

# Labels and Locations



# Labels and Locations

*Gender, Family, Class and Caste  
– The Short Narratives of South  
Asian Diaspora in Australia*

By

Amit Sarwal

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



Labels and Locations:  
Gender, Family, Class and Caste –  
The Short Narratives of South Asian Diaspora in Australia

By Amit Sarwal

This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2015 by Amit Sarwal

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-7198-2

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7198-3

*For Reema and Mishank*



# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	ix
Introduction .....	1
Chapter One.....	25
A Brief History of South Asian Diaspora in Australia	
Chapter Two .....	39
The Rebel and the Homemaker: Immigrant Women’s Narratives	
Chapter Three .....	52
Their Own Authors: Narratives of Immigrant Working Women	
Chapter Four.....	66
Narratives of “Marginal” Men: (Con)Texts and (Con)Tests of Masculinity	
Chapter Five .....	81
“Vasudheva Kutumbakam”: Family, Home, and the World	
Chapter Six .....	97
Ties of Bread and Blood: Class and Caste Consciousness	
Chapter Seven.....	114
Narrating Sports, Forming Communities	
Conclusion.....	122
Bibliography .....	134
Index .....	161



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development and completion of this research would not have been possible without the financial support of the Australian Government. I would like to thank the Endeavour Asia Programme which enabled me to visit Monash University, Clayton in 2006-2007. I would also like to thank the staff of New South Global International Projects which managed the Endeavour Asia Programme and made my journey and work pleasant.

My special thanks to Dr Andrew Hassam and Dr Tseen Khoo for hosting me at the National Centre for Australian Studies and School of Political and Social Inquiry respectively. Thanks also to Prof. Rae Frances (Dean of Arts, Monash University) and the staff of School of English, Communication and Performance Studies and Matheson Library (Monash University). I am indebted to Dr Andrew Hassam for encouraging me to apply for the Endeavour Asia Award. His friendly advice, constructive criticism and a first-hand introduction to the Australian way of life helped me formulate the theoretical framework for this study. Without his friendship and initiation, I wouldn't have made so many more Australian friends with such ease!

This book would not have been possible without the institutional support of Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University. I am happy to acknowledge the crucial feedback and support of my fellow researchers at CCG: Prof. David Walker, Prof. Fethi Mansouri, Dr Vince Marotta, Dr Yin Paradies, Dr Danny Ben-Moshe, Dr Benjamin Isakhan, Dr Michele Lobo, Dr Sally Percival Wood, Dr Amelia Johns, Dr David Tittensor, Dr Liudmila Kirpitchenko, Dr Masa Mikola, Ms Paula Muraca and Ms Cayla Edwards.

I owe wholehearted thanks to my teachers at Jawaharlal Nehru University and University of Delhi for their invaluable support and recognition of my work: Prof. Santosh K. Sareen, Prof. Makarand Paranjape, Prof. Harish Narang, Prof. G. J. V. Prasad, Prof. Kapil Kapoor, Prof. Saugata Bhaduri, Dr Navneet Sethi, Dr R. K. Verma, Dr S. N. Sharma, Dr Meeta Mathur, Dr Tasneem Shanaz, Dr. Rita Mehra, Dr Usha Shourie and Dr Usha Sharma. I greatly benefited from their lectures, discussions, and encouragement. I must also thank the staff of Centre for English Studies: Rawat ji, Radhe ji, Bhagwati ji, and Karamchand ji for their kind administrative help.

I am indebted to the editors and reviewers of *StreeLipi; Interactions; Culture, Society and Masculinities; Citizenship and Globalisation Research Paper Series*; and *Antipodes* for publishing earlier versions of these chapters. Special thanks to the editors: Dr Vince Marotta, Dr Diederik F. Janssen, Prof. David Lowe, Prof. Kadambari Mauhan, Dr Mahesh Londhe, Dr Nicholas Birns, and Mr Shalaj Mittal, for their kind permission to reprint my research papers as chapters in this book.

Many people have provided assistance to me in countless large and small ways at various junctures of time: Late Prof. J. V. D’Cruz, Late Prof. Bruce Bennett, Prof. C. T. Indra, Prof. Anisur Rahman, Dr Eugenie Pinto, Prof. Hema Sharda, Prof. Yasmine Gooneratne, Prof. Bill Ashcroft, Prof. Stephen Muecke, Prof. Vijay Mishra, Prof. Brij V. Lal, Prof. Satendra Nandan, Prof. Richard Nile, Prof. Marika Vicziany, Prof. Malati Mathur, Prof. Didier Coste, Prof. Paul Sharrad, Prof. Devleena Ghosh, Prof. Marie de Lepervanche, Prof. John Webb, Prof. Laksiri Jayasuriya, Dr Chandani Lokugé, Dr Lachlan Strahan, Dr Kama Maclean, Dr Richard Hosking, Dr Sonia Mycak, Dr Toni Johnson-Woods, Dr Geetha B., Dr Nathan Hollier, Dr Margaret Allen, Dr Suvendrini Perera, Dr Lisa French, Dr Larissa Jane McLean Davies, Dr Sissy Helff, Dr Michiel Baas, Dr Alice Ingram, Dr Sharon Rundle, Dr Bernard Whimpress, Dr Manas Ray, Dr Pramod Nayar, Dr Russell Blackford, Dr Indranil Acharya, Dr Nicholas Birns, Dr Nathanael O’Reilly, Dr Usha M. Rodrigues, Dr Sophie Loy-Wilson, Dr Agnieszka Sobocinska, Dr Vikrant Kishore, Dr Jaydeep Sarangi, Dr Goldie Osuri, Dr Sharon Rundle, Dr Jean-François Vernay, Dr Mala Pandurang, Dr Ishmeet Kaur, Dr Alex Naraniecki, Mr Sunil Badami, Ms Malathy Anandavalli, Mr Anupam Sharma, Ms Kumud Mirani, Mr Chris Raja, Ms Lily Petkovska, Mr Parichay Patra, Dr Saurabh Mishra, Dr Vijay Laxmi Pandit, Dr Jafri S. Abbas, Dr Vrasha Gupta, Dr Chander Shekhar Singh, Dr Bharti Sharma, Dr Harish Dahiya, Dr Rajesh Kumar Jha, Dr Gautam Chakrabarti, Dr Sumita Pal, Ms Gorvika Rao, Mr Ved Mitra Shukla, Ms Kanch V. Arora, Dr Pawan Oberoi, Mr Mithuraaj Dhusia, Ms Ana Tiwary, Ms Natalie Millar, Ms Anthea Skinner, Ms Fiona Ap Rhys, and numerous other scholars with whom I had the pleasure of interacting and honour of working. I am grateful to everyone and especially to those whose names are not mentioned here!

Personally, I am grateful to Suboohi, Ehsan, Rakesh, Tupur, Ashrut, Smriti, Jyothi, Panhi, Alex, Sonja and all other friends (Facebook ones too!) who have made me feel at home in Australia.

My thanks and best wishes must also go to my dear friends from JNU and DU, especially Gunjeet, Pradip, Aniruddha, Deepa, Rhythma, Shantanu,

Amrita, Parul, Aditi, Swapnil, Divya, Deepti, Prateek, Moola Ram, Geetharani, Sami, Devapriya, Shalabh and Pankaj.

A very special thanks to my dearest friend Dr Aneeta Rajendran for her guidance and advice during the various stages of this research.

Many thanks to members of Australia-India Interdisciplinary Research Network (AIIRN), Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies (ADSA), Indian Association for the Study of Australia (IASA), and Asian Australian Studies Research Network (AASRN) for their support and feedback during various conferences.

Tons of thanks to Ms Rini Barman (Delhi) for copyediting and fine-tuning this book.

To the Cambridge Scholars Publishing team, who have handled the editorial and production work on this volume with professional skill and finesse, a very big thank you!

My love and thanks to my parents, parents-in-law, brothers, my entire extended family (in India, New Zealand, Germany, and the United States of America) for their constant care and unconditional love.

Most importantly, I would like to express my most profound love, appreciation, and thanks to my wife, Reema, for her generous praise, advice, encouragement, guidance, and love. I would be lost without her!

I dedicate this book to my wife, our son (Mishank), and all the writers of South Asian diaspora in Australia to whom I am eternally grateful for writing such wonderfully thought-provoking narratives.

Dr Amit Sarwal  
Melbourne, 2015



# INTRODUCTION

## Locations

It is said that “when a man travels he takes with him what he can, but his baggage cannot hold everything” (Scott 5). When we discuss short narratives of South Asian diaspora, a shift away from nostalgia and space is desirable. As scholars concerned with diasporic consciousness and cultural baggage, we cannot overlook the politics of labels and location. The resulting social constructs such as gender, family, community, class and caste, therefore, add a much-needed dimension to this discourse. So, a key theme of this book is the constitution of *labels* and *locations*. I am fascinated and intrigued by the ways in which these labels circulate, thereby enabling South Asian diaspora to produce a politics of location that has multiple contexts or categories. Analysing the ways in which immigrants define themselves in relation to these locations helps us understand South Asian diaspora and its creative output better. And it is precisely through carefully situating the selected literary narratives in their literary, social, class and other contexts that we can help “capture both their specificity and their relevance to other contexts” (Hage, 2005: 495).

Structurally, according to Wylie (2003), a *location* is marked by the above mentioned parameters of social inequality along with sexuality and geopolitical location and their attending subject positions of identification and disidentification, material conditions, privileges and feelings as well as “conceptual resources [...] to represent and interpret these relations” (31). However, major researches on South Asian diaspora in Australia have failed to incorporate and address the politics of location—the “locations” they inhabit, reproduce and transform. According to the present study, this does not help in the reconfiguration of “identities in an ongoing quest for self-determination and power” (K. Butler 212) but also helps in, according to Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1987), gaining a better understanding of “the historical, geographic, cultural, psychic and imaginative boundaries for political definition and self-definition” (42).

The word “Politics,” as used in the *politics of location* comes from the Greek word *politika* and examines the acquisition and application of power structures. The word politics covers a very wide range of phenomena. It is used here to describe, what Erik Olin Wright (2001)

refers to as the “power relations within micro-organisational settings” (18)—as in the discussion of power relations embodied in a set of practices that individuals engage in a diasporic condition. While the word “location,” according to Floya Anthias (2007) represents

[...] social spaces defined by boundaries on the one hand and hierarchies on the other hand. Therefore when we think of our located identities we are forced to think of them in relation to each other and also in terms of some of the contradictions we live in through our differential location within the boundaries in terms of hierarchies. (17)

The notion of “location” recognises the importance of “context” and the “situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales” (Anthias, 2007: 17). Avtar Brah in *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), for example, explores the politics of location in the context of migration “as locationality in contradiction” (180). According to her, migrants and members of diaspora simultaneously experience situatedness in “multi-axial locationality” (1996: 205) and engage in “movements across shifting cultural, religious and linguistic boundaries” (1996: 204). In relation to this, Purnima Mankekar (2003) notes that a “*politics of location* entails the examination of how one’s perspective and subjectivity are shaped by one’s complex positioning” (53; my italics) at both the old and new homes subsequent to migration. The term *location* thus captures a number of aspects that contribute in the making of a diasporic consciousness. So, by *politics of location*, I refer to a migrant’s position within power hierarchies created through sensory, spatial, gender, familial and class factors affecting and shaping the relationship with homeland and hostland—a more useful way of thinking about the potential found in diasporic processes resulting from immigration.

Immigration or “separation of people from their native culture either through physical dislocation” or through “the colonising imposition of a foreign culture” is considered “one of the most formative experiences of our century” (Bammer, 1994b: xi). Immigration also signifies a situation of interaction between two cultural systems and in some cases between a traditional and a modern cultural system, like South Asian and Australian. It also means “a change in the existential conditions of immigrants with all its implications for the change in their consciousness” and further represents “a turning point in the lives of immigrants to confront a strange new world and to make sense of it” (S. L. Sharma 60). It also involves a possibility that immigrants and their subsequent generations may “modify” and “reconstruct” their diasporic world in the hostland. And although the situation of the migrant and particularly a diasporic writer

“does create a sense of identity, such an identity is renegotiated from time to time in relation to the regional or national contexts within which it operates” (Assayag and Bénéí 10-11).

Adib Khan, the noted Bangladeshi-Australian writer, in his essay “Trends in Australian Fiction” (2002), observes that in the last couple of decades, “the universe in Australian fiction has begun to creak open, but not without protests and frenetic writing about the perceived threats to mainstream culture” (1). Khan obviously is referring to a shift in Australia’s literary landscape, i.e. from Anglo-Celtic towards a multicultural one (see Helff 2010). Taking on this as my reference point, this section is concerned with the theoretical ways in which this shift is accelerated in Australia’s literary landscape by the South Asian diaspora writers who produce and cover *politics of location* in diverse forms and dynamics in different contexts. It also focuses on South Asian diaspora’s widely agreed “ability to recreate their cultures in diverse locations and locates the elements of the liminal within the nitty-gritty of this changing history” (Ray, 2003: 34).

A question that arises in mind is—what are these *locations*? Locations, as discussed earlier, does not merely refer to geographical locations but, *locations* rather, provides “a critical angle or perspective on cultural formations and emerging cultural capacities” (Chambers 27) of the South Asian diaspora in Australia. Avtar Brah’s distinction about “borders” as metaphors and “part of the discursive materiality of power relations” (1996: 198) can also be applied to these multiple *locations*. These *locations* like spaces thus can be understood as social and cultural characteristics (see S. Hussain 104). These postmodern and postcolonial locations are “stretched across multiple ruptures” between “here and there” or both “here *and* there and neither here *nor* there at one and the same time” (Bammer, 1994: xii).

So, whether the presumed South Asian migrant subject/protagonist is a student, a worker, a professional, a refugee or an exile, his *location* “depends on the routes and temporality of diasporic movement and determines the production of class, racial, and ethnic positionality” (Shukla 565-566; see also Daniels 1996). According to Sissy Helff (2013), “the way people live, move, and behave within a particular domestic space characterises their social status, gender roles, and right to belong to this place at any particular moment” (3). This in turn creates new spaces for dialogues on the nature of memory, space, gender, family and class. To contextualise the South Asian diasporic short stories, a new politics of sensory, spatial, gendered, familial, class and caste locations needs to be examined. The socio-historical experience of difference and construction

of a subject is also done on the basis of these multiple locations. Because it is not just the “historical subjectivity of a diaspora which holds the key to its cultural life” (Ray, 2003: 21) but also the locations and its politics that is played out between the majority and minority communities, this point warrants emphasis because “the very strong association of notions of diaspora with displacement and *dislocation* means that the experience of *location* can easily dissolve focus” (Brah, 2003: 615; my italics). My purpose here is to site various discussions and theories and to formulate a critique of *politics of locations* and the multiple modalities: memory, space, gender, family and class.

## Labels

According to Wikipedia “Labeling” is describing someone or something in a word or short phrase. Labeling theory is therefore concerned with how the self-identity and behavior of an individual is influenced by how that individual is categorised and described by others in his society/community. It focuses on the linguistic tendency of majorities to negatively label minorities or anyone seen as deviant from norms of a community/society. However, the use of the term *labeling* is often intended to highlight the fact that the *label* is a description applied from the outside, rather than something intrinsic to the labeled thing. This can be done for several reasons—to provoke a discussion about what the best description is; to reject a particular label; and to reject the whole idea that the labeled thing can be described in a short phrase. According to Sabina Hussain (2004), labels such as multicultural or postcolonial or migrant literature used in Australia, “operates in multifarious ways and indicates the historically derived political orientation in the country and its struggle over identity formation” (105). However, these literary labels are also important as I am more interested in the discursive practices of social integration and exclusion. Labels such as Diaspora and South Asian are often used in the terminology of nation formation for labeling the majoritarian migrant groups—always the socio-cultural “Other.” In relation to the development and use of terms like exile, diaspora, expatriate, immigrant, and multiculturalism as a result of immigration and socio-political experiences, it can be argued that although the same words or terms are being used in many parts of the World they may apply differently or “delineated a sharply different social space within each nation-state” (Hage, 2005: 491; see also Alomes 2009).

Similarly, according to sociologist Howard S. Becker (1963), the developer of Labeling Theory, difference or deviance is not inherent to an

act, but instead focuses on the linguistic tendency of majorities to negatively label minorities or those seen as deviant from socio-cultural norms. This theory is concerned with how the self-identity and behaviour of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them. It is also associated with the concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy and stereotyping by those labeling “Others.” For example, society may use more specific labels such as “racist” to demonstrate more clearly after the event the extent of its disapproval of the person as having offended against their social or moral norms of behaviour. But there is a slightly mechanical determinism in asserting that the application of a label will also invariably modify the behaviour of the one labeled. Within this, the other side of the coin is the problems related to the stereotyping of the victim. Personal factors such as age, gender, race, nationality, social class, his/her roles and functions in social interactions with majoritarian community, and the neighbourhood where the victim lives or the racist attack took place, are used to profile the victim and his/her community, by which an individual’s self-image is affected severely.<sup>1</sup>

The labeling theory further suggests that people obtain labels from how others view their tendencies, behaviours or socio-cultural practices. American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist George Herbert Mead (1982) argued that the self is socially constructed and reconstructed through the interactions which each person has with the community. Each individual is aware of how they are judged by others because he or she has attempted many different roles and functions in social interactions and has been able to gauge the reactions of those present. This theoretically builds a subjective conception of the self, but as others intrude into the reality of that individual’s life, this represents objective data which may require a re-evaluation of that conception depending on the authoritative nature of the others’ judgment.

Many philosophers and historians have grappled with challenges of understanding the “Other.” Edward Said, making his overall statement about cultural discourse, in *Orientalism* (1978/1991) writes:

how does one represent another culture? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (where one discusses one’s own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the “other”)? Do cultural, religious, and racial differences matter more than socio-economic categories, or politico-historical ones? How do ideas

---

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion, see “Labeling Theory.”

acquire authority, “normality,” and even the status of “natural” truth?  
(325-326)

Australian historian Inga Clendinnen (2003) notes “one of the most difficult things to do in the world is to get a grip on our own pre-conceptions, assumptions, unexamined convictions” about others (9). Added to this, factors such as race, gender, class, family, community, etc. or in other words the *location* of an individual or group within a society can also give rise to problems of stereotyping. It is in these “social acts” and “social manipulations” that the perspectives and responses of “Others” towards “Us” can be exchanged. Negative stereotyping or racism is very important to social theory as it involves the interaction of many individuals or groups at the level of communication, action and environment.

Similarly, terms like Diaspora and South Asian, used often as literary categories, also facilitate individuals to participate in the different social positions within an existing mainstream society and sometimes self-consciously address their given roles of belonging and non-belonging. Sabina Hussain (2004) has argued that,

Borders between literary categories are established through the process of labelling which gives recognition to varied forms of literary productions and establishes definitions of (non)belonging. The application of the label creates specific spaces, thereby defining literary designations, which, in addition, reflects imaginaries of national belonging. (104)

Labeling theory thus as a socio-psychological-cultural model can help us in identifying and coping with labels, and analyze how the roles of majority and minority are determined in hostland by the terms—Diaspora and South Asian—used for classification. In the discussion that follows I will try to establish some of the key differences in the use of these three terms and their importance in the study of Australia and South Asian diaspora.

### **Defining Diaspora**

If change of residence were the chief criterion of *diaspora*; if, moreover, crossings, migrations and travel are a part of the history of all humanity; then a clearer notion of boundaries will be required to distinguish the different kinds of *dislocation* we suffer. (Paranjape, 2000: 229; my italics)

Modern era is an era of unprecedented human mobility, global migration and scholarly discourse on migration. In this respect, it may be said that it

is an era that belongs to South Asia as it features significantly in the dynamics of migration not only in Asia but also the world (see Haque 2005). While for some “the societal diversity created by global migration is a cause for celebration, for many others the growing presence of ‘foreign’ peoples give rise to concerns about the ability of national societies and national citizenship to cope with and to accommodate cultural differences” (Nagel 231). There has been a veritable explosion of interest in Diasporas since the late 1980s. But the term Diaspora acquired a scholarly currency only in 1990s. Diaspora as a concept has travelled beyond communities, disciplines and generalisations. It is an historical formation that has caught the attention of a number of scholars and has “become a breeding ground for new sociological concepts within scholarly work” (Y. Hussain 5). To understand the concept and discourse of diaspora from different academic locations, there has been a scholarly response across national spaces through literature. In what seems to be a controversial statement, Vijay Mishra (1996) says, “All diasporas are unhappy but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way” (189). We are reminded by Robert Sellick (2004) that Diaspora is “first and foremost a political process, beginning with decisions taken by European governments to establish colonies, for whatever reasons. It was not only people who were dispersed across the globe, but also assumptions and attitudes, structures and institutions that had their origins in various ‘homelands’ ” (1). There is attached a multidisciplinary nature to Diaspora studies, as James Clifford (1994) notes that the Diasporic language “appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse” (311). Today, research on Diaspora is conducted from numerous academic perspectives as debates on Diaspora are spread across a range of disciplines, encompassing Sociology, Anthropology, Geography, Human Geography, Migration Studies, Culture Studies, Politics, International Relations, Race, Multiculturalism, Post-colonialism, Political Economy and Communication (see also Karim 2003).

My aim in the following discussion is to chart out and explore various theoretical approaches and analytical possibilities of conceptualising the term “Diaspora” that can supplement the narratives of South Asian diaspora in Australia as diaspora is a particular “way of imagining, inventing, constructing, and presenting the self” in different ways from the mainstream society (Klimt and Lubkemann 146). Today, the notion of Diaspora, as opposed to “collectivities of immigrants or people living outside their homelands,” that was used in the classical sense has “acquired renewed importance” (R. Cohen 1996). Therefore, any study

related to the Diaspora must begin by qualifying this term, with its chequered and complex history, as a point-of-entry.

Diaspora evoked the dispersion of people linked to political misfortunes or to commerce. The word derives from the Greek words *dia* (“through” or “over”) and *speiro* (“dispersal” or “to sow widely”), also implying “dispersion” or “forcible dispersion” as found in the Book of Deuteronomy (28:25). First used in the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures explicitly intended for the Hellenic Jewish communities in Alexandria (circa 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) to describe the Jews living in exile from the homeland of Palestine, diaspora suggests a dislocation from the nation-state or geographical location of origin and a relocation in one or more nation states, territories, or countries. The term “diaspora” then has religious significance that pervaded medieval rabbinical writings on the Jewish diaspora, to describe the plight of Jews living outside of Palestine (Brazier and Mannur 1). In religious terminology, this scattering of people was seen as a punishment to those who had forsaken the righteous path and good old ways. For a long time it has been associated specifically with the violent dispersal of the Jewish people—that filled them with anxiety and distrust (R. Cohen, 1996: 512). However, post 1948, when Israel became a nation for Jews, the land “promised” to them in the Biblical myth, diaspora no longer remained a term used only for the displaced Jews. A large number of Jews preferred to stay on in their countries of adoption or refuge due to the political turmoil of Israel and its relations with the neighbouring countries. As a result, diaspora as a term could no longer refer to Jews alone as in theory at least, they could “go back home.” The usage of the term has been subsequently extended, changed and expanded to other violent and forced human dispersals such as those of the Armenian and African people. People of African origin, with the painful history of slavery, descendants of indentured labourers, people of Chinese origin displaced through cultural revolution, and many others who had been transported, displaced or exiled due to the workings of the European imperialism also began to be seen in the same framework of the diaspora. Finally, voluntary migrants and their descendants, the second generations were also included.

Increasingly, however, the word, Diaspora, has come to refer to the resettlement of identifiable communities of people across the globe, not necessarily violent or forced and the present study employs the term in this larger contemporary meaning. Diaspora has not just itself become a much-contested term, but has led to problematisation of other terms like nationality, ethnicity and hybridity (inbetweenness or anti-belonging). The most widely held view about the Indian subcontinental diaspora is the one

adopted by Rabindranath Tagore—“The civilization of India, like the banyan tree, has shed its beneficent shade away from its own birthplace. [...] India can live and grow by spreading abroad—not the political India, but the ideal India” (qtd. in Tinker iii). As D. Dayan (1988) also observes, “diaspora” is more of an “intellectual construction tied to a given narrative. [...] incarnations of existing discourses, interpretants of such discourses, echoes or anticipations of historical projects” (110). The metaphor of the living tree or the banyan tree that Tagore has used, provides a sense of centre and rootedness. It can be argued that it has been so often used by the intellectuals for the diasporic condition, that it now seems a cliché, mere decorative jargon overlooking the pain and unhappiness of dislocation and other aspects of migration. According to Mohit Manoj Prasad (2005),

The diaspora is much a product of history as it is a performance of the narrative acts of inscribing place, people, event, incident, accident, coincidence, causality and the official record in contradictory practices of living/dying, dis/location, and of dying/living and dis/location as cycle. [...] Diaspora’s begin with moments of displacement with its insistent reasons for causality that begins the remove of a people, of place, of identities and representations. (12)

In the works of major diasporan authors, “diaspora” stands for traumas and pains of human displacement.

Khachig Tölölyan (1994) has tracked applications of the term that include references to “corporate diasporas” and even an “egg cream diaspora” (235). There are several other views regarding the contemporary significance associated with this dislocation and relocation of people around the world.<sup>2</sup> In his famous article titled “Diasporas in Modern Societies” (1991), discussing the concept of formation of Diaspora and the application of this term to other than Jewish communities—most notably “expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic minorities” (83)—William Safran highlighted nine key points or “common features” of the diasporic phenomenon, they being:

1. *Dispersion* from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions.

---

<sup>2</sup> The critical interest in this diaspora and its study is largely post-1990s, which coincides with the period of globalisation and political interest in home countries to strengthen their foreign policy and relations with the host countries through Diasporas (see P. Cohen 1999; Kalra et al. 2005).

2. Alternatively, the *expansion* from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions.
3. A *collective memory* and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements.
4. An *idealization* of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation.
5. The development of a *return movement* which gains collective approbation.
6. A strong *ethnic group consciousness* sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate.
7. A *troubled relationship* with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group.
8. A *sense of empathy and solidarity* with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement.
9. The *possibility of a distinctive yet creative and enriching life* in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (83; my italics)

As some of the definitions have been rather restrictive in defining diasporic communities across the globe, Tölölyan in “Rethinking Diasporas” (1996) suggests a tighter definition of this concept and puts forth the following criteria:

1. The diaspora has its origin in the fact that a large number of individuals were forced to leave their country by severe political, economic, or rather other constraints.
2. Before leaving their country, these people already shared a well-defined identity.
3. Diasporic communities actively maintain or construct a *collective memory*, which forms a fundamental element of their identity.
4. These communities keep more or less tight control over their ethnic boundaries, whether voluntarily or under constraint from the host society.
5. Communities are mindful to maintain relations among themselves.
6. They also wish to maintain contacts with their country of origin, provided it is still in existence. (16; my italics)

Here too Diasporas differ from other migrant communities or people by their desire to maintain relations with their own location or ancestral land through a “collective memory.” So, one of the key points in considering a diasporic community, is “group consciousness” or retention of “a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland, its physical *location*, history, and achievements” (Safran, 1991: 83; my

italics). In the words of French social scientist Michel Bruneau, “a conscious and factual claim to an ethnic or national identity” (qtd. in Dorais 4).

Also, Diasporas have largely been identified or defined in terms of social or economic power they yield i.e. the development of a triadic political or economic relationship. Vijay Mishra in the diaspora double issue of *SPAN* offers a three-tier definition of diaspora as a corrective to the original OED (1989 ed.) related to the dispersion of the Jews.

1. Relatively homogeneous, displaced communities brought to serve the Empire (slave, contract, indenture etc.) co-existing with indigenous / other races with markedly ambivalent and contradictory relationship with the Motherland(s). Hence the Indian diasporas of South Africa, Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, Surinam, Malaysia; the Chinese diaspora of Malaysia, Indonesia linked to high (classical) Capitalism.
2. Emerging new Diasporas based on free migration and linked to late capitalism: post-war South Asian, Chinese, Arab, Korean communities in Britain, Europe, America, Canada, and Australia.
3. Any group of migrants that sees itself on the periphery of power, or excluded from sharing power. (qtd. in Paranjape, 2001b: 3)

Being a diasporan, “based on free migration and linked to late capitalism,” is a win-win situation or a “privileging situation” in economic terms according to Makarand Paranjape (2001a), which is not any longer “an anguished state” because of further possibilities of bi-culturalism” (vi).

With reference to bi-culturalism, Diaspora, can be “minimally defined” according to John Docker (2001) as “a sense of belonging to more than one history, to more than one time and place, more than one past and future” (vii). He further observes that

Diaspora suggests belonging to both here and there, now and then. Diaspora suggests the omnipresent weight of pain of displacement from a land or society, of being an outsider in a new one. Diaspora suggests 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. (vii-viii)

Although there are possibilities of “new adventures of identity,” no fixed definition of Diaspora related to a particular geographical location can be offered or reached to. Kim D. Butler (2001) has proposed “shifting the defining element of diasporan studies from the group itself to a methodological and theoretical approach to the study of phenomenon of

diaspora in human history” (193-194). For this Butler has provided five dimensions that are unique to diasporas to facilitate research and studies:

1. Reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal;
2. Relationship with the homeland;
3. Relationship with hostlands;
4. Interrelationships within communities of the diaspora, and
5. Comparative studies of different diasporas. (195)

The historical discourse of the diaspora then may be seen as “a way of replacing or supplementing the majority/minority binary discourse” (Dorais 6) in life and literature. Isidore Okpewho (2001) further defines diaspora as “a global space, a worldwide web, that accounts as much for the mother continent as for wherever in the world her offspring may have been driven by the unkind forces of history” (xiv). This diasporic discourse based on a methodology using historical framework also provides a meaningful dimension to the whole transnational experience and further develops solidarity with co-ethnics in other countries (Dorais 7).

It is clear from the discussion above that “Diasporic discourses frame terms of argument rather than terms of definition” (Klimt and Lubkemann 148). Taking into account all the definitions of diaspora, it can be said that there is a very fine line between transnational migration and pure Diasporas. The term Diaspora can be restricted to, according to Glick Schiller, “dispersed populations who attribute their common identity, cultural beliefs and practices, language, or religion to myths of a common ancestry” (qtd. in Dorais 7-8).

It can also be noted, that the metaphorical figure of the immigrant occupies here a “third space” and is therefore considered to be a link between homeland and hostland. But if we study closely there is always a push and pull factor involved in it. Homeland, its socio-cultural aspects try to attract these immigrants towards itself, and similarly the hostland with its “opening” policies, incentives of monetary gains and equal status situations tries to push these immigrants into its own politics and culture. Resulting in what John A. Armstrong (1976) distinguishes as the “mobilised diasporas” (the elite) and the “proletarian diasporas” (the exploited).

How, then, might one clearly define or establish a concept of diaspora? Having reviewed the changing meanings of Diaspora, and pointed out differences and tensions, I use the term Diaspora with care to refer to the historical and contemporary presence of people of the Indian subcontinent with common national origin or national ancestry. Having said that, these

are the people who reside outside a claimed or an independent home territory in other parts of the world preserving their diversity as a transnational ethnic community and contributing positively towards both the cultures. So the concept of Diaspora, while focusing on transnational processes and commonalities, does so by deploying a notion of ethnicity which privileges the “point of origin” in constructing identity and solidarity (see Anthias 1998). As noted by Clifford as well, he suggests that the immigrants think globally but live locally. This constant negotiation with one’s roots and routes through memory, nostalgia, history and most of all through metaphoric *journeys* or *locations* is one characteristic of the diasporic communities which makes it possible and pertinent to study diaspora and especially diasporic literature as a separate category. Diasporic discourse in this context becomes stronger in terms of the four-part process of “displacement, detachment, uprooting and dispersion” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 339), while at the same time it is crucial to take into account the unique and multifarious causes that inform this process ranging from colonial migration, political exile, professional ambition to simply the desire to cross the seas in search of a “better life.” A view very similar to Stuart Hall’s (2000), who writes:

Diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return [...]. The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence of purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity. (235)

Hall’s emphasis on the terms “heterogeneity” and “diversity” is important to the focus of my study. I am not looking for commonalities of expression in the short stories of South Asian diaspora, but I am more interested in analysing the ways in which they write or interpret their multiple *locations*. As already discussed, the term Diaspora in the classic theoretical framework and analysis of diasporic literature is concentrated more on the reasons and conditions of migration, as well as on integration and assimilation issues in host societies.

### **Defining South Asianness**

The identity of South Asians [throughout the world] has proved to be problematic, both for the self-identification of the group and for the identifying institutions and popular perceptions of the host society. (Koshy, 1998: 285)

The term “South Asian Diaspora” allows for the “encompassing of a wider range of people and experiences” (Selvadurai 5) and diversity of region, language, religion, custom and tradition of the Indian subcontinent. It also provides some measure of inclusion within Australia, even if it is almost meaningless within South Asia itself. According to Vijay Prashad (1999) the cultural commonalities between the dominant migrant groups of the Indian subcontinent—Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, and Bangladeshis—draw them together, and “the moniker ‘South Asian’ allows them to feel solidarity despite their different national origins and religious commitments” (186-187).

As noted above, South Asia is not a homogenous region, which makes the South Asian diaspora a “complex and variegated” (V. Lal 2004) zone of engagement that includes immigrants with diverse social, political, economic, and cultural backgrounds. South Asia, home to well over one fifth of the world’s population, typically consists of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and the Maldives. A clubbing of countries, essentially encompasses countries that were part of the former British Indian Empire. The terminologies “Indian Subcontinent” or simply “The Subcontinent” are also in common usage to denote South Asia, as well as the “South Asian Subcontinent.” On the wide currency of the term South Asia, Shiromi Pinto (2004) notes that it appears to

have become the preferred descriptor when referring to the dances, literatures, cultures, even people, originating from these regions (ie. South Asian countries which are not, otherwise, in a formal or informal, economic or political block) [...] a concept that is said to underlie a panoply of cultural, artistic and political products, including identity construction in the diaspora. (3)

And according to Sunil Khilnani (2004), South Asia is a “bureaucrat’s phrase”

In the US map of the world, post-partition India came to be designated South Asia, and its new states were clubbed with the Near East (again a State Departmentism), to form the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs. Exactly what South Asia encompassed has always had some indeterminacy to it. Even after the creation of a separate Bureau of South Asian Affairs within the State Department (which only happened in the early 1990s), debate has continued over which countries exactly to include. (19)

And by “containing division and rivalry,” he writes further:

“South Asia” conjured the idea of a common space of community—perhaps temporarily in abeyance—that seemed to transcend national boundaries, and promised a kind of irenic description and identity for a subcontinent that seemed in reality to be driven by national, religious, ethnic and other divisions. Superbly anodyne, it seems to offer a benign transcendence of these conflicts. As a term of self-description, for members of the diaspora, “South Asian” might also be seen as a gesture toward safety. (20)

The question of “identity of South Asians” negotiates a rethinking of the question of South Asianness in the diaspora. According to Brij V. Lal (2006) due to its “varied origins, divergent patterns of migration and settlement,” and further “different degrees of absorption or integration” into the culture of the hostland, the Indian subcontinental diaspora “defies easy categorization.” It is moreover “a complex confluence of many discreet cultures, languages and histories” (10).

In the case of the South Asian diaspora in Australia, people who belong to different communities or groups in homeland blend into a new identity of “geographical ascription.” The supposed “identity” of South Asians is “merely mythic.” The Indian subcontinent is also “divided denominationally”—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, Buddhists—and moreover the Indian caste system separates people further (see Fludernik, 2003a: xx). Thus, South Asia or South Asianness can be defined as a field of inquiry that explores cultural consequences of migration from the Indian subcontinent. And it can be seen that even “within single diasporas, simultaneous diasporan identities are possible” (K. Butler 192).

For Makaran Paranjape (2000) South Asian diaspora is “a part and symbol of the larger” Indian subcontinent “not just in terms of its physical boundaries but also in terms of its mental dimensions” (243). As the term South Asian diaspora connotes people who have at some time in the past come from all the countries that comprise the Indian subcontinent, yet without the emphasis on forced expulsion that Jewish or black diasporas have conveyed (see Boyarin 1992; Gilroy 1993). Avtar Brah’s (2003) question: “Can we speak of a ‘South Asian diaspora’ other than as a mode of description of a particular cluster of migrations” (617) is very insightful to the study of South Asianness. She further suggests that “it is the economic, political and cultural specificities linking these components that the concept of diaspora signifies” (617). This means that “multiple journeys may configure into one journey via a *confluence of narratives* as it is lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory” (617).

As noted earlier, the situation of South Asian immigrants in Australia is ambiguous. A related and much politicised issue has been that of South Asian “racial identity.” According to Sucheta Mazumdar (1991), for South Asians, “questions pertaining to racial identity and skin colour have had a particularly convoluted history” (25). It is worth noting that although South Asians think in terms of class, caste, religion and region wherever they go. But upon arrival in Australia, from “being persons with no tangible race” they “become people of color in this society,” as South Asians do not think of themselves in racial terms (Rudrappa 85). Through mass media, South Asians now have “a fair inkling about race” structures in Australia, still “they are unprepared” and “cannot conceive of the ways in which their self itself will be challenged” (Rudrappa 87). Thus, South Asian migrants with their affluence become the visible minorities in Australia.

The very notion of a “South Asian identity” or “South Asianness” promotes a “unity and solidarity” among the “imagined community” of the South Asian diaspora. And “people from its various South Asian cultures have been treated typically as one monolithic people by the West” (Y. Hussain 2). So, the term “South Asian” also “functions as an umbrella term,” that is often “abbreviated to ‘Asian,’ to unify diverse peoples against common obstacles, in the name of empowerment and coalition-building” (Y. Hussain 2).

It has been observed that the number and proportion of people of South Asian descent living outside South Asia is small in relation to other migrant populations, such as Chinese, the Jews, the Africans, and the Europeans (see van der Veer 1). Moreover, as already observed, there are a number of differences within these ethnic groups, for instance lifestyles, dress, diet and language. Furthermore, their responses to new social and economic environments are also different, with diverse employment patterns and marriage practices for example (see Y. Hussain 2; Ballard 1994).

We have already noted in the above discussion that there is no essentially “homogeneous” South Asian cultural identity but because of “our common imperial past” we are bound, apart from sharing common ocean, ecology, rivers, and cable cultures, by “a common legal, administrative, and constitutional framework” (M. Desai 300) at one level. And similarly, at another level “centuries of migration and movement within South Asia and intermarriages have made its people similar” (M. Desai 298-299) thus helping the concepts laid down for the transnational identity and the South Asian-Australian diaspora by giving them tremendous opportunities in various fields.

Transnationalism or rather a global South Asian diaspora, according to Lord Meghnad Desai (2005), can be imagined only when we in South Asia break our “barriers [built] against the flow of goods and people” (289) created against each other. Because of these barriers and restrictions we have emphasised our “separateness, rather than [our] similarity” (M. Desai 289) to the rest of the World. What we need are speedy reforms in the Indian subcontinent—sorting out crucial political problems, stopping infighting within the South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation (SAARC), exploiting common advantages, creating a common market, and free movement of people (see M. Desai 290-292). Our mind and energy is great and what we need in South Asia is strong leadership—political and economic—which could help co-operation in various fields such as trade, transport, movement of people and goods, and most important of all on the lines of the European Union (EU) a South Asian Monetary Union (M. Desai 292-293).

It can also be added here that the South Asians, for example, Indians abroad have facilitated and galvanised in building India’s and the subcontinents’ image in a far better way than they could have done from the country itself. Repatriation of foreign earning by the diaspora also plays a significant role in the economic development of the homeland. Lord Desai calling South Asian community a “successful business community” writes that

South Asians abroad have shown that they can make a success in any country they go to. In most countries in the West, the South Asian groups which have settled there have succeeded against most adverse circumstances. (290)

Facing all odds in terms of economic, social, political, and cultural spaces, as first generation immigrants, they have created variant hues on Australian multicultural landscape.

Contributing through various societies, associations, lobbies, religious and spiritual bodies, they have collaborated within and outside community to cultivate India-Australia ties successfully. And their various attempts, as seen in these narratives undertaken in this study are just part of the various “means,” as Erez Cohen (2003) feels,

by which migrants come to understand and experience their life in a “new” place. Such attachments are not merely an act of nostalgia or part of the effort to maintain culture, as depicted by multiculturalism. Rather, relations with the homeland are part of the ambiguity of “home and away”

that constitute the life experiences of many immigrants and construct their various ways of generating “communities” in their new context. (38)

These short stories or narratives from South Asian diaspora in Australia thus play an important role in promoting the Australian and South Asian connections by acting as a gathering of colourful perceptions, experiences and reflections. There is a continuous need to re-enter these narratives, not just for the purpose of making analyses, but also to provide the diaspora discourse with new continuities, visions, and issues in terms of transnationalism, multiculturalism, biculturalism, based on questions related to social, political, cultural and economic vis-à-vis a new issue, as proposed here, in terms of commercial-cultural benefits that are reaped by the immigrants both at homeland and hostland.

On the use of the word “Indianness” for the people of the Indian subcontinent, Bharti Mukherjee (1985) observes, “Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of comprehending the world” (3). The very use of the term “Indian” encapsulates diversity and brings into play various contradictory viewpoints, in relation to identity and cultural dimensions. The divergence of viewpoints, in fact, related to any “identity,” be it the Indian or the much larger South Asian one, can also be noted in the different ways in which the term “diaspora” has been theorised by various academics in their dialogues.

A major trap in a study of such proportion is that the definition of South Asianness or South Asian Diaspora in academics sometimes reeks of “Indianness” to the exclusion of all else, momentarily excluding all other South Asians except Indians. The discussion of “South Asianness” is problematic as it presupposes a “unifying force.” Though there is still vast scope for a serious debate about the internal hegemonies implicit within the term South Asian, according to Crispin Bates (2001), a genuine pan-South Asian ethnicity, that could “realistically begin to address the material and spiritual inequalities of the subcontinent and its satellite communities throughout the globe, may therefore be an ambition that awaits a different generation, and a different set of circumstances to that of the present” (39).

In spite of the difference in the migration points i.e. the point of arrival of these writers from the Indian subcontinent show a common sensitivity and consciousness. This is the result of the idea of “Indianness” that is not made up of any particular geographical border in our diasporic imagination. This is also because, as Satendra Nandan (2000) observes

Unlike some other diasporas, the Indian consciousness of India is not linked by a single region or transferred institutions, nor by colonial