

4. 'I CAN MAKE CHUTNEY OUT OF ANYTHING': YOUNG INDIANS GROWING UP IN SYDNEY

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Introduction

This article deals with the effects of migration on young Indo-Fijians in Sydney. It discusses the ways in which their identities are being constantly negotiated by the experiences of migration and living in the diaspora. This translocation subverts the site of their homeland by interrogating the continuities between place and identity. As Peter Van der Veer (1995) points out, identity is neither stable nor unchanging, but contingent and contextual. According to him these ambiguities derive from displacement, disjuncture and diaspora and the contradictions between the notion of discrete territoriality in the discourse of nationalism and the transgressive fact of migration.

This article is based on interviews conducted with young Indo-Fijian men and women in the liminal space after two major events in their history: the coups of May 1987 and May 2000. The first event, a half-remembered story from their childhood, became one more point of trauma in a fractured history. The second acted, for many of them, as a kind of closure to the 'naming' of Fiji as home. For the young people I interviewed, the reality and the imaginative projections of home are like a palimpsest, inscribed with layer upon layer of personal, national, social and cultural issues that have to be constantly renegotiated with their historical and national selves. The way young people 'remember' home shapes the imagining of their history and the construction of the migrant self as both historical 'object' and 'subject' of that history (see for example Das Gupta, 1997).

The importance of 'Indian' identity for Indo-Fijians is illustrated by

'I can make chutney out of anything'

the response to a call to participate in an Australia Council performance project. This project, variously called 'Teenage Masala' or 'Suburban Masala', aimed to create a performance that would explore the meaning of being 'Indian' in Australia. Eight of the first group of ten people who responded to the call were young people who had migrated with their families from Fiji. I interviewed some of these young Indo-Fijians (aged between 17 and 25). In addition, I also interviewed some of the children of Indo-Fijians in the Then Ikya Tamil Sangam association, with whom I had worked before.

Most of my Indo-Fijian interlocutors had some knowledge of how their ancestors arrived in Fiji; in contrast to their parents' generation, they were less familiar with the memories of the trauma of confrontation with a completely alien world and the conditions of indenture. The British colonial government in Fiji imported Indian labourers to work in the sugar plantations from the 1860s onwards. These indentured workers, mainly Hindu, experienced migration as a form of bodily pollution, of missing the 'black water' (the ocean) and the subsequent breaking down of caste and religious sanctions; then the 'hell' of the sugar plantations and the oppressive brutality of the colonial system. The bitterness of displacement and the subsequent dehumanisation of the coolie huts had a deep effect on their psychological and social commitment to their 'new' country.

As Brij Lal (1992, 1998), among others, has pointed out, indenture was not just an experience of great physical hardship and suffering; it was also a cultural and spiritual upheaval. Often it was not possible to maintain the rituals of the old life in the new homeland, and the values, assumptions and institutions of the old world lost their meaning and relevance in the new environment. But the majority survived to reconstruct their lives from the fragments of a remembered past. For many of them, until very recently, India remained the repository of their identity and dreams of motherland.

In 1987, Fijian society was forever implacably altered by two coups led by Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka. His supporters claimed that the recently elected government led by Dr Timoci Bavadra was dominated by Indians and was not responsive to the needs of indigenous Fijians. Following these coups there was massive migration by Fijian Indians, mainly of the business and professional classes, to countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Statistics from the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs show a 23 per cent increase in the number of migrants from Fiji into Australia from 1991 to 1996

(DIMA 1996). The Fiji Bureau of Statistics, in its March 1999 publication *Statistical News*, revealed that 24,504 Fiji citizens immigrated to other countries between 1994 and 1998, and that 90.9 per cent of these were Indians. Consequently, the percentage of the population of Fiji that is Indian has fallen from 51 per cent before the 1987 coup to 46 per cent in 1999 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics 1999).

A constitutional review completed in 1997 produced a document that appeared to enshrine indigenous rights at the same time as producing a democratic political system. The 1999 election saw the victory of the Fiji Labour Party and the installation of an Indian Prime Minister. After a year of turmoil, George Speight led another coup in May 2000 and ousted the elected government.

These coups have highlighted a complicating factor for Fijians of both indigenous and migrant origin: that of national belonging. Since this is not singular, exclusionary or a function of direct or unmediated experience, my purpose in this part of the discussion is to unpick the factors that inform everyday life and disrupt the concept of 'Indian-ness' through ordinary narratives of dislocation and renewal. My own writing position implicates me in this undertaking. I belong to the South Asian Indian community in Sydney that is involved in this inscription and reinscription of home and identity, and its discourses and experiences construct at least part of my subjectivity.

As Manisha Das Gupta writes, most people crossing borders as immigrants hold at least two frames of reference: their homeland and the country to which they have migrated. This transnational traffic 'violate(s) borders, creolize(s) cultures, and produce(s) knowledges about each other' (Das Gupta 1997, p. 573). For my interlocutors, the idea of 'Indian-ness' served as the active ideological terrain on which they represented themselves to themselves and to each other. These young people are located in an unstable present, between a past which has great salience for their elders and the unpredictable future that is a consequence of their families' displacement and migration. The present acquires its meaning within this disjointed and conflicted location. Their experiences of growing up in Australia are tangled up with the personal memories and private recollections of their families. Gramsci refers to this as the 'strangely composite' nature of the personality, 'which contains prejudices from all past phases of history'. According to him, the critical task is to unravel the narrative which has 'deposited in you an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory' (Gramsci 1971, p. 324). For me, this attention to questions of individual history was important because

'I can make chutney out of anything'

I needed to establish the relationship between what my interlocutors considered to be the history of their families (in Fiji) and their experiences growing up in the diaspora in Australia.

'I think she feels trapped': crossing the in-between

In the local Indo-Fijian community, debates on authenticity, legitimacy and multicultural-bicultural rights are very important, because they convey specific messages to those perceived as like themselves as well as to others. Most of the young people I interviewed reported that their parents emphasised their Indian-ness after 1987 and before the May 2000 coup. They tried to inculcate in their offspring the importance of being Indian. After the May 2000 coup, however, Indo-Fijians began to negotiate their identity in relation to indigenous Fijians and indigenous-settler narratives. What emerged from our conversations about the past was a confused renarrating of memory, experience and identity that was played out in the interstices of Australian-ness, Fijian-ness and Indian-ness, meshing, adapting and recreating these concepts.

In spite of the strength of their Indian identities, representations of Fiji were powerfully imbricated in my interlocutors' daily lives. Even those who had spent only short periods of time in Fiji repeated the same narratives – the plentifulness of the food in the small towns, the ease of daily life, the availability of domestic help. One young woman (whom I will call Vidya), who was born in Suva and migrated to Sydney at the age of five, narrated how her mother still spoke nostalgically of her idyllic childhood and mentioned the many *roti* and *dalo* curries shared with her indigenous Fijian neighbours. Vidya added that her parents had taken the whole family back to Fiji a couple of years before the coup in 2000 to try settling there because they thought Sydney was too hectic and too materialistic. But after a few months they decided that they did not quite fit in and so came back to Sydney. Vidya, who bitterly resented being uprooted from her home and school in Sydney, was certain that emigration had liberated the members of her family. Her grandparents, who had remained behind, were now in a parlous state, as their indigenous landlords had refused to renew their leases. This unsuccessful attempt at returning 'home' disrupted the exclusive solidity of the Indian environment in Sydney, in which they had previously grown up. When I asked her how things had changed in her family after this visit to Fiji, she said:

I suppose (pauses) maybe we don't eat as much *roti* and curry. I think that we speak less in Hindi and don't wear our traditional

clothes as much. (Long pause) I think my mum would like to be more Indian, she would like us to be more Indian but (pause) I think she feels trapped.

Other young Indo-Fijians said that by and large, while nostalgic about the past, their elders found their present circumstances rewarding. They reminisced about idyllic childhoods in Fiji while simultaneously citing the gaining of respect and securing their children's future as the major reasons for migration. Concurrently, many of my interlocutors agreed that the status of their families was much lower in Australia than in Fiji. For example, Preeta said:

My aunt in Fiji is a lawyer. She has so many servants, a chauffeur-driven car, a huge house. In fact, I think that when she visits us in Liverpool, my mum is embarrassed because we live in a small unit in a grotty block of flats. (Laughs) My mum keeps saying that if we had stayed in Fiji, we would have been rich like her.

When I asked whether her mother regretted coming to Australia, Preeta replied:

No, she says that Australia is more modern – we'll have more opportunities and we can do really well. She keeps saying that she'll be satisfied if we learn to respect our religion and culture. (Pauses) She doesn't really want us to be 'Aussie', you know like dating and laughing at our religious customs and traditions. She would just die if I married an Aussie.

The parents of many of my interlocutors repeated this theme. Vidya's mother said:

We had achieved all our goals in Fiji: we had a house, a car, all the material trappings, a happy family life ... (Pauses) Moving to Australia was the hardest decision we made. But I wanted the children to have access to better education, to have opportunities to be better people. Fiji didn't offer people like us much opportunity – my children would always be disadvantaged regardless of how hard they worked because they are Indian.

'I can make chutney out of anything'

Vidya's mother's statements reveal a whole series of ambivalences about their move to Australia. The explicit reason for emigration was to secure the future of the children, yet the elders of the community also feared that these children would become alienated from the old world view. Vidya knew that if she went astray, for example, 'married an Aussie', it would be a betrayal of her parents' decision to emigrate and also of their identity as Indo-Fijian.

Many of those I interviewed were self-reflexive and analytical about the situation of Indians in Fiji. For example, both Vidya and Preeta commented that by emigrating, their parents had fulfilled the stereotype held by indigenous Fijians that Indo-Fijians were not committed to Fiji. Indo-Fijians who left because of discrimination in Fiji are aware of and have experienced racial discrimination in Australia. Paradoxically, this discrimination is also suffered by other migrant groups in this society, such as indigenous Fijians.

Vidya: I suppose if we really felt that we were Fijian we would have stayed in Fiji. I mean it is difficult for Indians there, but we should have stayed and fought.

Preeta: Yes, fought for our rights. I mean, it's like the Aboriginal situation here. I mean, can Aborigines just say, it is our land, all of you have to go back to wherever you came from. (laughs)

These young people were also conscious of the ambivalences of racial discrimination in Australia, especially refugee policies.

Chris: I mean it is all so hypocritical – look at Zimbabwe. Everyone is so upset because the white farmers are being thrown off the land. But no one here says a word about how terrible it is for the Indian farmers, you know the sugarcane farmers in Fiji. My uncle's family worked on the same farm for years and years – now they've been thrown off, nothing to do. He's trying to come to Australia ...

Preeta: As a refugee?

Chris: Dream on! The Aussie government is not going to accept him as a refugee. Now if he was a white farmer from Zimbabwe ... (laughs)

Mona: They would have a welcoming party!

INGENIOUS

'It's just normal, I suppose': retrieving Fiji/remembering India

After the May 2000 coup the discourses of belonging and remembering began to veer towards different referents; young Indo-Fijians reported that this event seemed to be a watershed in their elders' relationship to Fiji. It was as if the last bridge was now burnt, and this closure enabled memories of being Fijian rather than Indian. Some families even acknowledged some Fijian ancestry; this would once have been seen as a source of shame in the Indo-Fijian community, but was now looked on as a way of legitimising their right to live in Fiji.

Chris: My father says that his grandmother was Fijian.

Mona: Really! Come on!

Chris: Yes. I know they never spoke of it before. But now you can see where I get my hair and nose from. (Laughs)

Mona: But not your body, you're still a puny Indian. (Laughter)

Chris: Dad says he is both Fijian and Indian by blood, birth, everything. He has more right to live in Fiji than someone who is only Indian or only Fijian.

Mona: But he's not going to ...

Chris: (Rolls his eyes) Of course not.

These young people were conscious that their parents tried to fill what they considered a cultural, religious and traditional vacuum by encouraging their children's attendance at numerous community events. The most popular festivals are religious ones such as Diwali and Holi celebrations. Diwali, which normally falls in late October, is a specially joyous occasion. In 2000 almost 10,000 people, mainly Hindus, from all over New South Wales, flocked to the suburb of Liverpool for the occasion. Special roadside stalls selling clothes, jewellery, food and so on were set up and shops displayed the oil lamps that are traditionally lit to drive away evil.

The first nightclub in Sydney catering specially for the needs of the Indians from the area is also located on Liverpool's Northumberland Street. Other such clubs have opened and some have shut rapidly, among them Ghungroo in Leichhardt, Ashique in Ashfield and Purple Haze in Newtown. All these clubs targeted the Indian diaspora, and Hindi music, *bhangra* (Indian pop music) or Bollywood (Hindi films), was the main attraction. In August 2002, Bar Broadway celebrated ten years of Masala Mix on 2SER-FM by holding a 'Bend it like Bhangra' evening. It was

'I can make chutney out of anything'

advertised as 'Bent bhangra. Bollywood breaks. Raag fusion', and featured DJs Akaash and Sam with live dance and percussion performances by Phuse, Avijeet and Tandaur. It was hugely successful.

There are also community events such as the annual Mohammed Rafi (a Bollywood singer) night and other cultural shows. Indian student associations in the universities in the Sydney area also hold cultural nights and performances which are so popular that participants have to audition for the opportunity to perform on those nights and there are long queues for entry. Many of the performances are strongly influenced by Bollywood movies, especially in terms of dance and music. Hindi movies provide a vital link to culture, tradition, language and histories.

Most of my interlocutors mentioned the watching of Hindi films as a factor in their 'Indian-ness'. Most watched at least one Hindi film per week, usually at the weekend and as a family practice. Again, they, like most families, had large video collections of Indian films and episodes of the serials of the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* bought from shops or taped from SBS. These films were the ones that gave rise to family discussion. Film music and song forms by far the largest category of popular music in the Indo-Fijian community. Hindi film songs are equally popular among the young and old, and new audiocassettes, mainly imported from Fiji, are widely sought after and avidly bought. TV and video viewing appear to offer powerful representations of both Indian and Australian culture for the Indo-Fijian community, who do not always feel themselves to be fully Australian or Fijian and are sometimes less than willing to embrace all aspects of their 'Indian' cultural heritage. As in Britain, the VCR seems to have been appropriated by many parents as a means of recreating cultural traditions, though their efforts appear to be both subverted and diverted by young people (Gillespie 1995).

The distinctive visual style of the Hindi film synthesises 'traditional' eastern mythologised cultures with 'exotic and decadent' western cultures, drawing both on Hollywood genres and on Indian cultural forms to create a distinctive product that is a powerful instrument of cultural identity (Dissanayeke 1988). Viewing Hindi films on video appeared to be the main regular, family-centred leisure activity on weekends for most young Indo-Fijians. Their family gathering takes place around the television set, and, as Marie Gillespie has pointed out in another context, the episodic structure of the films, with their endless digressions, detours and plots-within-plots, enables the weaving of conversation around them. The successive modes of song, dance, action and emotion provide breaks and enable discussion of and gossip about the film. As in Gillespie's (1995)

study of the Punjabi community in Southall in Britain, the younger members of families regard their mothers, grandmothers and aunts as the repositories and disseminators of 'culture and tradition' within the family (Gillespie 1995).

The viewing of Hindi films is often accompanied by an airing of views and intense debates on tradition and modernity. For example, Vidya's mother, while acknowledging some of the 'unrealistic' aspects of Hindi films, approved of them because of their moral unambiguity. She said:

In Hindi films you know what is right and what is wrong. There is justice, there is morality. It is good for young people to see that goodness wins in the end.

When I suggested that this might be unrealistic, she was irritated:

Are the things you see in Hollywood films realistic? Bruce Willis always wins even if he fights a hundred villains; James Bond always escapes from any prison. Is it better to watch this rather than something which has some moral basis?

However, many of my interlocutors had to be asked specifically if they watched Indian films, either Bollywood or in their own regional languages. When I wanted to know why they didn't mention these films or videos when I asked them what kind of films or television programs they watched, it became clear that watching Indian films on video was a crucial way of learning to be Indian.

Chris: Why didn't I mention it? I don't know. It's just normal, I suppose.

DG: What do you mean, normal?

Chris: I don't know ... I mean, like my mother goes out shopping on Thursday and with the food and stuff, she brings back videos. I see that as, something, as a part of your everyday, like you know, how you would take a bath and brush your teeth and stuff like that.

Kala: Yes, I know what you mean. It's just part of our family tradition. On Sunday mornings we have to watch the Indian video.

Vidya: (Laughs) With us, it is Friday evening. If I want to go out, the oldies get annoyed.

'I can make chutney out of anything'

Mona: Yes, it's not like watching other TV or movies – it's just part of our daily lives. Like all those people who go to the temples in India and bring back video films of all the stuff that goes on, you know ...

Chris: Oh, yes, and my dad says, 'Look that's how they do the puja in India.'

David Morley has argued that 'the average sitting room' is a

... site of some very important political conflicts – it is, among other things, one of the principal sites of the politics of gender and age ... the sitting room is exactly where we need to start from if we finally want to understand the constitutive dynamics of abstraction such as 'the community' or 'the nation' (Morley 1991, p. 15).

It is clear that Indian cultural 'traditions' are likely to be challenged and subverted by TV and video viewing experiences. One interlocutor, Karishma, for example, found the images of India portrayed in the films unattractive, unrealistic and patriarchal. She was also embarrassed that her peer group lampooned Hindi films as 'absurd', comparing them with university subjects like 'Creation of the Third World 101', and felt herself alienated from the sense of 'Indian-ness' and the 'India' represented in the films. When she brought friends home, she said, she would always turn off Hindi film music or a Hindi movie playing in the background. She was studying an undergraduate film subject and was embarrassed by the contrast between European art films such as those she saw at film festivals and the simplistic nature of Hindi film. There was also some sense that some things depicted in the films, especially poverty, corruption and patriarchal values, might function to confirm dominant, racist discourses about the Indo-Fijian community in Australia. She said:

... my mother keeps saying I should watch Hindi films so that I am more aware of my heritage. But I am glad I am from Fiji and I have nothing to do with the kind of country they show in the films. They are silly, absurd. So simplistic. All that dancing and singing and throwing of flowers. Why don't they just pash and get over it. And the humour is so crude. It's vulgar. Can you imagine how my Anglo friends diss Hindi films? They are ridiculous. I try to avoid watching the videos my mother brings home every week.¹

INGENIOUS

However, these emotions are not shared by all young Indo-Fijians. The ones involved in the Suburban Masala project pointed out to me that Bollywood has now become trendy. Many mentioned Baz Luhrmann's Bollywood-inspired *Moulin Rouge*, or the success of the film *Monsoon Wedding*.

Katy: I think I am a culturally split personality. Sometimes I watched it (*Monsoon Wedding*) with Indian eyes, at times with Aussie eyes. With my Indian eyes, I felt there was no acting going on.

Mona: It's culturally up to date – I mean those crazy cell phone interruptions.

Katy: And the way they mix Hindi and English, just like V-TV and MTV.

Mona: And all those people from abroad, you know the idiot from Australia. (Laughs) And the guy thinking he's going to get a virgin. (Laughs)

Many of my interlocutors expressed amazement and incredulity at the father in *Monsoon Wedding* severing ties with the old family friend who molested his niece. The reviewer on the website 'Hot Ashes' comments on the storyline in *Monsoon Wedding*:

... [it is] nothing short of brilliant and courageous. To have a girl have a fling before her wedding and a father stand beside her unmarried daughter who was molested by a family friend, this film is obviously made for an international audience but somehow it doesn't lose its Indian touch. It captures the formula of a Punjabi wedding video and holds it throughout the movie (movies reviews, <http://www.hotashes.com.au/>).²

The crucial input of Bollywood films in the construction of Indian-ness was highlighted in this exchange.

Mona: With so many people taking on role models from film, maybe this will change our culture of always believing older people, you know people with respect and status.

Katy: Maybe it shows how people can act in a similar case, you know, be brave, stand up to the child molester, change their behaviour. (Laughs) Is this wishful thinking?

'I can make chutney out of anything'

Many of the battles within the family are also fought over American or Australian TV programs. For example, many of the interviewees mentioned *Sex and the City* as a program that their parents loathed and tried to prevent them watching. Ashlene Nand (who is an Indian but not Indo-Fijian) on the website 'Hot Ashes':

'Sex and the what?'

'Sex and the city', I announce.

'No, you are not watching that!', says my mum in a tone so sharp it could slice me in half.

'But I'm a 20 year old!', I scream my weak protest.

'Correction: an unmarried 20 year old.'

Nand adds:

I wonder how it could be my favorite show. After all, I always miss the beginning because I have to wait till my mum goes to bed. And I can hardly hear anything because the volume is so low I have to stick my ear to the TV. And because my ear is stuck to it, I can hardly watch what is happening. (I have fixed this problem by becoming a professional in lip reading) ('What and the City' by Ashlene Nand, <http://www.hotashes.com.au/>).

For young Indians it is crucial to counter parental narratives of 'Indian-ness' with their own versions of being Indian:

'Sex and the city', I announce, when my relatives ask me my favourite show. 'But you don't look like that type of girl!?' state my Auntie and Uncle quite obviously. At this point my mum jumps in, convincing them that I am quite the contrary and love Indian documentaries and Bollywood movies. I make all curries known to man and I can make chutney out of anything. ANYTHING (Nand, 'What and the City', <http://www.hotashes.com.au/>).

'I've been here seven years and wanna know my true identity': disrupting Australian identities

'Hot Ashes' is a website that specifically targets 'South Asian youth'. Its home page opens up to a frame of an attractive South Asian couple with names of countries scrolling to the right – 'Bangladesh, Nepal,

INGENIOUS

Fiji, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan' – which is followed by the tag, 'The Place to be for South Asian Youth'. The website contains message forums, news of upcoming events such as cultural nights and religious festivals, Bollywood gossip, beauty hints and even an agony aunt column called 'Ask Sarina'.

On the message forum, one 'Elaichee' (this word means 'cardamom' in Hindi) posted these ironic definitions about migrant identity:

FOB = Fresh off the boat ... individuals with a 'heavy' curry accent. dress sense to scare the shyt out of aboriginal druggies (no offence intended).. favourite hangout- curry uni parties. favourite pastime for the male category- not staring but scannin every girl (nationality no bar) passin by and tellin ur mate 'meet ur bhabhi³..' (hahahaha thats atrocious!)

ABCD = Australian born confused desi ... the cute aussie accent. dress sense that puts heath ledger to shame. hindi grammer equivalent to a class 5 FOB.. Indian culture or tradition washed out of the brain in its entirety. lost souls as called by those fresh off da boat ..

am i right??

and if i am. what happens to the people who are neither?? do the inbetweens have a name??

ive been here 7 years and wanna know my true identity...!!

hehehhe... pssst a secret.. even i feel silly after readin my message but i'll post it anyway... .. go die... (message forum, <http://www.hotashes.com.au/>).

Answers ranged from clever acronyms such as 'DICK ... Desi's in Confused Kaos!' to 'Dont bother me.. I m livin happily ever after!' There was also some confusion about the term FOB. 'Hot Ashes' actually has a page with definitions of 'Curry terms', which describes 'FOB' as 'quite a funny term and not necessarily a bad one. It merely describes people who have recently migrated here and still carry the accent, the dress style etc'. Some posters, however, conflated the term with its current usage to describe 'islanders' and one of them, 'islandz kween', took Elaichee to task.

hey first of all r u dissin the FOBZ....? Coz firstly, there is nothin wrong with them at all....They r tha most friendliest people....(talkin from experience here.... u should know by now why i said that...if u r smart enough that is) So if u r dissin

'I can make chutney out of anything'

them, watch wat u say aight..... It is important to love yourself before learning to love other people (message forum, <http://www.hotashes.com.au/>).

It is not clear from the posting whether or not 'Elaichee' is from Fiji. However, there are more specific assertions of Indian identity on 'Hot Ashes', such as the one from 'Tisha'.

Fiji-Indians are Indians. We carry the Indian culture and call ourselves Indian with much pride. We hold India in our hearts and no one can tell us that we're less Indian than anyone else (Issue 2, October 1998, 'Your Say', <http://www.hotashes.com.au/>).

A survey of the message forum on 'Hot Ashes' shows a surprising range of issues discussed. Besides the ironic pleas for identity definitions cited above, much of the discussion is about relationships, between those of different races or religions, especially in the context of conservative families and the posters' own beliefs and adherences to their cultural and religious norms. One question posed on the 'Ask Sarina' page says:

Im an indian bloke who is going out with a white chick. We have been goin out for about 1 yr now and my parents approve of her and everything! Recently i have been going to all these indian places and i am losing interest in my g/f. i have never gone out with an indian girl and i dont know if i should go out with one. could the color or nationality really appeal to someone or should it be the person inside that really matters, because my g/f is great and i know we would have a great future! H ('Ask Sarina', 2000).

The relationships discussed include those with parents and elders and the problems of moving in and out of the family world and the outside world. Many of the posters speak of 'rumours' about them in the community: that the women are promiscuous and that the men are untrustworthy. The effects of these 'rumours' can be traumatic.

Its just the things that my mum and dad put me through, mums really strict and doesnt even know how to talk to me properly. Sometimes she really upsets me by saying things to hurt my feelings , and i dont think she even understands that it hurts

me badly. And dad, well he's just as bad. Then there is the other problems, there are all these rumours about me and also with my cousins. My sister-in-laws, bitch about me so much and it eventually comes to me. And that hurts me badly because I have never said or done one cruel thing to them ('Ask Sarina', 2000).

In reply, Sarina didn't suggest confrontation with the parents or even a 'free and frank' discussion. Her answer emphasises the need to negotiate these relationships carefully, with regard for the complexities inherent in living in several different worlds.

Unfortunately some people can be very prejudiced and biased in their views and seem to forget that one situation can influence different people in totally different ways. Especially with parents. While it's hard to take their perspective, they do have a lot to lose, and mostly, their intentions are good. That isn't to say the way they actually act or speak is, but it is meant to be. I think you need to talk to your sister-in-laws, because like it or not they're part of your family now, and keeping them distant will distance you from your brothers as well.

Some of the confusion in being seen as Indian is displayed in this question to Sarina from an Indian girl who 'hates' other Indian girls.

i hate indians, but mainly indian girls. Right now i am dating an indian guy and am deeply in love with him. But i hate the fact that he has a lot of indian friends. I just wanted to know how can i go about making friends with them when i know majority of them hate me, this i don't know why. it was only last year when it was my first time i attended an indian function at fairfield showgrounds, and this is where i started hearing rumours about me, i mean i don't even tell them and they don't even know me. i was always under the impression that indian girls always want what's not theirs, which is why i dislike them. I just attended the indian youth festival and felt really left out because i didn't fit in the crowd. how do i get over the fact that i am also an indian and stop myself from hating them so much? Because of my hatred i never even let my boyfriend go to indian functions, dance parties, or even let him talk to any indian girls. what should i do? ('Ask Sarina', 2000).

Katy, a university student, has similar uncertainties about some of the constructed Indian-ness of the diaspora and pinpoints a kind of unease with the official discourses of multiculturalism. She says that, when asked, she always says she is Australian:

I think I've settled in more and I think I've accepted that idea of you can be of different cultures, but you can still have that same, you can still be Australian. Because I think initially there is always that emphasis on multiculturalism, blah blah blah, and you have to be culturally tolerant. So it makes it more obvious, it makes it stand out more. And I think it's just for me it has been, like, yeah there's all the stuff but you're still able to keep that same, you know, you can still be the same.

Other conversations are about how to negotiate life strategically within the parameters set out by their families, communities and the larger world. In a discussion on arranged marriages, the website has the following comment:

Although this seems to be a thing of the past, you'll be surprised how many Indians and Fiji-Indians practise it today (Issue 1, 1998, <http://www.hotashes.com.au/>).

The response of my interlocutors to the idea of arranged marriages was complex and based in a sense of the contingencies of the situation.

Vidya: Arranged marriages are not as bad as they sound. So long as you are not forced into it.

Mona: In many cultures, people grow up accepting that their parents will make the choice.

Preeta: So long as you are not forced into it. But nowadays, you usually get to meet the guy and even go out with him, get to know him a bit.

Vidya: I think you should go out for a while, even for a year or two. It doesn't matter what people think – are they going to do anything if you are in a bad marriage? If you have a divorce it is much worse.

Michael Chinappa, a young film-maker from Fiji, has made the first ever Hindi movie in Sydney. The theme is the traditional Bollywood one

of the clash between tradition and modernity. The movie, *Jhumka*, has a Fiji-Indian cast from Sydney and is based on the changing lifestyle and situations of the migrant community. In *Jhumka*, which is set in Fiji, the hero leaves his village to study in the city, where he meets a modern girl who falls in love with him. He starts a relationship with her even though he always intends to return to his village to enter into a traditional marriage. Meanwhile, the girl becomes pregnant and is disowned by her own community. Movies such as these provide the opportunity for members of the Indo-Fijian community to reflect on their lifestyles, traditions and cultures. The moral of *Jhumka* is the same as preached by the parents of young Indo-Fijians such as Vidya and Preeta: however much you assimilate into the Australian culture, it is better to stick to the customs, traditions and mores of your own culture.

Conclusion

Nikos Papastergiadis has suggested that the place of belonging can no longer be purely geographic (a notion of place) or historical (a sense of connection) because it is 'cross-cut by a variety of global forces' (Papastergiadis 1998, p. 1). If identities are fluid, unfixed and changing, it is perhaps appropriate that young people of Indian descent can function across various arenas, appropriating the accoutrements of different identities as they need them, be they Fijian, Indian or Australian, underpinned by the irony of hybrid terms such as 'curry', 'fob' or 'abcd'. The identities articulated from these processes are complex structures, related as much through their differences as through their similarities. As James Clifford eloquently argues, there is no authentic shape to their configuration; they are a series of adaptations, changes, and borrowings; they are political alliances with an ability to join some disparate elements and discard others. The constructions of these identities comprise continuing shifting and protean struggles 'hooking and unhooking particular elements'. Crucial political and cultural positions are not firmly rooted; they are constantly contested and contingent:

... cultural forms will always be made, unmade, and remade. Communities can and must reconfigure themselves, drawing selectively on remembered pasts (Clifford 2001).

In *Indian Daughters Abroad*, Vijaya Joshi explores the 'culture-conflict' experienced by second-generation Indian women in Australia and concludes that it is not the defining feature of her interlocutors' lives

'I can make chutney out of anything'

(Joshi 2000). I would like to take this argument a step further. The young people who contributed to this study displayed remarkable agency in defining their identities and, more crucially, in demanding that the term 'Australian' be extended to include all the differences that they embody. This demand subverts and shapes the way in which a 'mainstream' Australian youth identity is constructed in the public sphere. For this generation of young Indians and Indo-Fijians, identity is a process that is continually shaped by their current experiences, interactions and practices with other communities in Australian society, and that constantly disrupts the concept of any authentic 'Australian-ness'.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Marie Gillespie (1995), in which young Sikh informants in Southall, London say very similar things about Hindi popular film.
- 2 Quotes from websites are reproduced exactly as they were posted, including the spellings and punctuation and contracted words used.
- 3 This term means 'sister-in-law'.

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