

At the collection's conclusion, the editors' goal to challenge U.S. *national* approaches is achieved through the book's European-*international* approach as well as through many of the essays' overt challenge to accepted, even canonized, texts and U.S.-generated readings of Asian American literature.

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***Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City.* By Sunaina Maira.** Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002.

Sunaina Maira's *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City*, begins with the story of Radhika, a young woman at Hunter College in New York City, who struggles with the labels she has available to identify herself ethnically and culturally: American with an Indian cultural background, Indian American, and Indian, among others. Radhika, upon taking a course in ethnic studies, begins to reflect consciously on how her identity is shaped by factors of race, culture, gender, and class. Specifically, she addresses how her identity manifests itself in problematic and complex ways in her daily choices and life.

Radhika's story is representative of the focus that Maira's work takes. *Desis in the House* offers a study of South Asian second-generation children of post-1965 immigrants in New York City through analysis of the formations and developments in youth culture in New York City in the 1990s. The groundbreaking chapters that constitute the book include one that investigates constructions of ethnic identity through an examination of Indian "Bhangra Remix" music parties that gained popularity in metropolitan cities with a large South Asian youth and young adult population. Maira deftly combines her observations and interviews about the second generation club scene and the ethnically exclusive Bhangra Remix parties to complicate theories of second generation identity formation. In so doing, she illuminates the multiple meanings youth make of their cultural identity and shows how these meanings are acted out at social functions and gatherings. Maira argues that this negotiation of multiplicity is enacted through gendered performances of what she terms "cultural nostalgia" and "coolness" by second generation youth by the creation of music, fashion, and gendered behavior at various cultural gatherings. According to Maira, cultural nostalgia as both performance and feeling is influenced by childhood experiences of being seen as an outsider as well as by college experiences of being part of a large group (ethnic community) with similar feelings. Maira combines ethnographic research with

insights from theories of cultural anthropology and cultural studies in this engaging interdisciplinary study. This study distinctly furthers the work of ethnic, diaspora, and cultural studies by documenting and theorizing the second generation youth's understanding of their own position as complex participants and creators of cultural identity.

The first section of the book considers how Indian American youth insert themselves into a racialized landscape that is popularly conceived as black and white. Especially noteworthy here is Maira's discussion of Asian Indian masculinity and the relation of its expression to the appeal and the production of hip-hop performance and music. Maira points out that the move towards "machismo" is also a racialized project in "that the youth are consciously affiliating themselves (one way or the other) with the racial stratification of the binary poles of black or white" (66). This action may ultimately be viewed in two ways: 1) Asian Indians are mediators in the black/white binary; and/or, 2) youth identify as "youth of color" and reject the status quo of the racial system. Remix youth culture is characterized as constituted by "sampling sounds and styles of hip-hop and therefore is an overt expression of ethnicity" (67), which forms in response to the racially ambiguous position of Indians and Asian Americans in the dominant black/white paradigm of race relations. And yet, as Maira asserts, Bhangra Remix adapts black cultural forms in an exclusive ethnic *desi* space which is different from Indian cultural shows that feature "Indian" forms in an ethnic space (69). Thus Remix represents a third strategy that simultaneously distances youth from and yet also affiliates them with Black American culture in the process of enacting their own cultural and racialized experiences.

The central section of the book develops the foundations of Maira's theory of cultural nostalgia in relation to identity formation. She sets up the concept of cultural nostalgia as a series of hierarchies and ideologies of authenticity and morals of culture which are juxtaposed with American consumer images of culture, and then proceeds to explore the awareness of these conditions by and their impact on youth. The study showcases five examples of how cultural nostalgia operates through a discussion first, of how youth discuss their cultural identities at the Remix parties, and second, of their notions of "going back to India" and "coming out" as ethnic. Next, Maira explores the performance of nostalgia at cultural shows as well as participation in both secular and religious organizations at the national level. The segment on religion is particularly interesting and lays the groundwork for further work in this area.

Finally, Maira probes youth opinions relating to sexuality, dating, and notions of ethnic purity. She elaborates her theory of cultural nostalgia with a discussion

of how ethnic subjects are gendered and sexualized through parental influence on ideas of dating and career paths. Maira presents a particularly novel study of the conditions of masculinity that casts new light on how we conceptualize and understand young Indian men as well as Asian American men in general. Maira investigates the relationship between the trappings of masculinity and the exhibition of machismo through class status and the potential to join the economic elite in addition to standards of physical appearance. Following her lead, we can also re-evaluate how gender dynamics comment on the model minority myth and career aspirations for both female and male youth.

Maira's work also prompts us to study further how theories of authenticity and cultural purity are complicated in the case of mixed-race second-generation youth especially in terms of class, religion, and gender. *Desis in the House* provides us with a valuable model for analyzing the expression of cultural identity as a complex process of social acting that can be used to advance such work.

The conclusion of the book suggests that just as Gayatri Spivak theorizes "strategic essentialism," and Dorinne Kondo articulates the idea of "performative nostalgia," that perhaps in the wake of the current fad of the mass marketing of South Asia known as "Indo-chic," that Indian youth have the potential to combine these two strategies. Maira proposes that youth stage "strategic nostalgia" as a process that recognizes the inter-relation of "cool" (consumer appeal) and nostalgia. Such a conclusion invites us to ask, as bindis and henna and lunchboxes with Hindu deities become the fad, how might the material aspects of Indian culture end up further distancing South Asians as "foreign?" How does this inter-relation between "cool" and "nostalgia" relate to consumption practices in dominant culture and participation in a trans-national type of nostalgia?

*Desis in the House* is one of the few works that focus on Asian American youth and specifically on the second-generation Indian American experience in the late twentieth century. This significant work not only develops a new critical framework to discuss cultural identity in terms of class, gender, race, and religion, but also pushes us to expand our understanding of how materialism, consumerism, and popular culture affect Asian American and American traditions and experiences.

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