Gender plays an important role in how we constitute ourselves and how writers create a subject in the domestic as well as the public life in their narratives. Despite similarities in basic immigrant experience and cultural environment, the socio-economic experience of male and female immigrants affects the construction of a gendered self and role. This paper shows how the South Asian diaspora community has changed in relation to the gender discourse over the years, by analyzing representations of male protagonists in selected short stories of South Asian diaspora in Australia. Drawing from the theories of Judith Butler, Robert E. Park, Milton Gordon, Ronald F. Levant, and others on gender (masculinity) and sexuality, this paper shifts the focus from the politics of sensory and spatial locations that diaspora studies usually highlight toward a politics of gendered location and difference. This is to see whether the stereotypical image of the marginal immigrant male still holds in postcolonial, post-patriarchal, and globalized South Asian diasporic society.

Keywords: South Asian diaspora; Australia; male; culture; masculinist crisis; margin; short stories

Gender plays an important role in how we constitute ourselves or how writers create a subject in the domestic as well as the public life in their narratives. Despite similarities in basic immigrant experience and cultural environment, the socio-economic experience of male and female immigrants affects the construction of a gendered self and role. At other levels gender also works as an instrument of oppression, alienation and marginalization—within and outside the “home.” Gender should be understood “simultaneously as a structure, that is, a latticework of institutionalized social relationships that, by creating and manipulating the categories of gender, organize and signify power at levels above the individual” (Ferre, Lorber & Hess, 2000, p. xix). Thus preservation of traditional gender ideologies and
roles aggravates and sometimes even creates the tensions that plague many South Asian immigrant families. A gendered politics of location, according to Mankekar (2003), is “far from nostalgically seeking one’s roots or being complacent about where ‘one belongs,’ ” it “involves interrogating one’s privileges and blind spots” (p. 53). However, when **gendered locations** are referred to in diaspora studies, discussions are often restricted to women, as women often “bear the moral and symbolic weight” of representing tradition (Ram, 1988, p. xvii). In gender studies, women’s sexuality is central to the discourse of ethnic and national processes as women are “biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities since they give birth to children, who are future members of an ethnic group” and also “seen as the bearers of culture for the ethnic group” (Rudrappa, 2002, p. 97). Marginalized in one way or the other, women are often portrayed as passive victims “forced to struggle with their oppressive cultural systems” (Van der Veer, 1995, p. 14).

**Marginality and Masculinity**

Since much has already been written on the effects of migration on South Asian-Australian immigrant women’s dislocation, expectations and discrimination, this paper concentrates on narratives of “marginal men” and their experiences in the Diaspora. This paper points to a debate on the issue of gender power reversals—where women “become brokers of new domestic cultures and of new kinds of sexual politics” (Appadurai & Breckenridge, 1989, p. ii), and where in certain cases the male immigrant comes to bear the same burden of representing cultural tradition and family loyalty, as masculinity is also a product of cultural and historical forces in traditional society. In the diasporic situation “marginality” should be read as “a collective phenomenon” and “which must be studied at the group and societal levels” (Drew, 1987, p. 81) to promote current understanding of masculinities. Men in the diaspora attempt to reproduce their dominant patriarchal role in a new social milieu as they try to maintain family honor, and in certain situations men are often undermined by loss of position or centrality, that is, their place as the pivot around which others turn (Goode, 1982) through a lack of recognition of qualifications, language, and the loss of financial status and class superiority.

This paper specifically examines how the South Asian diaspora community in Australia figures in relation to gender discourses by analyzing the representation of male protagonists in selected short stories. It analyses how social, cultural, political and economic conditions of both homeland (old home) and **hostland** (new home) affect these male subjects and shape their new roles in mainstream society. While researching on South Asian Diaspora literature in Australia I came across certain short narratives that depicted the male characters as marginalized while most of the other stories dealt with female subjectivities. These narratives contained within them or pointed toward issues and range of questions related to a crisis in masculinity that is still not highlighted in sociological research. The South Asian man migrating with middle-class diasporic narrative of success in his mind and an

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1 At a personal level, I informally interacted with some Indian and Sri Lankan men in Australia during 2006-2007 and they shared that the loss of a privileged position in a new country increases their marginality that in some cases the men were not able to accept.
educational qualification that he soon finds out is either not recognized or is no longer considered desirable by the ever-changing rules of the Australian government and employers, often results in their frustration and depression and a feeling of emasculation because of being unrecognized and under-acknowledged within and outside the family (say in the case of advanced degree-holders driving taxis or working in 7/11s or waiting in restaurants; see also Voigt-Graf, 2003). This unifying theme of professional dissatisfaction or lack of respect in the public sphere leading to a feeling of loss of masculine identity coupled with a changing role within the domestic sphere that further destabilizes the notion of self, forms the basis for the selection of the six short narratives examined in this paper. These include Yasmin Gooneratne’s short story “Bharat Changes His Mind,” Chitra Fernando’s “Making Connections,” Adib Khan’s “Out There,” Suneeta Peres De Costa’s “Long Division,” Beryl T. Mitchell’s autobiographical piece titled “Tea, Tytlers and Tribes,” and Sunil Govinnage’s story “The Vanished Trails.”

Before I begin, two theoretical concepts—“margin” and “centre”—need some explanation with reference to their usage in this paper in the context of South Asian immigrant “marginal men.” The term “centre” is used to indicate the hostland, here implying the regulatory Anglo-Australian idea of a nation that may marginalize the new immigrants’ notion of home and identity. In this imaginary of the nation immigrants are put on a secondary level or margins of the society, notwithstanding the state multicultural policy. The centre tries to assimilate and subjugate the margin and the immigrants at the margin use subversion to challenge these assimilatory pressures into majority culture (see also Corkhill, 1995).

According to Spence (1985) the most important construct in recognizing or differentiating self is one’s “gender identity” or one’s sense of being masculine or feminine. She has noticed that culturally defined traits, attributes, abilities, and occupational preferences all contribute to one’s gender identity (see also Spence & Sawin, 1985)—allowing sub-cultural, cultural, and cross-cultural differences in defining femininity and masculinity. Within the imagination of any given culture, there always exists an archetypal image of the feminine and the masculine; what varies is the value attributed to each gender, and their respective descriptive characteristics. According to Judith Butler (2004), gender is a construct informing the ideas we hold about masculinity and femininity, about appropriate roles and about power relations. It is a “historical and social category” that is continuously enacted under the constraints of existing norms and imaginaries that differ across “geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose” (Butler, 2004, p. 10; Schiwy, 2007, p. 275). Feminism and the upheaval of the 1960s definitely provided the impetus for the “Men’s Movement” (coterminous with what I will call discourses of Masculism/Masculinism) that seek to analyze gender inequality and promote men’s rights, interests, and issues. It is now considered as a movement to empower men in society, and to redress discrimination against them. However, masculinist gender theory as a separate enterprise has focused largely on White men and their social, literary, and historical accounts of the construction of male gender identities. I use the term “masculinity” here with reference to the position of South Asian diaspora males in gender order and as a pattern of patriarchal practice which traditionally is thought to be concrete (see alsoConnell, 1995, 2013).

According to Alison Blunt, “diaspora space” is “both gendered and racialised” as “feminizing the diaspora” is important both in terms of “studying the migration of
women and in the domestic symbols often used to represent resettlement” (2005, p. 12). It is beyond doubt that being a woman, an immigrant, and a citizen is to hold a complex subject position in today’s world (see Tibe-Bonifacio, 2003). The main argument advocated in the history of western thought was that men and women are essentially different in nature—men are strong, rational and are constructed for productive work; women are considered to be weak, emotional, and destined for reproductive roles. From this historical viewpoint, according to feminists and Marxists, men are in possession of power over women because of the system of patriarchy. In South Asian (Hindu) culture, Manu’s treatise (5-6th century AD) endows male and female subjects with certain characteristics and notions of behavioral etiquette:

MALE = Instrumental, Rational, Aggressive, Brave, Competitive, and Dominant  
FEMALE = Expressive, Emotional, Warm, Procreator, Passive, and Submissive

Cutting across these age-old stereotypical gender constructions is the concept of “marginal man.” Noted sociologist Milton Gordon held the view that

the individual who engages in frequent and sustained primary contacts across ethnic group lines, particularly racial and religious, runs the risk of becoming what, in standard sociological parlance, has been called “the marginal man.” The marginal man is the person who stands on the borders or margins of two cultural worlds but is fully a member of neither. He may be the offspring of a racially mixed or interfaith marriage, or he may have ventured away from the security of the cultural group of his ancestors because of the individual personality and experience factors which predisposed him to seek wider contacts and entry into social worlds, which appeared more alluring [...]. Frustrated and not fully accepted [...] ambivalent [...] and beset by conflicting cultural standards, he develops, according to the classic conception, personality traits of insecurity, moodiness, hypersensitivity, excessive self-consciousness, and nervous strain [...]. (1964, pp. 56-57; italics added)

Robert E. Park defines the “marginal man” as

a personality type that arises at a time and a place where, out of the conflict of races and cultures, new societies, new peoples and cultures are coming into existence. The fate which condemns him to live, at the same time, in two worlds is the same which compels him to assume, in relation to the worlds in which he lives, the role of a cosmopolitan and a stranger. (1950 [1937], pp. 375-376)

Anne Summers has argued in her book Damned Whores and God’s Police (1977) that men oppose equal rights for women at work because it “threatens” their “power” in the home (p. 400). According to Sandra Bloodworth it was the idea of the nuclear family that gave rise to “the gender stereotypes of the aggressive, dominant male and the subservient woman” and it still “continues to shape our lives” (2005, p. 111).
Since its introduction, the theory of marginal man and marginality has had a major impact on sociology and anthropology. Over the last few decades, the immigrant male as marginal figure has also entered the narratives, typically compared to the White dominant male in the Australian context. “Marginal man” is a person who participates only slightly in the life of two cultural groups, identifying with neither. In this paper, the term “marginal man” is used to examine the male fictional characters, making up a growing underclass of males in the South Asian diaspora community, residing “on the borders or margins of two cultural worlds,” with little economic and traditional choices. The term also includes men whose lack of economic contribution as breadwinners or loss of patriarchal power (or authority) in the household makes them outsiders, leading to loss of self-esteem, a “masculinity crisis.” Such a crisis, according to Ronald F. Levant (1997), involves the collapse of “the basic pattern” according to which men in traditional societies have “fulfilled the code for masculine role behavior”—the role of the provider.

The issue of male victimization or lack of power in terms of agency or representation of the immigrant male in crisis definitely challenges gender relations in diaspora. This immigrant male in crisis differs from the traditional figure of the pioneering immigrant male (for a discussion on cultural constructions of masculinity and national identity, see Bode, 2009). He is “feminized,” firstly, by the challenges of socio-economic position that he faces in a new world, a feminization that is particularly evident in illustrations of mental and bodily harm. Second, men are feminized given the changing nature of domestic life, that is, men’s role in the home that is moving them toward greater participation in domestic chores and women’s involvement with economic activities outside the home to support the high standards of living in the new homeland. It has been argued by Banchevska that the “wife who remains at home, no matter how hard she works, is more likely to remain obedient and submissive than the one who contributes her cash earnings to the livelihood of the family” (1974, p. 180).

In the light of the changing economic, social, religious and cultural environment, scholars have started engaging with the theme of private and public sexualities within South Asia and in its Diaspora (notably in the UK, USA and Canada). In the last ten years, emergent body of critical research in South Asian masculinities has primarily dealt with, through case studies and analysis of literature and cinema, the practical problems of feminine vs masculine subjectivities; gender equality; queer male subjectivities; assertive masculinity (rape and violence); domestic violence (role of patriarchy and masculinity); race and masculinity; religious, political and nationalist masculinities; tribal and dalit (lower-caste or untouchable) masculinities; and marriage for the purpose of immigration (gharjawai) in diaspora. Since the 1970s there have been ongoing theoretical debates and quantitative researches on Australian masculinities across generations, ethnic groups, and classes (seeConnell, 2013). Despite this plethora of academic and popular works about East Asian

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4 To advance research on men and masculinity and foster collaborations among Australian and international scholars the University of Wollongong opened the first centre in this field—Centre for Research on Men and Masculinities (CROMM). One key the-
and South Asian men and masculinity in Asian American studies, there are hardly any noteworthy studies on South Asian diaspora men and masculinity in Australia.5

A welcome exception is the recent study by Baas (2010) and Howson (2011) on Indian male students’ mobility and influence of masculinity on social accommodation and integration as a key aspect of effective settlement into a very masculine Australian society. Howson emphasizes that it is “the aspiration and belief in success manifested as money and power” (2011, p. 36) that motivates the male transmigrant student and informs his sense of masculine identity. So what happens if this dream of success is shattered but the migrant status has already been sealed? The narratives analyzed in this paper offer some insights into this question by portraying the dilemmas faced by the male protagonists. Through this paper I wish to extend and also bring in the critique of marginal masculinity in South Asian diaspora studies. It is my view that South Asian immigrant masculinity, under the pressures of migration, is in crisis and the theoretical framework of diaspora studies requires reconsideration as the discussions on marginality of immigrant masculinity are still largely unexamined or under-theorized in South Asian diaspora studies in Australia.

**THE MARGINAL MEN: (CON)TEXTS AND (CON)TESTS**

Schmidt-Haberkamp (2004), writing about Sri Lankan-Australian author Yasmine Gooneratne’s story “Bharat Changes His Image” (1995), a story on migration, adaptation and identity loss,6 observes that the constant references to just arrived Sri Lankan immigrants Navaranjini and Bharat as “exotic and erotic orientals” in Australia denies them “their human and academic qualities, and reduces them to the stereotypical idea of the oriental as an object of sexual desire” (p. 222). This stereotypical idea, as Navaranjini also notes, mostly marginalizes her husband, Bharat:

> [F]rom the moment we arrived in Australia, my husband started having problems with his image. Before we came to Australia, I’d no idea he had an image, apart from his reflection in the bedroom mirror or his shadow on the grass. But now it seemed he’d acquired one, and with it he’d acquired problems: problems connected, as far as I could make out, with the various aspects in which, he felt, he appeared to the Australians around us.

(Gooneratne, 1995, p. 45)

These problems arose because of his feeling “under constant observation and fixed

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5 For an analysis of diasporic Asian-Australian masculinities, particularly on transformation of Chinese and Japanese masculinities in a globalized world, see Eng (2001), Khoo (2003), and Louie and Low (Eds., 2003).

6 Prof. Yasmine Gooneratne, OA, holds a Personal Chair in English and was also the Foundation Director of the Post-Colonial Literatures and Language Research Centre at Macquarie University 1988-1993. Her novel, *A Change of Skies*, won the 1992 Marjorie Barnard Literary Award for Fiction, and her second novel, *The Pleasures of Conquest* was shortlisted for the 1995 Commonwealth Writers Prize.
in an orientalist image of the Asian Other that crudely groups all Asians together” (Schmidt-Haberkamp, 2004, p. 223). Bharat, who is a Lecturer at an Australian university, feels alienated by the looks of his colleagues and neighbors. And seeking to assimilate to their Australian surroundings, Bharat and Navaranjini first swap their long Sri Lankan names to Barry and Jean Mundy—“True blue, fair dinkum Aussies” (Gooneratne, 1995, p. 50), and second, their car from an “Austin for a Holden, and moved to another suburb” (Gooneratne, 1995, p. 50).

Interestingly, it is both Bharat and Navaranjani, who try to simplify things by changing their names and in the process lose their identity from a Sri Lankan upper class to a class-less Australian one. However, Bharat’s change in name is very problematic. At one level it is an appropriation or construction of his Australianness and at other degradation or deconstruction of his superior birth. His dilemma as a male immigrant from an affluent family in the home of origin and changing his family name is not only tied to his family history but is also a comment on the national or sub-continental history: “Bharat” means India, representing the mythical idea of “India,” centre to and encapsulating major regions of South Asia. Moreover, the English name Barry pronounced in Sinhalese, the word baru means “incapable” or “impotent.” He is unable to defend himself or his image against the attacks and comments about his identity. His problem, as Chandani Lokugé observes is that: “Whereas in his homeland he had a position of authority, he is now relegated to a position as subject […]. He seeks to identify as closely as possible with an acceptable Australian stereotype” (2008, p. 207).

For Navaranjani, who understands Sri Lankan cultural associations and history, Bharat’s change of name is regrettable. It is Navaranjani who asserts herself and engages in a heated verbal dispute over “racism,” “Australianness” and “Asianness” with Prof. Ron Blackstone, an anti-Asian immigration intellectual, whom she blames for Bharat’s identity and masculinity crisis: “[…] I’m someone whose life you have personally made a hell on earth. I’m also […] a wife. The wife of someone whose personality you have utterly destroyed” (Gooneratne, 1995, p. 52).

To everyone’s surprise, instead of Bharat, it is Navaranjani who is able to obtain an apology from Prof. Blackstone. Here, she is not taking on a role of crusader against racism but just performing her traditional wifely duty in defending her husband’s honor. As she says in the beginning of the story,

My mother taught me to worship Lord Shiva in my husband. I’ve always tried to follow her instructions, especially when my husband is under strain. So I listened very, very carefully as he told me all about these problems. (Gooneratne, 1995, p. 45)

The reference to Lord Shiva here, more significantly the iconographic representation of Lord Shiva known as Ardhanarishwar (depicted as half male and half female together forming one body and revered as a state of primal wholeness) is very important because Bharat, in Gooneratne’s other story “Navaranjini Takes Note of Signs and Visions” (1992), is compared with Arjuna, the warrior. In the Indian epic Mahabharata, Arjuna spent one year in disguise to live incognito while in exile as a eunuch. Navaranjani is Bharat’s better-half; she understands how impotent he is feeling right now, like Arjuna in exile without the usual support structure of his family. She also observes that Bharat “being so westernised, […] is only semi-vegetarian. […] many of his ideas too are only, so to speak, semi-Asian” (Gooneratne,
1992, p. 46). She knows, in absence of a full identity—Sri Lankan or Australian—Bharat won’t be able to break away from his identity crisis and therefore takes the initiative on his behalf of defending him openly in the party—and with success.

What about Bharat’s view of his wife being his protector or guardian in Australia? When Navaranjani, during her dispute with Prof. Blackstone, is looking for him in the party and calls out his name, he “unaccountably disappears” (Gooneratne, 1995, p. 52). According to Lokugé, Bharat is a typical “male chauvinist,” he “might not have welcomed or tolerated anything more from his wife than a celebration of the domestic” (2008, p. 216). Lokugé feels that Navaranjani arrived in Australia “as the indulged wife of an absent-minded intellectual. In her own eyes, as in the gaze of her husband’s, she manifests a role, not personal identity” (p. 213). She is doubly marginalized in Australia—as she is also an “object of Anglocentric racist and sexist stereotyping” (p. 213). But “somewhere along the way Navaranjani develops a voice of her own” as independent from her husband’s views (p. 215).

Tradition and gender are inseparable parts of the cultural baggage that immigrants carry with them to the new homelands. Men in the Indian subcontinent, particularly husbands, rarely participate in everyday domestic household tasks—cooking, shopping, cleaning, doing laundry, lawn mowing, etc. This is largely due to the “strict separation of spheres” dictated by cultural norms that portray domesticity as woman’s domain and economic responsibilities as the male territory (Bhalla, 2008). Chitra Fernando’s story “Making Connections” from Between Worlds (1988), depicts the journey of its male protagonist, Ananda, from being a dissatisfied immigrant confused and even marginalized by his new domestic role to finding a new sense of identity and fulfillment as a painter. Ananda, who has immigrated to Australia from Sri Lanka, can understand, although with a nostalgia for old days that the role and responsibilities in Australia are to be shared between him and his wife, Leela. But he cannot help reflecting, that

At home in Beruwela, he hadn’t ever had to bother about making his own tea. Before his marriage to Leela, his mother had made it for him, and then Leela had. He no longer expected Leela to make his tea or his breakfast for him. Things were different here. There were so many things she had to do in the morning: making sandwich lunches for the two girls to take to school and getting her own lunch before she left for work herself at the Epping post office. (Fernando, 1988, p. 90)

He understands the changing nature of domestic roles but cannot grasp why the traditions have to be sacrificed for attaining it. A transformation in gender ideologies, according to Vibha Bhalla (2008), is accompanied by ideological shifts in the understanding of new male and female roles by both individuals and their families. She further notes that these are permanent changes and probably reproduced in subsequent generations. He looks at his grown-up daughter and feels a “discomfort” and “distaste” on the way she dresses up here—he “watched the girl balanced on her heels in her short uniform, observed her hair sprayed into a fierce cockatoo peak, her blood-red nails, a bright predatory parrot” (Fernando, 1988, p. 91). The girl answers his questions with indifference and he remembers how “parental authority” was yielded by his father back home in Sri Lanka. Loss of husbandly and parental authority makes him feel empty. He feels threatened by his daughter’s refusal to maintain traditional family culture as a result of migration to Australia.
Ananda also remembers that he never intended to marry and migrate to Australia, but wanted to dedicate “his life to the education of poor” (Fernando, 1988, p. 90). He further notes that nothing of that kind happened. He had married Leela, had two daughters, become a householder and a teacher in a Beruwala secondary school. (p. 91)

He often thinks that he was unable to fulfill his ambition of becoming a “second Gandhi” because of his marriage and household responsibilities. He immigrated to Australia because Leela proposed the idea. He “agreed in principle,” so that his daughters can get the best “food, clothes, employment, education, especially education” (p. 90). On reflecting back at his life he understands that it is his lack of interest in life around—particularly in his wife and daughters and their changed (Westernized) perspective—that makes him feel marginalized. In Sri Lanka, he was dependent on his parents and friends advice as well as critical appreciation of his ideas and therefore couldn’t fulfill his dream. In the new homeland, he finds financial security, but searches for a sense of self-worth and his role in the world as a man. He finally feels exhilarated by the thought of a new beginning in Australia—as a painter, something he feels he is good at. It is now through his paintings that he wants to tackle his marginal status and make connections—with his family, with other Australians, and with the world.

In recent years more and more South Asian writers have begun to base their works on a broad spectrum of themes and explore the gamut of social and political experiences or what traditionally is referred or considered as the dark side of life—madness, depression, drugs, prostitution, adultery, homosexuality, and sexual peculiarities in their works. Adib Khan, born in Bangladesh, who immigrated to Australia in 1970s, has dealt with different subject matters in all his stories and novels, ranging from the conventional material on nostalgia for a lost homeland to dilemmas of adaptation and settling-down in hostland or new home; love, loyalty, and adultery; and the war and post-war experiences. His first novel, Seasonal Adjustments (Allen & Unwin, 1995), won the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction, the Book of the Year award in the 1994 NSW Premier’s Literary Awards, and the 1995 Commonwealth Writer’s prize for Best Book and his second novel, Solitude of Illusions (Allen & Unwin, 1996), won the 1997 Tilly Aston Braille Book of the Year Award. Khan’s young narrator, in the story “Out There” (1997), a second generation immigrant from a war-torn Asian country, is a drug addict who also works as a male prostitute. On his way to meet a regular client he is stopped by a female prostitute of Asian origin. He remarks: “Like everything else, the price of lust has gone up. Blame the government and those foreigners” (p. 87; italics added). A second-generation immigrant himself, he feels that with the wave of successive immigrants and rising unemployment, immigrant sex workers, both male and female, are prospering in Australia. He does not consider himself as a prostitute, as he only works part-time to save money to permanently run away, with his lover Joe, to some “other country.” The narrator’s silent interaction, in the beginning of the story, with an Anglo-Australian security guard shows not only racist but also homophobic behavior marking mainstream society. The security guard’s male gaze and scrutiny doubly marginalizes the narrator. In his desperation to escape from Australia and need for more money he murders one of his regular clients, Peter.

The presentation of a narrator who is a drug addict, homosexual and male pros-
Constitute shows Khan’s awareness of the changing landscape of core issues in South Asian-Australian diaspora writing, particularly related to second generations and the difficult and complex questions of morality and life choices. Adib Khan has taken up a subject that still most of the (“straight”) South Asian diaspora writers are not eager to engage with in Australia. As he is not bothered about the issue of morality in South Asian diasporic community and more interested in tracing conflicts inside an individual, Khan is able to explore the issue of sexuality and dislocation, two deep-rooted dimensions of social inequality. He provides marginal masculinity with a new dimension within the discourse of gender studies in South Asian-Australian diaspora.

In her story “Long Division” (1997) Indian-Australian novelist and playwright Suneeta Peres Da Costa chronicles a dysfunctional family from the perspective of a child, Mina. The young narrator Mina’s mother, who works in a hospital, is a maniac depressive and her father, though trying very hard to control it, is heart-broken by the necessity of being a househusband, with daily household duties and taking care of his three young daughters. Mina, by means of multiplication problem, tries to question the role of her father in the family. The question: “Cathy has six hens: each hen produces six more chickens: how many chickens will there be altogether?” Mina asks Mr. Heaney, the Mathematics teacher: Why aren’t “the roosters who sired the chickens included in the equation?” The teacher replies with emphasis, “those hens sat on eggs all day—don’t you go inquiring about the role of the roosters. Were the roosters there when the hens were hungry, when their backsides were sore?” (p. 6). The hen and rooster debate is directly a result of issues that relate to the role of wife/mother and husband/father in the household. Who is more important—wife/mother or husband/father? Mina thinks that in her family both the roles are being played by the father. He has been feminized by his responsibilities. As she notes:

These were the hands of a man that were clumsy but tender in their responsibility. When we were smaller and he used to bathe us, he would take special care with our infant digits and toes, terrified that they might come off in his hands. Now he was preparing the Woolworths burgers [...]. (Peres Da Costa, 1997, p. 5; italics added)

She further notes the changes that have occurred in her father because of his added responsibilities:

Late at night my father was crying—I had never heard him cry before. He was weeping and my uncle had said something as he took my father into his arms, something like, [...] it will bring you down. (Peres Da Costa, 1997, p. 7)

Mina also observes that her father’s body language belies him now. He once was

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7 Non-heterosexual behavior and identity is largely talked about or perceived as something that is culturally western, despite the existing classical literature, like Vatsayayana’s Kama Sutra and Kalyanamalla’s Ananga Ranga.

8 Suneeta Peres da Costa’s plays have won many awards including the prestigious Philip Parsons Young Playwrights Award (1996), the Ian Reed Foundation Prize for Radio Drama (1998), and the Sydney Theatre Company-ICI Young Playwrights’ Award.
a man [whose hands] gestured always to the greater strength of things, af-
firming the superstructure of our lives, but whose face frequently bore the
expression that belied him, that seemed to say he no longer wanted to live
beneath that strength. (Peres Da Costa, 1997, p. 7)

This, according to the narrator, is “the entire grammar of humiliation” and defeat
(p. 9). And in moments of despair, sorrow and defeat, the narrator wishes for her
mother “to die” (p. 8). Mina realizes the marginalized position that her father is in
because of her mother’s psychological problems. As the eldest daughter, she is con-
scious of her responsibilities toward the family and wants to help her father in car-
rying on his role as head of the house and as an anchor to their floating lives.

One cause of marginalization of men post-immigration in the new homeland is
the kind of work environment they get. It has been observed in various narratives
under study that mostly the immigrant men, who were working on higher posts
with good incentives in the homeland do not get the same opportunities (at the
level of designation or authority) in the hostland. Beryl T. Mitchell, daughter of a
fourth-generation tea-planting family in Sri Lanka, who emigrated to Australia with
her husband and two children in 1968, in her autobiographical narrative, “Tea,
Tytlers and Tribes” (1997), observes that one of their relatives, who “was now em-
ployed with the Sydney ‘Daily Mirror’ […] was slightly lower down the ladder” (p.
306) than at what he used to work with the same qualifications and experience in
Colombo, Sri Lanka. As an immigrant from Sri Lanka he is fluent in English and
well qualified for a higher position, but he is not given an opportunity to prove
himself at the workplace. Similarly, Beryl’s husband Doug who was working as a
tea plantation manager in Sri Lanka gets his “first job in an import/export firm” (p.
307). Beryl writes that when they bought their first three-bedroom house in Aus-
tralia, the husband realized the visible contrast in their status here and in Sri Lanka.
She writes: “It did not compare favorably even with our first home, when Doug
was a junior planter, in Ceylon, but it was a start in our new country and we loved
it” (p. 308). It is only much later and after a lot of struggle that Doug is able to start
his own line of business and their situation improves. Other planters and high level
administrators too, soon realized that to improve their situation they must start
their own businesses.

Van der Veer in his study has noted that the “larger forces of racism and dis-
crimination” are also one of the major causes that inflict “marginality” on South
poet and translator Sunil Govinnage’s “The Vanished Trails” (2005), feels margin-
alized and persecuted in Australia. He immigrated with his wife Sujatha and
daughter Nimali, from Canada to Australia in the hope that they will get good jobs
and a secure future for their daughter. But “despite the Canadian experience, Anura
could not secure a good job after he arrived in Australia” (p. 75). While his wife is
able to get a job as administrative assistant and his daughter gets admission in Ma-
rine Biology at Sydney University, it is only Anura who “is not being able to find
a job in this bloody clever country!” (p. 76). Anura feels that he is being turned into
a mere “househusband”—not in the *gharjawai* sense—in the domestic sphere in
Australia and thus resulting in his emasculation or masculine degradation or servi-

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*A gharjawai* is a man who lives in his wife’s house dependent on father-in-law’s in-
come (see also Chopra, 2009).
tude of female members of the family. He outrightly blames racism among Australian employers for his plight and missed opportunities. He also feels that in competition, Indian immigrants are taking over all the jobs because of their corrupt practices. Similar sentiments are reciprocated by Anura’s best friend, Siri, a poet who also feels marginalized by the attitude of white editors of magazines and journals in Australia to which he had sent his work for publication. Sometimes, he was not even notified by them about the reasons of his poems being rejected. Among the two Siri is still hopeful that a change will take place; Anura on the other hand is frustrated because of what he has gone through in life and largely because as an immigrant male he feels limited by his contribution toward his family. He notes:

I am the only person who missed out on everything! [...] I wanted to do Philosophy degree, but I’d not be able to find a job by studying Philosophy. I’m doing casual work in a computer assembly plant for my pocket money. If not for our mortgage, I’d have gone back to study philosophy. (p. 76)

With no money, no stable job, no future, and nowhere to go, Anura feels blocked from becoming a real man, a family man as he can’t get any work and therefore cannot contribute anything significant, financially, toward his traditional family responsibilities. He knows that in the South Asian family the greater authority is vested in the man as the head of the family and he therefore is responsible for decisions affecting the welfare of his family members. As the head of the family, he controls work and leisure, earnings and expenses, marriages, represents the family in the outside world—even in the families where the women have the freedom to education and right to work. In contrast, marriage in the West is, or is at least supposed to be a participatory relationship between husband and wife and, consequently, men and women share responsibilities in all aspects of life, including “onerous domestic chores” (Bhalla, 2008).

CONCLUSION:
RENEGOTIATING MARGINALITY AND MASculinity

[... ] the compulsion to explain, the inevitable positioning of yourself as deviant vis-à-vis the normal, remains—especially for those immigrants marked by visible difference. (Ang, 1994, p. 10)

One of the purposes of this paper has been to expand on the discourse of marginality and the politics of gendered location, what Linda McDowell calls “renegotiation of gender divisions” (1999, p. 2). South Asian diaspora writers are creating new ways of representing their individual and collective identities. Issues related to gender and construction of masculinity are part of, and can be seen lying at the centre of their work, preoccupations, and explorations.

Both men and women reinvent the past, and themselves, in the diasporic home, which is “presumed to be a utopian space” and which also “allows an immigrant to be his or her ethnic urself” (Rudrappa, 2002, p. 100). Yet migration has uneven repercussions on men and women. Migration’s dislocations often provide women with new opportunities to renegotiate power and recreate family patterns that are favorable to them (see Bhalla, 2008; Foner, 1997). Keya Ganguly notes that
men’s narratives highlight their individuality, their ability to succeed—to ‘make good’ (despite the odds)—and their autonomy of will. So what if the ‘good’ is also accompanied by racism and marginality, and with all sorts of ambivalences in self-identity. (1992, p. 41)

Marginality is not only, or even principally, a personal plight. Instead, it is predominantly a “social situation.” In this sense, “individuals are reflectors and constructors of a larger social reality” (Drew, 1987, p. 81). The narratives of diaspora men “embody their own specifications and contradictions” (Ganguly, 1992, p. 38). Immigration has provided men with financial security and a better standard of life for them and their families. But some immigrant men, as presented in the stories analyzed here, have been hit hard by the deterioration in the job market or feel underpaid in Australia when compared to their qualifications and skill or previous status in the homeland. Because of this situation many are unable to maintain stable relationships and some often feel excluded from family life and decision making processes, or are deprived of their traditional roles because of a lack of economic resources available to them. This arouses in men a feeling of marginality and reflects a worsened position where the existing patriarchal power relations are challenged in the new society.

As seen in the stories discussed the prominence of women’s role in the diaspora often decentres the diasporic male voice. The shared diasporic space emerges as a site of contestation. These struggles for space in the diaspora often result in immigrant men and women a need to shape new domestic practices and post-immigration identities. Keeping in mind the historical circumstances and alternating environments, the position of South Asian diasporic “marginal man” reflects their search for new identity and place in this world (see Hussain, 2005, p. 4).

In conclusion, the issues and dilemmas discussed in this paper, in the light of the social and theoretical background of South Asian diaspora in Australia, help us understand that men have been and continue to be represented in some of the stories as still negotiating their own sense of being and thus re-framing the discourse of “marginality.”

The stories highlight the differences in the role of women and men in their community living in Australia. Men are shown to subordinate the private and personal spheres to the public and national. Personal attachments, family obligations, and emotional dependency often make them feel marginalized and impotent in diasporic society and are perceived as potentially dangerous for self-identity.

Resistance to patriarchy has manifested itself in all spheres of life, including South Asian diaspora literature. Literary and sociological research on gender and sexuality in South Asia diaspora in Australia is centered on women’s rights, exploitation and domestic violence. The present paper on men and crisis in masculinity, through a study of short literary narratives, is a preliminary inroad into a much needed interdisciplinary research (using sociological and anthropological methodology) in addressing immigrant and diasporic experiences of conventional male subjectivity, masculinity and marginalization of men in South Asian Diaspora in Australia (see also Baas, 2010).

The exploration of masculinity is necessary in understanding the settlement process of South Asian diaspora in Australia because the roles of both men and women are valuable in maintaining and transmitting cultural traditions and values for the family and community. It must be reiterated here that as part of the same
diasporic family unit “the men tend to live in yesterday, the women in today, and the children in the future” (Darvishpour, 1999, p. 22). South Asian diasporic male identity in Australia needs serious investigation as a particular field of inquiry within masculine gender theory (see also Brewton, 2002)—as such a study may help us in a re-evaluation of gender roles and re-definition of what it means to be a man in a postcolonial, post-patriarchal, and globalized South Asian diasporic society.

REFERENCES


