CHAPTER FOUR

"ONE WAY TRIP":
POLITICS OF SPATIAL LOCATIONS

Migration is a one way trip. There is no “home” to go back to. (Hall, 1987: 44)

A full migrant suffers, traditionally, a triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behaviour and code is very unlike, and sometimes offensive to, his own. And this is what makes migrants such important figures: because roots, language, and social norm have been three of the most important parts of the definition of what it is to be a human being. The migrant, denied all three, is obliged to find new ways of describing himself, new ways of being human [. . .]. (Rushdie, 1991: 277-278; my italics).

The complex location of diaspora informs the stories produced by diasporic writers, with the result that these stories are fraught with the experiences that are based mostly on dislocation, fractured identities, sharing and adaptation or re-accommodation of social and cultural values. Thus, migrant narratives need to be understood as inherently and essentially “spatial stories”—stories of movement and stories of different homes. Rosemary Marangoly George in The Politics of Home (1996) claims that “the search for the location in which the self is ‘at home’ is one of the primary projects of twentieth century fiction in English” (3) that is, in other words, a “search for viable homes for viable selves” (5).

By politics of spatial location, I mean a migrant’s positions within power hierarchies created through historical, political, economic, geographic and other socially stratifying factors in the new homeland. Writing by migrants is a culture specific tool and has developed, as Sudha Rai (2002) observes, against the backdrop of issues relating to the movement between home country and country of immigration as geographical spaces; culture shock; attempted cultural recuperation through ethnic bonding; binary
stereotyping of cultures traversed; the immigrant split-self; fantasies of return passages; and tentative stabilisations of identity. (134)
The migrants’ search for the things lost and their efforts to re-discover, cherish and bond with their past and culture alike often seems to the dominant majority, as nothing more than tactics of enclosure on the part of the new migrants. This was also noted, almost half-a-decade ago, by John O’Grady (a.k.a. “Nino Culotta”) in his famous novel, They’re a Weird Mob (1957):

There are far too many New Australians in this country who are still mentally living in their homelands, who mix with people of their own nationality, and try to retain their own language and customs ... Cut it out. There is no better way of life in the world than that of the Australian. (204)

This highly ambiguous Australian “way of life” that O’Grady is talking about here was used initially as the line of attack by the Anglo-Celtic Australian public to “discriminate against migrants” (White 160). According to Stratton and Ang (1998) the Australian way of life “was a vague discursive construct which lacked historical and cultural density, often boiling down to not much more than the suburban myth of ‘the car, the family, the garden and a uniformly middle-class lifestyle’ ” (153; see also White 166). However, it can be seen that this same concept of an Australian “way of life” as different from others was glorified in white Australian literature on the basis of its pluralistic, tolerant and multi-cultural nature.

Diasporans, in turn, see attempts—both on the individual as well as governmental levels—to initiate migrants into the culture and policies of the hostland as a ploy by the politically and linguistically dominant group to categorize them in some way or the other solely in the context of assimilation and multicultural policies. And sometimes, as pointed out by Janis Wilton (1985) in the case of Australia, the process of recognition of the “otherness” as now part of the “Australianness” can be slow (24). Wilton notes that Anglo-Australians have taken a lot of time to “recognise the richness and complexity of the experiences and traditions which have been brought to and re-created in Australia” by the migrants (24). And when the migrants are viewed through the lens of literature or other representative mediums, they just come out as stereotypical, complex, exotic, marginal, eccentric bunch of characters and highly un-Australian because of their racial and other differences. These archetypal viewpoints and prejudices are largely due to ignorance and lack of
knowledge on the part of the dominant culture about the culture(s) of the incoming migrants. This leaves the diasporans in a Trishanku-like situation of neither retaining their nationality of origin, and being at best, not-so-Australian Australians (see Parameswaran 2000; A. Sarwal 2006).

On the politics of home and spatial location, Rosemary Marangoly George reflects:

> Immigration and the fictions it engenders teach a certain detachment about “home.” In these texts identity is linked only hypothetically (and through hyphenation) to a specific geographical place on the map. And yet, wandering on the margins of another’s culture does not necessarily mean that one is marginal. Home in the immigrant genre is a fiction that one can move beyond or recreate at will. The association between an adequate self and a place to call home is held up to scrutiny and then let go. As postmodern and postcolonial subjects, we surprise ourselves with our detachment to the things we were taught to be attached to. (200)

The South Asian-Australian writers’ postcolonial and postmodern experiences as presented in the narratives analysed here support this statement. Specially, when “certain things and places” at first remind them of the homeland, then on visiting the homeland they are reminded of the adoptive home i.e. Australia, a hope for the future of the diaspora, and finally, when they are able to “transfer at will” between the two now familiar cultures (see Bennett, 2007: 336). In this chapter I analyse narratives in the light of questions and issues concerning the spatial identities the diasporans carry. The chapter is divided into three sub-sections: Part one “Re-collections of New and Old Homes,” deals with the diasporans recollections of their lost home and problems of setting up or shifting of “home” to the hostland; while part two “Imagining Others: Prejudices, Racism and Indifference,” deals with the presentation of other ethnicities and races, the pre-conceived social and political prejudices that are carried over from old homes and attitude of Australians towards South Asians and vice versa. The third part, “The Future in Australia,” deals with the issues of complexity of setting up of home and how diasporans imagine themselves in the present Australian social and national space and see themselves and the coming generations in the future.
4.1 – Re-collections of New and Old Homes

Wise (2000) observes that the idea of Home,

[... ] is a collection of milieus, and as such is the organization of marker’s (objects) and the formation of space. But home, more than this, is a territory, an expression. Home can be a collection of objects, furniture, and so on that one carries with one from move to move. Home is the feeling that comes when the final objects are unpacked and arranged and the space seems complete (or even when one stares at unpacked boxes imagining). (299)

In relation to the issues and problems of setting up or shifting of “home” to the hostland, the diasporans at every level confront the “localised” (Bromley 13)—be it in the form of people, places, names, etc. And this confrontation with the localised often gives rise to a “double representation” in the works of the diasporic authors. It is interesting to note how diasporic authors represent “home” in relation to where they come from and where they are now settling down.

The concept of home and the process of settling down is seen from a child’s perspective in Mena Abdullah’s first collection of short stories The Time of the Peacock (1965) about which Bruce Bennett (2002) observes,

Abdullah’s stories of childhood exhibit a gentle, celebratory tone, mingled with a certain sadness at the loss of childhood harmony and innocence. (158)

Immigrants bring many things to Australia, but their lasting contribution to the country has always been their children. The family presented in Abdullah’s collection consists of a Muslim father and an ex-Brahmin mother and their three children—Rashida, Nimmi and Lal. Nimmi, the young daughter, narrates these stories. Paul Sharrad (2000) in relation to the use of a child narrator has argued that “with innocent, sometimes naïve ideas on life,” a child narrator “allows the white adult reader to feel benignly condescending towards all kinds of difference represented” (253).

In her story the “The Time of the Peacock” Abdullah presents an immigrant Punjabi Muslim family living like exiles in New England, the Australian hinterland, which is their world now. This particular story exploits the Australian myth of the independent rural pioneer indulged in taming the land i.e. farming. This family is away from home yet the “stories [from home] were alive in [their] heads” (1). The family gets as pet from India—a white peacock fondly called Shah-Jehan but who
will never open his tail in this country” (3). For this family being Australian is not as important as preserving their cultural heritage in an alien hinterland. The very process of preserving can be seen working internally in the family, as the narrator’s mother, who was Brahmin before marriage and “believed in the tales of Krishna and Siva” (6), even now after getting married to a Muslim “remembers her old ways” (6). These religious beliefs, however small they are, such as the mother putting milk outside the house to satisfy and feed the snake, are dangerous in the Australian hinterland. The narrator’s father knows that it is foolishness to do such a thing and removes the bowl of milk without telling anybody or hurting his wife’s belief. In this story, the peacock, Shah-Jehan’s opening the tail can be taken as a symbol of joy and happiness, which this family is looking for in Australia. Whereas, the peacock himself becomes “in all his grandeur” a symbol and “link between the past and the present” as Intizar Hussain notes (184). Hussain in his “A Chronicle of the Peacocks” (1999) recounts many of the myths attached to the peacock. In one of the myths, the peacock is presented as “the bird of the paradise” exiled from the heaven for his sin of helping Satan (185). The family is exiled, just like this peacock, from their homeland into the vast hinterland of Australia, almost in total isolation from Australians, both individual and the society.

Similarly, in Abdullah’s story “Kumari” there is only loneliness for these diasporic children, as they do not have other kids as companions and playmates. The only pastime the family can think of is talking about India and naming the various plants, animals and places in their mother-tongue—Hindoostani—to continue or form new links with the past. This “evocation of audio, alimentary and visual pleasures through the naming of places” according to Chambers (1994) is coming “across cities that are both real and invisible,” a journey through places “whose symbolic and real alterity provide another chance, a further question, a further opening” (28).

Another insight into the working of an immigrants mind, language acquisition and the process of creating stories or yarns is provided in Abdullah’s “The Outlaws.” It is only through stories or yarns, the very acts of exploration, that the protagonists explore what they have lost in leaving their homelands and celebrate what they have achieved in this new land. Here, Abdullah compares the story of an Australian bushranger, Thunderbolt, with the story of an Indian dacoit, Malik Khan. Narrating stories becomes very important because the migrant experiences are best reflected in
the type of stories each individual remembers to comfort himself/herself and at the same time to tell others. For example, here, the stories of the narrator’s mother are set in a mythological space and time and are the most fanciful. She acquaints her children with the
gentle and strange, stories of the time when magic people walked through Hindustan, and everything they touched was right and good. (42)
Meanwhile, the “father’s stories were true and real” (42), containing practical wisdom inside them, drawn from his experiences as a hawker in Australia. But it is the stories of Uncle Seyed, which give pleasure to the narrator and other children of the household because his “stories were different—not always gentle, not always real [ . . . ] his stories were for grown-ups” (42) and, most importantly, in the language of the new homeland—English, that can be read as an act of educating the children with the ways of the hostland or new home.

In Mena Abdullah’s story from the same collection “Grandfather Tiger,” Raj, a second generation Indo-Australian and father of the protagonist Loti, believes in an Anglo-Australian education for his children, as opposed to his mother who thinks:

“Oh it is not right for her to go!” she said. “It is not right! She will learn the white people’s ways and think we are ignorant. She will call me stupid.” (94)

Raj is optimistic and understands the value of English education for his children in a new land.

“No, Mother, no,” said Raj. “My children must learn to live here. They cannot stay in the house always. They must learn all they can. Then they can go to India and teach what they know.”

“They have never known India,” said Ram-Suka. “They may not wish to go.”

“But now that India is free,” said Raj, “there is so much to be done. Schools to be built, and hospitals, and people will be needed to run them. India will be great again.”

“I thought,” said Ram-Suka, “that you were an Australian.”

“I am. I was born here,” said Raj. “But my people—”

“Your people,” said Ram-Suka. “I have been back and I have seen your people. There is a line through your father’s village. Where are your people? Are you Indian or Pakistani? They will kill you if you do not know.”
“Old friend,” said Raj, shamefaced, “old friend, you are always right and always wise. But what are we to do? I belong here. I am an Australian, but who will believe me? My skin, my face, my thinking contradicts me, and who will accept me—or my children? He looked at Joti.” (94-95)

A discussion on value of English education in Australia soon turns into a plea for acceptance or socialization of the family with the mainstream white Australians. On the subject of the socialization process Milton Gordon (1964), in his seven dimensional model of assimilation, postulates that the key to a meaningful relationship between people belonging to the ethnic minority and the majority is “structural assimilation”—the large scale entrance of ethnic minorities into the cliques, clubs, bazaars, and other “primary-group institutions” of the “core” sub-society (see also Cameron 2006). In the story, Raj is a second generation Indo-Australian, who is born and brought up in Australia. Raj fears that if he is still not being accepted as “Australian,” then the future of his children and all the third generation Indo-Australians is bleak. His question is straight—does his colour and thinking make him unAustralian? But then what is Australianness? The answer to both the questions is that there is no single trait that can define someone as or something as Australian (see White 1985; Harper and White 2009). Another important issue is the futility of return to “home”—post-partition India. As Ram-Sukal, the family friend points out: “They will kill you if you do not know” (95) whether you are an Indian or Pakistani. Post-partition India is, to borrow a phrase from V. S. Naipaul (1964), “an area of darkness”—a completely pessimistic world for some diasporans. This has also caused an acute sense of disillusionment and loss of determination to help the homeland among the diasporans.

Similarly, Satendra Nandan in “The Guru” (1988) presents people of Indian origin looking for “future possibilities” away from their motherland. Pundit advises the protagonist Beckaroo alias Beer Kuar Singh to not change his religion under any circumstances—because that would be, according to him, a “political suicide” (72). He does not know that Beckaroo has already converted to Christianity in Tasmania to marry his love, Wendy, and “to get a good job in the civil services [as] a Christian from Tasmania would carry more weight than a local one” (72). Beckaroo, looking at houses on the street on his way to his house, compares the lives of second and third generation migrants with their forefathers and reflects that the “temporary shelters of
the fathers [which] had become the permanent homes of the children who had accepted their lot with deepening fatalism" (70). One of the questions that such diaspora narratives constantly ask is: how much of an ancestral culture and hierarchy is “preserved,” “transgressed” and “transformed” in the passage of diaspora (Lin Ho 56)? It is the differences in power and status that characterize community networks and relations not just in the homeland but also its preservation in the hostland thus providing class mobility and social capital in the host society through generations (see Ballard 2001; Levitt 2009).

Brij V. Lal in “Labasa Secondary” (2001) notes how his indentured grandparents, first generation immigrants, must have felt upon arriving in Fiji from India:

In India their lives had been defined by their caste and community, their place in society determined by past deeds and misdeeds. There was no possibility of change in their own lifetime. But crossing the kala pani (dark, dreaded waters) had disrupted the old structures, and the rigours of daily plantation life had further destroyed the basis of social hierarchy. The lowly leather tanners, skinners of dead animals, and the twice-born Brahmins were all equal in the eyes of colonial law. In these green islands, private enterprise and individual initiative rather than social status determined whether a person survived and prospered. (102-103)

It is a “revolutionary realisation” at that time too and with education, the young Indian-Fijians looked forward to a “new more egalitarian world” (103).

As mentioned earlier, these migrants, who were part of the “labour diaspora” as a result of the colonial system of indentured labour, created in Fiji a mini-India, which was their way of projecting a return to a past to get over their feelings of rootlessness and lack of a permanent home. This was to some extent also because the “old diaspora broke off contact with India which, subsequently, existed for it as a pure imaginary space of epic plenitude” (Mishra, 2002: 236). The protagonist of Nandan’s story, Beckaroo, expresses an anxiety which most of the second and third generation feels, i.e., not the sense of homelessness or nostalgia for home but change that one needs in his or her life towards improving one’s lot rather than being stagnated in the old traditions of a lost homeland. He sees “history [as] what one sees in the rear view mirror” (70), and one wants to move away “as far the windscreen presents new vistas,
new perspectives" (70). Beckaroo stands for change in both economical and social conditions of his villagers.

Rashmere Bhatti in her autobiographical piece, “The Good Indian Girl” (1992), recalls her family background in Australia, the feelings of isolation, the lack of familiar comforts from India being available to the family, the Punjabi women’s role in the family, exposure to both cultures (Indian and Australian), her early education and tertiary studies, Indian tradition of arranged marriage, and career choices offered to girls in Indian-Australian community. She also points out the significance of culture (both Indian and Australian) in the third generation’s lifestyle. She writes of her dilemma about being a third generation Indian-Australian:

I think sorting out whether I was an Australian or an Indian was one of the most crucial decisions of my life. It is difficult enough to get on with growing up, without having to cope with a culture and religion that demand much and which influence a large number of both important and everyday decisions. I am certain my life would have been different if I did not have to constantly juggle my thoughts, emotions and actions between two very different ways of life. (131)

The spatial versus the sensory location and generation gap that we see in South Asian-Australian diasporic society emotionally and mentally puzzles the individuals, by further socially resulting in alienation, as Rashmere Bhatti observes,

Throughout high school, participation in social functions was not allowed. It was not considered right to go to school dances, to mingle with boys; there was no social mixing at all. So naturally I became alienated when all other children discussed the school dances—I had to make some lame excuse for not going. (132)

Rashmere Bhatti notes that while her parents were happy because “They thought they had been granted a gift from the gods, to have the fortune to live in Australia—the Lucky Country” (132), her father, who was born and brought up in India where he also got married and then migrated to join his father, who was already working as a pioneer farmer on a plantation, is particularly rooted in the old ways of India and also wants his children to grow up as Indians in Australia. Australia, and the Australian way of life, offers Rashmere and her elder sister the courage to revolt against him, thus “creating something of a controversy in the community” (132). Australia offers Rashmere not just freedom and confidence to rebel for her rights but also a career
choice and self-confidence to feel proud in her “new image” of “Australian Indian” (134).

In her narrative about her life experience as an Indian-Australian girl, we also get glimpses about her mother’s life as a pioneering migrant woman in Australia. Her mother came to Australia at the age of 22 after an arranged marriage, to live a lonely pioneer lifestyle with few Indians or Australians around her. Hers was a life of childrearing, cooking and enduring the primitive conditions of bushland Australia. (131)

For Rashmere’s mother who must have spent her early life in India surrounded by relatives, neighbours, street-hawkers, etc., a pioneer’s life is a lonely one. She misses “her family and homeland” and so “reminiscing about a carefree way of life full of chores, religion, girlish capers and dreams” tells Rashmere stories of her life in India (132). Rashmere’s mother can be compared with Nimmi’s mother in Mena Abdullah’s collection *The Time of the Peacock*, who as a pioneer migrant woman is placed in very similar situation and reminiscences a lot about her life spent in Kashmir.

Rashmere has heard so much about India from her mother that when the time comes to look for a husband, she visits India. She writes:

> So I went to India with much hope. Having spent my entire life in Australia, I had a picture of *my homeland* as a backward place with only the bare necessities for survival. Much to my astonishment, there unfolded for me a diverse land alive with vibrant colours and people—full of a history and culture that I could identify with. I found that for the first time I completely belonged. I felt I had come home and I didn’t quite realize till then just how much of an outsider I had felt in *my western world*. (135; my italics)

She marries a “lovely Indian man” and with him spends “a glorious year exploring, getting to know India” before beginning their “life in Australia” (135). Rashmere’s idea of an originary homeland leads her, as it does some second generation migrants to actually temporarily migrate to the place where their parents are from. They expect to find the ideal homeland which had provided them with a strong sense of belonging during their transnational childhood and adolescence. This is the concept of “roots migration” that is useful here to describe the migration of the second generation to their parents’ homeland—although not a permanent one in Rashmere’s case (see
Wessendorf 2007). The use of possessive adjective “my” with both India and Australia, and her return to Australia with her husband after an exploration of India presents her comfortable adaptation and acceptance as a second generation diasporan woman to both the countries. She is happy in/with her hyphenated identity (Indian-Australian) and has learned to negotiate with the Indian and Australian spaces, community and home.

Chandani Lokugé in her short story “Alien,” the last story in her collection *Moth and Other Stories* (1992), explores the issue of migration through the story of Ramya, who migrates from Sri Lanka to Adelaide. Her brother, Ranil, a well-known doctor, was brutally murdered by terrorists for not following their orders and the whole family ostracised. She could not believe that a nation could be so oppressed—how mutely it executed any order issued by the oppressors. But this was 1989. The terrorists had broken the back of the people. (95)

The refusal to subjugate to terrorism cost Ramya’s brother his life. The police did not investigate the murder and family members lost all hope for justice. It is under these circumstances in the “reign of terror” in Sri Lanka that Ramya submitted her application for migration to Australia. [... ] The application was processed in six months. She was granted the resident visa [...]. Her parents had promised that they would join her. She knew that they would not. Her mother would never leave behind the memory of her son. Nor would her father. (97)

She is lonely in Australia but glad to be back.

Far away in the distance the lights of Adelaide’s city twinkled as if to welcome her home. [... ] Home—in Sri Lanka. Home now Adelaide. (94)

Australia is a peaceful haven for her and she is one with the trees, birds, water, and the sky here. Yet her reverie on which she builds her narrative eventually makes her realize, at the end of her story, that she is an alien in Australia.

[... ] her friends [... ] whispered secretly with strange tongues. She suffered their exclusion of her. [... ] And it came to her that they did not need her, had never needed her. Did they not resent her alien presence then? (98)
She could not forget the happier times spent in Sri Lanka with her father, mother, and brother. Now, she longs for “the time when she had belonged to that island in the sun that knew no winters” (98; my italics).

Ananda Bandara in Chitra Fernando’s “Making Connections” from Between Worlds (1988) feels “empty” and “immobile” in Sydney. He immigrated to Australia from Sri Lanka but now wonders: “What am I doing here? Why did I come?” (92). To him Australia is “a jumble of unconnected shapes and clashing colours” (89). He feels cheated but doesn’t know whom to blame. His home gives him the feeling of a confined space and at work he feels like “a prisoner chained to his desk” (94). He feels a sense of disconnectedness with Australia—his new home. He observes that Australia offered only material comfort—but man couldn’t live by bread alone. He remembered his experience in the train, that sense of disconnectedness. What it told him was that he didn’t belong here, there was nothing significant he could do. Yet he felt capable of doing something significant—but not here. (95)

But, very soon he recognizes the problem behind his feeling of disconnectedness. Even now, he knew very little about the people he was working with and of the history of Australia. It was his lack of interest in their life and history that has caused his disconnectedness. In a moment of reflection standing near the Harbour Bridge, he feels that he needs to make connections with people and places around him.

He felt exhilarated as he saw that this was the beginning of his double life: his external life of eating, sleeping, going to the office, mowing the lawn, vacuuming the carpet, putting out the garbage—the life of the house-holder; and his secret inner life of making new connections, creating new meanings and forms. (101-102)

His exhilaration is also because in immigrating to Australia he hoped something for himself—“a widening of mental reaches” (102), and now he knew how to attain it.

Even in the compromises and acceptance made by the protagonists about their new identity as Australians, we see a celebration of the past through constant references to India. Manik Datar, who was born in Calcutta, confidently defines her roots through the kin networks and webs of social connection in Australia and India and uses the same theme in her fictional narratives about Indians in Australia. In her story “My Sister’s Mother” (1995), the younger sister living in Australia “begins to
understand that my sister’s mother is different from my mother” (76). The difference is not in terms of blood relationship but it lies deep inside the psycho-sociological conditions before and after the family’s migration to Australia. The elder sister never migrated and stayed back in India—“the country of [her] ancestors” (76), where she proudly “belongs as a native” (76). The shock for the younger sister lies not in the elder sister feeling proud about India despite its many negative conditions, but in how her elder sister perceives internal migration taking place within India. She believes fervently that “outsiders from other provinces in India should recognize they are guests and not demand equal rights as the local people” (76). This statement shocks the younger sister and it is evident because she herself is an “emigrant in a country already taken from its local people” (76). The younger sister, in the early stages of settling down in Australia faced cultural and linguistic shocks, particularly relating to the use of English—her agony at having to constantly switch between Indian English and Australian English. At other levels the younger sister, to preserve her authentic Indian image in Australia owns, as a proud possession, a “white marble mortar and pestle” (77) and because of it has suffered the jokes of her Australian friends to whom it looked like “a piece of Taj Mahal” (77). The elder sister does not need a mortar and pestle, as it is very old fashioned and she proudly says that “in India we are quite modern, we can buy all masalas readymade” (78). The elder sister, who is a connection between India and Australia is “caught between two beliefs” (78)—tradition and modernity in India, but is very happy and comfortable. While, on the other hand, the younger sister, who is also facing the same dilemmas as a diasporan, is still trying to balance and hold on to both the cultures for the sake of her future in Australia and because of this “holding on” she is not rooted in either Australian or Indian identity. The younger sister is married to an Australian and going back to India is not a possibility for her. The only choices available to her are either to confidently strike a balance between her Indianness and Australianness or to merge in the mainstream Australian identity.

The diasporans have come to Australia with a dream—“to learn, to earn [. . .] to save and return” (83), as the protagonist in Manik Datar’s “Point of No Return” (1995) says very poetically. He came to Canberra because he wanted to do something for his country. This is the very nationalist ideology in the heart of most of these
immigrants (going for study) that is carried on in their cultural baggage. The protagonist of this story like the other diasporans is grappling with its world [...] have an urge to name all things [...] birds, plants, places, whims of weathers, foodstuff, objects of everyday use—for in naming them in Bangla (he) can testify their reality. (84)

He is in search of Indian names and definitions for things that are Australian. We often find him comparing the things Australian with what he has left behind in the homeland, a practice to legitimate the things he finds and thus legitimizes his presence in Australia. Nevertheless, in doing so he provides the readers with various images of Canberra—"the bush capital" (85).

In India, for his family and relatives the problem is where to place Australia or where it belongs in terms of cultural effects—to East or West—as they have no stories, good or bad, of Australia and its impact on the immigrants and their culture. So, Australia emerges as a fascination for them but this lack of stories or images of Australia makes it, understandably, "not rate[d] highly as a foreign destination" (85).

On the other hand, on reaching the Indian Cultural Club in Australia, he finds that he can act as a bridge or a point of contact with the homeland for others because of his status as a recent migrant to Australia. But still, even here, he cannot stop himself from thinking in terms of Bengali and non-Bengali i.e. in terms of internal Indian regional or provincial divisions. The only option for him as a solution to his dilemmas is to "make friends with Australians, White Australians" (88). Again, he wants a choice in terms of friendship thus excluding Aborigines and other migrants from the category of "Australians," and the result of such a situation can only be "loneliness" (88). The solution for his problem too lies in his resolve to "belong" to Australia from within.

As seen from most of the cases above, the diaspora writers are desperate to write and talk about their experiences and to reflect on both the past and present. At the same time it is unmistakably evident that the diaspora writer, though presenting an image of Australia for the readers back home, still uses the Indian subcontinent as a comparative model or reference point. He/She presents the place that is left behind and the potential that this leaving has created for his/her present and future. This is mainly because of the diasporic author's need to strike a balance between the two—one that is lost i.e. the homeland, and the other that still has to be gained or conquered
i.e. the hostland. In these short stories, the main attempt of the writer is to move away from India and towards Australia. This movement of the diasporic authors away from India, in a sense, may be considered as the diasporans’ “farewell to India” and they, as Makarand Paranjape observes,

demonstrate a self-legitimating logic of leaving the homeland behind and therefore at least indirectly, of embracing the new diasporic home. ("One Foot [...]") 167)

So, the diasporic writing or literature in a way remains preoccupied with a sense of self-rationalization. Providing reasons for leaving the homeland, of being dislocated, of presenting a separate identity in the new homeland, of assimilating or integrating with the mainstream, and so on and so forth remains a common strategy amongst the writers of various migrant groups. A common strategy of diasporic communities [...] to “make up” the culture, as a means of interacting with others, negotiating an image that gives them importance and value, even by “inventing” traditions derived from local customs or events but appropriated and transformed in the new environment. (Coronado 49)

The homeland like the hostland, still, remains a pervasive reality for them. And the process of grieving for the lost homeland ultimately leads to an acceptance of the new “home” i.e. Australia, happily or unhappily. It can be seen that in most cases this process takes place happily and not only because of the involvement of economic and other privileges as incentives. Yet, in the acceptance is the exclusion of Aborigines and limited references to other migrant communities in Australia in these short stories which makes us wonder how South Asian diaspora imagines these “Others.” For in its imagining the other we can clearly glimpse its self-perception as discussed in the next section.

4.2 – Imagining Others: Prejudices, Racism and Indifference

Home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to all. Home is the desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few. (George 9; my italics)

Rosemary Marangoly George explains that spatial locations or “homes” are more about exclusion than inclusion because they involve both screening procedures and
closed borders (18). Homes embody a double nature because, while they might be places of security and comfort, they might also be sites of violence, terror, and injustice (22). She further notes that homes are not neutral places because imagining a home is, like imagining a nation—a political act that involves power and control since membership is extended to a chosen few and designed to keep others out (6-9). A diverse society, such as Australia, founded on migration does bring with it a range of ever-changing issues and challenges. This is because migrants, in their “cultural baggage” also bring their “traditional hatreds” and prejudices (see Vamplew 370). Migrants in their new homes are involved in a game of power and control through presenting other races in pre-conceived social and political prejudices carried over from old homes. Here, the South Asian prejudices that keep them apart from and against each other are at the same time also a unifying front against chiefly the whites, Chinese, Middle Easterns, and Africans.

In her short story “In the East My Pleasure: A Postcolonial Love Story” (1992), Yasmine Gooneratne discusses the concept of labelling by presentation of two American Professors—Philip Carter, a white American and Leila Tan, his ex student and now a prominent Asian-Australian-American feminist scholar working in the area of Asian studies. Leila says about her work in the USA:

“It’s a form of voluntary international social service. Aim: The Education of America. Believe me, America needs it.” (273)

She has been in the USA for a long time now and does not feel comfortable in filling forms at the US Immigration counter. She continues:

“Do you know that when I went through US Immigration in Honolulu, I was asked to fill in a form that actually asked me whether I was black, white, Hispanic, Asian or Islander?” (273)

Carter, the American feels interested and wants to know which box she checked. Leila replies,

“Oh, Asian, of course. But only because it didn’t seem to me I really fitted into any of the others. But, I ask myself, did I—do I really fit into the Asian box? ... Why didn’t that form ask about language ability? You preach diversity, you talk affirmative action, and then in the name of both you go right ahead and do the narrow-minded, neo-colonial thing, you divide people, you label them.” (273; my italics)

This is also the reason why Leila has chosen to pursue Asian studies in America. She asserts:
“Coming here, being here, speaking English in a funny accent but speaking it a great deal better than most people here can speak it, I become an American Learning Experience. About Asia. About Australia. About the world—the real world, which is outside America.” (274)

Her reply is a clear indicator that hyphenated identities, like Leila’s, in a globalised and transnational world, cannot just be captured in boxes of bureaucracy and immigration restrictions.

The narrator in Christopher Cyrill’s “Dusk and the Public” (2000) has no knowledge about the native Australians. He says that

I was so sheltered from the customs of native Australians, so sheltered from the people themselves, that in my childhood I believed they were from another country. I thought them immigrants, as my own family were, but I could never name their homeland. They did not resemble the Africans or Asians or Americans I had met or seen TV, and they were unlike the Australians I schooled with or befriended. Their skin was darker than anyone I knew, darker than my own. Up until the time I first heard the word Aborigine, and had it defined for me, I presumed the people who slept beneath the palm trees of St Kilda Esplanade were homesick, as my own parents often complained of being. (10)

Similarly, the narrator in Christopher Cyrill’s “Pestlesongs” (1997), follows the route (in Australia) that his grandfather took before his death—a kind of Aboriginal walkabout or spiritual journey. He travels along the highway in Australia and comes across towns about which he does not know anything—“lost in the broader cartographies of state and country” (179). He imagines his grandfather “passing along his way mountains and deserts and rivers named in a language long forgotten even amongst its once native speakers [...]”—the Aborigines (179).

In Suneeta Peres Da Costa’s story “Sydney 2000” (2003), Lata, a second generation Indian-Australian is in love with Fritz, a German. Fritz is very excited to go and see the Olympic flame procession, while Lata is totally uninterested. Fritz is surprised and asks:

“You’re not interested in your own country, in your own people? You’re not glad to see them smiling?” (44)

Is Fritz’s question just about “feeling at home” and staking claim to a place as one’s own? Or the destabilising effects of transition and movement of the individual’s cultural certainties? Probably, it is just a matter of choice, not related to an issue of
nationality or ethnicity. Lata is not interested in sports, as is reflected throughout the story. She cannot listen to Australians talking about sports and Olympic Games all the time. Although for Lata “home” means Australia, as evident when she answers Klara’s questions on native animals of Australia and on another occasion, such as on a visit to Germany, when she tells Fritz that she is feeling homesick (45).

David De Vos in “The Third Day of the Test” (1997) notes that when he saw the news of the civil war in Sri Lanka on Australian TV, he felt that the civil war has finally “grabbed Australia’s short attention span,” as all the “civil wars in developing countries eventually get their fifteen minutes of fame” (265). His story about the situation in Sri Lanka is quite prophetic. In relation to the LTTE chief Prabhakaran, he notes: “Where, I wonder, is Mister Prabhakaran? [...] Will he surrender to the army, confess his sins and then join the Colombo government as a statesman? Or should we expect that this singular Tiger will make his last stand in Jaffna’s streets among people who were and are prepared to sacrifice themselves for the cause?” (265). This war is compared with another war being played out in Perth—international Test cricket.

The Sri Lankan Test team has some way to go before it can out face the arrogance of the Australians, who are fresh from a two one victory over Pakistan which means that nothing from the subcontinent is going to worry the gum chewers. I suppose it’s the nature of this war that one must try to immediately wrong foot one’s opponent. (266)

In this instance, he further notes the portrayal of Sri Lankan team, particularly the questioning of off-spinner Muralidharan’s bowling action and ball tampering allegations by the Australian media. The writer notes that today “Cricket is the test of Australian-ness,” and it is “a rite of passage for the country and its people” (268). He proposes humorously:

Don’t worry about a language test for immigrants or demand that they bring a whopping bank balance as they escape Hong Kong—just take them to the nets, show them a ball, explain the arcane field placings and the names of certain deliveries, and then if they still show interest, if they can read an old score board, if they can behave like Geoff Marsh within and without the game, then and only then hand over the papers of their citizenship because they’ve made it. (268)

The reference to Chinese migrants escaping from Hong Kong shows the social prejudices one group of migrants—South Asians—has with another one—Asians
(Chinese). The writer belongs to the English-educated Burgher community of Sri Lanka and reads in cricket the process of belonging to the Australian way of life. He remembers an incident from his schooldays when his wickets were knocked off by an eleven-year-old Aussie boy. That was torturous for him and he suffered “the shame and the failure” of “non-belonging” at school, and never played cricket again, which according to him is “the real essence of Australia” (267).

In Adib Khan’s story “Between Eros and Agape” (1999), the narrator, presumably an affluent South Asian-Australian businessman, thinks that he is in exile in this “strange country.” He further comments on some serious contemporary issue of indifference and social prejudice that is carried towards other migrant groups:

History was not about morality but about charting progress and development. A little too much ethnic diversity out there … Oh, Chinese and Thai cuisine were fine … Heck, I wasn’t narrow-minded at all. Just a concerned citizen. Why, one of my best mates was a Singaporean, educated at Harvard […] (111).

The narrator’s view on the issue of migration, particularly Asian (Chinese), is a comment on his own sense of “intolerance and mild social prejudices” (111). He seems so involved in the idea to assimilate in the mainstream Australian way of life and thinking that he does not realize he is becoming a racist and stereotyping “Other” migrants present around him. But for Adib Khan the future of Australians—both whites and migrants—lies in the idea of “mateship” and “a communal sense of wellbeing” that can take Australian society forward (111).

Sunil Govinnage in “The Vanished Trails” (2005) too presents a story of South Asian prejudices towards other migrants and white Australians. On landing in Sydney, Siri observes the cab driver’s Italian accent, which suddenly reminds him “of an ugly graffiti in a public place” (75). He is there to meet his old friend, Anura and his wife Sujatha, Sri Lankan immigrants settled in Sydney. They migrated from Canada to Australia in the hope that they will get good jobs and secure future for their daughter. But “despite the Canadian experience, Anura could not secure a good job after he arrived in Australia” (75). While his wife is able to get a job as administrative assistant, Anura blames Australians for his plight—“some employers are racists in Australia” (75). Siri, his friend from school days, on hearing this wonders:

Is Australia a racist country? Why are migrants not always treated properly? (75)
Anura also feels that apart from racism, corruption is also a major cause of unemployment as most of the jobs are taken away by Indians, who apparently have connections with the right persons. He exclaims, “Bloody Indians! They have enough to do in their country but they come here and grab our jobs!” (76). Their prejudices towards Indians are highlighted when in an Indian restaurant in Sydney, Anura orders Indian food and after ten minutes walks out as the food was not on time. Siri asks him, “Why did we wait all that time?” and Anura replies, “Well I want the bloody Indians to learn a lesson. They would have cooked our meals” (78). Anura’s frustration and disappointment with himself has resulted in targeting others, here Indians, for his missed opportunities. In his daughter’s view, her parents have changed a lot, but “they’re still more Canadians than Aussies!” (78) as Canadians are more “demanding,” while Aussies are “more laidback and not aggressive” (79). On the other hand, Siri, who is also struggling as a writer in Australia, cannot get his poems published in magazines, even after doing a university course. He notes:

*There is no place for migrants’ writings in Australia. Everything has to be white and linked to their bloody convict past!* (76)

Siri, after all the rejections, loses all inspiration to write. He feels that since his writings deal with Aboriginal issues and deaths in custody (76), his themes are not good enough for white Australian magazines. Anura too has a very strong feeling that behind the rejection of Siri’s works, there is an element of racism involved. The daughter, on the other hand, has accepted the fact that she is an Australian, and

*Just like the white settlers, we have settled down in Australia. We need to accept things as they are. We can’t change the past and history.* (79)

Siri knows that he and his friend cannot “become a part of the history” but can sure try to change things” (79) for their small community and a better tomorrow.

As can be noted from the above analysis some of these perceptions are deep rooted in the South Asian diasporans cultural make-up. These are old social prejudices that cannot be easily discarded as they are entrenched in South Asian perceptions and habits of determining who they are, how they see the “Other” and what they see in the “Other” (see Stratton and Perera 2009).

Despite the development of many policy initiatives, racism remains a major concern. Historically and in more contemporary times, discrimination or indifference has emerged as a problem for the Australian government and the intelligentsia—
creative writers and academics. There are many forms of racism or discrimination. Culture and race sometimes become intertwined and dependent upon each other, even to the extent of including nationality or language among the categories that "race" covers to the set of definitions of racism. As noted earlier, the Macquarie Dictionary defines "racism" as the belief that human races have distinctive characteristics which determine their respective cultures, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule or dominate others.

Some scholars believe that in Australian culture radicalization has been so normalized by stereotyping the "Other" that it is deeply disturbing. Richard Delgado (1995) points out that

A culture constructs social reality in ways that promote its own self-interest [. . .]. Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct it with words, stories and silences. (xiv)

A case in point is Yasmine Gooneratne's story, "Navaranjini Takes Note of Signs and Visions" (1992). Gooneratne describes Navaranjini's first cab ride from the airport to a suburb in Sydney or in other words her first brush with Australian society. The ride is imbued with Navaranjini's vision:

I had decided, quite early on, that though I didn't know much about Australia to start with, I was going to learn. Part of the baggage I packed for our visit to Australia, I now realize, was a very strong determination to make a great success of the next five years, for my husband's sake. And so I decided to equip myself early for whatever Australia would put before us. (36)

Navaranjani is confident about her preparation but is alarmed by the pace of the city, grim faces, stickers on cars and racist graffiti on the walls—"ASIANS OUT" and "BASH A PAK A DAY" (40). Her first impressions of Australia turn into fear as she realizes "anything can happen in Australia" (38). But she wonders about an Australian immigration poster—"a smiling child with her woolly lamb" (40)—that she once saw as a schoolgirl in Sri Lanka.

I knew, then, that the welcoming smile on the face of that little girl in the poster at school had been meant for someone else. Whoever it was that she had held her flowers out so invitingly, it could not have been for me. (41; my italics)
Chapter 4 – “One Way Trip”  

Her initial confidence and self-determination of making this journey of relocation from Sri Lanka to Australia a success, seeing the strange gaze and racist remarks around her becomes weak.

Similarly, Ruth Van Gramberg in her short autobiographical narrative “Immigration Dreams, Foundations and Formations” (1997) points out that once the immigrants have undertaken their journey and reached Australia they are often subjected to racism in this adopted homeland:

On the way you’ll be misused, mistaken, confused, churned up, spat upon and sworn at. Your emotions will be ripped apart and laid bare, as you strive to survive and there will be occasions when you feel so lost and inadequate, you wish to run back to where you came from, to admit defeat. [ . . . ] you lose your equilibrium, as the earth has not even begun to stabilize beneath your feet and you don’t know who or what you are .... (209)

The results of such racism and dehumanization can be very dangerous for a new migrant and emotionally he or she will feel drained out and the simple everyday happenings that one takes for granted, “can develop into the most frightening, desolate and desperate situations” (210). As

The beginning of a new life in a new country can be very traumatic for any migrant. There are so many barriers to be overcome, largely the complete geographical, physical and cultural differences are intimidating. More so, if language is a problem. (210)

Van Gramberg feels an advantage over other migrant groups and other people from the Indian subcontinent as her family is proficient in English. She was lucky that she did not face any problems in Australia because of her language. But for others from South Asia, she further notes, “survival for the moment, for each precious day, constitutes a challenge” (210). She observes that travelling is always a problem at the beginning for a migrant—be it the journey from homeland to hostland or to a destination within the hostland.

Travelling was another nightmare without a map, as one only knew the name of the destination written on a piece of paper. How many stops between or beyond was part of the unknown, however once there, you felt it was another parcel of alien territory you had made friends with. (210)

But once the migrant becomes self-confident and starts adjusting and familiarising with his new environment, space and people around him/her, gradually, “a feeling of
stability emerges" and each accomplishment is like "a milestone, stored away for future reference" and looks "forward to the future with enthusiasm and love" (210).

Particularly following the 9/11 attacks in the USA, Muslim Australians (Arabs and South Asians) have experienced a significant rise in Islamophobia and racism. Such prejudice has manifested in the spectrum of violent attacks, mosque and other property damage, slurs, and in stereotyping in the mainstream Australian media. Dr William Jonas, Race Discrimination Commissioner, after listening to Muslim community’s members’ experiences of discrimination and vilification post 9/11, summarized it in his report titled, *Isma - Listen: National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians* (2003):

> What we heard was often disturbing. Participants identifiable as Arab or Muslim by their dress, language, name or appearance told of having been abused, threatened, spat on, assailed with eggs, bottles, cans and rocks, punched and even bitten. Drivers have been run off the road and pedestrians run down on footpaths and in car parks. People reported being fired from jobs or refused employment or promotion because of their race or religion. Children have been bullied in school yards.
> Women have been stalked, abused and assaulted in shopping centres.
> Private homes, places of worship and schools were vandalized and burned. (iii)

The above paragraph best summarizes the reported incidents of discrimination experienced and a general rise in intolerance towards by Muslim Australians following 9/11. They were attacked not because of their “individual actions, but on the basis of a cultural stereotype portrayed as barbaric” (Griffiths 161). These acts of racism and anti-Muslim prejudice in Australia can be linked to the Australian media’s exaggerating information regarding Muslims in general which is closely linked with the American media reports. This made the Muslim community in Australia more vulnerable and isolated. The question that arises here is: Was Muslim community Australia always seen with distrust and fear? Hanifa Deen in her autobiographical narrative “Curry, Crusades and Scripture” (1992) compares the 1990s with the 1940s and the 1950s, the time she grew up as a second generation Pakistani and observes,

> When looking back at the Australia in which I grew up—the Australia of the 1940s and 1950s—a feeling of nostalgia for a bygone era is singularly lacking. The dominant feeling is rather one of relief that fifty years down the track, society has changed for the better, that our
regional insularity has broken down and that cultural diversity is not the aberration it once was. (139)

Hanifa notes that the place, an inner city suburb, where she grew up in 1940s and 50s in Western Australia,

was jokingly and sometimes affectionately called “little Italy,” but it was also a “little Greece,” a “little China,” a “little India” and so on. The same area contained a Muslim mosque, a Jewish synagogue, various Orthodox churches and the more “normal” houses of worship. (139)

As the daughter of a Pakistani-Australian herbalist, she was often teased by high school boys about the “strange-looking herbs” at her father’s shop. She further notes, that although at school the “classroom was ethnically diverse, the school curriculum, especially social studies, was ‘true blue’ Britannica” (140). And as the only Muslim student in the school, she further notes, “I writhed with vague feelings of injustice and persecution” (140). School teachers, instead of enlightening her on historical and religious differences, added on to the confusion. But in the 1990s the scene has totally changed for Muslim children in Australia. Although “still a minority,” they belong to “communities which collectively have a much stronger presence in society” (140-141). Her mother explained the earlier injustice and absurdity of White Australia Policy to the children in her colloquial way:

“If Jesus Christ wanted to come to Australia [. . .] he wouldn’t be allowed in.” (141)

Similarly, impressions of rural life in Australia particularly of the Muslim family and children, is provided in Mena Abdullah’s stories from a Moslem and at times also from a Hindu view-point (see Corkhill 1994). These works from religious perspectives are “a challenge to dominance” of Anglo-Australians and are “made all the more remarkable and potent by the stories’ gentleness, humour, subtlety and apparent guilelessness” (Corkhill, 1994: 72).

Sunil Govinnage in "What’s in a Name, Mate?" from Black Swans and Other Stories (2002) tries to unravel the complexities presented by a new immigrant’s name that often results in indifference from Australians. In South Asia names mean a lot, in addition to containing the spatial identity, they are like a walking genealogy or encyclopedia of a family or family history. As the protagonist Siripala Wickramasinghe enlightens his Anglo-Australian boss about it: “In Sri Lanka, names
mean a lot. For instance, any other Sinhalese person would understand my origin, that I'm not a Tamil, and even know my caste from my name" (2; my italics). But for his Australian colleagues his name is a phonetic problem of epic proportions, leave alone the meaning and the historical significance related to origin, caste and the family. His name is funny for the Aussies and needs to be shortened for their customers. He is ready for the change but not a drastic one, like an Indian Tamil co-worker, who came from Malaysia and changed his name from Gopal Balasubramaniam Chandrasekaran to Frank, for his Australian wife, and now wants his colleagues “to accept him as an Aussie” (2). Moreover, to become an Australian he has not just changed his name but also disinherited his Indian identity by refusing “to join in a curry lunch” that the workers have organized (2). Gopal is not entirely to be blamed for his overzealousness in assimilating in the mainstream. The apathetic and indifferent attitudes that have existed for a long time in Australia exemplify the insensitivity of many Australians in terms of cultural understanding of the “Other.”

Another short story by Sunil Govinnage called “Black Moon” is set at the time when the One Nation Party, a Right-wing political party that advocates zero immigration to Australia, sweeps Queensland elections and is expected to get 25% votes in the coming Western Australia elections too. Jayadeva’s son, Asela, asks his father:

“Dad, what will happen to Asians if they [One Nation Party] come to power in Perth? Will we have to leave Australia? Are we Australians or Sri Lankans, Dad? Me, Sunitha andamma have Aussie passports, but you don’t! Will they ask you to leave?” (93-94)

These questions are not troubling only young Asela, but every migrant’s mind consequent to the rise of One Nation Party and Pauline Hanson. Jayadeva answers:

Where can we go? This is our country, You’re all Australians. Maybe this is the time for me to get an Australian passport as well. (94)

But why in the first place did Jayadeva not become an Australian citizen like his wife? The answer to this lies in his emotional attachment or the uncut umbilical knot that attaches him to his homeland Sri Lanka. He wonders:

How can I give up my Sri Lankan citizenship? I was born there, grew up there, studied there, perhaps one day I may go there to die... (94)

He left Sri Lanka because of terrorism and limited opportunities. Australia has been good to them but will Asians be able to “continue to stay here with racism” (95). The
father-son discussion and their interaction on the issue of the One Nation Party, and prejudice towards the Chinese migrants in the restaurant, provide a humorous peek into “the inescapable ramifications of multiculturality in Australia” (Dissanayake xviii).

Yasmine Gooneratne in her story “Bharat Changes His Image” (1995), provides the first impressions of the couple, Navaranjini and Bharat, who are impressed by the “many fascinating things about Australia, its landscape, its wildlife and its people” (45). The narrator, as if learning from a tourist brochure, learns two things about Australia that are also told to every new immigrant coming here:

[... ] Australia is very rich in unusual species of bird, beast and fish, there are some varieties of Australian wildlife which should be carefully avoided. “Australia is the most dangerous country in the world,” said the brochure the Rentokil man left in our letter box when he came round to spray the foundations of our house against funnel-web spiders and redbacks. Those are the creatures every newcomer to Australia is warned about. [... ] and told me to beware of jellyfish off Australian beaches in January, and sharks and stonefish all the year around.

“Better watch out for stonefish, they’re poisonous, and very very dangerous,” Christina said. “One encounter with a stonefish can be fatal.” (45)

This information is mainly related to the natural dangers that lurk on the earth and sea of Australia. Beneath all the “signs,” there is “also a distinct sense that the South Asian is an alien, a foreigner” (Paranjape, 2007: 342). One thing that Navaranjani sarcastically observes about the people of Australia is

[... ] like the Australian stonefish, which lies on the bottom of the ocean floor like a harmless piece of rock until you step on it,

—Australian people can be endlessly surprising. One surprising thing about them is, that deep, very deep, a long way down, Australians are true Orientalists at heart.

Of course like, like many Asians visitors to this country, I didn’t find that out at first, because Australians hide their sensitive souls under a rough exterior. I was fooled, just like everyone else. Just like my husband. (45)

Further, according to Susan Koshy (1998), some scholars “treat South Asian color consciousness as equivalent to white racism and criticises the immigrant community for denying its own blackness” (285). A point ironically expressed by
Gooneratne’s narrator, Navaranjini, in “Bharat Changes His Image,” where she observes this in relation to how we perceive “Others”:

You see, at home in Sri Lanka, and I suppose in India too, which is the centre, after all, of the real Asian world, we always called far Eastern people “Ching-Chongs.” My husband says it’s racist way of speaking, that we learned racism from the British in our colonial days, and must discard it totally now that we are free. But coming from such a Westernised family as his, he just doesn’t understand. There’s nothing racist about saying ... that word; racism’s unknown in India and Sri Lanka. Race and caste and colour just have their appointed places there in the divine scheme of things, in which everything moves in a beautifully regulated order. Everyone knows that. (46)

The narrator, in her innocence, speaks from a position of a loyal subject and feels that if you are not malignant towards others and follow the “divine scheme” of colour, caste and race then you are not a racist. She forgets that following such an order of things without thinking about the consequences of its result in the larger plan of things is quite dangerous, as racial prejudices are certainly present even among the South Asians (see Schmidt-Haberkamp 2004).

Gooneratne (1994), in an interview, has pointed out that when writing this short story she felt that, if “her racist Asian characters were to come up against fictional Australians, racist themselves, largely due to their colonial hang-ups, maybe they’d cancel each other out” (Rama 4). Australian racism and prejudices are interestingly presented through Prof. Blackstone, a sociology Professor from the same University where Bharat teaches. Blackstone reminds us of the Prof. Blainey and the debate that erupted in Australia in 1984, when Blainey expressed fears on the size of Australia’s migrant intake. Blackstone, like Blainey, questions the concept of multicultural Australia, which in turn has become more Asianised. His provocative statements make headlines and stir national debate. He in his speech on the radio lashes out at Asians:

“Asians,” he’d said on radio, “pollute the air with the fumes of roasting meat. And we Australians,” he’d added, “must be alert to the dangers involved for our society if we allow Asians in who cannot assimilate and accept our customs.” (48)

Navaranjani, initially is not bothered about Blackstone’s remarks and says the same to Bharat, who post-migration is undergoing an identity crisis. She feels that Blackstone is talking about “Asians” (Chinese) and not “South Asians.”
“Why should you care what Blackstone says?” I asked. “Your eyes aren’t slits and your head doesn’t look slope. It’s obvious he doesn’t mean you.” (48)

Bharat’s conception of his identity is shattered and it is up to Navaranjani to save him. She engages in a verbal fight with Prof. Ron Blackstone and blames him for Bharat’s identity crisis. She also tells him openly in the university party:

“You, a so-called sociologist who should know that real Asians would die before they touched charred pig meat, you, polluting the air with meat fumes from your filthy, smelly Barbie in your weed-ridden backyard.”

“[.. .] you ignorant, non-vegetarian racist? I am a Tamil, Professor Blackstone, and a Hindu. Pure veg, and proud of it. What do you take me for? A pork-eating Ching-Chong?” (53)

In the end with change of name, lifestyle and language (Australian English) Bharat feels more comfortable in Australia and among Australians. As Navaranjani notes:

“He seemed much happier as a result of all these changes, and instead of standing about at parties with a glass of orange juice in his hand, sulking and reading insults into everyone’s innocent remarks, he’d have a real beaut time” (50-51). Navaranjani is happy too as she has reformed a racist (Prof. Blackstone) and forgives him graciously to send home a message—“how well real Asians of culture and goodwill assimilate to the Australian way of life” (53).

People all over the world show some kind of racism. So, while racism is everywhere, it is also likely that it is everywhere in different forms (see Dunn 2003). In Suneceta Peres Da Costa’s story “Older” (2003), issue of social prejudice within India towards foreigners is highlighted. The young Indian-Australian narrator’s teacher, who once was having an affair with her, reports with disappointment about his trip to India with another young white woman. He says that he “was not treated well” by the men who were hostile towards him and made him feel like “a sexual predator,” while his young white companion was made to feel like “a whore” (128). A visit to India for them turns into a nightmare as being an odd foreign couple they simply attract more attention, which leads in turn to the reciprocal prejudicial and judgmental attitude of people in India.

Similarly, for some migrants from South Asia being proficient in English or westernized in culture is not a guarantee that they will not be subjected to social
prejudice and racism. In his autobiographical essay “Beyond the Pale” (2004) Glenn D’Cruz, an Anglo-Indian, says:

I have often felt that I’ve had to bear the burden of being visibly different without enjoying any of the benefits of belonging to two cultures. So, while I’ve been spat on and been on the receiving end of various forms of racism, I’ve never felt compensated by having access to another cultural traditions. (224)

D’Cruz’ dilemma is a peculiar one, as being an Anglo-Indian his affinities are closely linked with the British cultural heritage but he was “not white” as his school mates often pointed out to him (230). The Indian mistrust of them, due to their aloofness and their Western-oriented culture and Australian prejudice about their cultural characteristics similar to Indians persists. On this question of disparity between his appearance and culture, he further observes that

It is not easy being an Anglo-Indian in Australia, particularly if you look like an Indian and behave like an Australian. People are generally curious about the disparity between your appearance and your culture, and often ask questions like: Where are you really from? Where did you learn to speak such good English? Why can’t you speak “Indian”? (224)

Thus, in the early phase of their migration, Anglo-Indians often became victims of indiscretion throughout their existence in India and Australia. For Anglo-Indians who have left India and settled abroad, a similar problem of identity—“Who are you?” or “Where are you really from?”—arises (see James 2001). Australian lack of knowledge about the Anglo-Indians in Australia compounds Glenn’s predicament, identity crisis and community consciousness. But on his first visit to India, he realizes “[A]fter years of being ashamed of my Indian heritage, I noticed that it now conferred a certain distinction upon those such as me within academia” (227). The crisis is finally resolved in India and through a post-colonial orientation and Glenn’s new identity as a Post-colonial Anglo-Indian.

Surinder Jain in his autobiographical story “One Desi Man’s Encounter with Racism” observes his life in the light of the issue of racism and feels that as Indians we too indulge in prejudices and racist behavior towards other communities. He remembers, while living his early life in Delhi, his own prejudice behaviour towards a Madrasi, Sikh and Anglo-Indian families. He particularly notes that some Anglo-Indians behaved in a rude and racist manner towards Indians. For example, a
prominent lawyer, who had strong political connections with the then ruling Gandhi family, communicated in a very unsophisticated manner with his juniors, while the Secretary, who worked in Kuwait with Jain, often proudly said that her mother tongue is English and later settled in England. Because of this he is prejudiced against Anglo-Indians and unable to mix with them, as he looks down upon them as “loose Indians.” Before migrating to Australia, in 1980s, Jain feels that Australians “will be like British and they will look down upon him like British used to look down upon Indians as their slaves in pre-1947 India. But, to his surprise, his fears were soon laid to rest. Australians I found were some of the most open, friendly and fair people. To put ice on the cake, my Australian office colleague used to tease our new colleague from England by calling him Pommy. It was a lesson for me that not all white people are as bad as the Britishers of per-1947 India.

In Australia he also interacts with an old Hindi speaking Anglo-Indian salesman, who “was born in Delhi and had studied in Dehradun.” The old man’s eyes are moistened while discussing his parents’ love and nostalgia for India. Jain realizes that:

The emotions in his now choking voice were no different than the emotions I had felt when my father and his brothers would sit in a winter day, outside their warandah in Delhi and reminisce about their home which was now in Pakistan. All my hatred of British and low opinion about Anglo-Indians came to a crashing end as I realized that this man loves India perhaps more than I do. I learnt a lesson on that day that human beings are same everywhere and our prejudices against some are more to do with not having shared any common feeling with them than the injustices committed by their group in a different place and time.

Through these and many other small experiences with people from other races and countries, Jain learned a great lesson in tolerance, “understanding and courage to go beyond petty racism.”

Are these stories pointing towards racism in Australia? If what is going on in these stories is not “racism,” but just “indifference” towards a particular group, as some of the writers analysed here have suggested in their narratives, then we are constantly reminded by the great philosopher-thinker Martin Buber (1947) that the greatest evil in the world comes not from bad deeds but from “indifference.” Sometimes, deeply racialised aspects of Australian society and prejudices of South Asians towards others are played out in these texts. According to Stratton and Perera
(2009) this is the “everyday racism,” the kind of “unthinking racism” that is accepted as a general rule in our daily lives and that we do not consider it racism anymore that “prevents us from seeing the racialised discriminations that happen all the time in Australia.” In this literature, sexually and racially abusive graffiti at public places and media also play a crucial role.

Many people believe that racism only exists when it is accompanied by violence. They do not comprehend how emotionally and psychologically painful discrimination and prejudice can be to its victims in a society. David Carter (1997) has noted that “literature is not just a set of individual texts or authors but rather a set of institutions and institutional practices which regulate the making and transmission of (literary) meanings in a given society” (18). Given the cultural dimension of racism in Australia, as seen in the above analysis, the institutional challenge—both political and literary—is to translate the acceptance of cultural diversity, implied in the public’s support for multiculturalism, into a belief that this diversity can coexist with a commitment to shared political institutions and values (see Inglis 2006).

4.3 – The Future in Australia

To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier. (Rushdie, 1991: 24)

In “The London Link” (2002) Brij V. Lal recounts a funny incident that happened in London. On his way to the market a bedraggled old man asked him:

“Where are you from?” Australia. “But you don’t look Australian.”

“What’s an Australian supposed to look like then?” “No offence, guy,” the old man said apologetically, “I thought you was from India.”

Before I could explain my genealogy, he said, “Great country, India.” (78)

And on his way back Lal stopped at a shop with a “South Asian-looking man at the counter” (78). Lal couldn’t help himself “asking the perennial question immigrants of colour automatically ask each other everywhere” (78):

“Where you from?” [..] “Sri Lanka,” he replied. “Murali is a genius,” I venture. Muralitharan, the ace Sri Lankan spinner. “I don’t like cricket. Englishman’s game,” he replied sullenly. That peeved me. Cricket is the game God plays, and we all know that God is not an Englishman. And I thought, if the English are so bad, what are you
doing here in their country? But there was no point arguing. “You are hailing from where?” he asked me as I was leaving, “Fiji,” I replied. He gave me a blank, unknowing look. “Fiji,” I repeated. Still no reaction. “Fiji Islands,” I said, “in the South Pacific.” “In Gujrath?” I gave up. (78-79)

Who is an Australian? or What makes a person Australian—Colour, Race, Ethnicity, or Language? These are some of the questions that Siri is also grapples with in Sunil Govinnage’s “The Black Australian” from *Black Swans and Other Stories*. On a visit to Europe he is bugged by the “usual question”—“Are you from India?” (6). He wonders,

*Should I say that I’m from Australia and that I was born in Sri Lanka, but am now living in Western Australia? Why bother?* (6)

It is a “universal question” asked everywhere to him and other South Asians, but the trouble is “whatever he did to be an Australian, it always produced the opposite result” (7). During a footy (Australian Rules Football) match a youngster from Melbourne pointed towards him and said, “I didn’t know the Eagles had supporters in India as well!” (7). To avoid such questions Siri has devises a solution: referring to himself as a “Black Australian”:

*This is an honour. I’m a Black Australian! You need not be an Aboriginal to call yourself a Black Australian. The Aborigines must be called Native Australians, not Black Australians.* (9)

Instead of sticking with his Sri Lankan-Australian identity, Siri is in a state of irritability. He wants to be referred to as just “Australian”—Black or White should not matter. For him acceptance as an Australian is imperative. But deep down under he knows he is faking his “black Australian” identity: “Siri saw his image in the mirror behind the bar. He saw himself as if he were wearing thick make-up” (10). The ambivalence and complexity of his identity confronts Siri everywhere. His search then is for an image of himself as an Australian recognised by the world and people around him.

According to Chandani Lokugé (2008), South Asian presence in Australia is like that “leit-motivic presence” of the South Asian “immigrant mynah bird,” in Gooneratne’s novel *A Change of Skies* which “confidently makes its home in the lillypilly tree, sometimes resented by the owner of the tree but never aware of the resentment [. . . ]” (213).
Christopher Cyrill’s narrator, in “Dusk and the Public” (2000), son of a new migrant to Australia is intrigued by the search of his parents for a home. Towards the end of the story he realizes, it was “never my parents’ intention to buy any one of the houses they walked in. They were gathering ideas for the house they had in mind” (17)—similar to the one they had left behind in India.

Glenn D’Cruz in “Beyond the Pale” (2004) observes that for his family the future in Australia became clear when post-1980s the racial and cultural scene changed in Australia. His being an Anglo-Indian now was seen as an asset in the academia and his “Indian appearance” made people assume that he was an authority on India—a result of “explosion of scholarly interest in empire” (227). He notes that it is in Australia that his family “managed ultimately to acquire the accoutrements of middle-class life—‘respectable’ jobs, houses, cars and so forth—all of which seemed beyond their grasp in post-independence India” (230).

Sushie Narayan in “Asha’s Story” (1994) writes that

Coming to Australia was a choice she [Asha] did not make, but at that time it felt exciting. Her parents had decided to uproot themselves from their birthplace and start anew. (136)

For Asha, there was no option but to migrate. She leaves behind her love, whom she couldn’t marry because of her parent’s opposition. And the man she marries in Australia makes her “marginally content” (136). She notes at a very early stage, “life was better in a new land, it would hold many new experiences” (136). She starts observing the Australians at her workplace and notes their philosophy of “work, live and play.” But she feels alienated, confused and pained as “she didn’t fit in” (137) and felt that her culture was holding her back. To her, “the thought of having a new Australian life felt so strange” (137) and sometimes “frightening.” But, the author notes that Asha after going through so much pain realizes that, “she is no longer a member of old culture and not yet initiated into the new. [. . .] was in a vacuum” (137). To exit from the vacuum and to assert her individuality she rebelled against her parents and their culture. She distanced herself from them and wondered “what a new Australian was supposed to think” like and also wanted “to find her own roots in a new land” (137). She has sacrificed a lot for others but now wanted to pursue her life as an Australian with “her roots nestle(d) into Australian soil” (138). Australia
provides her the space to escape from her loneliness and devaluation that she suffers in social status.

Karobi Mukherjee, who immigrated from New Zealand to Australia, in her autobiographical story-essay “An Asian Migrant Woman’s View of the City of Adelaide” (1994), wonders

Was it wise to move from the friendlier and insular existence of Dunedin in the South Island of New Zealand, where everyone in the City knew us so well and we managed to develop a rapport with the City and its people but suddenly to leave behind all these relationships and migrate to Australia, severing all such friendships and securities and come to a new land which I knew so little about. (126)

Remembering her first few days in Adelaide, she observes that it was only because of the wonderful people, particularly veterans of ANZAC, who gave her family a warm welcome and guidance thus removing all her apprehensions as “a migrant from non-English speaking background and an Asian at that” (126-127). At this welcoming moment, she felt that “we were here to stay and make it our home” (127). Adelaide became her home and the people of this city her friends—she now cannot bear the thought of parting with it “in the near or distant future” (127). This is not because the city is beautiful and well maintained but, she notes:

There are no forms of discrimination as regards one’s choice from different religious freedom and hence for those migrants coming from religious background there is the choice of a Mosque for those of the Islamic faith, a Hindu Temple for the Hindus, a Buddhist Temple for followers of that faith. Even for smaller communities there is always a place where they are able to go and practice their own religion in whatever fashion they would like achieve their own spiritual requirements. Indeed there is always the feeling of open acceptance of all religions. (128)

Apart from the free life style of Adelaide, it is also the religious diversity, tolerance and open acceptance that attracts her to chose it. And, looking back at her life and days spent in Australia, she feels that although the initial decision to migrate to Australia was made in haste, at the end it turned out to be the right decision for her and the whole family. Yet, she notes that migration and

Moving places is always a traumatic event for anyone, it is like uprooting a small shrub and transplanting it in a place where there is
always the uncertainty of not knowing whether it is going to grow or whether it will wither away with the passage of time. (126)

But as a migrant she never felt "disadvantaged" and found a rich social environment to work in and a great community life.

Chris Raja in "White Boots" (2003) uses the Aussie Rules football as a metaphor for a migrant's engagement and understanding of Australia and Australian way of life. Chris, the narrator, immigrated to Australia from Calcutta with his parents, when he was just eleven years old. To him everything is strange, new and alien. Also, his idea of Melbourne, the one he always imagined, taking references from the model of American cities presented in Hollywood films, is shattered—"Melbourne was clean and green [. . . ] with not a person in sight on the road except for those who drive" (98). He further notes:

I found this place particularly quiet. But here, on television, at the football people seemed to come alive and their personalities shone through. (98)

It is only in football that his young mind can grasp the idea of multitude and an Australian national spirit.

My eleven-year-old brain tried to grasp reality of being in Australia, of living in Australia for the rest of my life. I hadn't even been to an Australian school yet but still I managed to understand that this strange game, the roughness, the secret hidden rules, would be useful currency. It would help me integrate and come to terms with being a stranger in a new country that was now going to be my home. (97)

The narrator as a thirteen year old boy, grappling with his new identity, idolizes Warwick Capper, the "idiosyncratic footballer, in a strange and alien land" (98), who in a way teaches the young migrant the "importance of being an individual" (98). The narrator notes that Capper with his tall height, blond hair, tight shorts and white boots stood out from the rest of the players. To his surprise, as he observes

[. . . ] that not everyone in Australia was blond and blue-eyed as I was led to believe growing up in India in the seventies. Naively, the young me had expected to become blond and blue-eyed when I became an Australian. (98)

It is the notion of individuality and being different than the rest that the narrator learns from Capper. Nevertheless, the white students at school made fun of him, his accent and his difference—"Have you ever got on with someone?" "You speak funny" (98).
It is his friendship with a white Australian boy Darren Carter and football that has helped him adapt to living in Australia. He notes "I was lonely and the football on television occupied me" (98) and "It was only after Darren Carter became my friend that I slowly began to feel accepted" (98). Chris saved Darren from getting mugged by other white boys at school and therefore in their friendship, one can read the Australian ideal of mateship.

According to Wray Vamplew (2007) "Sport has played a role in community formation and perpetuation; it has been part of the life of immigrants, providing a cultural link with what they have left behind [. . .]" (370). Further, on using Aussie Rules as a multicultural suburban event, initiating the new migrants into Australian way of life, Michael Atkinson, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Government of South Australia, says:

People coming to Australia already have a passion for sport, whether it is soccer, cricket or rugby. Football is so much a part of Australian culture it is important for our community that migrants who are interested in sport are introduced to our national game, to share with us the highs and the lows of following their local team. (qtd. in Forrest 2009)

And furthermore, according to Lieutenant Governor Hieu Van Le, Chairman, South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission:

Giving that extra support to migrants when they arrive in Australia will reap rewards in the future. It is important that new migrants are given every support to take part in activities that form the basis of our culture, so that they adapt more quickly to life in their new country. (qtd. in Forrest 2009)

The Australian government and its various agencies recognize sports culture as one of the major entering points for migrants into the country's national culture. However, John Kinsella (2002) sees Australian Rules Football or footy as a sports culture which inculcates a lot of ugly and aggressive masculinity, sexism, racism and animal cruelty. He observes that footy was used as a sign of "cultural assimilation," of recognising the power of Australianness, but somewhere it has also became the sign of "blind nationalism" that has led to the propagation of the game through many strata of Australian society and migrants.

Chitra Fernando in her story "The Birds of Paradise" from Women There and Here (1994) focusing on the notion of "return" for a diasporic individual provides the
way for a future in Australia. Rupa Gomez, is a young teacher, who immigrated to Sydney from Sri Lanka and

[A]fter two years in Sydney teaching English to Vietnamese migrants in Bankstown, Rupa Gomez felt she had to return to Sri Lanka. The insistent “When are you coming back?” in every letter from her father, her mother and [ ... ] from everyone [ ... ] took on the collective force behind a battering ram. (41)

Rupa feels happy to return, but is saddened by the death of her Uncle Anthony. On her return, she finds her old room “unfamiliar” and “uncomfortable” (43). And soon she longs for the “silence of her Bankstown flat” (45). She is surrounded by relatives with strange questions about Australia—“Did Australians keep kangaroos as pets? [ ... ] Was Australia really such a big country?” (44). The “hum and buzz of voices around dazed her” (45) and soon she craves for “the roar of Sydney traffic” (45) and remembers with a nostalgic pleasure “the easy informality of her life in Sydney” (45).

She felt a sharp longing for Sydney. A longing for its roads and freeways with traffic zooming, morning, noon and night; for glimpses of the Harbour, that wrinkled expanse of slate-grey water, glinting and gleaming as you flashed past by train or car; for the half-built Opera House, its thin white shells slicing through blue air; for the surf-riding, sun-tippling bathers at Bondi, Bronte, Cronulla ... the wine-bars and restaurants and the bold, impudent pigeons in Martin Place ... All these spoke to her of progress, of modern civilization and its freedoms. (46)

In her longing for Sydney, she moves beyond the nostalgia for an originary home and expresses instead nostalgia for origins in a new home.

Beryl T. Mitchell in her autobiographical account, “Tea, Tytlers and Tribes” (1997), describes the motives and the process of her journey of immigration from a tea plantation in Sri Lanka to Australia. She writes that

Race hatred had become a reality. The very benefit we had most enjoyed—the open spaces in the beautiful tea country—were now beginning to appear threatening because they offered no protection from unhappy or disillusioned party. (309)

She further notes

[ ... ] the political turbulence was colouring every facet of life in Ceylon. [ ... ] finally [the mother] decided that our future must lie Australia, not in Sri Lanka. (310)
But what did the Australian future hold for them? It is a question that so many migrants through the last two hundred years have asked themselves and each has thought of a different answer. The answer to this question is related to or lies in what kind of reception the migrant happens get in Australia. Beryl is happy with her Australian friends, who from the beginning gave her first-hand information of life “down under” and “they took away some of the nervous apprehension most migrants feel on taking the enormous step of moving permanently from their known habitat to the mysterious unknown” (304). These small gestures from the Anglo-Australians and also from the people of her small diasporic community made life easier and worth living for her family. Therefore, for Mitchell the answer was in “kindness,” “capacity to adapt,” “self help” and following just “one goal” and aim—“make a success of this life. Australia was our home and we were happy we had made this choice” (311).

At the end of her narrative in “A Family for Us” (2002), Madu Pasipoanodya is still not sure where she will live in the future: Australia or Fiji?

I love Fiji and, even though I wouldn’t have as much freedom as I do here in Australia, I might go back there for a few years, then return. I’ll cope with whatever comes my way. (125)

For young Madu, who was adopted in 1989, at the age of 9, from an orphanage in Fiji the concept of “home” is a complex one. Madu has adapted to her new family and country and sounds like any other young Australian but she seems to be able to move between Fiji and Australia with ease—like a true transnational.

In Mena Abdullah’s story “Grandfather Tiger,” the protagonist, Joti, a third-generation Indian-Australian, discovers the strength to “remain true to herself, to find the courage to resist the assimilationist trends she finds at her school—the tendency among other things, of the teacher to alter her name almost imperceptibly, to make it sound more British” (Corkhill, 1994: 71). Joti’s imaginary friend, the Indian tiger represents the wise animal from Panchatantra—a collection of popular animal fables, and advises her on various topics related to growing up and also helps with instructions on the different aspects of life.

“The lessons are good,” said the tiger. “Your teacher is good.”

“Oh yes,” said Joti. “I like the lessons. The teacher is nice. But she calls me Josie.”

The tiger banged his paw on the ground so that Joti jumped. “That is a different matter,” he said. “You’ll have to stop that or it will last
you all your life. Your mother’s name is Premiña and they call her Milly. Your Aunt Halima was called Alma. And your Uncle Shamshir—the tiger shuddered—“they called him Sam!”

Joti giggled and the tiger glanced at her sourly.

“You may think it funny now,” he said. “And another thing, I would not wear that dress again. Wear your own name and your own clothes and they will understand you better.”

Joti came down to breakfast the next morning in her white sulwa.

"Look," she said. “I am me again.” (98)

“They” in the above extract from the story are Australians. The tiger’s advice, which is really Joti’s own inner voice, is in favour of multiculturalism rather than assimilation.

In his short story “The Ganges and its Tributaries” (1993), an example of second-generation postcolonial migrant literature, Christopher Cyrill uses “ordinary language” to present a mundane local narrative “of unsettled settling in” (Sharrad 578) and exploring an Australian suburb. For example, consider Cyrill’s description of the family moving from St Kilda to Dandenong and then to Oakleigh. On looking at the photographs of the newly built house at Oakleigh that his father had taken while it was being built, he observes:

The house in Oakleigh was three storeys tall. The middle floor was level with the street, because the land that the house was built on sloped downwards from the street to the back fence. [. . . As] I opened the photo album I could see [. . .]. The first photograph in the album showed an empty block of land with foot-high grass, three garbage bags dumped against the back fence and pieces of glass on the nature strip. The last photograph showed the porch lights without bulbs, the four rectangular front windows without curtains and the landscaped island of mossy rocks, pygmy shrubs and azaleas dug into the perimeters of the front lawn. (157-158)

This shifting of home/address, according to Paul Sharrad (2009), “suggests not only the unstable newness of housing estates still under construction, but the sense of fixation on specificities of location to compensate for fluidities of movement, physical and mental, that have been shared by white settler and brown migrant alike” (579).

Christopher Cyrill recalls a model of India that his father had carefully constructed after his migration from India to Australia. This model, according to Sabina Hussein (2004), metaphorically “illustrates the construction and
deconstruction of borders and consequently the deconstruction of a previously
established space and its ceaselessly transformable reconstruction” (104). In the story,
his version of (a model) India the father ignores “everything outside the borders of
India [...] omitted the neighbouring countries to banish Pakistan from the map of
the world in his mind” (162). He further marks with toothpicks “the places on the map
that interested him: his birthplace in Lucknow; Calcutta, where my mother was born;
Bombay, where the great Sunil Gavaskar would bat on the streets with a plank of
wood” (163). He then places it in the backyard pond of his Australian house.
Christopher narrates:

He let the model drift in the water without securing it on the edge of
the mould. It looked as if India had pulled itself away from Asia,
bringing the Himalayas along with it, and was steering itself through
the Indian Ocean in whichever direction it chose. The Ganges no
longer flowed into the Bay of Bengal, but into all the oceans of the
world. (163)

The father’s version of India, according to Sabina Hussein (2004), “signifies an
imaginary which reflects his self-opted place of belonging, constitutes a stable core
and defines spaces of Inside and Outside. However, the detachment of the constructed
core from its specific geographical locality inaugurates a motion through which
borders are blurred and spaces demand new definitions. The individualized model of
India is constantly-floating and drifting in the water” (103).

In this story, Christopher’s life is characterized by an upbringing in an
Australian community in between his Indian relatives, and also a distancing from an
Indian community placing him similarly on the margin of the Indian migrant
community in Australia. He says,

When my uncles began to sing in Hindi I left them and walked upstairs
to third-floor bathroom. As I walked upstairs I heard them singing in
the language that I have never learnt. (160)

This reference to the “third floor” at this moment is quite significant. The third floor
acts as a third space, a term used to refer to social surroundings separate from the two
usual social environments of home (India) and the outside world (Anglo-Australian).
This third space—an “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” space where
negotiation takes place—is a mode of articulation; a way of describing a productive,
and not merely reflective, space that engenders new possibility (see Bhabha 1994).
Christopher, born in Australia, is a second generation Indian-Australian. He experiences through his parents as well as a constant flow of relatives from India, who are recent sponsored-immigrants to Australia, a presence of other places or other times or other worlds (see Longley 1997). Therefore, Christopher’s hybrid “identity is rooted in more than one space and his routes develop from the intermingling of diversified worlds” (S. Hussein 113; my italics) that construct and re-construct his identity.

It is, definitely, the uniqueness of the Australian land that has been the source of inspiration for these writers, making them explore home and local spaces. The local, here, referring to the “Australian” for them because of their increasing proximity with the things that are Australian—economically, culturally and politically. In this, however, the concept of “otherness” has been simplified to some extent with an inward looking gaze because of the cultural (baggage) discourse. And therefore, as argued earlier, the question of identity becomes central to these writings, where this “identity” works in both ways and is open ended like the hyphen (-) which looks at both the self and the other and homeland and the hostland. Still, this creates a third space or a diasporic space, which belongs to self-realization and the processes of rationalization for the diasporans, wherever they stay.

Another dimension to the South Asian diasporans’ future in Australia is the Australian outlook and attitude towards South Asia or the bi-lateral relations between the two great continents. This angle is explored in Mena Abdullah’s story “A Long Way” from The Time of the Peacock, when Nazit travels all the way from her small village in Mooltan, first by train, to Ranipur and then walks to the big city Karachi alone. Her youngest son is in Australia and she wants to send a woolen jumper to him as a gift. Begum, a social reformer, has through the help of an Australian Government Plan sent a large number of Pakistani students, poor peasants and skilled workers to Australia. Nazit remembers when

[... ] the Big Man had come to the village in the big black car [... ]. Then the Big Man stood on the great stone, and told the people that he had brought them a notice. [... ] The notice told them of a plan.

The Big Man explained that he was from the Big Government in Karachi and that there were other Big Governments in the world. He said that the Big Governments were friends, and they were friends who would help. (103)
Chapter 4 – “One Way Trip”

At that time his words meant nothing to the villagers. Since Yaseem, Nazit’s son had studied in the city, he is found to be eligible for an Australian scholarship—a “gift of goodwill” (104). According to Begum: “We must let our children learn, so that they can teach others. We must let them go a long way, so that they can return. It is not a kindness, it is goodness” (104).

The story in its representation of migration to Australia also traces internal migration within Pakistan and to other favoured international destinations. On her way to Karachi, Nazit meets a young Hindu couple, on their way to Ranipur.

They had come a long way to Ranipur, because it was big and might want them. It might give them food and work. (106) The couple is frightened of the big city as everything is new for them but are confident of a successful future. Nazit also meets a woman from low-caste—a chamar—whose son is studying to be a doctor in Canada. The woman is happy and proud for her son, and tells Nazit:

“Think of it!” said the woman. “Such a long way! My son, too—the father of my grandchild—he is in Canada. He is learning too. Think of that! My husband was a sweeper. He and I were called chamars, we were untouchables. But our son can now be a doctor. Think of that! And his son—here with big eyes open—who knows what he can be?” (107-108)

International immigration and study-abroad programmes opened doors of possibilities not just for the migrants and their dependent family members, no matter to which caste and class they belonged, but also for their coming generations. Migration in such a situation has also played an uplifting role in the South Asian society.

But the looming question of whether Australian Government’s Plan would fail or succeed, has made Begum anxious. She has received reports about the plan and its reception in Australia from her daughter.

She wrote home often, but recently the letters from Australia had been full of worries. The Plan might fail, its good work be undone. There were critics who said that it was silly, wasteful, uneconomic; that the country had causes of its own, that its people needed houses, and that its people’s money was being thrown around overseas. What, they asked, have foreigners to do with us? (112)

Begum feels that probably
The critics were right. Australians need have nothing to do with her people unless they wanted to be friends. And did they want to? (112)

At the end, Nazit succeeds in handing over the gift to Begum and narrates how she was helped by strangers, who are “all our people.” Begum is optimistic now and knows what to say to Australian people: “I will go to the houses, the streets, the parks. I will find the people who are my people, and I will tell them how their people need” (114).

They are all our people, she thought, no matter who we are or what, no matter where they are or why, the world is all our people. (114)

The story ends not only on a note of optimism but also on that of a cosmopolitan future. Abdullah shows the strength of friendliness. The last echoing phrase: “The world is our people,” reminds us of the famous Greek philosopher, Diogenes of Sinope, who declared himself to be a cosmopolitan—“I am a citizen of the world”—an ideology that all kinds of human ethnic groups belong to a single community—a move towards truly transnational being.

Mena Abdullah also points out creation of a third space or a diasporic space, beautifully in her story “Mirabani” from The Time of the Peacock:

“It is not India,” said Father.

“And it is not Punjab,” said Uncle Seyed.

“It is just us,” said Ama. (31)

For the diaspora the spatial identity or geographical location, where one resides is not important anymore, as pointed above, whether it be India or Australia or any place on earth. It is better for them, as Spivak (1994) notes, to make a sense of themselves and their situations to produce self identity (179) and to move around, maintain and sustain a network contact with both India and Australia and thus to act in prominence.

This constant confrontation with new spatial and social locations demands “adaptation and creativity that often leads to invention and development” (Scott 1). The diversity of experiences in these stories present the dynamic phase towards which the authors are moving. For Nandini, in Sujhatha Fernandes’ “A Pocket Full of Stories” (1999), Australia robs her of the multicoloured stories that she carried, and it makes Rajan in K. C. Paramanandam’s “Of Human Infatuation” (1956) struggle to locate a sense of being Australian. Similarly, the narrator of Rani Jhala’s “Life’s Key” (1999) becomes a widow in Australia but she does not lose her faith and instead
learns to “give more meaning to the purpose in life” (21). She comes to this “another planet” (21) i.e. Australia, after marriage and lives a happy life with her husband and children. After the loss of her husband she makes “this new country [her] future home” (22) and is confident and prepared to take on “the modern sprawling city that is Sydney” (22). Australia takes away from her many things but also presents before her the challenge and opportunity to realize her potential in absence of her husband: among other things, she makes herself socially and economically independent with the help of a job-oriented course. She belongs to Australia and to her towards the end of the story it symbolizes, like the plant she has grown the “love of today and promise of tomorrow” (21).

This sense of “belonging” according to Peter Read (2004) can also be “intellectual” (23). Manik Datar reflects on this in her writings as she feels a bond with Australia and its landscape

because she had consciously grafted herself to Australia, because she liked the look of the land, because it gave her space as a non Anglo-Celtic Australian; because she felt accepted by its people; because she held a commitment to its democracy; because of her memories, and because occasionally she felt an ache for the land. (23)

A clear solution that she provides to the protagonists of her stories is that to search for return to homeland is pointless and to find space and identity or to belong in the diversity of Australia is a more desirable and a profitable aspiration keeping in view the future that lies ahead. Similarly, Sudesh Mishra in “Diaspora and the Difficult Art of Dying” (2004) observes:

[... ] india slipped through my fingers like silk, like silk it slipped through the fingers of three thousand seven hundred and forty eight girmityas, and many things were lost during that nautical passage, family, caste and religion, yet many things were also found, chamars found brahmins, muslims found hindus, biharis found marathis, so that by the end of the voyage we were a nation of jahajibhai [... ] all for one and one for all. (60; lowercase in original)

Being away from the homeland then is not always a depressing dilemma. It is here a positive experience too that has created spaces of equality among the indentured labourers. Conditions in the homeland have not changed, as on a visit to India Brij V. Lal discovers “how un-Indian I was in my values and outlook, how much I valued my individuality and freedom, [...]”. The Indian obsession with status and recognition,
the routine acceptance of a ritually sanctioned hierarchy, was beyond my comprehension" ("The Road to Mr Tulsi’s Store": 44).

South Asian immigrants are looking to make Australia their home and build a future for themselves and their families. Australian cities offer migrants an urban, industrial and technological way of life. And some writers have noted that the feeling of dislocation that is so frequently a part of the immigrant experience can be overcome by “an intense desire on the part of the new settler to come to terms with Australian life” and this “can be achieved by virtue of a commitment to loving and working the soil of the adopted homeland” (Corkhill, 1995: 37).

The longer the migrants stay, the more rooted and at ease they feel in their new home and environment (see Ballard). These stories make it clear that Australia and its literature are not just an Anglo-Celtic space but “there also exists other voices, bodies, worlds” (Chambers 5) and the “possibility of another place, another world, another future” (Chambers 5). South Asian diaspora can help Australia, which nurtures high hopes to act as a bridge between Asia and the West, to become a good neighbour.

Conclusion

In the introduction to Seeing it Their Way (1973), a handbook designed to be used at any level of the school curriculum, David Dufty et al. noted that the materials aimed to bring a clear awareness that we are all conditioned by our culture, that we tend to judge other cultures by our own standards and that to be culturally mature we need to be able to understand and appreciate at least one other culture in some depth and to be able to imagine with some accuracy how others view their world: in other words, to develop an intercultural perspective—to try seeing it their way as well as our own way. (2)

For Australians and its various migrant groups an understanding of their diversity and tolerance of difference is required to build a stable and secure future. As Kessler (1991) has noted “it is only by engaging with difference, not simply intellectually within our own minds but in the pluralistic public or political world where difference has its origins and is upheld, that we can really understand ourselves” (63).
Throughout these stories, we can note that the characters are not stable in their present location although there is a clear will to stay and make Australia their home. However hard the protagonists try to locate a sense of Australianness, it skips away from them or makes them first accept the challenges as a test of resilience. But this is just the initial stage for migrants in the process of settlement. There is always an aspiration nurtured by the diasporans to move on with life in this new home. The protagonists are put under predicaments which their authors might have gone through or experienced or dealt with in one form or the other during the process of settling down in Australia. Table 2: "The Stages of Cultural Consciousness" given below illustrates the five stages of development that diasporans go through and on which the stories understudy in this chapter have been analyzed. These stages can be seen in both the overall patterns of the development of the diaspora group and individual consciousness. Each new stage of cultural consciousness arises in response to a given set of problematic life condition in the hostland and coincides with external pressures and internal development. It also develops in reaction to the preceding stage’s negative values. The recognition of these stages by characters and their creators help geographically opening-up of Australia to its Diasporas.

**Table 2: Stages of Cultural Consciousness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Attitude toward One’s Culture</th>
<th>Attitude towards Other Cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Oblivious/Unclear</td>
<td>Curiosity/Excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Confusion/Helplessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reintegration</td>
<td>Idealization</td>
<td>Denigration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pseudo-independent</td>
<td>Aware</td>
<td>Intellectual acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above table clearly shows that the
true acceptance of the host and the adoptive culture goes through several stages before it is incorporated into consciousness [...]. The ability to grow, develop, learn and benefit from other cultures would naturally be reduced if the stages are not gone through progressively and acceptance attained. (Patri and Patri 14-15)

It can also be clearly noted that most of the acclaimed diaspora writers, who are writing about their own experiences have in one way or the other reached Stage 5—Independent with the ability to grow, develop and accept the “otherness” of the people of the hostland. However, this independence and the ability to accept otherness is often deliberately not provided to their characters as a solution of cultural difference(s). The protagonists/characters are shown to have retained many of their South Asian traditions in the hostland, a land “alien” to them, in their original or a slightly changed form, while the Indians living in India have long discarded or changed some of the norms and practices or modified them beyond recognition. So, the diasporans are shocked and surprised at the changes, as they were still preserving a set of cultural norm in the “India(s)” of their own that were created in Australia or any other foreign country/hostland.

In most of these stories the diasporans try to bring the Indian subcontinent to Australia with them by using myths, legends, historical facts, etc. in their stories. According to Bruce Bennett (2002), the “powerful hold of myths and stories brought with migrants, and retained in the new country, recurs in much cross-cultural fiction” (158). These diasporans, besides using myths, also display proudest possession, which reminds them constantly of home. These proudest possessions act like “iconic referents,” which perform the signifying function of an icon and to a certain point act as a linkage between personal and national (see Chapter three). For the diasporans, in their everyday life in Australia, everything depends on these representations or icons. These “iconic referents” or “cultural symbols,” according to Homi Bhabha (2006), “ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rhetoricized, and read anew” (157). These icons will break when the Trishankus or the diasporans reach Stage 5 of the cultural consciousness. Then there will be no need for those “old” icons. In the breaking of old icons lies a withdrawal from original and a movement or a way towards constructing or shaping life’s narratives by gaining meaning from experiences individually under the conditions provided by the hostland. For example,
going back to the stories discussed in this chapter, in Rani Jhala’s “Life’s Key,” a rose plant becomes the symbol of “love of today and the promise of tomorrow” (21). Also, it does not take time for the protagonist to realize that “thorns are inseparable.” A “white marble mortar and pestle” is the “proudest possession” and an authentic one too for the younger sister to show her Indianness in Manik Datar’s “My Sister’s Mother.” Her elder sister who presents the modern face of India counters this perceptual exaggeration. In Mena Abdullah’s “The Time of the Peacock,” narrator’s mother has made her own garden full of Indian flowers, a connection with the old country or in other words with the Indian subcontinent inside their farmhouse—“her own walled-in country.” Similarly, the white peacock, Shah-Jehan, in the same story is a reference to “Indians” or migrants who are settling in Australia. The peacock as India’s national bird symbolizes the national sentiments and an Indian way of life in the diasporas, wherever they are settled but the time of the peacock must come to an end for the protagonist to move on and the peacock symbolically dies.

These objects or icons, which the diasporans carry with them as cultural products are used as helpers in making sense from the alien situation presented before them as argued in chapter three. Sticking with them and putting meanings inside these objects or referents in an alien environment can also be seen as at the initial stages of migration, a way of legitimating their relationship with home from a “third space” for the future’s sake. This in a way is the diasporans’ strategy of providing these objects a dominant meaning in reference to the homeland by articulating an ideological or socio-religious function different from what they had back home and thus establishing a privileged position as the “present acquires its meaning only with reference to a disjointed and conflicted narrative of the past” (Ganguly 30).

South Asian-Australian diaspora narratives—“personal memories and private recollections of past experience” (Ganguly 30) also act as “written documents which give expression to the experience of living, or having lived, in Australia” (Castan 65). In this chapter, we have also seen how stories represent some very Australian issues in a fascinatingly different perspective as compared to mainstream Australian literature. The first is the populating of the Australian land by Indian subcontinental migrants. In Mena Abdullah’s stories we find a family making home in the Australian hinterland, while in others it is the charm of the city—Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide or other places. These characters are drawn towards Australia for economic
opportunities. So, be it the Australian city or hinterland, filling the spaces and becoming part of a social change by bringing his or her economic logic to change their destinies is what matters to these diasporans. Second is the presence or representation of Australians—whites, Aborigines or people from other migrant cultures. They exist but only on the periphery or just as references in these stories and do not act as crucial participants. And even if they are a part, they have no say in the central issue of these stories. This can be seen as a test of adaptability not only for the diasporans but also for the Australians. The stories are inward looking in terms of both characters and situations. In these stories, the “self” is not just the individual but also the collective identity of the community to which they belong. We can note that the diasporic community uses all the resources available to survive collectively in adverse conditions, reproducing, transforming and inventing specific forms of identity to make clear their distinctiveness, creating “resistance identities” as cohesive strategies against the risk of cultural disappearance under the pressures of assimilation, or against a disadvantaged position in a country dominated by one culture-language-race. (Coronado 42-43)

The diasporans imagining Australia and resisting forced identities may vary within the individuals of a diasporic community. It depends on the conditions and space provided to them in the mainstream environment of the hostland and also on the diasporans’ “urge to appropriate space at home, and to use it for self-sustenance abroad” (R. Jain 88).

Vijay Mishra (2007) constructs this relationship between the diaspora and the homeland in dialectical terms:

diasporas construct homelands in ways that are very different from people of the homelands themselves. For an Indian in the diaspora, for instance, India is a very different kind of homeland than for the Indian national. At the same time the nation-state as an “imagined community” needs diasporas to remind it of what the idea of the homeland is. (424)

The stories of South Asian diaspora in Australia make it clear that the idea of diaspora acknowledges that “the history and culture” from which they have come “is not an illusion,” as “histories are real” and the “past still informs” who they are (Selvadurai 5). These diasporans, are now “expert in crossing borders and performing identities, using, transforming and inventing new identities” (Coronado 51). For them, it becomes necessary, borrowing a phrase from Gabriela Coronado (2003), to prove or
to become an “Indian/South Asian” outside the Indian subcontinent and inside Indian subcontinental culture, which may also ultimately produce a new form of Indianness/South Asianness. Therefore in Australia, as is felt by other migrants too, they become more “authentically” Indians, Sri Lankans, Pakistanis and so on or collectively “South Asians”—contributing, understanding, and strengthening key elements of Australia’s social, cultural, political and economic foundations by transmitting the values of their homeland to their present keeping in view their and coming generations’ future. Australian immigrant literature, according to Corkhill (1994), became “specifically Australian, rather than merely an offshoot of its collective overseas homelands, from the moment it ceased to set its works solely in its multiple countries of origin and began to place them at least partially in Australia. This inevitability happened soon after the potential authors’ arrival in Australia, since problems of settlement inevitably preoccupied the writers and these difficulties were communicated to their readers” (73). As the relationship with a homeland does not end with the departure, it continues in diverse forms. Furthermore, the diasporan representations of the homeland are “part of the project of constructing diasporan identity, rather than homeland actuality” (K. Butler 205).

At the end, one central question inevitably arises: Is the South Asian diaspora’s future built on nostalgic longing or progressive thinking? As noted above, there is naturally a sense of alienation, at the outset, where the mainstream or the “others” stare and point out the difference—religious, cultural and social. The process of integration may take some time according to the individual and the cultural baggage or cultural orientation he or she carries as well as the reception in the hostland. The migrants in Australia, first encounter a harsh land—unknown and alien to them; second, they miss the old cultural values of the homeland and at the same time are attracted towards the new society, its values and lifestyles; thirdly, the sense of dislocation felt by the first generation diasporans gets weakened in the subsequent (second and third) generations and for them Australia is their home and they are Australians; and lastly, though they are Australians they carry with them hyphenated identities or bi-culturalness, and in some cases, this actually gives them an extra edge over the dominant others who have a mono-cultural identity, as now they can choose what they want to be, for example—Indians, Australians and Indian-Australians or Australian-Indians. The stories point out both the global and regional realities, and
indicate that both South Asians and Australians require a cross-cultural understanding through the study of each other’s culture and history, if they want to effectively make “sense of the world” they are sharing and the diasporans seem willing to aid this understanding, at least in the short stories discussed here. For

[T]he cultural maps we hold in our minds to make sense of the world are tangible maps which we often mistake as immutable truths. To dislodge the apparent immutability of our cultural interpretations of the world requires considerable effort. It requires educating the mind to identify cultural boundaries within which we operate and it requires the willingness to venture into the foreign and to potentially be changed by it. (Crozet et al. 9)

As South Asian migrants cross “cultural boundaries” and “make a journey from their home over there in order to construct a home over here” (Kershen 97)—they venture into the foreign creating stories of spaces as well as spatial stories of a promising future for the South Asian diaspora in Australia.

Endnotes

1 In 2007, Dr Haneef, an Indian doctor working in Australia, was being “framed” by the Australian police for the London and Glasgow bomb attacks and involvement in other terrorist activities. Widespread public concern in India about Dr Haneef’s treatment by the Australian government and police forced Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to intervene, making a statement expressing the hope that Australia would extend “all the facilities” to Dr Haneef “fairly and justly under Australian law” (see Head 2007). Mike Head notes that letters to newspapers and blogs indicate that broad layers of people (both white Australians and migrants) are now disgusted with the Howard government’s approach and Kevin Rudd’s support for the government’s conduct and actions taken against Dr Haneef.

2 For a detailed discussion on racism towards immigrants in Australia, see Griffiths 2005.

3 For a discussion on depictions of interactions between the landscape and protagonist in Asian-Australian women’s writing, see Tucker 2003.

5 See Uma Parameswaran's article "Ganga in Assiniboine: Prospects for Indo-Canadian Literature" where she identifies four phases of the immigrant experience to Canada (qtd. in Paranjape, "One Foot" [ . . . ]: 164).