Simultaneously critiquing and celebrating their country, which they called ‘the land of plenty’ the Australian rock band ‘Men at Work’ in their 1981 hit single ‘Down Under’ sang: “Do you come from a land down under / Where women glow and men plunder?”

There are plenty of women who glow and men who plunder in The Permanent Resident, a collection of sixteen short stories, whose author Roanna Gonsalves seems to be asking: what is it like to live in a land of plenty for people coming from a country like India where multitudes live in poverty?

One thing her answer does not state but makes implicitly clear: Australia is not for the unskilled, illiterate poor from developing nations. However, there may be place for the educated middle classes with abilities that Australia’s officialdom may deem desirable. Still, getting into this country is no cakewalk as Gonsalves’ stories depict, and there are a lot of investments, financial as well as emotional, that a prospective emigrant has to make.

Gonsalves, herself a first-generation Australian immigrant from Mumbai, populates her book with characters who are mainly Indians, and most of whom are of Goan Roman Catholic descent, like the author. All of them want to acquire or have already acquired permanent resident status in Australia. They go to Australia in order to attain what they perceive will be a better life for themselves and their children.

Goa, now a popular tourist destination on India’s west coast, was until 1961 a Portuguese colony. It has a fairly large Catholic community, which has a long tradition of emigrating to greener pastures, and whose members at different periods in history have travelled and settled in different parts of the former Portuguese empire; in British India; in various former colonies of the British Empire, especially East Africa; and later in the Arabian Gulf nations. Lately, they have more often migrated to the United Kingdom, Canada, America and Australia.

Over the years, these Goans seem to have acquired the skills, attitudes and abilities to move across the borders of our globalised world. Their religion and their command of English make it easier for them to integrate in Christian majority
countries. However, this has often been at the cost of their native culture and the language of their forefathers, Konkani.

Yet the specificity of the fact that the immigrants in the stories happen to have ancestors belonging to the little state of Goa, is not the only, or even the main reason, why they stand out. Rather, it is because Gonsalves’ characters embody the experiences of any immigrant in any foreign land that their stories are special.

At another level, anyone can relate to these stories because they grapple with themes such as the stirrings of love, the challenges of marriage, racial harassment and sexual abuse, all of which can happen to immigrants anywhere in the world.

The title’s significance lies in the fact that when a non-citizen is given Australian permanent resident status, he or she can live, work and study without restriction in Australia. It also confers on the non-citizen social security benefits; public medical care; education, and ultimately citizenship conferral. Obviously, the latter is highly prized by aspiring immigrants.

Citizenship is so prized that, for instance, in ‘The Skit’, when Lynette, a budding writer who wishes to read her skit at a party of immigrants from Mumbai, where an Australian government official is expected to attend, she is quite firmly dissuaded from the idea. The skit is about the injustice and racism of Australian life and features an immigration official who seeks to sexually exploit an immigrant. But the immigrants at the party are petrified that the white Australian guest, who could wield influence when they apply for their own permanent resident visas, might get offended. The permanent resident status that these people yearn for is far too important to be risked by anybody’s literary pretensions. ‘The Skit’ illustrates the unequal power relationships that exist between the secure white Australian citizen and the submissive Indian immigrant.

‘Curry Muncher 2.0’ is another story that explores this unequal equation, as an Indian who is beaten up by Australian racist louts ultimately does not file a police complaint partly because the police don’t seem very responsive and partly because of the fear that a police record may somehow result in his losing out on a permanent resident visa. The story also illustrates the resentment and the racial hatred that is borne against newer immigrants of colour by some citizens, who ironically, were themselves immigrants not too many generations ago. However, while Gonsalves shows that traces of racism exist in Australia, she is also fair in pointing out that there are also kind people, such as the white taxi driver in the same story who goes out of his way to help the Indians who were attacked.

The dramatis personae in these stories are sharply etched by the author, whose sensibility is calibrated to register fine variations in the emotional states of her characters. In ‘Full Face’, there is a protagonist who “left Bombay to escape not only the mushroom cloud of a failed relationship, but also the swarming multitudes that had long outstripped the available loaves and fishes” (3). Her host, when she first gets to Australia, is Gloria, who she thought was an intellectual but slowly turns out to be “another Catholic Bombayite transplanted into Australia, still a sheep following a shepherd into a paradise that didn’t exist” (11). She observes the breaking up of Gloria’s marriage to Tony, while in a sub-plot also
featuring Indian immigrants, we are told of the tragedy of Gloria’s Indian hairdresser who gets murdered by her abusive husband. ‘Full Face’ begins as a tightly knit story of a ‘happy family’, but gradually one sees the lives of the main characters disintegrating as they find that ‘the quality of life’ which they chased by emigrating to Australia is not what they imagined it to be.

Most of the action in Gonsalves’ stories is shown, not told; hence, rather than being buttonholed by a teller of tall yarns, the reader is like a spectator to a drama enacted before her eyes. ‘Christmas 2012’ is one such story, where we observe the comedy of manners of a nuclear family with a domineering wife, until at the very end there is a sinister twist to the tale, as we discover the henpecked husband is sexually abusing his own daughter.

Gonsalves is as adept at creating plots where she can show relationships between couples being formed as she is at showing them being torn apart. In ‘Soccer Mum’, a divorced woman who accompanies her son to football coaching gets attracted to another boy’s parent, at the very moment her son seems to have lost interest in the game. On the other hand, ‘The Permanent Resident’, the title story which is placed last in the collection, is a story of a relationship gone sour for a couple. After their daughter dies in an accident in a swimming pool, there is nothing to stop them separating and going their own ways.

One of the pleasures of reading Gonsalves’ prose is her deft turn of phrase as well as her ability to create fresh metaphors such as “barcodes of sunlight fell through the half-open wooden venetian blinds . . . (117). She is deeply influenced by the language of the Bible as its imagery permeates her writing. Her feel for the form of the short story is also surefooted, and she often creates multiple layers of meaning in her stories: for instance, ‘The Teller in the Tale’, which reworks a folk tale collected by A. K. Ramanujan, does not merely tell the story of a rocky relationship between a mother and a daughter, but also exemplifies how cathartic the act of storytelling can be.

The only piece that seems out of place in this collection is the shortest: the incoherent two-page ‘First Person’ which a note says ‘is a scrambling of texts from selected websites’ to indicate how people process information about Australia’s indigenous aboriginal people. Neither in style nor in theme, does it have much relation with the rest of the book?

All said and done The Permanent Resident signals the arrival of a fresh, insightful and witty voice from Australia, and hopefully this will be the first of many more works from this talented writer.

Work Cited
is a collection of short stories by Jayanti Naik, an award-winning Konkani writer. He has also co-edited and translated stories in *Monsoon Winds: Stories from Goa* (2016).

**Roanna Gonsalves** came to Australia as an international student from India. She is the author of *The Permanent Resident*, an acclaimed collection of short fiction published by UWA Publishing in November 2016, and quickly found a place on a number of lists of must-read Australian fiction. According to the award-winning Australian writer Michelle De Kretser, *The Permanent Resident* is “a brilliant fashioning of newness in the Australian literary landscape”. Roanna has been called “a bold Australian voice” who “writes like a minx, full of mischief”, “like Jhumpa Lahiri but with a playful approach”.