

## **Eras Journal - Costa-Pinto, S. Abstract**

### **Abstract of Costa-Pinto, S. 'Constructing identity, exercising agency in the diaspora: Narratives of Indian women migrants in Melbourne.'**

Constructing identity in the diaspora can be fraught with dichotomy, division, and dissent. This paper draws on the migration narratives of Indian women in Melbourne to focus on how they exercise agency to create worthwhile lives for themselves and their families. The narratives suggest dynamic shifts in how the women present themselves to the migrant community as well as how they navigate the networks of mainstream Australian society. By exercising agency the women rationalize hardships, meet challenges, seize opportunities, and build on available support.

From the standpoint of being from the same cohort group I argue that the Indian woman migrant's identity in Melbourne is a fluid entity. Its construction is based on factors that emanate from who she is: middle-class, English-educated, Western-oriented. Other factors extend to where she comes from and where she now finds herself. These include issues of class and autonomy, race and colour, ethnicity and multiculturalism in India and in Melbourne. Still other factors reflect how the women wish to conduct their lives on a daily basis. All derive from intervening influences such as the impact of technology, the gendered nature of household activities and community expectations regarding socio-cultural reproduction.

I suggest that the Indian woman migrant uses negotiation, compromise and tolerance to be autonomous while fulfilling community expectations, flexible while actually being in control of her life, and self-reflexive while being continuously engaged with her environment.