, childless, and following mutual infidelity, in divorce.

Kamala Markandaya’s novel *The Nowhere Man* (1972) offers a particularly ambitious examination of postwar interracial relationships in Britain. Thematically, the novel’s most important interracial union is that of Srinivas and Mrs Pickering, the white woman with whom he becomes involved following the death of Vasantha, his Indian wife. Srinivas’s and Mrs Pickering’s unmarried co-habitation, which only gradually becomes sexual, is too radical for their neighbours in 1950s London, who are ‘hypocritical about the nature of the relationship . . . pretending it did not exist, shoring up their sense of propriety by delicate references to Mr Srinivas, the landlord, and Mrs Pickering, his tenant’. And in spite of Mrs Pickering’s kindness and innate decency, her total absence of prejudice, and the consistently calming effect she has on Srinivas, the novel implies the difficulty of full intimacy between the couple.

Distance is suggested through the withholding of Mrs Pickering’s given name while history and politics threaten to expose the cultural chasm between Srinivas and herself. Although they are both opposed to Britain’s actions during the 1956 Suez crisis, Srinivas believes that, whereas his reaction ‘sprang straight from the blood’, Mrs Pickering has come to ‘her conclusion by reason and intellect’ (99). Later, amidst a tide of rising racial violence in the 1960s, she seems to him to be an ‘immune islander’ (180): an irrevocable part of postcolonial Britain, which he regards as a parochial, tribal country owing ‘debts it had not paid’, following ‘crimes that had not been atoned for, nor even acknowledged’ (177). Unlike Vasantha, Mrs Pickering sometimes appears to Srinivas as a non-Hindu ‘stranger’ (236) who fails, for instance, to grasp the equality of animals and people: an article of faith for him. Such perceptions are clearly narrated from Srinivas’s closed, third-person point of view. Thus they reveal as much about the destructive effects of external forces upon his peace of mind as they do about the strength of his relationship. In such a context, as Ilan Katz has argued, it becomes ‘very difficult to separate the personal from the racial elements’.

*Émigré Journeys* chronicles an unconventional ménage: Mary, the unmarried, pregnant, white lodger, gives birth to a mixed-race (black/white) baby by one man; conducts a live-in relationship with another (Hussain Shah, the putative head of the household); and enters into a marriage of convenience with a third (his nephew, Irshad). Miscegenation may provide social escape for Mary but her marriage to Irshad culminates in
the double murder, at each other’s hands, of uncle and nephew. Depicted as feckless and untrustworthy, Mary is clearly presented as the catalyst for this tragedy through which Hussein implies that, in the postwar historical moment, relationships between white women and South Asian men can only lead to destruction and disaster.

Fears about the birth of a mixed Pakistani/white child are displaced through Mary’s son: a different kind of racially mixed offspring, after all. This fictional aversion towards a biracial South Asian second generation is one way in which British Asian and South Asian American writers negotiate underlying community fears about miscegenation, particularly as felt by older immigrants. In South Asian American texts as different as Chitra Divakaruni’s short story ‘The unknown errors of our lives’, from her eponymous short fiction anthology (2001), and Mukherjee’s novel Jasmine (1989), it is telling that we never witness the birth of the biracial children expected by pregnant characters. This response to miscegenation may also reflect the conservatism of authors who are themselves first-generation, and indeed, it applies to a range of writers from Naipaul and Hussein in Britain to Divakaruni, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Mohsin Hamid in the United States context. As Shilpa Davé has argued, ‘more inter-racial and inter-ethnic marriages . . . occur among second-generation Asian Americans . . . first-generation immigrants tend to marry within their own group.’

Challenging this chiefly endogamous attitude, Kureishi’s work draws on miscegenation as both straightforward backdrop and key creative inspiration, as I have argued elsewhere. Thus he posits a first generation for whom interracial relationships are common, although sometimes extra-marital and paradigmatically brown–white.

Academic attention has traditionally privileged white reactions to miscegenation in Anglo-dominated societies. By contrast, such texts as Kureishi’s screenplay My Beautiful Laundrette (1985) and Ayub Khan-Din’s play East is East (1996) examine South Asian prejudices towards interracial relationships. These attitudes often echo white public opinion, which has customarily demonised the Caucasian women involved in such situations. Kureishi’s older white women characters, such as Margaret in his first novel, The Buddha of Suburbia (1990), and Yvonne in the short story ‘We’re not Jews’ (1997), are depressive and taciturn. They resemble Ella Khan in East is East in that each woman is portrayed as working-class and uneducated: not of course negative traits in themselves, but part of a pattern nonetheless where each relatively powerless woman must defend her position against brown or white derision – or both. Yet Khan-Din’s portrayal of a woman thought to be based upon his own mother is affectionate and respectful, not least because of Ella’s coura-
The real-life accounts contained within such memoirs as Sarfraz Manzoor’s *Greetings from Bury Park: Race. Religion. Rock ‘n’ Roll* (2007), and Sathnam Sanghera’s *The Boy with the Topknot: A Memoir of Love, Secrets and Lies in Wolverhampton* (2008), suggest that to embark on an interracial relationship is seen by the second generation as explosive and potentially disastrous in familial terms. Yet British Asian writers often link sexuality with national belonging through the trope of racial mixing among the second generation. In *Nowhere Man*, after Srinivas and Vasantha learn of the wartime marriage of their son, Laxman, to Pat, an awkward meeting ensues in
which Markandaya is careful to disparage neither the ‘pale pink’ Pat (34) nor Laxman’s parents. Instead, the narrative reserves its censure for Laxman, a caricature of the assimilation-obsessed second-generation son. His brutal rejection of his heritage can be explained (if not condoned) by the postwar British climate of racial intolerance and social conformity with which he must contend. Underlining this detachment from his natal family and their Indianness, Vasantha dies without ever meeting Laxman’s biracial son, Roy, and shockingly, Srinivas is never introduced to his grandchildren.

Addressing contemporary miscegenation in his short fiction anthology *Burning Mirror*, Saadi generally presents interracial sexual encounters as a troubled means for young British Pakistanis to put down deeper roots in Scotland. Here white women, and the promise of assimilation they seem to offer, are treated as objects of both fantasy and scorn, thus rehearsing the fear/fascination paradox traditionally associated with miscegenation, and recalling Frantz Fanon’s classic formulation of black men’s bid for acceptance in racist white societies through sexual relationships with white women.59 In ‘Ninety-nine kiss-o-grams’, Sal dreams of the eponymous women

all blond [sic] and bikini’d and stonin in a circle aroon him, and smilin at him wi thur thick, red lips . . . he saw himsel surroondit by them, their wee white breasts pushin intae his broon face, fillin his moth, his body so that he could-nae breathe fur the whiteness. So that he could become invisible.60

This second-generation dream of becoming ‘invisible’ through sexual intimacy with white women – its frenzy conveyed through a suffocating blend of bright colours and heavy textures – is discussed more explicitly later in the same story. Sal has been stung and horrified by his late father’s defection into the arms of a ‘goree’, a defection which leads Sal to reflect that he himself has both ‘despised’ and envied the British Asian men openly involved with ‘mini-skirtit’ white women in Glasgow: ‘he’d wantit tae . . . huv his ane long-legged, thin-waisted goree tae wave like a white flag at the world’ (7). Sal’s simultaneous need both to integrate into, and to detach himself from, white society recalls Karim’s position in Kureishi’s *Buddha*: ‘we pursued English roses as we pursued England; by possessing these prizes, this kindness and beauty, we stared defiantly in the eye of the Empire and all its self-regard . . . We became part of England . . . yet proudly stood outside it.’61 Shifting from England in the 1970s and 1980s to twenty-first-century Scotland, Saadi updates these ambivalent sentiments towards white women, while suggesting that little has changed.
His fictionalised British Asians retain a similar blend of pride, anger, and self-loathing, figured by the image of surrender implied by Sal’s ‘white flag’.62 As we saw in the Introduction, it makes sense to read Saadi’s stories as responding intertextually to Kureishi’s work since he has specifically acknowledged the older writer’s influence.63

Saadi offers an ultimately pessimistic, decidedly non-utopian vision of interracial relationships, which provide no easy solutions to the complex negotiations of identity and belonging facing young British Asians. He is nevertheless more positive about such relationships when they are confined to white men and British Asian women, perhaps because such a position allows him to contest traditional Western norms of female beauty as white by celebrating the glamour of South Asian women.64 Yet interracial relationships which concern second-generation women seem no more likely to succeed than those of British Asian men. In Atima Srivastava’s novel Looking for Maya (1999), Mira’s relationship with Luke, her white boyfriend, is a failure, as is that of Parvin with Martin in Émigré Journeys. Across British Asian literature, then, interracial alliances are just as inevitable – and potentially just as bleak – for the second generation as they are for postwar South Asian immigrants. Despite the bid by such writers as Kureishi and Khan-Din to create a new, biracial national blueprint, the sometimes difficult realities of racial mixing itself are handled in a cautious, measured way by the majority of British Asian authors. They suggest that, although the social conditions and attitudes governing such relationships have improved since the 1940s, little has changed at the personal level. Interracial unions may be commonplace in these works, but they remain fraught and their chances of survival are no more certain than they were for a postwar, immigrant generation.

Interracial Intimacy in South Asian American Literature

THE FIRST GENERATION

Unlike the largely ambivalent, even critical, attitude of much British Asian literature, a significantly broader range of responses to miscegenation informs South Asian American writing. At one end of the spectrum, Kavita Daswani rules out interracial marriage entirely for Anju, the protagonist of her novel For Matrimonial Purposes (2003). Instead, a particular diasporic order is established when Anju marries Rohan, a second-generation Indian American from the same ethnic background (Sindhi) as herself. Although they marry only after falling in love, this denouement suggests the first generation’s need to maintain certain forms of South Asian ethnic-
ity on American soil, and thus to secure a stronger sense of home through religious, linguistic, and cultural familiarity. This can be read alongside Divakaruni’s message throughout *Unknown Errors* that specific subcontinental cultures (Bengali in Divakaruni’s case) need to be protected and preserved, through arranged marriage, in the US.\(^6\)

Kirin Narayan’s novel *Love, Stars, and All That* (1994) also rejects miscegenation through the failure of Gita’s marriage to Norvin, a white Jewish American academic, and her eventual choice of Firoze, a fellow South Asian American. In Mohsin Hamid’s novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), moreover, the relationship between Changez, a young Pakistani in New York, and Erica, a ‘beautiful . . . Wasp [sic] princess’, never properly succeeds.\(^6\) In such a heavily allegorical work, this failed romantic bond seems reflective of the protagonist’s decision to leave America. In other words, the relationship with Erica – whose name some critics have read as a form of ‘America’\(^6\) – would have provided a key means of further connection with Changez’s adoptive homeland, thus recalling the symbolic function of interracial relationships as international romances. For James Lasdun, this doomed relationship is ‘interestingly free of the racial tensions that traditionally afflict such couples in literature’,\(^6\) yet in the novel’s one sex scene, Changez performs as a dead white man: it is only by pretending to be Chris, Erica’s deceased boyfriend, that she will allow him to make love to her. Apparently prostituting his own cultural and emotional ideals in order to gain sexual experience of white America,\(^6\) it is actually Changez’s perception of the costs of mainstream American success which is illustrated here, and his role-playing is also entirely appropriate in a novel which is all about performativity.

Hamid’s handling of this interracial relationship consistently implies the fear that cultural identity will be lost through miscegenation. This sense of discomfort among writers and their characters about the loss of ancestral heritage through racial mixing is also apparent throughout Divakaruni’s *Unknown Errors*.\(^7\) By contrast, some South Asian American authors suggest the sheer ordinariness of interracial love. Meena Alexander’s novel *Manhattan Music* (1997) is a case in point, yet in her autobiography *Fault Lines* (1993), anxiety underlies the apparent normality of miscegenation. Here she recalls the painful memory of her own wedding day in India, with ‘countless faces staring in through the barred windows at the blonde [sic] foreigner I was marrying’ and absent parents who ‘wanted nothing to do with the whole business’.\(^7\) Before creating this strangely carceral image – the bride and groom are, after all, trapped behind ‘barred windows’ – *Fault Lines* also recollects Alexander’s teenage encounter with a South Indian–white Canadian marriage in 1960s Khartoum and its absolute strangeness
to her, both culturally and physically, at this point. Tiru’s white wife, Chloe, is remembered as ‘beautiful’ and ‘pallid . . . I was fascinated by her looks and wondered what it would be like to live in such a body and have a tall dark man like the Tamilian Tiru drawn to her’ (101). Alexander observes how out of place Chloe seems in an all-Indian expatriate context and how infantilised the Canadian woman appears, despite – or perhaps because of – her husband’s ‘immensely proud’ attitude towards her (101). Chloe’s cultural discomfort, mirrored by her physical alienness, is only exacerbated when the couple go to India, a version of events relayed in surprisingly violent language. Chloe is ‘stunned’ by India and ‘invaded by nightmares’ (101); the couple later ‘flee’ back to Canada (101), where order is apparently restored, but at the cost of future travel to South Asia.

Like Kureishi, Mukherjee deploys interracial relationships as a consistent leitmotif. In her first novel, The Tiger’s Daughter (1971), the protagonist, Tara, has effectively ruled herself out of a place in Calcutta society by marrying David, a white American man, while Dimple in Mukherjee’s second novel, Wife (1975), embarks on an affair with Milt, a white Jewish American. The fact that Dimple cannot sustain this marital infidelity symbolises her disastrous inability to assimilate into mainstream America in a traditional, non-transgressive sense. This abortive relationship is a kind of failed miscegenation, which also presages Changez and Erica in Reluctant Fundamentalist. In her later work, Mukherjee explores new immigrant paradigms and changing social patterns through the dynamics of ‘the reconstituted family’ which ensues through migration. Her interracial ménages imply that the all-American – or white – nuclear family has been overtaken by more ethnically diverse arrangements in which adopted Asian American children and nannies from outside America abound. These tropes are brought together in Jasmine, where one might read interracial encounters as indicative of Jasmine’s successful relationship with American space, both private and public. Thus, for Jasmine, as for a number of Mukherjee’s other South Asian immigrant women, racial mixing is a liberating necessity. The process of physical and biological inscription within the US for such characters also relates to Mukherjee’s wider intention of writing India into American culture. Anu Aneja therefore writes that ‘Jasmine does her best to insert herself into the flesh and blood of America, to the point where her body is literally impregnated by that of the white man.’

Mukherjee’s strategy of depicting interracial relationships and biracial South Asian Americans extends to her novel The Holder of the World (1993), where miscegenation is used to incorporate modern South Asian migrants into a longer tradition of immigrant America by emphasising India’s posi-
tion in an era of nascent US imperialism. Fakrul Alam has contended that Holder represents Mukherjee’s most overtly ambitious attempt at American literary revisionism through its reworking of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter (1850). Mukherjee challenges this earlier text, moreover, by giving a South Asian father to her version of Hawthorne’s Pearl. She also reconfigures seventeenth-century captivity narratives through the notion that Hannah’s white mother, Rebecca, willingly becomes involved with a Native American. Such multiple interracial couplings are reflected in the modern-day frame narrative where Beigh, the white narrator, is in love with Dev, a South Asian American scientist. Although Mukherjee’s version of miscegenation generally assumes white people as the other half of the equation, her response to them is by no means straightforwardly positive, as I have argued elsewhere.

Amulya Malladi’s novel The Mango Season (2003) offers a psychologically richer, more radical, and paradoxically more old-fashioned, treatment of interracial relationships than that of any of these other writers. Her protagonist, Priya, fears that there will be absolutely no chance of future acceptance when her family discover that her fiancé, Nick, is both ‘American and an un-devout Christian to boot’. At the same time, it is simply not an option for her to repay Nick’s love with a failure to tell her family about their plans, and she spends the novel weighing up the different forms of love in question in order to decide whether the risk of sacrificing her family is worth taking. This emotional and moral quandary generates the narrative’s principal momentum, and it is Malladi’s use of a particularly conservative Indian backdrop – the traditional world of a high-caste family in Hyderabad – which lends this scenario its old-fashioned feel. As with Alexander’s autobiographical account of her wedding day and of Tiru and Chloe’s disastrous visit to South Asia in Fault Lines, and the local rejection of Tara’s marriage to David in Mukherjee’s Tiger’s Daughter, the fact that the interracial relationship must be negotiated in India, rather than Britain or America, is arguably crucial in raising the stakes.

Through her unapologetic presentation of the love between Priya and Nick, Malladi suggests, like Mukherjee, that interracial relationships can sometimes result in greater liberation for South Asian women in America. Their union is certainly intended to represent freedom from the suffocatingly narrow version of India embodied by Priya’s family, whose racism – namely, a sense of superiority towards Caucasians and an even greater disdain for black people – is cast in an ironic light by the novel’s dramatic final twist: Nick is African-American. Even though Narayan includes a brown–black couple, Najma and Noah, in Love, Stars, and All
That, and before that, the director Mira Nair examined such a relationship in her film *Mississippi Masala* (1991), Nick’s racial status still comes as a surprise. The ‘presumption of Nick’s whiteness’, as Anita Mannur has put it,\(^8^0\) perhaps equates to the overuse of ‘American’ to mean ‘white’ in South Asian American literature and to the frequent suggestion in Asian American writing generally that interracial relationships usually concern Caucasians.

On the one hand, this reflects social ‘reality’;\(^8^1\) on the other, anti-miscegenation laws in the United States – operative across as many as thirty-one states at various points until as late as 1967 – specifically applied to interracial marriage as it affected white people. As Philip Tajitsu Nash has observed, ‘nonwhite races were allowed to mix with each other . . . showing that the true intent of anti-miscegenation statutes was to prevent the diluting of the white gene pool with the blood of allegedly inferior races’.\(^8^2\) In a traditional American context, then, miscegenation involving a white party has been more radical and dangerous in political terms. The emphasis by South Asian American writers on brown–white coupling may therefore be read as a conscious reaction to – or an unintentional reminder of – America’s fraught racial past. Yet it also hints at a certain conservatism behind their handling of this subject: that is, racial mixing as a form of assimilation into the social mobility promised by an old-style (read, ‘white’) American Dream and thus a move which supports, rather than challenges, white hegemony. One might compare this to critiques of South Asian American political self-interest by such commentators as Vijay Prashad,\(^8^3\) but it is worth remembering that there is still public discomfort in America about brown–white relationships – as Susan Koshy has shown in her analysis of the Louise Woodward/Eappen family affair in 1997\(^8^4\) – as well as ongoing resistance to such racial mixing in certain quarters of both South Asian America and South Asia itself. And it is revealing that, by and large, British Asian writers draw on the same brown–white template in their treatments of interracial intimacy.

**INTERRACIAL ROMANCES FOR A POST-1965 AMERICAN-BORN GENERATION**

Certain South Asian American novelists – Lahiri and Sameer Parekh, for example – directly address first-generation fears about the interracial relationships of their children, born in the US following the liberalisation of immigration laws in 1965. In his novel *Stealing the Ambassador* (2002), Parekh addresses the reactionary stance of many Indian American parents towards the prospect of brown–white marriage. Not coinciden-
tally, perhaps, the relationship of Rajiv, the protagonist, with his white girlfriend, Anne, breaks down. Yet it would be reductive to suggest that in transatlantic South Asian literature, a hidebound, judgemental, and humourless first generation always rejects the idea of its children marrying non-South Asians, just as it is clearly a cliché to suggest that an interracial relationship will straightforwardly resolve the second generation’s cultural and ontological dilemmas: a strategy persistently favoured in South Asian diasporic cinema and an idea to which I will return in a moment.

Rather as interracial relationships are not confined to the second generation within South Asian Atlantic writing, so an intraracial union is also no guarantee of happiness. Some parents may even welcome the prospect of an exogamous marriage for their offspring. Thus, in Lahiri’s *Namesake*, Ashoke and Ashima warn Gogol about ‘Bengali men . . . who’ve married [white] Americans, marriages that have ended in divorce’, yet in the same novel Moushumi finds that her plans to marry Graham, a white American, are greeted with less parental disapproval than she had expected. Nevertheless, it is telling that this marriage never actually takes place. Similarly, none of Gogol’s relationships with Caucasian women ultimately succeeds. In particular, Maxine’s white privilege, unconsidered and uncontested, fails to accommodate his cultural background, thus recalling Eleanor’s self-absorbed attitude towards Karim’s history in Kureishi’s *Buddha*: a novel which provided an important early influence for Lahiri, as I argued in the Introduction to this book. Again like Kureishi, Lahiri suggests the relative scarcity of enduring sexual relationships of any kind: inter- or intra-racial. Gogol’s marriage to Moushumi is, after all, short-lived and disastrous.

*Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri’s most recent work of fiction, replaces her earlier focus on the limits and perils of interracial relationships with a more matter-of-fact, even optimistic, approach. This recalls the shift from pessimism to acceptance of miscegenation in the work of other Asian American writers, such as the Korean American novelist Chang-rae Lee and the Chinese American author Gish Jen. While one should not rely on easy autobiographical explanations, the subject of racial mixing is of direct relevance to such writers: as with Mukherjee and Alexander, Lee, Jen, and Lahiri have all made interracial marriages and become the parents of biracial children. Several of the stories anthologised in *Unaccustomed Earth* (‘Hell-Heaven’, ‘A choice of accommodations’, ‘Nobody’s business’, ‘Only goodness’, ‘Unaccustomed earth’) assume the inescapability of such alliances, taking for granted the birth of a new generation of mixed-race children to whom the first generation, now grandparents, respond lovingly.

Overall, then, South Asian writers in the US veer from an outright pro-
hhibition on interracial relationships – predicated upon a traditionally pess-
imistic vision of their difficulties (miscegenation as social ‘problem’) and a
drive towards cultural survival – to a sense of their inevitability and finally
to a tentative, sometimes outright, celebration of their possibilities. Their
response to this subject is arguably fuller and more complex than that of
British Asian writers, perhaps because of the longer and more troubled
history of miscegenation in the United States and because of its status as
an American social reality and central component within US racial think-
ing. To tackle the issue of interracial relationships appears to be an equal
necessity, however, for South Asian diasporic writers on both sides of the
Atlantic.

**Racial Mixing in South Asian Diasporic Cinema**

The South Asian American director Krutin Patel has contended that his
film *ABCD* (1999) is

> a cautionary tale for young Indians in the sense that Nina’s decision [to marry
> her white boyfriend] . . . will come back to haunt her . . . At the end of the
> film there is [the] potential for happiness . . . It’s [about] the repercussions of
> buying into the American Dream wholesale instead of customising it to your
> needs.87

Patel’s notion that marriage to a white person is ‘buying into the American
Dream wholesale’ recalls Fanon’s formulations – as well as America’s mis-
cegenist history and the question of South Asian American political self-
interest – discussed above. Patel does not explain how young South Asian
Americans such as Nina and Raj, the film’s sister-and-brother protago-
nists, might actually go about ‘customising [the American Dream] . . . to
. . . [their] needs’, and when he speaks of the ‘potential for happiness’, his
implied optimism is undercut by such words as ‘cautionary’ and ‘haunt’.
One might argue, then, that – as with certain literary works – Patel’s state-
ment casts interracial couplings, and the quest for a more secure American
identity that they seem to imply, in an ultimately negative light.

However ambiguous it may remain in his own mind, however, the
ending to Patel’s film corresponds to other recent films about the South
Asian diaspora from both sides of the Atlantic in that a brown–white
relationship provides dramatic resolution. Indeed, whether they save the
day – acting as a kind of social, cultural, and narrative panacea – or offer
a more ambivalent form of closure, interracial relationships appear to be
thematically central. In the UK, such films include Damien O’Donnell’s
East is East (1999), his highly successful screen adaptation of Khan-Din’s play, which crucially embeds biracial British Asians within the popular consciousness and is in fact one of the few films about South Asian diasporic communities to consider the next stage of an interracial relationship; Jeremy Wooding’s Bollywood Queen (2002); Gurinder Chadha’s commercial hits Bend It Like Beckham (2002) and Bride and Prejudice (2004); Ken Loach’s Ae Fond Kiss (2004); Dominic Savage’s Love + Hate (2005); and Penny Woolcock’s Mischief Night (2006).  

Unlike South Asian diasporic literature, which is often published by small presses and which, as we have seen, is more likely to problematise interracial encounters, films such as East is East and Bend It Like Beckham have – like Kureishi’s My Beautiful Laundrette in the 1980s – reached large audiences, generating an appetite for British Asian cultural productions based upon particular representations. One might argue that these mainly white-directed films deploy brown–white couplings to make their ideas and storylines more relevant – and economically viable – to a wider audience, much as Hollywood cinema has traditionally made ubiquitous use of black–white buddy pairings. This question of the box office is significant. In contrast to the commercial success of British Asian films, South Asian American cinema – generally characterised by a greater number of low-key, independent works than mainstream hits – has proved more conservative on interracial matters. This is exemplified by such films as Piyush Dinker Pandya’s American Desi (2001), Anurag Mehta’s American Chai (2002), Bala Rajasekharuni’s Green Card Fever (2003), and Bob Roe’s Dancing in Twilight (2004; written by Rishi Vij), all of which explicitly favour intra-Indian sexual relationships over interracial ones. Possibly this forms part of a bid to target South Asian diasporic audiences specifically.

Other British Asian and South Asian American films challenge interracial stereotypes by rejecting a heteronormative or brown–white pattern. Homosexual relationships feature in Nisha Ganatra’s American movie Chutney Popcorn (1999); Harmage Singh Kalirai’s British production Chicken Tikka Masala (2005); and Pratibha Parmar’s Scottish Indian film Nina’s Heavenly Delights (2006). Since My Beautiful Laundrette focused on gay racial mixing well before any of these films, it is again hard to ignore Kureishi’s influence on later South Asian diasporic artists in both the US and Britain. As we have seen, Nair’s well-known film Mississippi Masala depicts a brown–black couple, as do Stephen Frears’s 1987 film of Sammy and Rosie (through Rani and Vivia’s lesbian relationship); Chadha’s first UK feature Bhaji on the Beach (1994); and Guru in Seven (1997), a film by the British Asian director Shani Grewal.

These films make clear that for South Asians, a greater taboo sur-
rounds brown–black sexual relationships than brown–white ones. Indeed, in *Mississippi Masala*, such alliances are acceptable only if they remain platonic or professional. Once the relationship between Mina, the South Asian immigrant protagonist, and Demetrius, her African American lover, is discovered, the Indian community closes ranks, while some of Demetrius’s black friends and colleagues are equally censorious. The public scandal of Mina and Demetrius’s relationship reveals the claustrophobic nature of contemporary racial divisions within their Mississippi town, while a courtroom scene connected to violent events provoked by their affair recalls the South’s history of anti-miscegenist legislation.

The message of Nair’s film is that this particular South Asian American community – obsessed with tradition and the past, whether in India or Uganda – must refresh itself through miscegenation. Handsome, morally irreproachable, and deeply respectable, Demetrius partly recalls John Wade Prentice, Sidney Poitier’s character in Stanley Kramer’s film *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967); and he represents a much more appealing prospect than any of the South Asian men Mina meets. For all the boldness of its interracial pairing, then, the film rather unsubtly pits the idealistic promise of racial mixing against the apparent inadequacies of intra-ethnic relationships, literally cutting between love scenes concerning Anil and Chanda, an Indian married couple, and Mina and Demetrius to contrast the failed intimacy of a sexless, arranged marriage with the electrical erotic charge made possible through interracial passion.91

Crucial in terms of the development of South Asian diasporic cinema, *Mississippi Masala* is now twenty years old. Two much more recent American box office hits, the white-directed ‘Harold and Kumar’ comedies – Danny Leiner’s *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004) and Jon Hurwitz and Hayden Schlossberg’s *Harold and Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* (2008) – seek to make new points about interracial relationships. Challenging stereotypes of Asian Americans as model minorities – especially through Kumar, the South Asian American ‘slacker’ protagonist – the films draw, playfully and intertextually, on a range of tropes from earlier film comedies, from Gene Saks’s *The Odd Couple* (1968) and Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall* (1977) to the ‘gross-out’ antics of the Farrelly Brothers’ work in the 1990s.

In an almost post-ethnic sense, both films take interracial relationships entirely for granted. Whether these relationships are expressed through the sparring intimacy between Kumar and Harold, a Korean American – a new kind of interracial buddy pairing, which is not black–white, but intra-Asian, thus incorporating South Asian Americans into a wider Asian American fold92 – or through the men’s trouble-free sexual encounters
with women, presented as exclusively Caucasian or Latina, neither man agonises over the social, cultural, or familial costs of such partnerships. Rather than emphasising the dramatic possibilities of an interracial sexual encounter, we are offered what Sukhdev Sandhu has seen as the ‘guiltless’ potential that such relationships – and, perhaps more importantly here, an alternative interracial buddy pairing – can offer the second generation.93 The ‘Harold and Kumar’ films thus cater to mainstream audiences even as they contest stereotypical expectations.94 But, as with many films about British Asians, their idealised treatment of miscegenation, through the erasure of any problematic associations it might still possess, may be explained, in part, by the fact that each film is written and directed by a team of white artists.

The Tropes of Mixed-Race Identity in British Asian Literature

Beyond the ‘Harold and Kumar’ series, films by or about diasporic South Asians are more often concerned with the narrative trajectory of what one might call ‘the road to marriage’: that is, the young protagonist’s securing of a ‘successful’ match, rather than the story of their actual experience of matrimony. This phrase might be adapted for the purposes of this discussion to ‘the road to interracial marriage’ or indeed, ‘co-habitation’. As we have seen, the interracial relationship (usually heterosexual), and its temporary survival, rather than its long-term future or the children it might produce, are the object of dramatic attention in such films as *Mississippi Masala*, *ABCD*, *Bend It Like Beckham*, and *Ae Fond Kiss*. Perhaps the social, psychological, and artistic implications of a new mixed-race generation are simply too complex for the kinds of simplistically utopian ‘happy endings’ such films attempt.

Such thematic strategies also characterise transatlantic South Asian writing, with authors similarly reluctant to address the wider cultural and material consequences of miscegenation. Where racially mixed characters do appear, they tend very often to be children, consigned to incidental roles. In the US, this applies to Dora in Alexander’s *Manhattan Music*; the quarter-white, blue-eyed, unnamed sons in Divakaruni’s ‘The names of stars in Bengali’ (*Unknown Errors*); and the babies and toddlers of Lahiri’s new biracial generation in *Unaccustomed Earth*. In British Asian works, this point is illustrated through Laxman’s son, Roy, and unnamed daughter in Markandaya’s *Nowhere Man*; and in Nadeem Aslam’s novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) by Charag’s young mixed-race son, who is also nameless, as though, like the examples above, his individual being comes after the role he plays in symbolising the assimilation by his minority parent into
the white mainstream. Aslam humorously refers to the lexical uncertainty regarding the boy’s racial status through the statement that he is “half Pakistani and half . . . er . . . er . . . er . . . human” – or so a child on his [white] English mother’s side is reported to have described him in baffled groping innocence. Kaukab, the boy’s Pakistani immigrant grandmother, meanwhile sees him as the harbinger of a distant British future in which all trace of her family’s South Asian ancestry will have been wiped out. In Ardashir Vakil’s novel *One Day* (2003), the racially mixed figure of Whacka may be more fully realised, yet he is still an infant rather than an older child with his own distinct voice.

In view of the long tradition of racially mixed Americans and Britons, and specifically of biracial people in South Asia, one wonders how to account for this depiction of mixed-race characters as children: a move which represents them as a new phenomenon, while quite literally infantilising them. It is also not confined to racially mixed South Asians, since Cynthia Nakashima complains that ‘mixed-race people usually appear in Asian American discourse as children . . . certainly not as empowered adults . . . In reality, a lot of us are all grown up.’ One reason for this tendency may be that many South Asian diasporic authors draw, perhaps inevitably, on their own individual experience. As we have seen, although not usually of mixed race themselves, they often have biracial children. The subject therefore remains one of compelling personal and social interest to them, yet it is too much of an imaginative leap to follow through the experiential and ontological implications of being, in Amal Treacher’s words, ‘a different colour from both [one’s] . . . parents, who in turn are a different colour from each other’.

Other artistic examples, particularly from American literature, may offer a further explanation. The métis son of Fleur Pillager, the Native American protagonist, in Louise Erdrich’s novel *Four Souls* (2006), suffers from an unspecified mental disability and is essentially nameless, since he lacks an all-important tribal name; while Mitt, Henry’s half-Korean, half-Anglo son in Chang-rae Lee’s novel *Native Speaker* (1995), experiences an early, accidental death at the hands of neighbourhood children in a supposedly ‘safe’, predominantly white, suburb in the northeastern United States. Erdrich and Lee deploy such strategies – namelessness or unusual naming (as Markandaya, Divakaruni, and Aslam do); disability; or early death – to ask whether there is a place in American society for racially mixed children and indeed to underscore the limitations of the interracial alliances that produced them. The burdens borne by both Mitt and Fleur’s son are thus a figurative means of suggesting that America – and we may extend this to Britain – is still not ready for racially mixed people. In all of
these cases, then, the especial vulnerability of biracial children, rather than adults, powerfully reinforces the traditionally liminal, threatened position of the mixed-race subject.98 By contrast, however, Caroline Rody reads this device in rather more positive terms, suggesting that in recent Asian American fiction more widely, the racially mixed child is ‘the horizon of the book’s interethnic vision, the locus of its hopes’.99

If, as I am arguing here, biracial South Asian characters remain children because of the difficult existential questions posed by their coming of age – both to authors and to the societies they examine – it is apparently left to writers who are themselves racially mixed to address such questions. Thus Kureishi, Khan-Din, Kunzru, Niven Govinden, Helen Walsh, and Zadie Smith remain among the few British writers to examine the personal costs of being mixed-race.100 Kureishi has in fact been the principal British chronicler of mixed-race South Asian identity since the mid-1980s, yet existing critical work has focused little on this theme within his work; since I have already considered this subject at length elsewhere,101 I will not, however, examine it here.

In *East is East*, Khan-Din explicitly considers the difficult territory negotiated by the biracial Khans as the children of George, a Pakistani father, and Ella, their white British mother. Openly critical of ‘English’ family practices, George refers to his seven children as Ella’s when rebuking their apparent godlessness, but reclaims his paternal rights whenever his authority is challenged.102 And each child has a Muslim name. In debating how to refer to themselves, the Khan children in fact run through various terms from ‘half-caste’, ‘Paki’, ‘English’, and ‘Pakistani’ to ‘Anglo-Indian’ and ‘Eurasian’, with Maneer recalling the idea, discussed above, of language’s inbuilt failure to express racial hybridity when he asserts that ‘we’re not Anglo-Indian, not Eurasian and not English’.103

Kunzru’s *Impressionist* imagines South Asian miscegenation in an early twentieth-century Indian and British context, offering an ambitious British contribution to literature about Anglo-Indians. The orphaned, transnational protagonist’s chameleonic status is most obviously represented by his changing names, so that the reader is never sure how to refer to him and, like Mukherjee’s Jasmine, he is usually named by other people. The child of a British colonialist and a privileged Indian woman, he is first ‘Pran Nath Razdan’, allegedly the scion of a wealthy Agra family, before becoming ‘Rukhsana’, a teenage, transvestite prostitute; then in Bombay, he is ‘Robert’ and ‘Chandra’ to the Reverend Andrew and Mrs Elspeth Macfarlane respectively, as he assists Macfarlane with his experiments in racial ‘craniometry’ (part of Kunzru’s merciless, obsessive satire of scien-
tific racism, which later extends to anthropology, zoology, and botany). He is also ‘Pretty Bobby’, an errand-runner for brothels in the city’s red light district; and finally, in a flagrant piece of identity theft, he is ‘Jonathan Bridgeman’, a British orphan with links to India, who moves from an English public school to Oxford in the 1920s. Since the protagonist is known as ‘Jonathan’ more than any other name, I will use it to refer to him here.104

Caste-obsessed Indians abhor Jonathan’s ‘mixed blood’, but he is no safer among Anglo-Indians, who look down on ‘natives’ but are themselves scorned as ‘horrid blackie-whites’ by the British (46). This racial hierarchy operates according to a strict chromatic taxonomy, whereby to have ‘skin the colour of a manila envelope’ (47) or ‘parchment’ (42) ensures only a provisional degree of social status. Anglo-Indians fervently wish to escape the ‘clinging swamp of blackness’ (48) by steering clear of the sun, which they avoid ‘like the plague, feeling pain with every production of melanin . . . Of course they do not call it that. They have other names. Dirt, grubbiness’ (47; emphasis added). Their Indian ‘half’ – ‘half-baked bread’ (43) and ‘half-and-half’ (52) are only some of the terms within the rich miscegenist lexicon Jonathan encounters105 – is as much associated with disease and contamination for them as miscegenation itself appears to be for fastidious ‘pure’ Indians such as the protagonist’s putative father, Amar Nath.

Much of the novel’s suspense is generated by its reworking of the racial ‘passing’ narrative. Unlike Indians or ‘blackie-whites’, many white people believe Jonathan is ‘one of them’ (185) and to pass as white becomes a game.106 But he, too, is fooled by other ‘half-and-half’ people posing as white when he is drawn to the beautiful socialite Lily Parry, who immediately sees through him and angrily rejects his advances. Members of a secret society in that their racially mixed origins must remain hidden, Lily and Jonathan are epidermally whiter than so-called ‘white’ people;107 while, in his urgent need to pass, Kunzru’s protagonist is a ‘mimic man’, whose colonial identity confusion owes a debt to Naipaul’s eponymous novel. The sometimes bold, sometimes uncertain stages of his personal reinvention are narrated as an ongoing process through the text’s use of the present tense, a device which can almost obscure the fact that the novel is a work of historical fiction. Indeed, this becomes a further piece of imposture in a narrative already consumed by notions of illusion and fraud. The present tense – ‘beguilingly cinematic . . . [yet] tiresome’, for one reviewer108 – is also about Jonathan’s continuing need both to conceal and to forget his own past. Further exposed to white supremacist attitudes in Britain, he becomes increasingly racist and reminiscent of the ‘blackie-
whites’ who disdained him in India. Although he is largely complicit in British imperialism, it is Jonathan’s so-called ‘tainted blood’ – and the gradually dawning insight into the lives of subject peoples that this finally allows him – which ultimately saves him in the novel’s final episode: a doomed British anthropological mission to west Africa.

Khan-Din’s second play, Last Dance at Dum Dum (1999), updates the Anglo-Indian story by showing elderly members of the community, living quite separately from modern India as they desperately cling to their communal home in 1980s Calcutta. Proudly Indian, they are nonetheless tangled up in a web of prejudices towards both other Indians and the British, who have ignored their rights post-1947, and they feel the need to trade on their former status, however ambiguous that was. Thus Muriel recalls being talent-spotted alongside Merle Oberon, the famous film star of Anglo-Indian origin. Muriel’s husband, Bertie, meanwhile highlights the discrimination of Indian doctors towards Anglo-Indians when he recalls that ‘one . . . said [dementia] . . . was a problem “inherent in people of mixed blood”’,109 while Daphne and Elliot bring together old stereotypical associations of mixed-race people with fornication and prostitution, rather as Impressionist does.110 At the same time, the group’s elderly status and Muriel’s very real mental deterioration symbolise the growing obsolescence of Anglo-Indians (now a large overseas community) in India itself.

To be officially ‘Anglo-Indian’, one’s patrilineal descent must be white British: a reversal of the background of Kureishi, Khan-Din, Kunzru, and Monica Ali, and of the miscegenist patterns generally at work within British Asian writing. Indeed, transatlantic South Asian cultural production challenges the gender dynamic of the white man–woman of colour which has characterised interracial romances in a traditional British and US imperial context,111 instead suggesting a much more even split. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Manzoor has claimed that British Asian writers ‘credited with telling typically Asian stories’ are often those ‘with the Asian name and white partner who . . . [are] more interested in exploring the life of their Asian fathers than their white mother’.112 This suggests that if contemporary biracial writers wish to pass as anything, it is as ethnic South Asians, and that the ‘brown’ side of their ancestry is more exciting and glamorous than the ‘white’. This status has nevertheless often been predetermined by paternal nomenclature, since ‘Hanif Kureishi’, ‘Ayub Khan-Din’, and ‘Hari Kunzru’ immediately foreground the writer’s South Asian ancestry.113 As with the gender pattern of interracial relationships in a white colonial setting, mixed-race people have also been subject to gender stereotyping, particularly in US culture: as female and, most
notably, as the ‘tragic mulatta’. Within a British context, Khan-Din, Kunzru, and, above all, Kureishi challenge this assumption through their creation of a cast of biracial British Asian men.

*Mixed-Race Lives in South Asian American Writing*

Whereas the biracial status of such literary figures as Kureishi, Kunzru, and Ali has almost come to seem synonymous with British Asian writing, there are fewer high-profile, mixed-race authors of South Asian descent in the US. Such racially mixed South Asian American writers as Kirin Narayan, Sara Suleri, and Carmit Delman remain relatively unusual and are less prolific or well recognised than Mukherjee, Alexander, Lahiri, or Divakaruni. Delman has published fewer literary works – and to less commercial and critical acclaim – than these predominantly first-generation, Bengali American women writers, while Suleri and Narayan are better known for their academic work; and in Narayan’s one novel, *Love, Stars, and All That*, Gita, the Indian American protagonist, is not biracial.

As with certain British Asian writers – for instance, Saadi in his short story ‘The dancers’ (2001) – some South Asian American authors write mixed-race adult identity imaginatively: for instance, in such novels as Ameena Meer’s *Bombay Talkie* (1994), Indira Ganesan’s *Inheritance* (1998), and Shobhan Bantwal’s *The Sari Shop Widow* (2009). In *Bombay Talkie*, Rani – the US-raised daughter of an Indian mother and a white American father – moves to India and marries a local man, Hemant, even though she is viewed with suspicion as ‘a cheap Anglo-Indian’, thus anticipating the anti-miscegenist attitudes, prevalent in both colonial and contemporary India, later evoked by Khan-Din and Kunzru. Rejected by both Hemant and his family, Rani meets a ghastly fate when she is burned to death in a marital fight, and indeed it becomes difficult to disentangle her tragic demise from the apparent problems – social, cultural, and existential – posed by her mixed descent within Indian society. At the same time, as a fashion model, whose picture is on Delhi billboards for all to see, Rani ironically comes to represent a particular version of India: an ideal of Indian beauty, even.

In *Inheritance*, the biracial teenaged protagonist, Sonil, is presented as choosing one side over the other although she has in fact never met her white American father and barely knows Lakshmi, her South Asian mother. Growing up in India and Pi, an invented island north of Sri Lanka, the protagonist claims that ‘Sonil [is] . . . a name with no definite roots’ and that ‘where my mother was a beauty, I was ugly, a changeling
child, a half-breed, a mistake . . . I wanted to be . . . boasted of, scolded . . . My identity was lost, and I did not know who I was. Standard adolescent identity confusion is further complicated here by Sonil’s sense of maternal rejection and an overheard language of distaste towards racially mixed people.

Later, Sonil situates the specificities of her mixed heritage by bringing America into the equation – ‘I must have appeared strange, half brown, half white, without actually having the cachet of having been to America’ (59) – and, more importantly, by referencing Pi’s history of miscegenation. Her already uncertain racial status is complicated by her affair with Richard, a white American tourist, who, like her unnamed white father, represents fantasy and escape. Richard forces her to consider the possibility that, through their relationship, she is ‘choosing white over brown’ (98). If there is a question of choosing one ‘side’ over another – a somewhat simplistic proposition to begin with, as is Ganesan’s discourse of an ontologically ‘lost’ biracial protagonist – Inheritance clearly shows Sonil privileging her matrilineal Indian ancestry.

As I argued in Chapter 1, the Britishness of Rishi Shah in Bantwal’s Sari Shop Widow initially makes him an object of mistrust for South Asian Americans, a situation potentially exacerbated by his mixed South Asian–white descent. His ethno-cultural appropriateness as a possible marriage partner for Anjali Kapadia, the novel’s Gujarati American protagonist, is, however, ensured through his ‘purely Gujarati name’ and through his rejection of Samantha, a white woman, in favour of an Indian bride: Anjali. Bantwal nevertheless does little to explore Rishi’s biracial subjectivity, perhaps because – as I suggested of his British status in Chapter 1 – it is of principally symbolic importance. This background makes him seem appealingly mysterious and complex and allows him to pass as white. He therefore emerges as a more intriguing proposition, for Anjali at any rate, than Gujarati American men: an apparently known quantity in the book’s New Jersey context. Rather as I contended earlier of interracial alliances in South Asian Atlantic cinema, Rishi’s white lineage seems to offer a Caucasian audience easier entry into the narrative, although Bantwal’s characterisation of white people remains superficial through, for instance, the caricatured presentation of Samantha and of Kip, Anjali’s ex-boyfriend.

Unlike such writers as Kureishi and Gish Jen, Mukherjee rarely discusses her mixed-race children in her writing or interviews, and rather than examining the life-world of racially mixed characters, she focuses far more on interracial relationships. The deferred birth of Jasmine’s mixed-race child beyond the end of the eponymous novel is one case in point.
Yet biracial people do populate Mukherjee’s work. Once again, a number are infants or older children: Shawn Patel in the short story ‘Saints’ (Darkness [1985]); Eng, a half-Vietnamese, half-white girl in ‘Fathering’ (The Middleman and Other Stories [1988]); and Hannah’s daughter Pearl in Holder of the World. The adult status of the biracial protagonists, Ratna in ‘The world according to Hsü’ (Darkness) and Devi in the novel Leave It to Me (1997), is therefore exceptional. Like Rani in Bombay Talkie, both are used to reinscribe older associations of mixed-race people with ideas of rootlessness: another side to mobility’s liberating potential in her work.

Mukherjee suggests that neither Devi nor Ratna, whose ‘Indian’ side is ‘dominant’, will easily find a home in either India or North America. Brought up as ‘Debby’ by Italian American adoptive parents, Devi later discovers that she is actually multiracial, since her biological father is of mixed Asian descent. Claiming that adoption allows her to ‘imagine myself into any life’, she signals the shifting identities made possible by her mixed descent, and indeed her changes in name anticipate Jonathan’s in Impressionist. Yet she is also envious of those who ‘knew what they were . . . no evasions, no speculations’ (66). Mukherjee may celebrate ‘mongrelisation’ but her treatment of both Ratna and Devi presents a more complex and unsettling picture.

Delman’s memoir Burnt Bread and Chutney (2002) offers a more extended, subjective account of a mixed South Asian American heritage than either Mukherjee or Ganesan. The narrative traces a very particular biracial background and can be situated in relation to other literary works about the South Asian Jewish diaspora, for instance Shelley Silas’s British play Calcutta Kosher (2004). Marking the gendered nature of much South Asian American writing, the vanishing traditions of Delman’s maternal, Indian Jewish lineage are favoured over those of her Ashkenazi Jewish paternal forebears. The story of European Jewry is, of course, far better known than that of India’s Jews. Delman feels a greater sense of physical belonging among ethnic South Asians than among white American Jews, although the ignorance of Indian Americans about India’s Jewish history estranges her from them. As she puts it: ‘the connection to just India was not enough to stand alone between shy [Indian American] girls. How could I explain to them all I learned in Torah class? They had not even heard of Indian Jews.’

Delman’s memoir is an original contribution to the better-known arenas of Jewish and Asian American writing. But rather than aligning it to broader Asian American constituencies, she is more interested in the preservation of her matrilineal heritage and the issue of her own mixed-race Jewishness. Delman is not the first biracial American writer to shore
up the claims of non-white Jews to Jewishness. It is nonetheless unusual to find discussions of mixed-race Jewishness in the context of South Asian miscegenation. Burnt Bread repeatedly points out that to be seen as ‘authentically’ Jewish by other Jews in both America and Israel, one must be white. Delman’s darker skin clearly challenges this assumption: a status only complicated further, not least in ontological terms, by her part-white descent and by many white American Jews’ denial of a specifically Jewish history of racial mixing.

Delman relates her own complex position to that of her parents’ interracial marriage, in which ‘my father was seen by the Indian side as a prized token of the white people, and my mother, in his circles, could be eyed coolly, because she was not Ivy League-polished and cardigan-clad’ (xxii). In Israel, Delman encounters white Israelis who assume that she must be part of the ‘large populations of poorer Jewish immigrants from the African and Arab nations’ living in deprived areas (162). Explaining that she is ‘Indian’, she notes that ‘to identify myself, I had to clarify what it was that made my skin brown. No matter that I was just as much white’ (163). Like Ratna in ‘World according to Hsü’, but unlike Jonathan in Impressionist, her white ‘half’ – which could become expedient in the face of white racism – seems invisible to those around her, whether Israeli or ethnically South Asian, Gentile or white Jewish American. Delman’s privileging of her Indian heritage may also stem from an internalisation of this reaction to her liminal status, which is too complex to be explained easily. Yet this painful, complicated past drives her memoir, since she derives urgency, authority, and creative power from her occupation of a putatively ‘outsider’ role.

**Conclusion**

On either side of the Atlantic, miscegenation is a dominant trope within South Asian cultural production, but the theme of interracial relationships is still more prevalent than that of mixed-race identity. Such relationships, among both the first and second generation, are presented as important, inevitable, and often problematic, but they are handled more ambivalently in British Asian than in South Asian American writing. Yet even when South Asian writers in the US offer a celebratory perspective, more troubling issues emerge. Transatlantic South Asian film-makers represent this idea in a more straightforwardly utopian light, perhaps to meet the commercially driven need for a formulaic ‘happy ending’, while white film-makers like Ken Loach and Damien O’Donnell risk problems of appropriation and inauthenticity when they approach the topic of
South Asian miscegenation. Interracial alliances are nevertheless consistently thematised within cinematic works about the South Asian diaspora – where the individual passion they represent is used, Romeo and Juliet-style, to examine and superficially to resolve thorny social divisions – while in recent television dramas, particularly in the UK, they occur seamlessly and without explicit comment. In both cases, however, such relationships are handled somewhat simplistically because they are devoid of the longer-term problems – what Andrew Anthony has called ‘the messy, difficult and tense business of living and loving together’ – which might haunt such relationships.

Whereas interracial unions, especially where they concern white people, can suggest conservatism through assimilation into the socio-cultural mainstream, the racially mixed subject remains a more radical and difficult theme in transatlantic South Asian literature. For such writers as Lahiri, Vakil, and Aslam, however, biracial people remain children: a strategy which works to contain the social threat mixed-race characters might pose and minimises the ontological and existential questions they continue to embody, or, in Lewis Gordon’s words, ‘the unique experience of living the racial realities of more than one group in the course of their innermost private lives’. Other writers – for instance, Mukherjee, Kunzru, and Ganesan – do show mixed-race characters in adulthood, but they reinscribe certain stereotypes, especially the ‘tragic mulatto’ and the myth of biracial rootlessness. For some of these writers – and various others discussed earlier, such as Markandaya and Alexander – absence of the lived experience of what it means to be mixed-race inevitably comes into play, although such writers are themselves often committed to long-term interracial relationships and have racially mixed children.

That Kunzru’s portrayal of Jonathan in *Impressionist* is nonetheless subtle and wide-ranging makes it tempting to attribute his ambitious vision of biracial selfhood to his own mixed descent. Certainly, it appears to be racially mixed South Asian Atlantic writers – for instance, Kureishi, Delman, and Khan-Din – who offer the most sustained and complex accounts of mixed-race lives, drawing on the creative strength afforded by their own position. It is in their work that we witness such tropes as passing, double consciousness, self-naming, the pragmatic forging of situational ethnic affiliations, and the importance of colour itself. Kureishi and Kunzru, in particular, draw attention to the protean physical possibilities of being biracial by creating characters who are simultaneously dark and light, brown and white. This highlights the opportunities for personal reinvention afforded to ‘multiracial people . . . [whose] identities might change over a lifetime’. These writers seek to establish a new national...
model, where to be racially mixed can become the personal and aesthetic ideal, yet this project remains at a fledgling stage and is complicated by a paradox of normality and exceptionalism, because they still present biracial status as a relative rarity and because each character’s particular mixed background is different in ethnic terms.

Despite the long history of US miscegenation and, even more pertinently, of Anglo-Indians in the subcontinent, the biracial people examined in these works are conceived as a largely new phenomenon in British and American terms, a discrete incarnation of Mukherjee’s ‘thing new to US history, someone who had never existed before me and hundreds of thousands like me: an Indo-American’. The biracial writers in question thus chart the difficulties of being what Glenn D’Cruz has called the ‘new “Anglo-Indians” . . . the current first generation progeny of “mixed marriages” in multicultural societies . . . who must negotiate two separate cultural traditions in order to define themselves’. This may explain their suggestion of the simultaneous pain and opportunity which arises from being mixed-race. The trajectory for Kureishi’s characters and for Kunzru’s Jonathan Bridgeman appears to be in one main direction, in fact: towards middle-class whiteness. Kureishi deploys humour to handle the more disturbing, confusing elements of this situation, but even though his treatments are significantly removed from traditional anti-miscegenist stereotypes, they ultimately fail to answer older questions or allay earlier fears.

Returning to Alibhai-Brown’s point that biracial British Asian writers seem less ‘troublingly alien’, one might contend that a largely white readership does indeed identify more with a South Asian writer of mixed parentage. But we have also seen that writers may play up their South Asian rather than their white side, both as a result of nomenclature and perhaps because a ‘minority’ background sells better. There is both novelty and familiarity to miscegenation as artistic material: while brown–white relationships have become a recognisable, even clichéd, device, the biracial subject remains under-explored, and this will continue until a greater number of racially mixed South Asian writers emerges. In recent British Asian and South Asian American cinema, mixed-race identity takes up even less thematic space – with the notable exception of East is East.

Despite the sometimes difficult questions about British and American multiculturalism posed by such films as My Beautiful Laundrette and Mississippi Masala, biracial lives are apparently still too messy and complicated a subject to be tackled in any depth.

Delman aside, it is British Asian writers who have really tackled the implications of being mixed-race. This is perhaps paradoxical in view of
America’s richer tradition of racial mixing; and it recalls the contention, made in the Introduction to this book, that British Asian writers and filmmakers, rather than their US counterparts, have enjoyed a greater cultural impact, both nationally and internationally. The subject of miscegenation highlights yet again the very different relationships of South Asians to Britain and the United States respectively. But whereas the stronger physical presence of South Asians in the UK extends to a more developed literary treatment of biracial identity, South Asian American writers investigate interracial intimacy in more varied ways.

Miscegenation in transatlantic South Asian literature ultimately draws heavily on the utopian/dystopian paradox which has traditionally characterised discussions of this subject. The utopian strand can be explained by the hope and idealism which underpin two interrelated ideas: love’s ability to cross racial boundaries – the interracial relationship’s ‘privileging [of] personal emotions over social systems’134 – and the concomitant promise of a racially mixed future, embodied by biracial individuals. A correspondingly dystopian response arises, however, because miscegenation evokes primal fears which can be traced, on the white side, to the impact of European imperialism and post-Enlightenment scientific racism. On the South Asian side, this horror of racial mixing goes further back, since it contravenes caste boundaries for Hindus and, if it involves interreligious alliances, breaks rules for the subcontinent’s other faiths: Islam, Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Judaism.135 The utopian/dystopian dichotomy translates into a kind of superiority/inferiority complex for the biracial subject – who simultaneously embodies cultural loss and gain – which in turn corresponds to the divisive combination of fascination and revulsion which interracial encounters have traditionally attracted. In the case of British Asians and South Asian Americans, fear of miscegenation also relates to community worries over the future maintenance of the diaspora itself.

As Susan Benson has argued, ‘in . . . a racially divided society . . . the decision to enter into an interracial union is, inevitably, a political act’.136 In the hands of these creative artists, moreover, miscegenation is both a subversive and a conservative force: subversive because it charts the courage of individuals prepared to face opposition by crossing racial and cultural lines and to reject the safety of tradition, but conservative because such relationships are almost uniformly heterosexual and because they usually rely on white people as the other half of the equation. As Frank Wu contends, ‘if intermarriage and the mixed-race movement are to live up to the optimistic claims that they are the future of race relations, they must hold out a greater promise than that . . . a few individuals are able
. . . to ascend to whiteness’. Several decades after they first appeared, *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Mississippi Masala* still stand out through their contestation of a heterosexual or brown–white miscegenist orthodoxy. Despite its emphasis on simplistically happy endings, cinema has, however, proved more radical than literature in this regard. Thus the brown–black relationship in Malladi’s novel *Mango Season* remains a significant anomaly; and gay interracial relationships are even more rarely explored. Within the American context, relationships between South Asians and Native Americans, Latinos, or East Asians in either literature or film appear virtually non-existent. Writers and film-makers on both sides of the Atlantic have, however, challenged the gender dynamics of the Anglo-American imperialist master narrative of miscegenation by often opting for a man of colour–white woman dyad and by rejecting the traditional feminisation of the racially mixed subject. Such departures ensure that, despite its sometimes contentious nature, miscegenation does not become simply another cliché of South Asian diasporic cultural production.

**NOTES**

1. Lord Beginner, ‘Mix up matrimony’, included on Ainley and Noblett, *London* [CD]; and compare the vision of the song ‘Melting pot’ (1969) by the British pop group Blue Mink, where in ‘a hundred years or more’, Britain will ‘turn out coffee-coloured people by the score’; for further information, see n.a., ‘Blue Mink’.
2. I will generally deploy the terms ‘mixed-race’ and ‘biracial’ for those people with parents from two different racial groups, and ‘multiracial’ to refer to those of multiply mixed race (that is, from more than two racial backgrounds). Such terms, which will be discussed in greater detail shortly, are inevitably problematic, since they rely on the notion of immutable racial categories and the possibility of so-called racial ‘purity’; compare Sollors, *Neither Black*, p. 3.
7. According to the 2001 UK census, ‘people from South Asian backgrounds were the least likely of the minority ethnic groups to be married to someone from a different ethnic group. Only 6 per cent of Indians, 4 per cent of Pakistanis, and 3 per cent of Bangladeshis had married someone outside the Asian group’; for more information, see n.a., ‘Inter-ethnic marriage’. A 1997 report from the UK’s Policy Studies Institute claimed, however, that a fifth of Indian and African Asian men in Britain had a
white partner; cited in Ahmed, ‘After Obama’, p. 26. In the 1991 British census, only 0.1% of the population were of mixed South Asian–white descent; cited in Phoenix and Owen, ‘From miscegenation’, p. 81. The 2001 census recorded a mere 189,000 Britons of ‘White and [South] Asian’ origin out of a total population of 58.7 million, while a further category of ‘Other Mixed’ is likely to include racially mixed British Asians with no known white history; see Bradford, ‘Who are’, p. 4. As I noted in the Introduction, information for the most recent UK census (2011) is still being collated and falls outside the time period covered by this book.

8. Barnes and Bennett, ‘Asian population’, p. 9; these figures – which comprise Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, Nepalese, and Bhutanese – are problematic since, like British census information, they also cover interethnic, as well as interracial, mixing and ‘do not add [up] to the total population. This is because the detailed Asian groups are tallies of the number of Asian responses rather than the number of Asian respondents. Respondents reporting several Asian groups are counted several times’; ibid. More specifically, however, Lavina Melwani claims that ‘nearly 18 percent of births involving an Asian Indian father or mother in 1993 had an interracial spouse’; see Melwani, ‘Beyond black’. Clearly, the UK and US figures I have given are also not strictly comparable, since one refers to marriage and the other to the children of interracial unions, but they do seem to suggest a more dominant trend towards South Asian racial mixing in America than in Britain. For general information on Asian American intermarriage and multiraciality across various censuses, see Wu, Yellow, pp. 263–4, 287. As we saw in the Introduction, a more detailed statistical analysis of specific ethno-racial groups in the US based on the most recent census data (of 2010) has not yet been published.

9. Compare Mijares, ‘You are an Anglo-Indian?’, p. 128, where she writes that ‘the historical figure of the Eurasian . . . exerts a fascination on the literary imagination of India’s writers in excess of the community’s impact on Indian reality, past or present’; and see also Weedon, Identity and Culture, p. 123.


11. Compare Nesrine Malik’s attack on this strategy as a default mechanism in British TV dramas about characters of South Asian descent; Malik, ‘TV’s shorthand’.

12. Alibhai-Brown, ‘Curse’. At the same time, Alibhai-Brown has also done much to champion miscegenation in the British context; see Alibhai-Brown, Mixed Feelings. When Sarfraz Manzoor later recapitulates many of the points she raises in the article above, he nonetheless includes Alibhai-Brown in his list of ‘atypical’ British Asian ‘writers credited with telling typically Asian stories’; see Manzoor, ‘Why do Asian writers’. The question, however, of what constitutes ‘typically Asian’ remains an open one.

14. See Waris Hussein’s film *Sixth Happiness* (1997) for consideration of India’s Parsis in this context; and for discussions of the Anglo-Indian superiority complex towards other Indians, see Blunt, *Domicile*, pp. 97, 122, 130, 133, and D’Cruz, *Midnight’s Orphans*, pp. 157, 206.


16. I refer here to the alliances between Punjabi Sikh men and Mexican women in early twentieth-century California; for a detailed study of these communities, see Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*.


19. In literary terms, the idea that the ‘half-caste’ child is a curse to the white parent is played out in, for instance, W. Somerset Maugham’s short story ‘The force of circumstance’ (1926); see Dolley, *Penguin*, pp. 133, 146, 152, 155, and the early stages of Naeem Murr’s novel *The Perfect Man* (2006); see also Lowrie, ‘Disruptions’, pp. 142–3, 145, 147.

20. The sterility imputed to mixed-race people was also countered by anti-theoretical theories of ‘hybrid vigour’ and the general ‘superiority’ attributed to having mixed blood; see Sollors, *Neither Black*, pp. 133–5, 139.

21. Critics have also paid tribute to a range of successful, high-profile historical figures, particularly in the UK, who either were of mixed race or made interracial marriages in this period; see, for instance, Alibhai-Brown, *Mixed Feelings*, pp. 30–1, 36.

22. Sui Sin Far, *Mrs Spring Fragrance*, p. 221. Class and economic factors clearly continue to be important to an understanding of miscegenation. As Andrew Anthony has argued of racial diversity in contemporary Britain: ‘it’s . . . [working-class] people . . . who live cheek by jowl with new arrivals and adapt to rapid change. They are the ones who really embrace people from other countries and cultures by forming relationships and raising children together’; see Anthony, ‘How Britain’. In the American context, compare Gordon, *Her Majesty’s Other Children*, p. 69.


26. As we have seen, such commentators as Rushdie and Mukherjee have reclaimed ‘mongrel’ in a positive sense, although see also Sollors, ‘Can rabbits’, pp. 9–19; and Wu, *Yellow*, p. 285. ‘Mulatto’ is thought to originate from ‘mule’; see Sollors, *Neither Black*, pp. 127–8. In a US historical context, such language relates to the idea that slaves were regarded by their owners...
as little more than livestock.

27. See Carton, ‘Beyond “Cotton Mary”; and compare Woolcock, Mischief Night, where Kimberley rejects ‘half-caste’ in favour of ‘dual heritage’, a phrase which suggests historical dignity and taps into the contemporary fashion for tracing one’s genealogy.

28. I am grateful to Kiran Patel for this phrase. See also Sollors, Neither Black, pp. 113–16, 118–25, for a discussion of the ‘calculus of colour’ behind the ‘scientific racialism’ of the Enlightenment; and Ifekwunigwe, ‘(An)Other’, p. 330, where a mixed-race interviewee responds to the phrase ‘half-caste’ by asking ‘Half of what? How can one call oneself half of something?’ Compare the use of ‘eight-anna’, a fraction of an already fractional unit of Indian currency, in Kunzru, Impressionist, p. 46, to refer to Anglo-Indians; and see Yule and Burnell, Hobson-Jobson, p. 32, where the use of ‘anna . . . applied colloquially to persons of mixt parentage’ is compared to the ‘Scotch expression that a person of deficient intellect “wants twopence in the shilling”’, thus signalling a revealing slippage between racially mixed people and mental deficiency. By contrast, Lori Harrison-Kahan argues that ‘in replacing “half” with “mixed”’, the biracial subject ‘prioritises . . . plurality . . . over . . . duality’; see Harrison-Kahan, ‘Passing for white’, p. 44. Yet the notion of ‘halves’ persists, as we see, for example, through Junot Díaz’s use of ‘halfie’ in a contemporary American context in his short story, ‘How to date a browngirl, blackgirl, whitegirl, or halfie’; Díaz, Drown, pp. 111–16.

29. Blunt, who writes that ‘Anglo-Indians form one of the largest and oldest communities of mixed descent in the world’, cites article 366 (2) of the Indian Constitution for the official definition of an Anglo-Indian: ‘a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only’; Blunt, Domicile, pp. 1, 220. Elsewhere she notes that ‘Anglo-Indian’ to mean mixed-race was first adopted in the Indian census of 1911; Blunt, ‘Geographies’, p. 286.

30. ‘Anglo-Indian’ is also sometimes interchangeable with ‘British Asian’ in popular British parlance. ‘Country-born’ is yet another ambiguous term, employed in colonial times to mean both white European and mixed-race subjects born in India, and still used in both senses. Compare the disputed nature of the word ‘creole’, which can refer both to white colonialists and to people of mixed race in a Caribbean context; see Bost, Mulattas, p. 89.


32. For the use of ‘mochaccino’, see Jen, Who’s Irish?, p. 28. The problematic conjunction between food and racialised terminology will be considered further in Chapter 4.

33. Kamali, review of Brown Eyes, p. 86.

34. According to Kamal Ahmed, ‘“mixed-race” hadn’t really been invented’

35. Compare Katz, Construction, p. 3; and Mahtani and Moreno, ‘Same difference’, p. 71.


37. Such terms, which recall the ‘tragic mulatto’ stereotype, include ‘caught between two cultures’ and ‘Britain’s children without a home’; Kureishi also cites the verdict of the British politician Duncan Sandys in 1967 that ‘the breeding of millions of half-caste children would . . . produce a generation of misfits’, to which he responds: ‘I wasn’t a misfit; I could join the elements of myself together. It was the others, they wanted misfits; they wanted you to embody within yourself their ambivalence’; see Kureishi, Dreaming, pp. 69 and 27–8 respectively. Such language, couched in ostensible concern, implies that to be mixed-race is an existential and social crisis of the first order. Compare, too, Benson, Ambiguous Ethnicity, p. 10; and Wu, Yellow, p. 270, where he astutely observes that ‘the very people who ask “won’t the children suffer” of a mixed-race marriage are the ones that make it so’.

38. Ifekwunigwe, ‘(An)Other’, pp. 333–5, 339. In endlessly celebrating London as an emblem of British racial syncretism, Kureishi, for instance, suggests that the UK capital is the nation’s key site of mixed-race identity.


40. Thus the Chinese American writer Maxine Hong Kingston argues: ‘Forget territory. Let’s make love, mate and mix with exotic peoples, and create the new humane being . . . Hapa children of any combination are the most beautiful’; see Kingston, ‘Novel’s next step’, pp. 38–9; and, more recently, Kingston, Fifth Book, p. 263. On Hawaii, the US state whence the term hapa originates and one in which 21.4 per cent claimed to be of ‘two or more races’ in the 2000 census, compare Yamanaka, Wild Meat, p. 218, where the hapa becomes the aesthetic and social ideal. Kingston and Lois-Ann Yamanaka are both mothers of mixed-race children. For a discussion of this particular positive stereotype about racially mixed people, see Ropp, ‘Do multiracial subjects’, p. 4; and also Bost, Mulattas, pp. 195–8. On the old stereotype of the particular ‘beauty’ of Anglo-Indian women, see Blunt, Domicile, p. 15; and D’Cruz, Midnight’s Orphans, p. 35.

41. Gilman, Difference, p. 18.

42. In an Australian context, it has also become more common in recent years to claim Aboriginal blood; see Shakespeare, In Tasmania, p. 180.

43. Wu, Yellow, pp. 287–9; and on transatlantic differences in the politicisation of this issue, see Ifekwunigwe, ‘(An)Other’, p. 324.


46. One thinks of such British sports stars as the former athletes Sebastian Coe (of South Asian–white parentage) and Kelly Holmes (of black–white descent); the racing driver Lewis Hamilton (black–white parentage); the former cricketers Mark Ramprakash and Nasser Hussain (both of South Asian–white descent); and most strikingly, the very large proportion of the English football team who are from a black–white background. Thus, through sport alone, Britain might be regarded as Ashley Dawson’s ‘mongrel nation’. Beyond Coe, Ramprakash, and Hussain, prominent biracial British Asians include the actors Ben Kingsley (born Krishna Bhanji), Jimi Mistry, Indira Verma, Raza Jaffrey, and Chris Bisson; the TV presenter Melanie Sykes; and the comedian Danny Bhoy. Now that census records offer such information, the perception is that numbers of mixed-race people in America and Britain are increasing, a point famously made in the US context by a 1993 issue of *Time* magazine, whose cover featured a computer-generated image of ‘Eve’, a multiracial woman, and proclaimed – in a gesture of US exceptionalism, which is also ahistorical – ‘The new face of America: How immigrants are shaping the world’s first multicultural society’. For discussions of the debates provoked by this issue of *Time*, see Bost, *Mulattas*, pp. 1–2; and Santa Ana, ‘Affect-identity’, pp. 16–19, 27–9.


49. A relevant intertext here is Sam Selvon’s novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), which evokes a similar era and milieu; here interracial sexual relationships, however brief, represent a home away from home where white prejudice thankfully plays a lesser role.


52. Katz, *Construction*, p. 27.


54. See Maxey, ‘Beige outlaws’.

55. In relation to Kureishi’s screenplay *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), bell hooks argues that this version of interracial relationships erases women of colour; see hooks, *Yearning*, p. 161.


58. For a definition of ‘model minority’, see Chapter 1, n. 50.
61. This image recalls the language of exploration and conquest used by Mustafa Sa’a’eed to discuss his relationships with white British women in London in the interwar period in Tayeb Salih’s classic Sudanese novel *Season of Migration to the North* (1969); see Salih, *Season*, pp. 39, 41; see also Kunzru, *Impressionist*, p. 291; and compare Roth, *Portnoy*, p. 235, where the protagonist claims that ‘through fucking I will discover America. Conquer America . . . Columbus, Captain Smith, Governor Winthrop, General Washington – now Portnoy’; emphasis in original. My thanks to David Gooblar for this last reference.
64. Compare Davé, ‘No life’, pp. 53–66, which outlines the Gujarati American community’s belief in the importance of intra-ethnic marriage within the US.
65. Lasdun, ‘Empire’.
67. Lasdun, ‘Empire’.
68. My thanks to Judie Newman for suggesting this point.
70. Alexander, *Fault Lines*, p. 211.
73. See ibid., pp. 135, 141, 146, for a discussion of this idea in Mukherjee’s work.
80. According to Jennifer Lee and Frank D. Bean, the 2000 US census suggests that such mixing is more common statistically; see Lee and Bean, ‘Interrmarriage’, pp. 51, 53.
83. Koshy, ‘South Asians’, p. 45. The racialised elements of the Woodward case anticipate the British media circus which surrounded the Molly Campbell/Misbah Rana episode nearly a decade later in 2006: a young Scottish-Pakistani teenager of mixed race whose two ‘halves’ were literally embodied in her two names, Molly/Misbah chose her Pakistani ‘half’ by emigrating to Pakistan; see Scott-Clark and Levy, ‘Why Molly ran’.

86. Beyond the influence of *Buddha* on Lahiri, Rahul’s laundromat job in her story ‘Only goodness’ recalls *Laundrette*, just as Omar’s father is ashamed of his son’s job, so Rahul’s parents recoil from the idea that ‘someone they knew would see their son weighing sacks of dirty clothes on a scale’; Lahiri, *Unaccustomed*, p. 151. The notion that Kureishi was washing the community’s ‘dirty linen’ in public was picked up in reviews of Frears, *My Beautiful Laundrette*; see Thomas, *Hanif Kureishi*, pp. 26, 30–2. Lahiri updates this idea, using the laundromat to suggest the exposure of Bengali American secrets.

87. Patel et al., ‘Audio commentary’.

88. By contrast, recent British TV drama series have generally approached such relationships in a more understated way: see, for example, Sam Miller, Audrey Cooke, and Nigel Douglas, *This Life* (1996–7); Brian Grant, *Party Animals* (2007); and S. J. Clarkson, Philip John, and Peter Hoar, *Mistresses* (2008–10). As with a number of black–white unions in such programmes, no explicit comment is made on racial differences between South Asian and white characters. One may explain this progressive – yet nevertheless utopian – attitude as owing to the obligation of the BBC and Channel 4, as public broadcasters, to tackle social diversity. My thanks to Liz Evans for suggesting this latter point.

89. For more on the uses of black–white buddy pairings, see Gillan, ‘No one knows’, pp. 47–8, 50–1; and Nishime, ‘I’m Blackanese’, pp. 48–51.

90. Compare Desai, *Beyond Bollywood*, p. 59; and for more on queer South Asian Atlantic cinema, see Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, pp. 1–6, 63–160.


92. In this context, South Asian Americans are no longer ‘a part, yet apart’ within a wider Asian American coalition; see Shankar and Srikanth, *A Part, Yet Apart*. On cinematic challenges to traditional interracial buddy tropes, see Nishime, ‘I’m Blackanese’, pp. 43–60.


102. George’s hypocrisy anticipates Kureishi’s discussion of his father’s attitudes to white British women, whom he dismisses as ‘slutty’, despite his own marriage to one; see Kureishi, My Ear, p. 115.
103. Khan-Din, East is East, pp. 44–5.
104. This is also how Kunzru refers to his protagonist; see Aldama, ‘Hari Kunzru’, p. 12.
105. Compare Blunt, Domicile, p. 130, where she discusses ‘British snobbery towards Anglo-Indians’ through the term ‘Mr Middlerace’.
106. South Asian history also contains examples of people trying to pass as mixed-race in order to secure the benefits sometimes available to members of biracial communities; for this phenomenon in India, see Blunt, Domicile, pp. 89–90; and in Sri Lanka, McGilvray, ‘Dutch burghers’, p. 262.
110. Compare D’Cruz, Midnight’s Orphans, pp. 33–5, 80. He argues that British colonial literature deploys such Anglo-Indian stereotypes because the mixed-race subject ‘transgress[es] the cordon sanitaire between coloniser and colonised . . . [colonial] novels . . . represent Anglo-Indians as irredeemably other in order to disavow Britain’s material connection with India’; ibid., p. 45, emphasis in original. Cynthia Nakashima has traced the connection between sexually ‘immoral’ behaviour and mixed-race people to the perception that they are themselves the result of ‘an immoral union’; cited in Spickard, ‘What must I be?’, p. 47.
111. Consider the clichéd paradigm of the ill-fated interracial romance between the white man and East Asian woman – a thinly veiled metaphor for the imperial conquest of feminised foreign land – whereby the woman and her equally ‘tragic’ biracial progeny (‘Amerasian’, if born to a white American father) are abandoned in their Asian homeland; examples include Onoto Watanna’s short story ‘A half-caste’ (1899) and, more famously, Giacomo Puccini’s opera Madame Butterfly (1904) and Claude-Michel Schönberg, Richard Maltby, and Alain Boublil’s musical Miss Saigon (1989); see Koshy, Sexual Naturalisation, pp. 13, 29–49. Alternatively, the East Asian woman, orphaned or sold by her family and forced to earn her own living in a demi-monde world, is carried off to a better life in the West by her ‘white knight’; see Hillenbrand, ‘Of myths’, pp. 50, 73n. In these scenarios, the US is somehow seen as a superior alternative despite its anti-miscegenation laws and shameful historical record on Asian American rights; for examples of such films, see Joshua Logan’s Sayonara (1957) and Richard Quine’s The World of Suzie Wong (1960). Western films addressing the aftermath of the Vietnam War show the white man’s compassion through the rescue of his Amerasian offspring; for a critique of such fantasies, see Houston, ‘To the coloniser’, pp. 69–84. In the British Asian texts under discussion here, the
first-generation subject is generally male and enacts a reverse colonisation by claiming white Britain through miscegenation; compare Fanon, *Black Skin*, pp. 41–82; and Selvon’s *Lonely Londoners*. This reverses the patrilineal pattern of official Anglo-Indian descent, although biracial British Asians, especially in the postwar period, act as a reminder of colonial history. It also reflects the gender dynamics suggested by the Policy Studies Institute report cited in n. 7 above and reflects the miscegenist tropes deployed in a series of ‘Merchant Ivory’ films, for instance James Ivory’s *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965), *Bombay Talkie* (1970), and *Heat and Dust* (1983).

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114. Thanks to Sinéad Moynihan for suggesting this point.
116. An early example of this phenomenon is G. V. Desani’s novel *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), where Hatterr’s biracial (white–Malay) status arguably affords Desani a powerful position from which to satirise religious charlatanism and the self-importance of British imperialism in India; and see also Murr’s *Perfect Man*, where the author – not of South Asian descent himself – creates a mixed Indian–white protagonist, Rajiv (Raj) Travers, taking him on a global journey from India to Britain to a 1950s American South in order to observe all three places, but most of all the US, at a critical distance. Although Murr devotes a certain amount of attention to Raj’s mixed blood in the novel, it is generally viewed through the eyes of the other characters, all of whom are white, rather than being considered by Raj himself.

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120. Mukherjee, *Darkness*, p. 43.
121. Mukherjee, *Leave It To Me*, p. 28.
126. Compare Rody, *Interethnic*, pp. 150, 152–4, where she observes this tendency in Asian American literature more widely.
127. See Chapter 2, n. 43, for a brief discussion of this concept.
130. Mukherjee, ‘Imagining’, p. 82; and compare Nash, ‘Hidden history’, pp. 15–16, 22.
132. See Maxey, ‘Beige outlaws’.
133. In Varun Khanna’s film *American Blend* (2006), the presence of Maya, a half-Indian, half-white character, is thus unusual. Yet the narrative avoids proper analysis of her experiences of this mixed status through the notion that she has reached adulthood with no knowledge that she is racially mixed and indeed passing, unwittingly, as white. This is because Jayme, Maya’s Caucasian American mother, has kept her daughter’s Indian side hidden from her: a secret which is divulged only late on in the film.
135. Compare traditional Biblical exegesis in which key passages – for instance, Leviticus 19.19 – have been interpreted as a prohibition on racial mixing. For a classic discussion of these passages, see Douglas, *Purity*, p. 54; on Hindu fears of caste impurity, see ibid., pp. 126–7, 145; and D’Cruz, *Midnight’s Orphans*, p. 82.