INDIAN STUDENT MIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIA: ISSUES OF COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

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The established Indian Australian community mainly consists of people with professional occupations who came to Australia after 1970, and their Australian-born children. They come from the educated urban middle class in India, speak English fluently, and are doing well in Australia. In contrast, the wave of Indian students who arrived mainly after 2001 are more likely to come from rural backgrounds. Even though they may have bachelor degrees from India, they often have poor English. Many have enrolled in vocational courses in cookery and hairdressing in the hope, often realised, of gaining permanent residence. As is now well known a number of them have been subjected to robbery and violence, often racist, and some have died. This article explores this recent history and also draws on interview data. It uses this to outline some of the differences between the established community and the growing number of students, and to describe the efforts made by the two groups to bridge these differences.

INTRODUCTION

A long queue of mainly male Indian students and student migrants swells the congregation of the Blackburn Sikh Temple in Melbourne to 5,000 every Sunday. Every week there are new brides wearing the ritual red and white bangles. The 120,569 Indian international students comprise nearly one-third of the Indian community in Australia. Now 160 kilos of wheat flour is kneaded every Sunday to make chappatis for the langar, the ritual meal in the temple, compared to 70 kilos five years ago. Master Darshan Singh, Chairperson of the organisation that runs the Blackburn Sikh Temple, says that every week 10,000 people—and not all of them are Sikh—have a hot meal in the temple.[1] This coming together in the Sikh temple overlays the growing diversity within the Australian Sikh population in particular, and the Indian community in general.

In this paper we outline the recent racist attacks on Indian international students and student migrants. At the same time, the professional Indians who migrated with their families from 1970s onwards see Australia as a multicultural society. We argue that the social background and migration experiences of recent Indian international students and student migrants differ from those of the earlier migrants and their families. The migrants with professional occupations and their families came from metropolitan cities, had a good knowledge of English, and worked in their areas of expertise. The most recent Indian students and student migrants come most often from small towns and villages, have poor English, and are financially stressed because of the financial costs of migration. They have also been poorly served by the government's policy linking education, skilled labour and migration. These factors are contributing to Indian students becoming vulnerable to racism, particularly on the streets of Melbourne.

Thus, the Indian students who have come to Australia in recent years, many of them hoping to gain permanent visas when they complete their studies, are different from the professionals who migrated up to 40 years ago. There is a similar disconnect between the second generation Indian Australians, the children of these earlier migrants, and the new cohort of Indian international students. The second generation Indian Australians, who grew up in Australia, live with their parents or in their own homes. If they are working, they are in professional jobs. They report incidents of name-calling, but do not interpret these incidents as experiences of racism.

We conclude by examining the role that Indian religious organisations can play towards building greater connectedness between the Indian student migrants and the more established Indian Australian community. We detail the latter's efforts at addressing the problems of the Indian students and mentoring them to better fit into the wider Australian community. These community efforts can be one of the building blocks contributing to a more harmonious society.

In this paper, we draw on our open-ended interviews with 14 first generation established migrants and 16 second generation migrants of Indian origin on their migrant and family experiences and 11 interviews with Indian religious and community leaders. We supplement these interviews with census, immigration and educational data, media reports and research studies on the Indian community in Australia. This analysis also draws on Singh and Cabraal's participation in the Melbourne Sikh and Hindu Indian Australian communities respectively for over 20 years.

ATTACKS ON INDIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

In early 2010, the Indian media ran daily news of Indian international students being robbed, assaulted and killed in Australia, particularly in Melbourne. We know that 32 Indian students died in Australia between 2003 and 2009.[2] There are no precise figures about robberies and assaults. The Indian High Commission says 130 Indians have been attacked. Police say that 1,447 Indians were victims of reported crime in Victoria, in the year ending July 2008.[3]

As the attacks continue, there is an edginess in the wider Indian community, as there are reports of abuse and increased questions about safety.[4]

The Indian media have branded the attacks as racist. The Indian government visibly showed its displeasure, with the Indian High Commissioner accusing Victoria of being in a state of denial, and of being ineffective in its policing.[5] The initial stance of the Victorian and federal governments was to deny that these attacks were racist and to reiterate that Australia was a safe multicultural country. Their immediate focus was that these attacks would negatively affect the international education industry, believed to be worth $17.2 billion. In May 2009, Deputy Police Commissioner Kieran Walshe described these attacks as 'opportunistic' and said the Indian students were 'soft targets' because they were passive, travelled alone late at night and carried expensive gadgets.[6] In the same vein, police had earlier advised Indians not to speak loudly in their own languages in public places.[7]

As the attacks continued, in June 2009 Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, Simon Overland, admitted that some of the attacks on Indian students were 'clearly racist in motivation'.[8] He has had to keep reiterating the admission, for the initial government reactions to news of new attacks continued to be that the attacks were not racist.

It is now openly recognised by the federal government, the Victorian government, eminent Australians and parts of the Australian media that some of the attacks on Indian students in the last two years have been racist. The debate in Australia is moving towards the need to recognise there there are racist pockets and to demonstrate that these attacks will not be tolerated. General Peter Cosgrove, ex-Chief of the Australian Defence Force and Australian of the Year in 2001, noted in his Australia Day speech that Australians have shown much generosity and compassion in the face of troubles in our region. But he also accepted that there were 'pockets of racism' and that attacks on Indian students were becoming a 'litany of criminality'.[9] Australian Foreign

Minister Stephen Smith said on 9 February 2010 that:

> Recent contemptible attacks on Indian students and others of Indian origin in Australia have cast a long shadow, not only over our education links, but across our broader relationship and bilateral agenda. These attacks are inexcusable. Australia needs to take this seriously and we are taking it very seriously.[10]

Some Australian media commentators have addressed the continued denial of racism by the Victorian state government.[11] The debate has more directly entered the political arena in Victoria with the Leader of the Opposition attacking the state government for its ineffectiveness in stemming the violence.

The Victorian police have not released the crime statistics, saying that the data can be easily misinterpreted.[12] Hence there is no definitive analysis of the circumstances of the crimes, or the ethnicity of the victims or of the assailants. The police have said that most of the perpetrators are teenagers, and that alcohol and drug related violence is behind many of the attacks. There is speculation that the perpetrators come from existing migrant groups in the outer suburbs, people who are reacting to the large numbers of Indian students displacing them in housing and jobs.[13]

EDUCATION POLICY AND THE RAPID INCREASE OF INDIAN STUDENTS

In educational and police circles, it has been known for at least two years that trouble was brewing. The link between vocational training for occupations such as hairdressing and cookery, and the opportunity of gaining permanent residency, has led to the exponential increase in the numbers of Indian students in vocational courses. The numbers rose from 2,213 enrolments in 2002 to 79,173 in November 2009. In all, there were 120,569 Indian students in Australia in November 2009 compared with 11,280 in 2002. Of these 120,569 students 46.9 per cent were in Victoria.[14] The Indian vocational students sought permanent residence rather than education. At the same time, there was inadequate regulation of the standards of education that they were receiving, particularly in private vocational institutes. Unscrupulous agents and fraud further compounded the problems.[15] Moreover, inadequate safety and security have been a continuing problem for international students in general, and Indian students in particular, for several years.[16]

Another reason for the policy failure was that policy was focused solely on educational income and labour outcomes rather than on the motivations of the students and potential migrants. The lack of student-centredness in the educational/migration/skilled labour policy is reflected in the fact that key government organisations like the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and Australian Education International (AEI) do not have publicly available data on the socio-economic background of Indian international students or indeed of any other international students.

The policy linking education and migration was aimed at getting 'designer migrants'[17] to satisfy Australia's needs for a younger professional labour force at little cost. There are some important continuities and differences between the Indian international student cohort who arrived in Australia between 2001 and 2006 and those who arrived after 2006. Since 2001 permanent residence (PR) in Australia has been an important reason for seeking education in Australia. Migration is the main driver for those who plan their vocational education with a PR in mind.

AEI data cited above shows that in 2006 nearly two-thirds (65.2 per cent) of the Indian students were enrolled in higher education institutions. Baas (2006 and

2007) says, the students who enrolled in the larger universities came from the bigger Indian cities and had studied in English for most of their lives. But the students who enrolled in the cheaper, smaller and newer vocational colleges came from small towns and cities. They had not received most of their schooling in English.[18] In November 2009, the situation changed so that nearly two-thirds of the Indian students (65.7 per cent) were in vocational education.

Australian education for students who hoped to become migrants did not translate to professional jobs, even for those who came between 2001 and 2006. Of those who held degree level qualifications, only 22 per cent had found 'professional or managerial positions' by 2006.[19] Their unfamiliarity with Australian work culture contributed to a large percentage of recent Indian migrants with graduate degrees working below their skill level, thus lowering their potential household income. There was also a lack of fluency in English which was reflected in low scores on English language tests, even after their study in Australia.[20] The current batch of vocational students with qualifications in cookery, hairdressing or community welfare, plus those affected by the new requirements for employer sponsorship, will be even further away from professional and managerial jobs.

The mismatch between education, labour and migration policies and the students' needs could have been predicted because most of the Indian students were not seeking an education. Many of them already had university degrees from India. They tended to enrol in vocational course in haste; their urgency was due to a fear that policy changes would directly influence pathways to migration.[21] Families were not investing thousands of dollars for their children to become cooks, hairdressers or taxi drivers—occupations with little status in India. Despite India's rapid economic growth, the Indian international students and their families judged that opportunities overseas were better than what was available to them in their small towns and villages.[22] The family investment in education as a pathway to migration was based on expectations of future prosperity for the student migrant and for his or her family.

In the small towns and villages of Punjab, the excitement was not about the excellence of Australia's education, but the brick houses that have been built with the money sent home by migrants. In India, money flows from parents to children and from children to parents and other extended kin. It is this family boundary of money that has led to India receiving $US52 billion in remittances in 2008.[23] India received the largest amount of remittances, with China coming second with $US48.5 billion.[24] The fact that 75.5 per cent of Indian international students in August 2009 were male,[25] further places the issue of transnational family money at the forefront. This is because Indian patrilineal cultural norms of filial duty dictate that sons are responsible for the financial care of parents.[26]

A forthcoming narrowing of the list of occupations that will lead to permanent residence will give greater emphasis to professional courses and to employer sponsorship. This may tighten the link between educational and occupational outcomes. The requirements for the amount of money that an international student must bring with them for living expenses have also increased from $12,000 to $18,000 a year for a single student. The students' motivations, however, are not likely to change.

INDIAN STUDENTS AND THE WIDER INDIAN-AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY

Indians, numbering 234,720, were the tenth largest ethnic group in Australia according to ancestry in 2006.[27] If we add another 120,569 Indian students on temporary visas in Australia as of November 2009

plus 67,634 permanent settlers from India between 2006 and 2009,[28] the size of the community increases to more than 400,000. Indian students thus comprise nearly one-third of the Indian community in Australia. They have changed the linguistic, religious and occupational profile of the Indian Australian community.

Nearly half the Indian students in September 2009 came from the Punjab.[29] Though belonging to the upwardly-mobile middle class, few of these Indian students in small towns and villages would have studied in English. This is reflected in the increase in the number of Indian students doing English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) courses in Australia before they undertake vocational courses.[30] We do not know the religious background of the students, but it is likely that many from Punjab are Sikhs and Hindus. And as already noted in the last section, few of the recent Indian students are finding professional or managerial jobs.

The ancestry data (see Table 1) provide a picture of first, second and third generation Indians in Australia in 2001. Seventeen per cent of persons claiming Indian ancestry also claimed other ancestries, revealing the importance of multiple migrations from the Indian diaspora.

Table 2 shows the demographics of the India-born population in Australia, 2006. The numbers increased by 46.6 per cent between 2001 and 2006. Persons born in India are almost three times as likely as other Australians to have a Bachelor degree or above.[31] In 2006, 40.9 per cent of India-born persons were in professional or managerial occupations, compared with 32.4 per cent of those born in Australia.[32] It is also noteworthy that the religious profile of Indian Australians is very different from that in India. In 2006, 34 per cent of the people born in India who were living in Australia were Christian, compared to two per cent Christian in India in 2001.[33] The higher proportion of Christians in Australia reflects the migration of Anglo-Indians and Christians from Kerala.

The first Indians in Australia arrived in the first half of the 19th century, working as labourers, camel drivers and hawkers.[34] One of the most visible signs of this early Indian migration is the Sikh community engaged

Table 1: Persons with Indian Ancestry, 2001

Total number	156,581
Generations in Australia, per cent	
First generation	77.4
Second generation	20.7
Australian-born of Australian-born parents	2.0
Also stated another ancestry	17.1
Country of birth of persons claiming Indian ancestry, per cent[1]	
India	43
Australia	23
Fiji	18
Malaysia	3
South Africa	2
Singapore	2
England	2

Source: Australian Social Trends, 2003, Catalogue no. 4102.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Canberra, 2003 <www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/af5129cb50e07099ca2570eb0082e462!OpenDocument> retrieved 17 February 2010.

Note: [1] Birthplaces accounting for lower than two per cent of the ancestry group have not been included, therefore percentages do not total 100 per cent.

Table 2: Profile of people born in India, 2006 (excludes overseas visitors)

	Number	per cent
Number of persons born in India and living in Australia	147,106	100.0
Gender		
Males	81,189	55.2
Females	65,914	44.8
Total	147,103	100.0
Age (in years)		
0–19	16,572	11.3
20–29	38,033	25.9
30–39	30,762	20.9
40–49	24,024	16.3
50–59	16,148	11.0
60–69	11,186	7.6
70 and over	10,366	7.0
Total	147,091	100.0
State of usual residence		
New South Wales	57,156	38.9
Victoria	52,853	35.9
Queensland	10,974	7.5
South Australia	6,828	4.6
Western Australia	15,157	10.3
Tasmania	804	0.5
Northern Territory	588	0.4
Australian Capital Territory	2,738	1.9
Total (Other territories)	147,105	100.0
Year of arrival		
2000–2006	66,068	46.6
1990–1999	33,184	23.4
1980–1989	15,828	11.2
1979 or earlier	26,598	18.8
Total	141,678	100.0
Citizenship		
Australian	79,025	53.7
Not Australian	65,307	44.4
Not stated	2,775	1.9
Total	147,107	100.0
Ancestry (multi-response): Top Five		
Indian	112,590	79.6
English	16,345	11.6
Anglo-Indian	6,864	4.8
Punjabi	2,838	2.0
Irish	2,769	2.0
Religion		
Hinduism	64,968	44.4
Christianity	49,975	34.2
Islam	4,888	3.3
No religion	3,899	2.7
Not stated	3,082	2.1
Other religions	19,463	13.3
Total	146,275	100.0
Language spoken at home (Top Five)		
English	50,613	34.4
Hindi	29,302	19.9
Punjabi	15,091	10.3
Tamil	9,602	6.5
Gujarati	7,551	5.1

Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing: Media Releases and Fact Sheets, 2914.0.55.002, ABS, Canberra, 2007. '2006 Census ethnic media package: persons born in India', 27 June 2007.

in the banana industry in the Woolgoolga-Coffs Harbour area. In 2001, there were 731 of such persons. Some of their ancestors came from rural castes in Punjab as single males from British India to work as labourers.[35] In the early years, Punjabi Sikhs worked mainly in the cane fields in Queensland and Northern New South Wales. In the 1940s the Sikhs began working in the banana fields. But as Dusenbery[36] says, until the 1950s the Indians in Australia saw themselves as sojourners rather than settlers. With a shortage of labour developing during the Second World War, and the goodwill of some employers, the Sikh community in Woolgoolga—along with two Muslim families—were able to establish themselves as landowners working on sugar cane, bananas and later in blueberries. It was only in the 1960s that the men brought their families to Australia.

The number of Indians increased in the 1970s after the dismantling of the White Australia Policy. In 1971 there were only 28,656 India-born people in Australia.[37] Indian migrants with professional qualifications came to Australia from the 1970s as nuclear families. In time, other members of their extended families joined them.

Our interviews show that, despite some initial difficulty, those who came in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s gained work in their own professional fields, or had come with jobs in hand. Only one of the persons we interviewed found it more difficult than he had anticipated, for it took him two years to get a full-time job in his field. Women had a more difficult time getting jobs equivalent to the ones they had left behind, for this migration was most often initiated by the men. They also found themselves with child care responsibilities without the help of extended family or domestic help.

While the majority of Indian migrants from the 1970s and 1980s came from metropolitan and cosmopolitan backgrounds,[38] many in the group of recently-arrived private vocational students come from villages, small cities and towns. Indi Singh, a member of the Melbourne co-ordinating committee of Sikhs Helping Sikhs, an organisation facilitating the settlement of Sikh migrants, says: 'For more than one-third of the 150 people we have on our database, Melbourne is their first urban experience'.[39]

Unlike the earlier professional wave of Indian migration, Indian international students have invested heavily in migration. Baas's study of Indian university students in Melbourne in 2005 showed that Indian students took out loans of between A$15,000 and A$55,000 to cover education, travel and visa expenses. The family home or land was often mortgaged as guarantee for the loan. The understanding has been that the student would repay this loan by working in Australia.[40] The costs of living (including fees) have increased and can reach $42,000 a year.[41] From our interviews with Indian community leaders, we find that the current batch of students also take out loans to show they have the financial resources required for the issuance of student visas. They, however, hope to raise money towards their fees and living expenses by working in Australia, so that they do not have to use the loans.

Though the second generation of Indian Australians and Indian student migrants are young, the two groups have little in common. The single second generation Indian Australians we interviewed lived with their parents, unless their job or education dictated otherwise. The married ones lived in a house that they owned. All of them had a university degree, with one studying towards a further professional qualification. This was also true for two persons where the father had worked in a factory. It was a picture of a relatively sheltered life. Ten of the 16 second-generation participants had friends from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The friendship circle of the remaining six was a mix of different people from a South Asian background.

Fifteen of the 16 second-generation Indian Australians whom we interviewed, did not know a single Indian international student through study, work or social circles. Our participants, at times referred to the Indian students as 'FOB' meaning Fresh off the Boat, a derogatory term for recently arrived migrants. These stereotypes were affirmed by four of the seven women in this group. When we asked about Indian students, four related only negative encounters with Indian students at musical evenings, in supermarkets, taxis, and the streets of Melbourne and Adelaide. They objected to the sexist language used by some of the students who wrongly assumed that these modern looking young women did not understand Hindi or Punjabi.

At other times, it was a grating of different cultures concerning communication and privacy. A 20 to 24-year-old Indian Australian from a professional background says she feels uncomfortable around Indian male students. She says, they would either point and stare at her, or approach her and ask if she was Indian. She says it often happens when she is '... minding [her] own business at the train station and reading the paper. One of them will come up to you and say: "Excuse me. Are you from India?" And they are always with a big pack of their friends'.

INDIAN EXPERIENCES OF RACISM

In our interviews, migrants from professional backgrounds who came bringing their families from the 1970s onwards did not talk of overt racism. Their relatively easy journey to professional jobs, home ownership and material goods emphasised what they had accomplished. Their main support systems continued to be their families, with religious and community organisations playing a bigger role than they had in India. They saw Australia as a land of opportunity, where they had achieved much. Even the person who found a job in his field only after two years says: 'I love this country. I have learnt many things in Australia, as a person, as a professional. Right, it was very stressful for two or three years, but personally and professionally it has been very rewarding'.

The police and other related government departments have consulted with the Indian community leadership, people who are primarily drawn from this group of migrants with established professional backgrounds. The leaders interviewed in the media have differed in the detail of their public responses, but the main thrust of what they have been saying is that Australian society is not racist and that the Indian students need to connect more with the Australian community. Many of the community leaders have also spoken of the need for Indian students to better adapt to Australian culture, often citing the same issues as the police, such as talking loudly in Hindi or Punjabi in public places.[42]

The Indian international students' claims of racism would have been likely to have had a more sympathetic hearing in Woolgoolga, NSW. In the early years, if an Indian passed through a cane field, the field was known as 'black cane'. The growing prosperity of a visible minority went together with a long fight for its own religion and customs. It was as late as 1993 that Sikh men in this rural community gained the right to wear a turban in an RSL club, after taking the case to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal.[43]

Most second-generation Indian Australians have been silent in the public arena regarding attacks on Indian students. Our ongoing study of second-generation Indian Australians from professional backgrounds shows that they express sympathy saying that 'this should not happen to anybody'. They recognise that the international students often need to work at the least desirable jobs, often late at night, and that they

then have to travel to outer suburbs where the rents are cheaper. Like the established migrants of the first generation interviewed in the media they say that much of the violence can be attributed to the students being in the wrong place, at the wrong time, such as on public transport at night.

When the second generation look back at their experiences of growing up in Melbourne, the majority cannot point to violent racist episodes, and say that Australia is not a racist country. One man we interviewed mentions name-calling in school when they were called 'curry munchers' in high school. But later in university, when he was able to choose his own group, they called it the 'Curry Group'. He is reluctant to see the name-calling as racism, but sees it more as 'culturally based' differences. For another woman, aged 20 to 24, colour became an issue when she was 11. They had a buddy system at school where the older children were teamed up with younger children. She says her buddy was a five-year-old boy who did not want her because she was 'brown'. She came back and told her parents who said: 'You must not let these things get to you'. She says '... it hurt for I was only 11 myself'. Later in the evening, unexpectedly, the boy's parents arrived at their house with a card and a present and apologised on their son's behalf.

We know we did not get the whole story in all cases, for the mother of one of the second-generation Indians told us her son had had a horrendous time in school because of racist abuse and bullying. He himself had chosen to remain silent about this.

THE ROLE OF THE INDIAN–AUSTRALIAN RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS

Responsibility for addressing the attacks on the Indian students has to be widespread. The education providers and the government have a duty of care. And as is already happening, some sections of the Australian public are making it clear they are appalled by the growing violence and racism. The Indian religious organisations also have a particularly important role in addressing the problems faced by Indian students for they offer the comfort of common traditional values and a shared cultural framework. The police and the government are also in continuous consultation with them. Some of the more explosive incidents have religious significance, like the removal of turbans, the cutting of hair and arson at a Sikh temple. Moreover, it is crucial for continued harmony to bridge the differences amongst the different groups in the Indian community.

The Sikh Gurdwara (house of worship) in Blackburn, in Melbourne's east, is a community setting that has worked well for the students and new migrants. As nearly half the students are from Punjab, language is a common bond in the Gurdwara, irrespective of religion. The Gurdwara is open to people of all religions and Hindus often attend. It is the place where the largest numbers of students meet. The emphasis on common traditional values is one of the reasons why the Blackburn Sikh Temple—and no doubt the other Sikh Temples in Melbourne—has been a successful community place. It has emphasised the values of worship and selfless service in a place where people of every creed are welcome. It is a two-way relationship. The voluntary work of the students is indispensable in serving the ritual meal and cleaning up afterwards. Every week the congregation prays for the welfare of the students. The Gurdwara has set up a half-way house for the temporary accommodation of new Indian migrants and initiated a telephone help-line for parents from India in July 2009. In the first three weeks the temple received 500 calls, mainly from worried parents in India.

Other Sikh organisations have also taken the initiative to address the issues of community sustainability as they see them. The Victorian Government has granted

$50,000 to the Victorian Sikh Association (VSA). The VSA has a 21-year-old history of community engagement through sports and social events. Crucially, it has been able to involve younger and older Indian Australians from Malaysia, Singapore and India, particularly in their hockey and soccer teams. The VSA will co-ordinate and be accountable for the parts of the grant that also go to activities in the Blackburn Sikh Temple (including Sikhs Helping Sikhs) and the Sikh Welfare Council of Victoria.[44]

The Hare Krishna temple is also active in the pastoral care and mentoring of the Indian students. The temple provides accommodation for 60 to 70 students, plus others who live with members of the congregation. Food is provided in the temple every day. Members of the temple also help seek jobs for the students, particularly within their temple community. Recreational activities like ocean cruises and overnight trips away are subsidised. Perhaps the most important part of the relationship is the connection between the different groups of Indians. Nitindra Dindorkar, an initiate of the temple says, when he came to Melbourne as a graduate student in 1996, he was shown great kindness by the temple and the elders. 'They treated me like a son', he remembers. When he sees a new student come to the Temple, he and others will sit with him and serve him 'prasadam', the food served in the Temple. 'Sometimes, the student is in tears', he says, 'for this is the first time an Indian from the community has talked to him'.

Similar pastoral care is also shown to the 70 or so students who are part of the congregation of the Syrian Jacobite church in Melbourne. Ann Alexander, one of the founding members of the church established only four years ago, says the students are helped to find jobs, with the priest as their main contact point for comfort.

Nazeem Hussain, the Treasurer of the Islamic Council of Victoria, and a second-generation Bangladeshi Australian, says Indian students often contact the Council, for they see that Muslims 'are facing almost identical issues'. Hence the Council has been outspoken in its criticism of the level of aggression and the lack of police protection and has called for more stringent measures to be taken against racism. He thinks their more critical tone is also because of the presence of second-generation Australians in the Council.

Indian religious and community organisations are one of the powerful connecting points between the Indian students and the Indian–Australian community. However, the success of this community engagement depends on the established Indian Australians understanding that their own migrant experiences have been different from the experiences of the current waves of Indian students. It must also be said, that much also depends on the willingness of the Indian students to want to connect with both the Indian and wider Australian communities.

What is missing in these initiatives is the coming together of the Indian religious organisations in any joint advocacy against racism and demands for more stringent action. Many of these organisations are part of the consultative process with the police and sections of the government. But as Nazeem Hussain says, the danger is that being part of this consultative process can also dilute the criticism. When we talked to the 11 different community and religious representatives, it was clear they had not talked to each other to jointly work out a strategy to further assist the Indian students. There was also no evidence that the Indian organisations had connected with other ethnic groups that face similar discrimination. If the Indian organisations are to mentor Indian students to connect more wholeheartedly with the wider Australian community, it would be a potent example for them to reach out to other Australian groups to address the growing violence and racism on our streets.

These steps may not prevent mindless attacks like the one on a sleeping Sikh man at a bus stop in Epping at 12.00am in late October 2009. But these initiatives can act as bridges between the different groups within the Indian Australian community and with the wider Australian community.

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