CHAPTER THREE

RECOLLECTING THE PAST:
POLITICS OF SENSORY LOCATIONS

[... ] it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the midst of lost time. (Rushdie, 1991: 9)

[... ] a sense of belonging to more than one history, to more than one time and place, more than one past and future. [... ] belonging to both here and there, now and then. [... ] the omnipresent weight of pain of displacement from a land or society, of being an outsider in a new one. [... ] both lack and excess of loss and separation yet also the possibility of new adventures of identity and the continued imagining of unconquerable countries of the mind. (Docker vii)

Satendra Nandan has written in his book, *Requiem for a Rainbow* (2001), that there are at least three ways of knowing a country: you’re born in its landscape and are buried in its dust; you fall in love with a person of that country, or you read its literature or narratives (see also R. Sarwal 2008). The first way of knowing has the concept of *location* acting as a key in the study of South Asian diaspora. And to think of diaspora as “here and there,” a dispersal marked by a displacement still assumes the predominance of an earlier placement or home, as the “past continues to speak” to the migrants, but it no longer addresses them “as a simple, factual past.” It is “always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (Hall 226).

Salman Rushdie in “Imaginary Homelands” (1991) sets in motion a complex investigation into the condition of the diasporic writer. He eloquently puts it,

> It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect the world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost. (10-11)

Seeing the past through the pieces of a broken mirror inevitably distorts the memory one has of a “homeland,” making it idealized so that only certain memories and ideas are highlighted. Further, in relation to construction of a past world through memory,
Adib Khan (2003) observes that “fragmentation, detachment and melancholy are inevitable conditions for the migrants,” as they “live with parallel worlds”:

One is a world in the memory, of what was and you cling to that because that sort of represents a pristine idea of life which is gone now. Everything changes and yet you cling to and retain a part of the past and you sanitise it. You remember the best bits and somehow or the other you hope that that is still there when you get back and it is an impossible expectation. (318)

This remembrance of “the best bits” is a powerful impulse of the memory that awakens a longing for the past, about the unrealised dreams of the past in a lost home and often leads to the re-presentation or re-creation of South Asian spaces in Australia and a reflexive appraisal of the homeland and its cultural values and norms.

South Asian diasporic writing as a genre in Australia encapsulates the collective social and psychological anxieties of whole dispersed generations and their children. In an interview Arnold Zable (2008) explains:

The current generation of refugees [and migrants] are experiencing the intense challenges faced by previous generations. We tend to forget, or fail to imagine, how difficult it is to start life anew far from the homeland. We forget also that nostalgia, the longing for the return to homeland, is a deep and enduring aspect of the refugee [and migrant] experience.¹

Diaspora consciousness, in the host country, is shaped by “nostalgia, the longing for the return to homeland,” through specific texts, discourses, practices and institutions that were part of a migrant’s life in the lost homeland. It is within this literature that “diaspora is used as a social and political tool” for highlighting and expressing issues which are intimately concerned with diasporic identity, place in homeland and the “quest for individuality” (Y. Hussain 3). In this chapter, I examine the formation of ideas like (lost) home, nostalgia, sense of belonging and diasporic identity represented through the ideas of time and journeys of the authors through memory i.e. how “roots” can be constructed by nostalgia for home. The analysis is divided into three sections: Part one “(Re)Presentation of Lost Home,” part two, “Nostalgic Journeys to Home,” and part three “Re-creating the Idea of Home.” As the problem of origin is “no longer a question of starting or finishing, the question [is] rather what happens in between” (Deleuze, 1995: 121).
3.1 – (Re)Presentation of Lost Home

A diaspora exists precisely because it remembers the “homeland.” Without this memory, the image of “their” India [Home], these migrants and settlers would be simply people in a new setting, into which they merge, bringing little or nothing to the new “home,” accepting in various ways and forms the mores and attitudes that already exist in their new country and society. (B. Lal, 2006: 18).

In Diaspora literature, most homes are constructed through the memories of the migrants. In relation to this, Manfred Jurgensen (1986) has argued that ethnic writers are “monocultural writers whose creative imagination remains restricted to a native culture [home] in exile” (81). This construction of home through memory raises an important question—how do representations of lost home shape the lives of the diasporans? The diasporans foreground an “ongoing and contested construction of a transnational set of images, discourses, and institutions that engender what different people mean by” home (Mankekar, 2005: 197).

Through the movement of people from the Indian subcontinent to the diasporic locations, homes are constantly re-narrated in migrants’ stories. Home, as a place of origin becomes a key site of a migrant’s experiences and connections with past. Home, the domestic and public space, also constructs the attitudes and behaviours of migrants towards “Others”—people of the homeland and hostland.

For migrants, according to Anne J. Kershen (2006) home or the idea of homeland is a contested metaphor, a carpet bag of memories, emotions and experiences. It is now but it is then. It is over here yet over there. It is days filled with laughter, love and sunshine but it can be also darkness and threat. Real and tangible yet imagined and mythologized, home is deconstructed on departure and then constantly reconstructed as the migrant experience and life cycle evolve. (97)

Let’s look at the perceptions of re-visiting “home” in some narratives. Satendra Nandan in “First Flight?” (1992) notes, “there are other worlds and, once you have imagined them, the mind is forever restless like waves nibbling the shore” (303). He further remembers his first journey to India, his ancestral home: “I was going to India: a land of mystery, magic and ancient mantras, from where all our grandfathers and grandmothers had come” (304). Similarly, in “The Road to Mr Tulsi’s Store” (2003)
Brij V. Lal recounts that growing up in postwar Fiji India for him “was not just another site for fieldwork, not just another country” (44). It was the land of my forebears. We grew up in Fiji with its myth and legends, its popular sacred texts, with sweet, syrupy Hindi songs and films. Our thatched, bamboo-walled huts were plastered with pictures of film stars and various multicoloured gods and goddesses. In short, India was an important cultural reference point for us. (44; my italics)

The idea of home or a “cultural reference point,” according to Brij V. Lal (1998), has another side to it that “grows gradually and imperceptibly” and its “influence is overwhelming and humbling” (“Return to Bahraich” 99). He further adds that the “sheer variety of sounds and colours of various festivals, the shape of the landscape, people at home in multiple (but to me incomprehensible) languages is astonishing to some born [...] in [an] uprooted immigrant culture” (“Return to Bahraich” 99-100).

A journey through impoverished regions of Uttar Pradesh in India fills Brij V. Lal with “renewed respect for those hundreds of thousands of men and women, ordinary people from all walks of life, who took fate in their own hands, shouldered their little bundles and marched off to the far flung corners of the globe in search of a better life for themselves and their children” (“Return to Bahraich” 106-107).

In Satendra Nandan’s “Mangoes” (1992), the old man, who was once an indentured labourer, remembering the “delicious, juicy and sugar-sweet” mangoes of his village Sultanpur in India notes:

The Fijian mangoes, thick and fleshy, lacked the taste, the character of the fibre that made you suck the mango stone till it shone white like a piece of human bone. Mangoes in Fiji lacked the mithas and the people were no different: fruit and flower, fish and flesh reflect the nature of people in a place. (307)

For the old man, the mango tree is also “a symbol of this bountiful land” (309) that he left. He is unable to find the same warmth in social life from the Fijian community.

But for some diasporans the small villages in which they settled in Fiji as indentured labourers with their families also became their home. The narrator’s father, son of an indentured labourer, in Shrishti Sharma’s “Saying Goodbye to the Mango Tree” (2003), looking at his family album remembers the “best times” spent in his small village in Fiji. He observes:

I enjoyed … everyday, I went one step further … no turning back … had to … that’s how you get here. That was village life, see? There
was the farm, and the friends, and the family ... but most of all the family. We went along with the simple things. Everyone did. Not enough of nothing sometimes. But the good things were there. In the people ... in the life ... in the soccer! Very little we had, but we had the open field ... different place, different time it was ... not anymore ... but that was the life ... the village ... (51-52)

The expat woman in Manik Datar’s short story “If I were a Teller of Tales” (2002) recounts the description of homeland from the perspective of a diasporan:

She looks around as though for the first time. Again, that kaleidoscope of expressions twirls across her face as she takes in the chaos of buses pulling up and leaving, passengers disembarking or jumping on the steps of moving vehicles, auto-rickshaws and even a bandy-legged camel erratically pulling its cart. Tourists and travelers each with their respective burdens of video recorders and backpacks or baskets of ripening guavas or wood apples to sell at the stalls bustle around. (21)

For the expat woman everything has changed and is so different. Throughout the story, her speech is interspersed with phrases that compare the present with the past, an India she lived as a little girl. Her Australian husband humourously says:

“Ah, your childhood. My poor darling. The country has changed too much for you, hasn’t it?” [... ] “My homeless darling.” (22; my italics)

Husband’s use of the word “homeless” to represent his wife’s diasporic situation is quite interesting. While his Indian-Australian wife is just nostalgic about her childhood, he reads certain rootlessness in her yearnings. But to his surprise a few moments later the woman finds her purse missing, from the chay-stall, at which she was sitting at. She shouts in disbelief:

“God, how I hate this place. You come to have a holiday and they bloody well fleece you soon as look at you.” (23; my italics)

The husband, although surprised, calmly continues: “Just think honey, 36 hours and you’ll be in Sydney” (23). All the nostalgia that she was feeling earlier vanishes, filling her with disgust and hatred for Indians sitting around her. She wants to leave India as soon as possible. On the other hand, the “chay-wallah” is saddened because he knows what this expat memsahib (the Indian-Australian woman) will tell “Others” about India and its people when she returns to Sydney—her home.

The narrator in Grace Mackie’s story “Of Jasmines and Jumboos” (1993) also narrates her return journey to Sri Lanka as an expat:
[... ] my first aerial view of this magical land—a land that had been haunting me for the last ten unhappy years. When I left it shores those many years back, it was on a dark monsoon night, when the lightning flashed, the thunder crashed and even the skies cried buckets at my departure. (299)

Her first sights of home “blot” out the intervening years and she is so excited to “see old faces, old places and to feel warm all over once more” (299). She as an expatriate can feel the changes that have taken place in the Sri Lankan society:

The air smelt familiar and heavenly; lots of dark eyes and brown smiling faces—lots of changes too. New airport for one thing, the people dressed differently. They had traded their traditionally gaily coloured sarongs for more conventional trousers and frocks. I looked around disappointed—somehow I wished they had retained their individuality. (299)

The narrator however is disappointed with the change, as from her memory she was still looking for a Sri Lanka that she had left on the monsoon night ten years ago. She has come back as a tourist to “devour” the scenery of the “picturesque countryside” but is shocked on her arrival and narrates the city with disdain—“buses rattled, trams clanged and trains whistled and roared under the bridge. Bullock carts, trishaws (the motorized rickshaw) and cycles joined the throngs and pedestrians were everywhere, literally taking their lives in their hands as they weaved and dodged among the traffic” (299). Looking at this “organized chaos,” she despairs and for a moment the only escape is getting lost in her childhood memories. The narrator has returned to visit her family home, see the places where she grew up and got married. In short she wants a “stroll down the memory lane” (300). She has already prepared herself with gifts and extra baggage, even such basics as razor blades, to distribute among her friends and relatives who are facing hardships in Sri Lanka. For her, Sri Lanka has changed and she can feel that the people here are thankful everyday that they are still alive.

Ruth Van Gramberg in her autobiographical piece “Immigration Dreams, Foundations and Formations” (1997) observes in relation to leaving the homeland:

Severance is bitter sweet. To leave a known environment, the dear familiar loved ones and the tranquil, sweet security of your home is particularly traumatic. There are the beloved faces that will be etched into your memory and the photos you store away to help you remember—are they sufficient? No, nothing can prepare you for this journey, as it is very, very frightening! (209)
But then what would be “sufficient” for a migrant to carry? Van Gramberg writes “The two crates, three or four boxes and suitcases are the ultimate sum of your past years, the rest lie in your treasure chest of memories” (209; my italics).

Michelle De Kretser in her story “Life with Sea Views” (2000) presents the life of a Burgher family in Sri Lanka. One of the sisters, Estelle, marries Harry, because he was a Sri Lankan-Australian, and his being an Australian citizen provided her with an escape route from the political tribulations (civil war and Emergency) and poor economic condition of her family. Kretser observes that during those days Sri Lankans preferred to migrate to Australia—“Islands are the places you set out from. Continents are where you arrive” (6). But for Estelle “the promise of leaving,” also brought “the sadness of arrival” (1). Estelle wrote to her sister, Monique, that “things hadn’t worked out with Harry” and promised to “send a cheque as soon as she was back on her feet” (9). In Sri Lanka, for this marginalized Burgher family things are not the same anymore. They depend on Estelle for monetary help. In Australia, Estelle can work, save and also send a part of her income to help her poor family members. But for the conservative and traditional family members, Estelle’s divorcing Harry and living with a Slovene migrant named Stefan, represents “living in sin with a communist” (10). To the family Estelle’s life in Australia is an ambiguity. They find her letters too incomprehensible, obscure and a “puzzle” as the family cannot understand the references to “Jamingtons,” “nature strips” and other markers of Australian way of life (8). She never returns home and the family is destroyed by turmoil of civil war in Sri Lanka.

Neelam Maharaj in her story “Festivals” (2004) looks back at life in India through the struggle of Kamala, who lives in an Indian slum. Kamala works as an “efficient and capable maid” (127) in “the middle class suburb a few miles away” (127). The responsibility of the family is solely on her shoulders. Her husband Ram, who has fully recovered from a “bout of Tuberculosis a few years ago” (128), is good for nothing, and refuses to work and share the responsibility of the family. The daily problems in Kamala’s life seem unending to her. The in-laws of her daughter, whom she married off at an early age, are pressurizing her over more dowry. Kamala as a slum dweller has to bribe the local police for carrying out construction in the house. In between the mention of all these hardships in the story are devoted paragraphs about festivals of India. Overall, though a depressing picture of India, the story presents how
still, with all the hardships, people in India, particularly lower or lower-middle class, try to make things better to enjoy the small joys that festivals provide them. The descriptive paragraphs devoted by the writer in explaining various festivals, however, really make the story seem as if it were written to educate or inform “others” in Australia about the great Indian festivals, their importance in our lives and civilization. As Kamala says, “one had to preserve tradition, tradition was what kept us civilized” (129). The reference to these celebrations at such a level is beyond doubt to offer a reflective feeling of “rootedness” to the scattered Indian diaspora in Australia.

In her story can also be read another dimension that is attached to the festivals in India. As Kamala narrates the incidents related to the celebration of the festival, it gives a sense of the ghost of poverty that haunts the central character. Festival brings into the life of her daughter Veena, the whole range of seasonal outpourings from her avaricious in-laws, starting from taunts to tantrums, because her mother is incapable to meet their demands. So, festivals, instead of bringing an atmosphere of bliss and ecstasy only provokes anger towards the impoverished state of living as Kamala fails to gift thalis (platters) of sweets and clothes to her daughter’s in-laws.

Kamala’s problem is not festivals but the “debt,” which she will take to fulfill the demands of the family and relatives. She, in spite of being a woman and doubly marginalized because of her social and economic position, shows great strength of will to provide everything she can to preserve tradition and most importantly the joys of her family. The story, however, lacks subjectivity, which is an inalienable part of Indian perspective. The sense of loss of “Indianness” is represented as the voice of the narrator is that of a detached observer. This detached sense of belonging is amplified by the use of scientific outpourings that get enmeshed with the religious dimension of the festival. For instance, *diwali* is no more connected with religious rituals like *Lakshmi puja* but it becomes a means to relish scientific inventions like “marvelous pyrotechnical displays of fireworks” (131). The language and style used in the story are deficient in capturing the class-consciousness or even the sociolinguistic factors that are important in relation to representation of Indian way of life.

Radha D’Souza, in “Riding High” (1997), presents life experiences that relate to India and particularly to the life of its suburban middle class people. She takes us
on a “thirty hour journey by train” (94) with a story about a girl whose “cropped hair stood out incongruously like an alien imposition” (95). The hair on this girl’s head “looks [so] odd” (95) to the narrator because for her it is the general opinion in India that in the world only “angrezee memsahib” (94) or “Christian girls had short hair” (100). The girl’s tale is interesting but an ordeal in itself. This girl “had long luscious hair” (95) which “fell like a straight sheet of blackness right down” (95) and her mother used to care about her hair. When her mother became ill and was not able to take care of her hair, she hired a maid to look after it. Her parents die leaving the responsibility of her two younger brothers and their education on her shoulders. With all her hardships she “felt like a heroine in a Hindi cinema and that lightened [her] burden” (98). But one day the tragedy struck, as on a busy day someone chopped off her long plait in the local train. She cried and on the advice of her colleague, a Christian girl, went to a beauty parlour. Before entering the parlour, she felt like a “harijan [who is] entering the sanctum sanctorum of a Hanuman temple” (100). It is in the parlour that she is enlightened on the value of the Indian hair and their demand in the European and American markets. This also in a way is a solution to all her monetary problems and later becomes a source of extra income to fulfill her own wishes. She grows her hair long for about ten months and then sells them off at rupees five hundred to buy things she likes and needs most. This story is predictable by nature but it looks at the situation in not too funny or tragic a manner. It presents India as the chaotic and unpredictable land where anything is possible.

Life of the urban, highly educated and “foreign returned” is presented by Sunitha in her story “Reminiscence” (1987). This story presents various issues like Indian values vs. the western values, superstition vs. rationalism and urban vs. rural. Savitha, the protagonist, is an educated women and earns as much as her husband. She teaches in a college but because of problems at her home she remains imprisoned “amidst the four walls of her room” (107). To her relatives and in-laws her not conceiving a child even after two-years of marriage proves without doubt her infertility and gives rise to all sorts of speculations and superstitious methods to get over it. Her husband, who is “foreign returned” and “highly educated” is presented as a “paragon of social responsibility” (107). Savitha and her husband’s modern outlook appears to be “anglicised” behaviour to others (108). Savitha feels that, she who is
educated “was being pressured to move backwards to good old days of superstition, [and] blind belief in oracles” (109), which she would never believe in her right senses.

In contrast to Savitha is her “Americanised friend” (111), who through her mannerisms shows that she is a *pukka* NRI. She constantly makes it clear that she will not be able to live in India for a second, “she kept on commenting that India was full of dirt [. . . ] infection [. . . ] [with] so many problems like unemployment, poverty, dowry, rape and so on, whereas America is a land of dreams. It is a land of opportunities” (111) for her. She got “married to a green card holder; a widower, who already had a five year-old son” (111). But she doesn’t mind it, as to her “it is better to be a second class citizen, a second hand wife in a country like America than be a first class citizen in a country like India, where problems keep escalating one after the other” (112). Savitha too has experienced life in America, and “America was no doubt [a] beautiful land” (112) but her own experience was of “an alien in America [. . . ] severed from her roots/people/country” (112). And she chose to came back to India because for her “India’s poverty was far better than America’s luxuries” (112).

This story contains a message for all NRIs, and the message is not of rejecting the traditions of homeland but “of blending the oriental and occidental ways of thinking” (108) and bringing change in “traditions that are decadent, rotten to the core” (108). The story is full of sayings and anecdotes from *Bhagavad Geetha* that are related to customs and traditions. It also makes an appeal to all to weigh every option that comes your way before making a choice. India, here, is not only the land of traditions (and superstitions) but it has a modern face too. Savitha is a teacher and the two texts she teaches, Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* and Bessie Head’s *Maru*, are both women centric. So problems presented here at one level have universal implications. Savitha as an earning member of the family feels she is equal and, therefore, independent in making her decisions. She is the face of the new, independent and educated women in India. Western education and knowledge of Indian traditions and values allows her to take the best of both the worlds and she knows what she is doing and what she can do for her family and the society.

Life of the academics and their world view, various facets of the Eastern and Western society, marked changes in historical and contemporary relationships
between East and West and various other relevant themes are encompassed in Yasmine Gooneratne’s writings. She conveys several of her own experiences to present and make her points more personal and real to the readers. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee (2001),

There is a continuity in everything Yasmine Gooneratne has written so far, whatever be the genre. Fiction and history get woven together, poetry permeates her prose, and as a literary critic her attempts to explore histories of exile and expatriation, the effects of imperial domination, and its aftermath encapsulate the concerns of postcolonial experience.

Gooneratne’s “Masterpiece” (1995) from Masterpiece and Other Stories (2002) presents an East-West encounter in India. It is at a level about cultural clash and also about the issue of adaptation, commentary and textual “authority.” She uses a story within a story format and the central story is related to the ancient Indian legend about Sri Jayadeva’s literary masterpiece Gita Govinda or “The Song of the Shepherd” written nine centuries ago. The story presents proceedings of a seminar discussion going on the subject—*Gita Govinda*, “its status in relation to India’s classical heritage and to world literature, its literary qualities, and the process of its composition” (199). On this latter aspect of the poem, a well-known storyteller had been asked to speak. While the storyteller narrates his tale about the composition of this great classic, there is present in the room an “irrepressible questioner”—an Australian Professor (202). He continues to interrupt the storyteller with his academic questions related to the writer’s block, women’s status in India and his own theory about who completed the poem in the absence of Sri Jayadeva. In the original legend it was “the god [Lord Krishna] himself [who] descended in glory from his lotus throne in the temple, and climbed the hill to a poet’s house in order to complete a classic poem” (205). But on the contrary the Australian Professor feels that the poet’s wife completed the poem. To the storyteller this is “sacrilegious” because “as a respectable young woman of twelfth century India, palm leaf and stylus would have been carefully kept out of her reach” (205). The storyteller feels that the professor should study “the art of interruption” and that too of the “constructive interruption.” Because it is such “interruptions [that] allow the story to move smoothly onwards, to a proper conclusion” (206).
“Masterpiece” in a way is not just a story about the academic vs. the non-academic or believer vs. the non-believer. It presents before the readers an unknown facet of India. It tells subtly about the rich and vast classical literature of the Indian subcontinent, its readings and interpretations that are available in the villages of India, which are “unknown” to West and have to be discovered in full. Gooneratne presents the conflict of East and West in a very witty yet serious authoritative tone reflecting the ancient Indian legend and contemporary Western experience.

Suvendrini Perera in “Rejections” (1984) reflects on her student life at a Sri Lankan university. Her description of the campus is a typical one;

[... ] raw, freshly bulldozed roads, harsh green vegetation dotted with ragged children and dogs from the village—and particularly in the shabby and dust-ridden English department, rumoured to have once served as a cattle shed [...]. (357)

Strong radicalism and nationalism is also noticeable on the campus as the Resident Poet, writes Perera, “had called [English] language” the language of “the most despicable people on earth?” And had “resolved his dilemma by deciding he would write only ‘destructively’ so long as he wrote in English” (358). This hatred of English becomes further more complex by a strong hatred towards affluent English speaking classes of Sri Lanka, as Perera notes:

[... ] a majority of angry rural students who were hostile and mocking of our sheltered Anglicised backgrounds. Kadu-class they called us, the English-speaking classes. The word directly translated into swords. Our speech marked us out for the swords. (359-360)

The “rejection” in the title can refer to (a) the rejection of the first American Professor’s attitude by his Sri Lankan students and in turn his rejection of the students and the campus; (b) rejection of their own multicultural history by the young Sri Lankans (particularly Sinhalese); and (c) rejection of Steve, the new vibrant friendly American Professor, who because of the “fear of condescension” is sacrificed by his English class bowing to the pressures of Sinhala dominated students and their “moral authority”—resulting in poor attendance and aloofness of students in his class like his predecessor’s (360). In the background of this story we can read the building social tensions that led to the rejection and exile of many of Sri Lanka’s affluent and marginalized English-speaking classes.
Suvendrini Perera in her autobiographical story-essay “Dravidian Curls” (1999) on a visit to Sri Lanka as an expat on hearing a bomb excitedly asks: “what was that, a bomb?” (112). Her teenage nephew’s reply to this question is a sarcastic: “That’s what they sound like” (112). Perera notes that as an “invulnerable” expat her question is a stupid one. She does not have any knowledge of the lived reality of their lives in Sri Lanka anymore, although as an academic she keeps track of everything through news channels and papers. Her expatriate gaze on return is more focused on the surface cultural changes, as noticed through food, behavior and dresses of her family members.

In the household there are almost as many dress styles as ethnic and religious denominations: my mother sings her Anglican hymns and, these days, has taken to kaftans; my sister’s wardrobe is full of Burmese lungis and Indian salwar-kameez; my young nieces are in round-the-clock black, a fact I know owes nothing to their Muslim father, and everything to their devotion to MTV. (114)

She further notes that her house in Sri Lanka was a multicultural household, as reflected through the dresses—“kaftans,” “lungis,” or “salwar-kameez.”

With nostalgia is associated the pain of leave taking or parting. Perera remembers the play of language, in both Tamil and Sinhala, when taking leave from someone. It is never said that “we are going” but we are “going and coming back” (114). Questioning this use of words of parting, she writes:

Is it because the concept of parting so pains us, so hurts and offends us, that we Sri Lankans try to erase the very words from our everyday vocabularies? [ ... ]. “Varome,” we announce in Tamil when, in fact, we are just leaving, not arriving; as in Sinhala it is correct to say “we are coming” even as we walk out of the door. [ ... ] Do we really aspire, by these reality-deceiving means, to cheat ourselves the finality of departures, to assuage the unspeakably crude act of separation, the emptiness one feels to be one moment inside the fraught circle, and the next—where? (115)

Perera further observes how the notion of a good and bad migrant is developed, particularly in West, through the mannerisms of departure, arriving and nostalgia. She notes that while a “good migrant” is aspiring for “a fresh start, a new leaf, another life” (115), a bad migrant.

is the one who arrives without having left, or leaves never to arrive; the one who, as we say, doesn’t know whether she’s coming or going;
whose baggage, tied up in awkward shapes and emanating struggle smells, is not to be tossed cleanly into the waiting bin at the customs terminal. He is the one on whom the sniffer beagle playfully pounces at the baggage carousel, followed by its polite, uniformed keeper: “Excuse me, Sir, Madam, isn’t there something you’ve forgotten to discard ...?” (115)

Australia, like other destination nations, demands from its migrants “letting go, of passions and engagements of the past, of history” (115). And

[not to let go, to insist on memory and the indestructibility of earlier lives and other places is to put on the black armband of history, stubbornly to fight against the forward-looking times. (115)

But for Perera, “letting go” is not always a solution, as “[... ] our history, the past surprises and confronts us. Like a phantom [...], all the way into the unpromising future” (115).

Leaving the homeland and remembering it also provides a greater introspection into its workings. As Perera, a Jaffna Tamil Christian and now an academic in Australia, notes about the tribulations in Sri Lanka, the first reason for the conflict in Sri Lanka is the language—Sinhala vs. Tamil vs. English. Language, directly interplayed with ethnic identity and nationalism. The English language teaching and books, acted as

[... ] essential agents in the scene of violence, rage and terror [...]. Our primrose path to the professional middle-class, our secure niche in the colonial and post-colonial scheme of things, the wider divide between ethnicities, peoples and classes that it signaled—all this was marked with just these volumes, and the privileged role of the English language in breaking open our lives, our understanding of who and what we had been, and had become. (117)

As English language offered socio-political and economic opportunities to certain Sri Lankan ethnic communities on the one hand it also cultivated a class not only fluent in English but instilled with western cultural values on the other, thus widening the growing ethnic and religious divide between the Sinhalese and Tamils resulting in an ethnic strife. The severe contest for power between the various ethnic groups in Sri Lanka increased the sorrows of the people:

Somewhere between the madness of our caste system, the poverty of an unkind environment, the combined violence of the Portuguese, Dutch, British and Sinhala states, we have simply lost our bearings,
cast off along an unknown coastline, face-to-face against some turbulent, rolling, unplumbable deep. (123)

But can these differences of language and ethnicity be taken for granted. From her situation as a diasporic Sri Lankan in Australia, she speaks, about Sri Lankans and the mythical stories she remembers, using the pronoun “we.” She knows that those who insist on separateness in Sri Lanka won’t be happy with it, but she as an individual knows that separateness was a total of colonial authority and now the politicians are using this old trick with the “ample collaboration from historians, anthropologists and other learned observers” (117) i.e. the native academia.

On the language and subject of her stories she observes that

In tracking the impossibility of a single mother tongue for my stories, in revealing the absence of a home ground that is unambiguously my own, by dwelling on the shared absurdities and longings of our languages, I am guilty of amalgamating what is easier kept apart. (117)

Her stories are the stories she remembers—stories told to her from her childhood by women belonging to various ethnicities, religions, social classes, etc. She observes critically that despite the government assertions of separateness, Sri Lankan identities have mixed,

have leaked and flowed into one another, through the quotidian transactions of travelling and trading, eating and celebrating; of invoking, appeasing and casting out the same demons and deities. (119)

And it is this history of togetherness and ethnic cohabitation on this small island nation that she misses “reading about in the textbooks and newspapers: the irrevocable mixing of our blood and our stories in war and love, conflict and coexistence” (119). It is in this irrevocable mixing that she recalls her own hair style—curly (“Dravidian Curls”) and suddenly remembers a work written about with all the “painful longing, anger and obsessive detail of the exile” on Jaffna Tamil Christians.

Derek Bartholomeusz in “Tamil Tigress” (1997) narrates a tale of love in troubled times. Major Mahinda, a Sri Lankan army officer and Ranji, a beautiful young LTTE fighter both loved each other but unfortunately they belonged to different ethnic communities. Unable to meet both part ways and in the end both die saving each other. Their tragedy, the writer notes, reflects the tragedy of thousands of
young Sri Lankans, who are “at the threshold of their lives, well educated and
talented” but the never-ending civil war has ended all “their hopes and dreams” and
“seeing no further use of life” they have ended it (263). He questions everyone—
“Who can one blame for a tragedy like this? Or for countless similar tragedies the
world over [...]” (263).

In her story “Made in England” (1997), set in a tea estate in Sri Lanka,
Yasmine Gooneratne gives a glimpse into the life of some other migrant groups
present in Australia and knowledge about them in Sri Lanka. Mr Goldman, is a
Visiting Agent on the narrator’s uncle’s tea estate. He is also known as Periya dorai
(big boss) in the neighbourhood. He works for an English company but is not an
Englishman. The uncle explains to the children that: “He comes from Australia. [...]”
He’s a German from Australia” (5). Mr Goldman and his family escaped the Nazis,
during the holocaust, and were trying to migrate to Britain, when he tells the children

“[...] the ship my parents and I were on was stopped by British
Immigration when it reached Tilbury. There was talk that we would
have to go back to Hamburg. But then the captain gave an order and
the ship just turned around. He refueled at Marseilles and again in
Bombay, and he landed us in Perth, Australia. Luckily for us.” (9)

The reference to Mr Goldman and his immigration to Australia is important in two
ways. First, he does not come from England, a nation that the children of this
household are obsessed with as most of their relatives have migrated here. He comes
from Australia—which is for the children “the other end of the world” (6). Secondly,
it positively represents Australia’s refugee intake policy during the World Wars.
People restricted by Britain were given shelter and a country by Australians.

Adib Khan in his autobiographical story “My First Love” (1995), discusses the
process and motivation behind his becoming a writer. He notes that it is the
“beginning of a long journey that will presumably continue as long as I am alive”
(25). He nostalgically discusses the experience of reading and learning at his school in
Bangladesh that brought new meaning to his life as a writer. Thomas O’Linn, the
teacher who inspired Khan was an Irish-American Christian missionary living in
Bangladesh. Khan writes that his teacher “made no attempt to discuss or scrutinise
what he had read to us. I suspect that he tried to reach out and make us feel the words
and put us into direct contact with the experiences [...] swirling colors and the
turbulence of life. [...] I learned to interpret and create, squeeze the words and
drench myself with their possibilities” (25). The story provides an insight into the makings and workings of a diasporic writers’ mind. For Adib Khan writing his life experiences or writing about past and representing his homeland through memory is a window to explore the self.

According to Uma Parameswaran (2000) the diaspora writers often act as “outsiders to the homeland, looking in at a past of a space that has changed in their absence.” The question then is: do these South Asian diaspora writers, act as what Makarand Paranjape refers to “native informants”—“seeing” the Indian subcontinent with all its faults and shortcomings on one hand and as an exotic and beautiful land on the other, and re-presenting what they see for Australians (or the West).

3.2 - Nostalgic Journey to Home

[... ] it’s my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the midst of lost time. (Rushdie, 1991: 9)

And how shall I speak for myself without memory—my memory and the memories of my people, however dispersed, however distanced. (Alexander 156)

In this section, I explore the melancholia of diasporic loss and the place of longing and memory in the re-negotiation of lost home. It was a Swiss doctor, Johannes Hofer, who coined the term “nostalgia” in 1688, from the Greek “nostos”—return home, and “algia” or “algos”—longing, suffering or pain. Corkhill (1995), explains Nostalgia as a form of melancholia or severe homesickness caused by prolonged absence from one’s country or home. Inevitably, the literature produced by those who have left their countries of origin is full of this emotion. Because nostalgia really represents a longing to return to the land of childhood to revisit family and places of the past, it is generally a backward-looking or regressive emotion: rather, it is often a constructive feeling, unleashing creativity among immigrant writers as they struggle to describe and define their moods and reminiscences. (45)

Thus this intense attachment or nostalgia towards one’s lost homeland is often seen as unnecessary and is dismissed as a primitive stage. David Lowenthal (1985) further
observes that nostalgic longings are becoming increasingly common in Western societies, and he postulates that a mistrust of the future fuels much of today’s nostalgia (11). Yet he explains, “If nostalgia is a symptom of malaise, it also has compensating virtues. Attachment to familiar places may buffer social upheaval, attachment to familiar faces may be necessary for enduring association” (13). Daniel Francis (1997) reinforces this point when he writes, “In an age of anxiety, it is not surprising to find nostalgia flourishing” (176). Some recent readings of nostalgia also suggest that it is an emotional resource for insight and cultural production. Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (1988) defines nostalgia as “an essential, narrative, function of language that orders events temporally and dramatizes them in the mode of ‘that’s that happened,’ that ‘could happen,’ that ‘threaten to erupt at any moment’” (227). She further notes that nostalgia, “like the economy [cultural industries] it runs with, is everywhere. But it is a cultural practice, not a given content; its forms, meanings, and effects shift with the context—it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present” (227).

While nostalgia has traditionally played a central role in migrant literature, this longing has typically rested on a nostalgic desire to “journey toward an originary home” (Kamboureli 132). The nostalgic desire that the diasporans display is often “blended with fear—the fear of uncertainty and of facing the challenges posed by the larger world and the fear of the absence of the clarity and confidence provided by the past” (Jin 22). These two primary causes along with dislocation promote insecurity in a migrant (see Bates 8). However, nostalgia may be used as a tool “to create that space, but it is not the heart of home” (Wise 305).

Subhash Jaireth (2001) borrowing the idea of “walking” from Michel de Certeau observes that “Walking is one of those spatial practices through which people transform places into spaces by making them ‘their own’ and by circumscribing them within their everyday living” (“Remembering Dehlie” 20). The same applies to migration or crossing over or journeys through memory and spaces. Jaireth in “The Bridge Near Firozepur” (2003) re-assembles the story from his memory, of his college friend. Sunil, who now lives in the USA. Sunil on one occasion tells the writer,

“Can you imagine [. . .] I have never ‘seen’ my mother in my dreams? I have had dreams about her, but she has never, ever been physically
Sunil has for the last twenty years tried to “see” in his dreams the face of his dead mother. The family once had several photos of her but “they were either left behind in Rawalpindi or perished in the refugee train” (69). In the absence of her photograph, he even “dug up a few old photographs of his grandfather and grandmother and took them to one of his painter friends so that he could conjure a portrait of his mother from the photos” (69). But to his disappointment he still doesn’t know what his mother looked like. For Sunil, who has a “knack for telling stories” (62), the dilemma of not knowing and remembering his mother is very much similar to not being able to tell her story.

Photographs, paintings and other visual markers often serve as entry point into a nostalgic journey. Subhash Jaireth notes in “Maps, Photographs, Paintings” (1998) that looking at an old painting of a bridge in Roorkee, India feels a strange romantic wonder. Because:

this bridge is no stranger to me. I have walked across it, have been pulled in a rickshaw over it, and have carried my daughter across on my shoulders. “I know this bridge very well,” I tell myself, but when I look at it in the painting, it appears to me unknown, novel and attractive.

The bridge, by appearing in a painting, has become special. The painting has framed it into a relatively autonomous “reality” outside the world that surrounds the “real” bridge over which I have walked. But the painting has also made the surrounding landscape attractive, romantic and picturesque. (257)

In his yearnings about his old home Jaireth feels that he has somewhere in his search for a new home in Australia become a tourist: “I have obtained my visa from the Indian High Commission. I am no longer Indian; the passport that I carry tells me so. Perhaps that is why I have started behaving like a tourist” (264). For Jaireth the gaze that looks at India has changed post-Australian citizenship. While Satendra Nandan in “Delhi: Among the Ruins” (1998) remembering the India of his “childhood imagination” notes that India which had seeped into my adolescent consciousness with immense force through her epics, songs, stories of grandparents, films, pictures of gods and goddesses, portraits of Nehru and Gandhi, colourful, mischievous posters of Lord Krishna in a kitchen stealing
and eating butter, Ram and Sita in an idyllic forest—was quite
different from the India and the Indians one jostled with on the cobbled
streets of Delhi. Indian mythology, like the dust of Delhi, is so
powerful that I think it prevents one from seeing the realities of India.
(109-110)

Beryl T. Mitchell in her autobiographical account “Tea, Tytlers and Tribes”
(1997) writes:

When deciding what to bring to Australia we sold some very precious
things at auctions, but the old long-playing records we brought with us.
They still rest in a bottom drawer of an unused wardrobe—memories
we do not want to discard. (306; my italics)

The “records,” reminds her of the happier times that she and other young married
couples—(mostly) plantation owners or administrators spent in the Planter’s Club at
Patiyagama in Sri Lanka—“we would have great all-night parties—the sort that one
can only enjoy in the exuberance of youth” (306). She not only brought her records
but also booked her furniture on the ship to Australia—“every family migrating to
Australia in the sixties and seventies would send their special pieces of furniture by
sea, even if they were travelling by plane” (304). Every article of her household is not
only precious but carries with it a memory of happier times and a story.

She further notes that in the process of settling down,

I soon filled my garden with plants of any species I remembered from
those other gardens tucked away on mountain sides in Ceylon, now
growing only in my memory, but still as fresh as yesterday. (308)

Her constant use of terms of longing such as musical records, garden, furniture,
letters, gems, photographs, etc. throughout her narrative shows her rootlessness in
Australia. And, for her Sri Lankan garden to grow in Australia, she takes the help of
her Australian neighbour, who helps her “with advice on the seasons in which various
flowers would grow and bloom” (308). And finally her flowers of Sri Lankan variety
“grew and flourished right through the year” in Australia (308).

Subhash Jaireth in “Cricket Ball” (2006) writes about a subject that is close to
the hearts of both the Indians and Australians—Cricket. On a trip to India, he sees at
his friend’s house, a very old cricket ball—the same crucial ball that helped India win
the 1959 test match series against Australia in Kanpur. For Jaireth, who since his
childhood days in India was a huge fan of the Australian team, Australian players
“had a special place”: 
We loved the Australian team, although its invincibility, professionalism and arrogance annoyed us. We wanted them to be like our Hindu gods, perfect, kind, but also fallible, frivolous and unreliable. (83)

He is surprised that after so many years he remembers the details of the match. It was in this test match that the “Indian team recorded its first memorable win” (86) and then “disappeared into the pages of the history” (87) like its hero Jasu Patel, who gave a sensational bowling performance. For Jaireth the old cricket ball is a point of entry into a nostalgic journey into his childhood, spent with friends playing cricket on the streets.

It can be noted that however fervent be the migrant’s dream of a return to the homeland is, the idea is a futile one as there is no point of return. Shelagh Goonewardane in “A Migrant Dreams” (1994), using the trope of “dream” writes that she often dreams about “a house” in Sri Lanka that they “owned for many years, but never went to” (283). She rhetorically asks, “Why did we not go and live there, since it belonged to us?” (283). This “mystery of the dream” is also the mystery behind many a nostalgic journey that migrants take to their homeland. She dreams that her husband has agreed to leave Australia soon and once again live in their beautiful country house in Sri Lanka. But “suddenly, the distant sounds of gunfire” invade her dream and bring her “back in reality” (283). The socio-political conditions of Sri Lanka because of which they left their home in the first place are still the same. Although, migrants intend to return to their place of origin, the physical possibility of a return is rare. The only viable option for them is to make “nostalgic returns” to their place of origin.

In Chitra Fernando’s “Making Connections” from Between Worlds (1988), Ananda, the protagonist, feels a “great loneliness” and “resentment” for immigrating to Australia. He tries to remember, mostly through a comparison with his new environment, his old home in Beruwala, Sri Lanka. On looking at the “confined space” of his flat, he longs for

the wide open verandah of his Beruwala home, for those leisurely early mornings: the chants of fishermen pulling in their nets, loud and clear, then momentarily drowned by the roar and thunder of the Colombo Express flashing past between coconut trees, comfortable sounds of household activity, the clatter of crockery, Leela bargaining with a
fisherman early with his catch, the deceptive hustle and bustle of an essentially slow-paced life. (90)

In Sri Lanka he used to dream of becoming a “second Gandhi” by

Dedicating his life to the education of the peasants: eating and dressing like them, sharing their miserable huts, sweating in the fields, the founder of a new movement sweeping through Lanka, India and Asia. (91)

But he never does become a “second Gandhi,” having immigrated to Australia for a better life—“food, clothes, employment, education” (90)—especially the education of his children. Moreover, the early morning train ride to his office in Sydney, reminds him of a “distant time and place, another train” (93) and friends with whom the “journey to Colombo was whiled away eating vadei, drinking tea and chaffing each other” (93). In Australia a journey from his home to office now gives him a “sense of disconnectedness” (95). On walking down the street in front of the offices and shops, that looks like “multi-storied temples of fashion and commerce” (95) to him, he longs to return to the bazaars of his home town. He cannot imagine a future for himself in Australia. On seeing a derelict old man,

For one terrible second he saw himself in that old man—the girls married and indifferent, Leela dead. (95)

He feels a sense of urgency to return to Sri Lanka and start his social service and “new” life—a life that he always dreamt of.

I must go back, he thought, before it’s too late, I have work to do. [. . . ] setting Lanka alight. He would be a second Gandhi. (95)

But all his feelings and the urgency to return are only due to a “sense of deflation and embarrassment” at not knowing where he is. He knows that he cannot return to Sri Lanka, as

there was nothing of special significance for him to do there. If he did, then he’d very likely think longingly of his brick house in Epping with the tall gums at the back [. . . ]. (100)

He now understands what his mother meant when he told her about their decision to migrate—“the grass on the other side is always greener” (100).

Shelagh Goonewardane in her autobiographical story “The Pain of Leave Taking” (1997) on hearing in the news of a bomb explosion in the business heart of Colombo is suddenly transported back in time. She writes, “It seems that our memories and our emotional responses are very much bound to landscape” (6). She
has lived in Australia now for more than ten years and feels that Australia is her “home” and “country.” But the news of the bombing in a place where she had grown up and worked arouses “horror, anger and grief,” which made her realise that the umbilical cord which binds me to the country of my birth is not easily severed. The pain of that separation will probably persist until the day I die, even though it might come in spasms or gradually diminish with time. (6)

Through her musings she narrates that the best years of her life were spent in her family house, which they disposed off because of conflict and immigrated to Australia. But in her dreams, down memory lane, she writes

I was back in its intimate and well loved environment. I would walk down the graceful stairway, sit in the pleasurable comfort of the sitting-room, and listen to the heavy clock which was positioned on the top of a glass-fronted cabinet in the gracious dining-room. To this day, I can remember the patterns of curtains and the silky feel of leopard skin rug on an upholstered cane settee on the front verandah. (7)

And when after many years on a visit to Sri Lanka, she is allowed to see her old home, by its new owner; she was unable to see the full house, as she can observe that in the house “all was completely changed. […] Only the basic shell had remained” (7). For her now the memory of the house and the happy days is the last resort, as the people who know about the old house are not there anymore and her children were too young when she left Sri Lanka. She feels that her children will never understand her nostalgia and longing for her old home, as her children have Australian sensibilities and they never get to know how it feels to come from a sad place.

On the other hand, Chitra Fernando’s protagonist Rupa, in her story “The Birds of Paradise” from Women There and Here (1994), in her youthful days, longed for her return to Australia seeking individuality, freedom and an escape from her family and their traditions in Sri Lanka. But having lived all her life in Sydney and after her children have grown up and left, She thought of the continuity of life there [in Sri Lanka], of years of custom and tradition shaping every domestic event, major and minor, and grew affectionately nostalgic, as she re-knitted herself in memory to her family at 14 St Mary’s Road. (50)

Her remembering and longing for home at this stage of her life is a true longing of a diasporan and not a “trick of memory” (51). She can hear old voices and sounds of a
distant time and land that are familiar to her but cannot return except through memory.

Chris Raja, a Melbourne based writer, remembers nostalgically in his autobiographical story “White Boots” (2003), the time spent in Dilhousie Institute—“an old remnant of the British Raj” (97). In the postcolonial India it has become a club for the middle-income professionals. He remembers

swimming at the pool, while they [his parents] socialized with friends over drinks and Chinese food or played billiards and tennis or simply browsed in the library. (97)

He further writes

Occasionally, we watched movies on the outdoor screen. [ ... ] I remember sitting between my friends Nitesh and Brian, watching Bette Midler in The Rose as it caused some fuss by its screening. I can’t remember the film but I remember Mrs Buttacharia, one of the really wealthy members of the club [ ... ]. (97)

In his memory of the past Raja uses selective remembering to compare Melbourne and Calcutta. He notes that Melbourne is a “particularly quiet,” “clean and green” place (98) while Calcutta with “its heat, colour and noise” (97) makes him yearn for it.

Chitra Fernando in “The Chasm” from Women There and Here (1994) presents a small Sri Lankan community living in Alice Springs. The arrival of Vijay, a sociologist from Colombo on a study tour of Australia, in this community makes them elated, as he was from “home” and “they still thought of their former country as home” (53). Vijay, as a Sri Lankan,

roused in them a mixture of envy and self-satisfaction: envy because he hadn’t chosen to subject himself to the pain of self-uprooting; self-satisfaction because there he was sweating it out in the Third World while they luxuriated in the sweet life here. (53)

His critical observations as a non-diasporic or an outsider in this diasporic community present most of the happenings of their lives in the story. He sees that behind all the talk and show of success these Sri Lankan migrants were

often overcome by starkness of their surroundings, so different from the land they’d left behind. A land of endless green expanses: paddy fields, palm-edged coasts, forests and jungles, tea-covered hill slopes, grassy plains; people everywhere, their houses, gardens and cattle. It was small, manageable and pretty. (54)
Chapter 3 – Recollecting the Past

When compared to Alice Springs' “vast bare plain surrounding the little enclave of Alice Springs overwhelmed them” (54). The vastness and barrenness of the Australian landscape and the “void outside transformed into a private panic” that the Sri Lankans living there “couldn’t explain to themselves or to anybody else” (54). To Vijay, people of this small community look like “primitives” and he says that

No one at home in Sri Lanka will believe this [. . .]. There was here the rage, the frustration of the disposed. The supermarket cornucopia and the electric plenty were there; they laughed all the way to the bank. Yet deep within, they were dispirited. The landscape, its endless flatness broken only by huge bumps of rock or deep clefts, overwhelmed them. They talked to people. An exchange of sounds with no engagement of the spirit. (61)

These people still believe and think crudely about ancestry and class, values which, Vijay observes, people at home tackle with “subtlety and finesse” (63). These people live their lives in a strange land, on memories of good times spent, and places and people (belonging to high class strata) they knew in Sri Lanka. An invocation of a civilisation that they have lost is for them a kind of “self-assurance” that back home “would be both mocked and contested” (see V. Lal 2002). They have in their small diasporic community developed a “self-repair system” to assist each other to “dispel the chill, the discrete distances” through a “round of dinners, lunches and picnics” (64) and preserve in their consciousness memories of home.

In his story “Out There” (1997) Adib Khan’s young narrator, who escaped with his mother from the war-torn homeland, feels an “unspeakable yearning” (85) for home and its
tatty memories of tropical trees and a hot sun. The sky ... acres of blue, its innocence finally restored. Sweaty faces, that do not wish to remember, shoveling rice and dried fish into small slits. Water buffaloes and paddy fields. The land has stopped burning [. . .]. (86)

The war is over and he wants to return to his homeland—now “a foreign country” or “an imagined world” (86). He feels trapped in this adopted country. For his college assignment he writes a paper on “Asia, a Threat or a Boon for Australia?” (87). As a second generation immigrant to Australia he does not fit the bill of a stereotypical Asian migrant. As his silent interaction with a security guard makes it clear:

My overcoat and shoes are relatively new. I don’t look helpless enough to be bullied. It’s not quite right in his scheme of a prosperous country
he once knew. I suspect that he belongs to a desperate order that views
the world with yesterday’s eyes. (85)

The narrator in spite of having grown up in this country feels that the security guard,
an Anglo-Australian was looking for someone with a “raggedly dressed—torn jeans,
faded windcheater, and a frayed baseball cap” (85) like the old times.

Uma Parameswaran (2000) notes that people who move away from their
native countries “not only occupy but also bequeath to subsequent generations a
liminality, an uneasy pull between two cultures.” For a second generation migrant, the
place of his/her birth is home. In “Dreamless” (2001), a quasi-autobiographical piece
written after Suneeta Peres Da Costa shifted to the USA for studies, the narrator talks
about Australia as her home: “A place unravaged by war but a place that nonetheless
caused me anxiety when I thought about it” (101). She observes

I had just moved from one country to another, one continent to another.
In fact, my world had literally been turned upside-down because these
two continents were also in different hemispheres, [...]. it was with
some bad feeling that I had left my own antipodean home. (88; my
italics)

The narrator, who is a second generation Indian-Australian brought up in Sydney,
probably didn’t feel out of place or confused in Australia. It is in the USA that she
feels like a migrant and notes that at the supermarket

I became stupid and forgot the logical location of things. [... ] I
searched for these items because to me coffee meant Vittoria, and juice
Sunburst and shampoo Pears, I immediately felt cheated by the fact
that they weren’t there; I imagined at once that the new and un-familiar
product names contained ersatz commercial goods, that I was being set
up or duped. (91)

Her frustration and confusion are also due to the fact that even though she spoke “the
same language, some very basic things could cause bafflement and bewilderment to
the people around” (92). One example of this was the use of the word “trolley”
which in the USA is called a “shopping cart.” Another reason for her paranoia is
despite having all the papers attesting to her “legitimacy to be in the new country”
(93) she is unable to open a bank account easily. And to her own surprise she finds it
difficult to communicate her own side and explain the situation to the authorities.

On leaving her family and home in Australia, the narrator says:
It was not the calling long distance itself, but my ability to close the distance if I so wanted that comforted me more than the voices of those whom I had left and for whom I longed, because, it has to be said, I had left because they could comfort me no longer and, as for longing, one longs only for what is impossible, for what is irrecoverable. (95; my italics)

However she feels homesick as the “new city was full of piercing contradictions” (97). She also meets other migrants—two men from the hinterland of Venezuela, employed in the business of moving furniture. These two men “had come for better opportunities, but because the degrees they held were quite redundant in the new country, they made their living moving furniture” (98). It is with one of the two men, the narrator debates about “whether it was possible to write without a home,” and observes “how the writing about one’s home is often distorted both there and away from it” (98).

Being at home or away from it, the point of reference always remains home—your own or your ancestors’. For the narrator, the daughter of a first generation migrant, there is another home away from home—India. And she goes on a holiday to the village in Goa where her father was born. She writes about this ancestral village:

A village is a small thing, barely a smudge on the map of the world. At the time my father was born, the village and the territory in which the village was located was a part of Portugal. It was only when he was a young man that it ceased being so. On a particular day when he was a young man some soldiers from the larger land-mass which shared its borders took over the territory in which my father’s village was located. There was no war, few reprisals and recriminations; very soon it was said that the territory, including the myriad villages such as the one in which my father had been born, had been “integrated” with the larger sub-continental land-mass that adjoined it. But this integration in words amounted to very little in the minds of people such as my father. (102)

The fate of her father and village to which he belonged occupies a “mythic place” in her “imagination” (103). She does not know and was never taught “the native tongue” of her father—Portuguese, and yet she continues, “I had an intimation of saudade, that melancholy for lost things, often confused with nostalgia” (103). Her family has lost many things in India and she loses her passport. She writes that she was able to satisfy the Indian authorities with a “guarantee of returning,” it is a guarantee that is “always fantastic anyway” (104). She knows that she won’t return as no one returned
to their roots permanently and this is one of the most dominant and distinctive characteristics of a diaspora (See V. Mishra, 1996: 75). Homeland or “Watan” for the diasporans is thus not so much an actual place to which one must return at all costs but according to Marije Braakman and Angela Schlenkhoff (2007) “the importance of the notion lies in the sense of identity and belonging it offers. It can serve to create a niche, a space of belonging, within another country” (13).

However, a fictive return is possible only through memory. As Jaireth questioning the value of maps in “Remembering Dehlie” (2001) notes:

It seems that the map we construct through acts of remembering and forgetting, and the topography this memory inhabits, has warps, cervices and valleys where daylights fails to penetrate. It needs the helping hand of time to unravel that which is hidden. I am not sure if that is how the memory functions but we always assume, hope and believe that it works like that. (22)

It is through these maps or re-constructions of home that the “past serve(s) as the active ideological terrain on which people represent themselves to themselves” (Ganguly 29). On the sense of loss, Roger Ballard (1994) writes:

No matter how bad the social and material conditions they may have left behind, and no matter how great their achievements abroad, migrants invariably feel a grievous sense of loss. They miss—and therefore long once again to experience—the familiar sights, sounds and smells of their birthplace, and the warmth and conviviality of everyday domestic life. (9)

These nostalgic yearnings to return to a lost home reflect the migrants’ search for the home or a sensory location in which the self is comfortably secure thus providing a therapeutic value. Memory and nostalgia play with concrete spatial histories in not just recreating the lost home but also in a “cultural construction in which our very selves and sense are constituted” (Chambers 22). Borrowing further from Braakman and Schlenkhoff it can be said that the South Asian diasporans are rooted in the homeland “discourse and its habits,” but they also pursue “Western routes through the education system and the perspectives opened to them” (16).
3.3 – Re-creating of the Idea of Home

Introducing the essays of Günter Grass, Salman Rushdie observed that literature of migration offers us “one of the richest metaphors of our age”:

> The very word *metaphor*, with its roots in the Greek words for *bearing across*, describes a sort of migration, the migration of ideas into images. Migrants—borne-across humans—are *metaphorical beings* in their very essence; and migration, seen as a metaphor, is everywhere around us. We all cross frontiers; in that sense, we are all migrants. (1991: 278; my italics)

Adding to this viewpoint, Satendra Nandan (2000) notes that the idea of a “metaphorical being” is perhaps more true about “a writer than of any other member of a society” (35). He further notes that a writer “is almost always and everywhere either an exile or a migrant and, because of this distancing and distress, he may capture more vitally and vividly the very essence of our migratory experience” (35).

The continuance of a dialogue with the past through “plot, characters, actions,” and a constant looking back by the diasporic authors, “through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” in their stories is to a larger extent the result of the notion of “home” and its “authority” as constructed over the mindscapes of the diasporic individuals. But, as discussed in the previous section, this is not to say that a diasporan will “return” to the origin because there is no point of actual return for him/her. For Vijay Mishra (1996), this inability to return is one of the most dominant and distinctive characteristics of diasporas and he observes that “diasporas do not, as a general rule, return” (75).

Although the diasporans may not actually return home permanently, as they are now located in a new adopted “home,” they however do present an attachment towards traditions, customs, values, religions and languages of the ancestral home, through the use of memory or sensory locations, as can be seen in the themes of their works. How they re-create their South Asian identity under diasporic conditions through recreation, continuation, maintenance and nurturing of their social and cultural uniqueness is often the product of their desires to connect with their country of origin, homeland, and with the other subcontinental diasporas present in different regions of the world, thereby giving it a true global unity and identity. In the words of Bhabha (1994), this is the “celebratory romance of the past” (9). It is a result of the restrictions that migration has placed upon them and the creative possibilities it has offered. This romancing with the past is reflected in the creative output of the diasporic author and
continues to depend on the bits and pieces of its origin to hold itself together in the face of the onslaught, rejection or domination by the “other,” by the world which both frightens and fascinates. (J. Jain, 2001: 79)

This “fascination” with/for what has been left behind, or with the very “home-idea” (Mishra, 1996: 75) in relation to what is to be acquired in the hostland is the consequence of the migratory displacement. And this in turn makes the writer imagine home the way he/she wants it to be i.e. “a romantic idealization that fossilises memories,” and therefore it can also be referred to as the “constant looking back syndrome” (Ahmad 93). The return to home or roots, physically, is also not viable because of the other important incentives that are offered by the hostland. In the very act of returning/re-turning lies the problematic of losing identity and most important of all, losing the opportunity that has been procured through hard work in the hostland or places of migration.

Descendants of Indian indentured migrants, who are now twice displaced because of the coups in Fiji, constitute an important part of “the mosaic of this Indian diaspora” in Australia (B. Lal, 1996: 167). From this part of the world, Satendra Nandan, Brij V. Lal, Vijay Mishra, and Sudesh Mishra have emerged as the most prominent Fiji-Indian voices in Australia. They belong to that special category of the diaspora authors who carry a double hyphenated identity i.e. of being Indian-Fijian-Australian. These authors, descendents of the indentured labourers, are preoccupied with reassessing their origins in the mini-Indias created by their ancestors in lands outside the Indian subcontinent.

Vijay Mishra in “Ni Sa Moce/Salaam Fiji” (1989) notes “in remote Fiji, a displaced Indian migrant community clung onto traditions that the community brought with it from the India of the late nineteenth century [ . . . ] this India had effectively been frozen in time” (481-482). Brij V. Lal, in “Return to Bahraich” (1998), calls it the dilemma of the “people caught in-between the tensions of culture and history.” He finds “something strange, something incongruous” about the indentured people, the villagers and writes

Now in their mellow twilight, they seemed to be shipwrecked by fate in a place they did not, perhaps could not, fully embrace, and they could not return to a place they so dearly loved. They were a people caught in-between the tensions of culture and history, resisting
Satendra Nandan in his short story “The Guru” (1988), takes a very humorous view of this (“frozen in time”) diasporan situation and the Indian way of life away from India. He builds his story on the pattern, however not on the same scale and grandeur, of V. S. Naipaul’s The Mystic Masseur (1957) and Cyril Dabydeen’s The Wizard Swami (1985), two of the best known Girmitiya narratives. It is important to mention here that it was Naipaul who started the trend of a distinctive Girmitiya narrative or the narratives of the old labour diaspora by providing it with a form, style, language, ideology, fantastic images and also in some ways made it consciously into a discourse to be comprehended and critiqued. According to Nandan, “Naipaul has given us a searing glimpse of our own unexplored, unwritten lives, roadless and rootless” (“Antyesti Samskara”: 420). Similarly, in “The Guru,” Nandan presents Pundit Bhondu Maharaj, whose “mumbling” of Sanskrit mantras makes “the hair on his knuckles bristle with holy excitement” (69). He exploits illiterate people and blind believers of Hinduism, its rituals and traditions. He and other indentured labourers, as Selvadurai (2005) has observed “cut off from South Asia [...] were forced to recreate little self-conditioned South Asias and to draw meaning from their landscape” (9). It is their common memories that have united the indentured people in a way that makes them distinguishable from other groups on the plantations. They have re-created a “home away from home” and preserved the rich cultural, religious and social traditions of India over the years of their dislocation in Fiji and carried it to Australia too. This, according to Vijay Mishra (1991), is the construction of an “imaginary belief systems for its own self-authentication, self-generation and legitimation” (79) by the Indian section in Fiji. Despite the strictures against travelling overseas in the Hindu shastras, these early Indian immigrants were indentured as labourers to countries unknown to them. Soon their relationship with the Fijian landscape became solid and they accounted for more than half of Fiji’s population till the coups of 1987 and again in 2000, as a result of which these people migrated to various other countries for safety. The protagonist of Nandan’s story, Beckaroo, can obviously see that his parents, the Pundit and the other first generation or old diasporans are living with an invariable hope of making “a trip to Motherland” (77).
because they are still, what Vijay Mishra calls, “trapped in a cultural time-warp” (1991: 79).

Similarly, Sudesh Mishra in his autobiographical short story “Lila” (1994) describes in detail “the time-warp” in the celebration and performance of Ram Lila by the Indian-Fijian community in Nadi, Fiji. A playing field is converted into a “stage for this week-long enactment of Tulasidas’s Ramayana” (650) in shudh Hindi. Using Ramayana, its characters and the trope of exile, Sudesh Mishra discusses the politics of language—Hindi, English, Fijian, and Fijian-Hindi or Fiji-baat—in the diasporic context. The narrator’s father can speak Fijian in Nadi dialect, and for him language is “an evanescent butterfly and not a thing to cast in bronze. He speaks it and it is gone” (653), whereas for the narrator, on the other hand, says that he “plunge(s) the living butterfly into a vat of molten ore in search of an aesthetic that is durable” (653). Fijian drivers, who work under the narrator’s father, respect him for the “use of their language as if it were his own” (654). The narrator, having grown up and journeying a lot, settles down in Australia but keeps his connection with Fiji and the language. He again sees the Ram Lila performance and notices “Shudh Hindi has long been altered [ . . . ] so that his lines are no longer scripted by Tulasidas. Instead they are the lines of a diasporic self [ . . . ]” (655). Sudesh Mishra’s story is a celebration of Indian-Fijian culture and Fiji-Hindi—a diasporic language that encompasses within it the history, experience and stories of indenture and shifting or recreation of home in Fiji.

Satendra Nandan in “Nandi” (1990), remembering the stories he was raised on observes “We lived by such stories—first of our grandparents, then our mothers and fathers, now our political leaders. Our fate in Fiji had echoes of the Ramayana: exile, suffering, separation, battles, but no return” (629). In “Nandi,” Jagat Mahajan, the richest man in the narrator’s village, who worships Lord Shiva, erects under the pandanus tree a temple. The narrator observes that there was a caved wooden statue of Shiva mounted on a clay figure of Nandin, Shiva’s joyous bull. A mound of red earth symbolised Mount Everest, on which Shiva sat in meditation. These pieces of sculpture were grotesquely coloured and covered with hibiscus petals or small yellow marigolds. [ . . . ] Shiva looked strong, ominous as a mountain with a hidden volcano. (620)
This temple, however “grotesquely covered,” represented the very memory of the sacred religious space—a temple—that the indentured labourers have left back in India.

For Nandan in “Antyesti Samskara: The Last Rites” (1996) this re-creation of the “lost” space and re-enactment of sacred customs and religious rituals is the very essence of the Indian-Fijian community. It is also a journey of “going back—into oneself, one’s family, one’s country—the search for a history and identity” (420). Nandan understands that by preserving the rich myths along with the cultural, religious and social traditions of India over the years in Fiji, Indians blinded themselves from seeing the culture and value system in which they were transplanted.

Mena Abdullah (along with co-author Ray Mathew) presented in her short story collection *The Time of the Peacock* (1965) delightful and light-hearted descriptions of the transplantation of an Indian family in the hinterland of Australia. According to Corkhill (1995), “the beauty of these brief sketches of life in an alien environment lies in their clarity, simplicity and integrity” (36). Growing up in New England, a region in New South Wales and despite many odds the narrator “never loses her optimism, joy and innocence.” Despite their problems in this hinterland, the family becomes accustomed to the Australian soil and the landscape. The garden, representing the Garden of Eden, in “Because of the Rusilla,” although like a place of exile, is also an example of their adaptation to Australian land:

The garden was a strange place and lovely. It was our mother’s place, Ama’s own place. Outside its lattice walls was the farmyard with its fowls and goats (Sulieman the rooster and Yasmin the nanny), and beyond that was Father’s place, the wool-sheds and the yards, and beyond that the hills with their changing faces and their Australianess. We had never been to them, and Ama [ ... ] told us they were very strange. But everything was strange to Ama, except the garden.

Inside its lattice walls grew the country that she knew. There were tuberose and jasmine, white violets and the pink Kashmiri roses whose buds grew clenched, like baby hands. The garden was cool and sweet and full of rich scent. (12; my italics)

The garden, with its mix of tuberose and Kashmiri roses, is not just a symbol of India or the motherland, represented in the story as “mother’s place,” filled with its representative flowers, it is also a security or defence mechanism that this family
employs by recreating the environment of the homeland against anything hostile in their present. The garden “provides an important sanctuary for the mother and a place to confine her children” (Tucker 2003).

Three generations of a migrant family are portrayed in Renuka Sharma’s short story “Paternity” (1994). Sharma writes that the grandfather, now a ninety-six year old man, wore a turban and rode a horse “to look at the land and talk to his descendants,” that “he had helped settle almost sixty years ago when as a foreman of the sugar company he was rewarded for his toil” (154). The old man, has the “curious sensation” that he has “achieved” something in his life as a migrant in Australia, but “never quite sure of what” (154). The children from his two wives have merged into the Australian society and are now university educated and they live “in the urban centre with long periods abroad” and come on “infrequent visits” to meet him (155). His only regret is that his youngest son doesn’t believe in the traditions of India and in the eyes of the old man he is “an infidel” with all his modern views:

With much glee the son had told the father that he ate pork. A high caste Brahmin eating pork, the old man had been outraged and asked one of the lurking grandsons to bring buckets of water for his sons’ cleansing, after the visit the house was scoured. (155)

The old man, belonging to a Brahmin family, has, for the past sixty years, performed at various functions the role of a high priest and one man judiciary for his small community. Still, he cannot understand the feeling of loss: “some valuable part of himself which he longed for in an uncertain way” (155). The loss he feels is of the youngest son, who in all respects resembles the old man but with his foreign ways has distanced himself from his father and his traditions. He is a “man toughened and hardened by circumstances” (156) just like his migrant father, but representing modernity, while his father stands for traditions of India transplanted in Australia. It is the grandson who understands what his father and grandfather are truly feeling and muses that “even in seeming opposites there are similarities” (156) and in their “acknowledgement of difference” there is present true love (157). The grandson represents the third generation of Indian-Australians and says that “he would be different, a real radical, a nihilist disagreeing with their ideas on tradition and modernity, going beyond” (157).
Recent migrations are creating new displacements, this recreation of home, the reconstruction of the South Asian way of life and cultural values to produce a home away from home, and this has resulted in what Paranjape, calls an astonishing cultural continuity [that is seen] when one crosses boundaries these days—one never has to leave India, so to speak, even as one leaves its shores. The same, or at least similar, music, food, clothes and people haunt one not just on the plane and through the transit points, but also at the final destination, whether it is America, Canada, Britain, or Australia. (Preface: vi)

Migration, diaspora and exile offer diverse and complex environments for the renegotiation of social and cultural identities. These phenomena have become everyday experience in our contemporary society in relation to cultural markers and intercultural negotiations taking place between individuals and nations.

**Conclusion**

Because, no matter how “fictional” the account of these writers, or how much it was a product of invention, the act of imagination is bound up with memory. [...] Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, [...] It is essentially memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our flooding. (Morrison 77)

South Asian diasporic narratives characterise bifurcated, dis-located identities that exist in a liminal space, in-between two identities, two cultures, and two histories. Yet, “home” remains, through acts of imagination, remembering and re-creation, an important reference point for these writers in the stories discussed here. As Aijaz Ahmad (1992), answering Salman Rushdie, writes: “it takes a very modern, a very affluent, uprooted kind of person to give up the idea of home” (68-69). Similarly, Christopher Cyrill’s narrator in “What Withers and What Remains” (1996) wonders: “if people were preserved by the thing that they preserved” (178), as in these stories the migrants carry over many markers to deal with identity issues and in doing so define the South Asian diasporic space. Thus, the “consumption” of particular commodities in the diaspora might lead an “individual to remember the warmth and laughter surrounding family gatherings and celebrations in the homeland (rather than the conflicts and family politics surrounding them)” (Mankekar, 2005: 206). The task is to keep the roots, history and memory, of South Asia alive in Australia by
conspicuous consumption. Satendra Nandan in “Ashes and Diamonds” (1989) notes, that to his father, Air India, the connector between the subcontinent and Fiji, represented “the idea of India itself” (65). This acknowledges how the “experience of dislocation, modulated by a nostalgic longing for the familiar, is also deeply rooted in the creation of imaginary fictions” (Mannur 2007).

Nostalgia then plays an important part in the immigrant condition as it acts as a “desire to simultaneously embrace what is left of a past from which one is spatially and temporally displaced, and the recognition that nostalgia can overwhelm memories of the past, allowing the colors of history to seep out of the mind’s eye” (Mannur 2007). For the migrant, just as for the non-migrant, nostalgia is tied to the process of home-building as we seek to produce in the present what we feel we had in the past: the feelings of security, familiarity, community, and possibility. Ghassan Hage (1997) states,

Nostalgia is nothing more than a memory of a past experience imagined from the standpoint of the present to be homely. Clearly, nostalgic feelings do not only abound in migrant life but in everybody’s life. They guide home-building in the present because people seek to foster the kind of homely feeling they know (105).

Therefore, the longing for and thoughts about homeland, heritage, and a place to call home become the identity rather than merely the means toward it. The nostalgic subject often turns to the past to find or re-construct “sources of identity, agency, or community, that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present” (Tannock 454). Their frustrations and sense of irritability suggests their predicament as immigrants—search of home and self. Paul Carter (1992) endorses the truism that a sense of place is a highly significant factor in one’s sense of self. In relation to the diasporans longing for home, he writes it is “a mothering space that both nurture[s] him and help[s] define his own difference” (12-13), and also helps in negotiating with the communities and of the new space the diasporans enter.

As discussed earlier, nostalgia and memory play a fundamental role in the way South Asian diasporans see themselves and also in how they structure their daily existence and the world around them in Australia. However, they know that being in the Diaspora marks the end of an easy relationship with the homeland. A question that begs to be asked here is—why would a diasporic writer who has “willingly” or “voluntarily” left home constantly portray that “lost home” in his or her writing?
Stephen Gray (1986) contends that the principal feature of post-colonial and immigrant writing is place or “setting,” and this one variable, assumes great importance for us as analysts, and we like to see it percolate through a work, conditioning plot, characters, actions, etc., and when that place is fully embodied in a work, when it affects every other element, [...] we say [...] It has some discrete identity of its own. (7)

The other reason of course, and the most common one as discussed above in detail, is “nostalgia” for the “past” which is now like a land far-far away and can just be imagined through memory. However, language, literature, and certain norms of behavior are traditionally valued and preserved by the South Asian Diaspora. Another issue and a very important one in relation to the politics of diaspora writing could be the readership. It can be seen that the writers of the diaspora generally come from an advantaged group or social background. They write in English and their target readership is English-speaking both in the homeland and hostland. As the work of a diasporic writer

attracts the attention of two different sets of readers [...]. The culture of adoption wishes to see “through” the text to the culture of the “other”; the culture of origin wants to assess the authenticity of self-reflection. (J. Jain, 2001: 85)

This concept of readership has a flip side too. Aware of the readership, the writer has a very strong “diasporic urge to appropriate space at home, and to use it for self-sustenance abroad” (J. Jain, 2001: 88). This is because of a sense of alienation in their new “home” and the corresponding need to belong and therefore to travel through the memory lane in search of known and familiar markers of home. Homeland and its various known and unknown facets presented in these works cannot be judged as valid or invalid, as they represent only a “slice” of the Indian way of life, be it in India or in mini-India(s) established elsewhere in the country of their migration. So, while physical place may be important to a sense of continuity, cultural identity is finally an imaginative construct (the product of memory, fantasy and myth) in which the land itself is only one factor.

In these short stories we see various versions of the homeland. It is not just nostalgia that makes the diasporan writers to write or imagine or present an image of the home in their writings. It can be seen that however strong the diversity of
circumstances under which these authors came to Australia, there is an interesting parallel in the aspect in which their writing is concerned with presentation of the myths, legends, customs, festivals and rituals of the homeland for the “others” i.e. the readers of the hostland. To make them informed about the various cultural markers that are related to persons of Indian subcontinental origin and sensitize them about it is a very significant factor in the writings of the diasporic authors. More often than not, it is the utter ignorance or lack of proper knowledge about the migrant’s culture that frequently becomes the basis of unnecessary and avoidable misunderstandings, prejudices, indifference and discriminations against them, these short stories employ long descriptive paragraphs and special comments about the socio-religious practices of the migrants home culture, which is in some ways the writers’ contribution in creating a knowledge base. These authors act as source informants, or what Makarand Paranjape and some other scholars have termed as “native informants” for the host country, and who provide the people of the hostland with “knowledgeable” perceptions about their (lost) homeland(s).

We here see a deconstruction of home and its realities. The style used is humorous, ironic and sometimes even full of cynicism regarding the conditions prevalent in the homeland. Although they do not reject outright the homeland, the use of a comparative tone i.e. comparing South Asia with Australia makes it appear that they are somewhere constructing “the image of homeland as not only an area of darkness, confusion, violence, but a hopeless and doomed country which must be rejected” (Paranjape, Introduction: 11). This is largely because of the rationalizing principle involved in the process of settling down in the hostland. And this imagining of “home” on the part of the diasporans is therefore to be “understood in terms of the logic of the dominant culture, of which it is an ambivalent or unwilling part” (Paranjape, Introduction: 10).

These stories present not fanciful re-creations of home but for a larger part the harsher realities in which millions of South Asians live every day. It does seem that through these stories the authors are sharing “meanings as part of a diasporic community [to] make the process of settlement easier” (Coronado 43) by nostalgically remembering the past. The constant “looking back” and “imagining the lost” may signify to some readers a complexity in interrogation where the “dominant culture of
the host country is not interrogated as consistently or rigorously as that of the homeland” (Paranjape, 2007: 351).

Indian subcontinent, as discussed above, is not just a construct in these stories but it sounds and feels real, bursting out with local details, variety of voices and individual consciousnesses that are working in it. It is therefore also a celebration of certain aspects of the homeland, as can be seen from the visual images used to represent India that are rich, varied and colourful.

These narratives do tend to simplify and to some extent homogenize the differences and similarities of the home, so that the people of same origin—Indian subcontinental—reading these stories do not feel alone and away from the familiar traditions, cultural and religious rituals and its other aspects. This use of the familiar in these narratives, helps the diasporans in moving, with their eternal diasporic cultural baggage, towards their Australian future. Furthermore, nostalgia is predicated on a selective remembering and forgetting of the past (see Berdahl 198).

In this chapter I examined how nostalgia is always already “predetermined” in “scripting immigrant attachment” to the past in the representation of home by the writers of the South Asian diaspora in Australia (see Mannur 2007). This desire to remember home by recreating memories through various referents, in the words of Anita Mannur (2007), cannot be “understood merely as reflectively nostalgic gestures,” rather such “nostalgically-framed narratives must also be read as meta-critiques of what it means to route memory and nostalgic longing for a homeland” particularly through one’s relationship to practices which help in formation of a national identity. 3

South Asian immigrants view home as both a concrete reality that is achieved physically or in relation with others and a symbolic reference point that moves beyond territorial boundaries. With reference to South Asian diaspora’s conception of home, Reema Sarwal (2008) writes that:

It is the revisiting of the old home—not physically but through memory and writing, which can make possible the acceptance of the new home. Words become essential for finding home, for a “movement forward.” (249)

These overlapping strategies allow the diasporans to imagine and recreate their sense of home and belonging—to both a past and present—that provide sources of stability
used in dealing with life in the diaspora. However, these strategies also highlight a
lack of desire to return to the old homeland as they illustrate how South Asian
immigrants bring home to their new settings questions that relate to the idea of
belonging and process of identity formation. Using the past and the present, diaspora
writers keep an eye on the future, and construct a narrative which tells the migrant’s
story (Kershen 98). Diaspora writers once free from the problems of settlement
inevitably also write about their spatial experiences in Australia—experiences of the
place and the Australian “way of life,” which I will discuss in the next chapter. Thus,
a nostalgic return to an immigrant past or homeland can be a means of establishing
roots in the hostland or new home. It represents the diasporans’ resilience in
recreating new homes and in reconstructing their identities anew.

Endnotes

1 See Arnold Zable, Interview with Mark Rubbo, 30 May 2008, 7 May 2010

2 Many of the stories in Mena Abdullah’s collection were first published in the
Bulletin in the 1950s.

3 See Anita Mannur, “Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and
Diaspora.” MELUS 32.4 (Winter 2007), 14 May 2010
<http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-173644213/culinary-nostalgia-
authenticity-nationalism.html>.