

# THE ETHNICALLY DIVERSE WORKPLACE

Experience of Immigrant Indian  
Professionals in Australia



SUNAINA GOWAN

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# **The Ethnically Diverse Workplace: Experience of Immigrant Indian Professionals in Australia**

BY

**SUNAINA GOWAN**



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*This book is dedicated to*

*My love and my life Neeraj and Simran – you are the wind beneath my wings*

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# Abbreviations

AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CSAM	Citizenship's Continuous Survey of Australian Migrants
CSOL	Consolidated Sponsored Occupation List
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DIMIA	Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
ESB	English-speaking Background
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
NESB	Non-English-speaking Background
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OQU	Overseas Qualification Unit
PEP	Professional Experience Program
SAP	System and Applications Product
SIE	Self-initiated Expatriate
SOL	Skilled Occupation List
TAFE	Technical and Future Education
WWII	World War II

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## **About the Author**

Dr. Sunaina Gowan is a seasoned Higher Education academic who has worked in Education and Management for over 21 years. During this period, she has distinguished herself in higher education administration by serving in governance roles, promoting education, and working for humanitarian causes. She has taught a range of business and communication courses at several higher education institutions. Her research interests include student development and belonging, cultural diversity, environmental concerns, principles of responsible business and education, inclusiveness, and emotional labour. Her experience is in organisational capability development, multiliteracies pedagogies, internationalisation of education, sociocultural approaches to identity, and constructing sustainable operations.

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## Preface

I've always wanted to write a book. When I finally chose to pursue it, I had no idea it would lead me on a journey of personal highs and lows while writing about immigrants' experiences, particularly immigrant Indian professionals in Australia. I arrived in Australia in 2004, having left a comfortable life in Delhi, India, to join my husband, who had been accepted into a leading Business School in Sydney. Family and friends had questioned our choice to immigrate and leave behind our secure, well-paying careers for student life in Sydney. It was my idea to migrate. Growing up in Fargo, North Dakota, I had a strong yearning to return to 'western civilisation'. Why Australia, specifically? I'm still unsure. In retrospect, I believe I would have been happier returning to the society in which I grew up, and I often wonder what I would have done if I had returned to the United States. We didn't have a strong internet connection in India at the time, so information was limited. We decided to pack up and move here.

Do I regret my decision? Yes and no. Australia has been very kind to us. We established our professional career path quickly and have never looked back. Certainly, it's not been easy. I could connect to most of the protagonists' stories as I was writing this book. Today, I feel proud of the many awards and accolades I have received in my academic career over the years, happy to be a professional, a wife, and a proud mother to a daughter who has excelled in her Honours Program in Law. We, like any other immigrants, have worked hard to fulfil our aspirations of owning a home, having dogs to play with in the backyard, and forming a social network of friends who became family. As first-generation immigrants, my husband and I often reminisce about our past life in India, while our daughter politely shows interest in our happy memories. I often wonder how her life must be – caught between two cultures? We are mindful of this and hopefully have succeeded in giving her the freedom to flourish as a young Australian.

Have I personally experienced racism or prejudice in Australia? No, contrary to several of the book's respondents. Have I encountered the well-known glass and bamboo ceiling? Yes. Despite my degrees and job experience, I have often been passed over for top management positions by Anglo Saxon's. I have gone through what some of the respondents in this book have experienced and am slowly coming to terms with it. My fiery spirit and drive to prove what an ethnic immigrant woman can do has been smothered on several occasions. Is it because of my race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin? I am often left wondering.

I had to study local degrees and get local work experience before getting a role in higher education, like some of the stories in this book. Despite having extensive experience in my field and a degree in business administration from India, I knew I needed to upgrade my skills and qualifications if I wanted to compete in the local job market. Be ready for it and be prepared to put in a lot of hard work once you arrive. When you find yourself in a mostly white setting, you will feel strange and doubt your abilities. You will go through everyday emotional labour if you are not 'like them'. Do not get burned out. Persist and never second-guess yourself, and you will shine, since Indians are diligent workers who are loyal and trustworthy.

The growing body of research on skilled immigrant professionals has various underlying assumptions that produce a negative narrative. In the literature, skilled immigrants are described as being treated unfairly in the host country, losing their status, and struggling in the host job market. This book examines the careers of skilled immigrants as seen through the eyes of a group of 20 Indian professionals living and working in Australia. As a result of increased worker mobility and growing worldwide demand for highly trained personnel, skilled immigration has become a key component of local and international economies, especially Australia. Even though qualified immigrants who make a significant career change by relocating to a new country can bring comparative advantage for businesses, they are frequently excluded from the workforce. In the host country, their degrees, abilities, and experiences are generally perceived as lacking. Indeed, the evidence 'points to a prevalent perception of barriers and impediments', with skilled immigrants often having poor job prospects. The struggles of these immigrant Indian professionals as they strive to reconstruct their professions and lives in Australia are recounted in this book.

Without the 20 immigrant Indian professionals who shared their personal stories with me during my PhD journey as a qualitative researcher, this book would not have been possible. I would like to express my gratitude for their faith in me to portray their triumphs and tribulations as they navigate their lives in this beautiful country, they now call home. I also want to thank Emerald publications' Iram Satti, David Mulvaney, Sangeetha Rajan, and Dheebika Veerasamy for their patience and direction while I wrote this book. This book would not have been conceivable if my husband and daughter had not encouraged me to pursue my desire of publishing my own book. For all eternity, I love you both.