1

Introduction

Countries have no sympathy; only praises
amplified like distances for the newer
land: the housing gauntlets we had to enter,
stripped but with freedom!
Standards change like faith in a foreign country:

. . .

Did you pledge allegiance to lawns and fences,
better lives for us; the best western education?
Neighbors take the place of extended families,
freedom expires

From "A Better Life," by Diane Mehta (1996)[1]

New York City is laid out on a grid not just of cross-cutting streets and avenues but of intersecting stories of migration and cultural re-creation. The city has historically been a node of multiple diasporas, and today immigrants from South Asia[2] are increasingly visible on its streets, on its campuses, and in the drivers' seats of its taxicabs. While the wave of Indian immigrants who arrived in the late 1960s and 1970s and spread out to the suburbs of America were mainly professionals and graduate students, many of those who came to New York and New Jersey in the 1980s and 1990s tend to be less affluent and not so highly educated. Newsstand workers from Gujarat, India, who run kiosks on

sidewalks or in subways are now part of Manhattan's daily landscape, as are the men from North India and Pakistan who drive yellow cabs or the Bangladeshi waiters who work in Indian restaurants. South Asian immigrant labor has become a visible and integral part of New York City at the turn of the new century.

Less visible in the media, not to mention academic literature, are the children of these immigrants and of their more well-to-do compatriots who work in technology, finance, health, education, and other professions. The second generation of post-1965 Indian immigration began to come of age and to enter colleges and the workforce during the late 1980s and 1990s, but the stories of these Indian American adolescents and young adults have not yet been etched into the larger narratives of immigration, ethnicity, racialization, and youth cultures in the United States. These second-generation youth have collectively created a new popular culture, based on dance parties and music mixes, that is as much a part of New York—and also global—club culture as it is of a transnational South Asian public culture. They have crossed national boundaries to identify collectively as "desi," a colloquial term for someone "native" to South Asia and one that has taken hold among many second-generation youth in the diaspora of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, or even Indo-Caribbean, descent.

In the portrait of one young Indian American woman that follows, I begin to grapple with some of the questions raised by the experiences of second-generation youth in the 1990s and to explore what constitutes the "authentic" ethnic subject, subcultural codes of belonging and exclusion, and the resources that popular culture offers to second-generation youth. Layered into this discussion of the different social spaces that this young woman travels through—"Indian," "American," "local," "foreign," "college," "home"—is the dimension of time, for these experiences emerge at a particular historical moment and are linked to previous moments in the histories of Indian Americans. The temporal element cannot be separated from the spatial map that emerges in this story. A discussion of the historical contexts of Indian immigration to the United States is thus embedded in the narrative at points of intersection between individual and collective experiences, deliberately highlighting the dynamic meaning of history in self-making rather than separately presenting a "grand historical narrative" of Indian immigrant experiences (Marcus 1998, p. 14).

Radhika: Reflections of a "Fake Indian"

Radhika, a twenty-two-year-old woman who was studying at Hunter College when I met her in 1997, grew up in Jackson Heights, Queens. Hunter is a public institution that is part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system, and its extremely diverse student body traditionally draws the children of immigrant and working-class families—a tradition invoked during the heated debates and student protests over changes in CUNY's admission policy in the late 1990s. I met Radhika through a friend who was invited to speak in a course on multicultural literature that Radhika was taking at the time. Sitting in the bustling college cafeteria suffused with warm light and the noisy hum of conversations in several different languages, Radhika said, "When I first came to Hunter, I didn't identify myself as Indian, so [I felt] don't call me an Indian, don't associate me with an Indian, uh-uh, that just won't work!" Later, she remarked, "Today, I define myself as an American with an Indian cultural background, but don't ever call me [Indian] because I'm not Indian." Her insistence on positioning herself within the nation-state, as an "American," and her uneasiness about claiming an unqualified "Indian" identity, were strikingly different from the stance taken by most of the other youth I spoke to, who embraced the label "Indian" more eagerly than even a hyphenated "Indian American" identification. My conversation with Radhika coincided with a moment in her life when she was reframing her definition of what it meant to identify ethnically, as she remarked:

> When I took the . . . multicultural literature course with Professor J., that was the first course I'd taken in the college on any cultural environment and basically discussed the whole concept of identity and ethnicity . . . that's when it really hit me that so many people are really proud of who they are, and where they come from, if you look at the Spanish-speaking people, Latinos or however they really want to be defined, these people are very proud . . . and they have, the African Americans with their slavery, and the Latinos with being discriminated. . . . I mean, they have all that.

Two striking issues emerge from Radhika's reappraisal of ethnic identification. One is that the intellectual frameworks the course provided had helped her place her reluctance to identify as Indian within a comparative analysis of race politics and had encouraged her to reflect critically on the meaning of being Indian American. She had come

to a realization that ethnic identity need not be a totalizing identity and could be critically and selectively reconstructed: "The course basically helped me understand that there's no reason for me to be totally estranged from [my ethnic identity]. I may not like every aspect of it, and I don't have to like every aspect of it." This self-conscious, intellectual exploration of ethnic identity among college-age youth leads to what some call an "ethnic revival" in the second generation (Gans 1979; Roosens 1989). This revival is often spurred by formal programs of study, and it was an experience shared by most, if not all, of the Indian American youth to whom I spoke.

The second dimension of ethnic identity that Radhika pondered in the multicultural literature course, as if from a distance, was collective pride not just in one's "roots" but in a history of resistance to oppression centered on ethnicity. In pointing to the race consciousness of Latinos and African Americans, she was not simply turning to textbook portraits or political rhetoric about other communities of color, for she lived in a predominantly Latino area of Jackson Heights and had a multiethnic circle of friends. In Radhika's reflection lies almost a tinge of envy of—or a longing for—an ethnic identity that is associated with political defiance. In many ways, Radhika resonated with this view of ethnicity as a source of pride and resistance in the face of discrimination, perhaps because of the harassment and censure she associated with her own ethnic identity as a person of color *and* as an "unorthodox" Indian American. She was singled out for being Indian by her non-Indian peers as a child and criticized for being not Indian enough by her Indian American peers in college. Radhika was ambivalent about her Indian ancestry, and about ethnic labels in general if they served only as a mark of identity, for her experience underscored that these identities are often situationally constructed and unstable.

"Hindoos" and Early Labor Migration to the United States

Radhika's refusal to automatically adopt an ethnic label in part stemmed from the racial harassment she experienced as a child in a predominantly White school in Queens. She commented that "little kid jokes . . . can have a great impact on you as an individual," recalling that she was, and sometimes still is, "insulted . . . for the color of [her] skin": "When I walked on the streets and stuff like that, kids in

school buses—and even now I get that sometimes, not as much though as before—'Oh, Hindu! Hindus!' They only used to call me Hindu, and what really ticked me off is first, I'm not Hindu! I am *not* Hindu, I am a Christian."

Radhika's family are, in fact, Protestant Christians from the state of Maharashtra in western India, but the children Radhika remembers used "Hindu" as a derogatory word for someone who might well have been Catholic, Muslim, Jain, Buddhist, or Zoroastrian, given the diversity of religions practiced in India. Radhika pointed out, "So I'm not Hindu, that was number one. Second of all, even if I was Hindu, what makes me really . . . Hindu became sort of a negative connotation. . . . [I]t started from when I was growing up, and how I was treated in school, and although you're just being teased and stuff like that, it can have a really great influence on you."

The use of "Hindu" as a pejorative label for Indian Americans has historical antecedents in the United States and Canada and can be traced to the arrival of the first wave of Indian immigrants in Washington and, later, California in the early twentieth century. Those agricultural workers generally emigrated from rural areas in the Punjab, a region in North India and what is now Pakistan, and to a lesser extent from the United Provinces (now the state of Uttar Pradesh in North India), Bengal (East India), and Gujarat (West India) (Hess 1976). Many were initially lured by the advertisements of Canadian employers, particularly those in the railroads; recruiters were especially successful in attracting Punjabi Sikhs, a group that accounted for almost 90 percent of the pre-1920 emigrants to North America (Leonard 1992).[3] Their arrival evoked an ambivalent, if not racist response, and Sikh as well as Muslim labor migrants were caricatured as "Hindoos" by an ignorant public and media.

According to some historians, Indian laborers initially came as "sojourners" rather than as settlers; they lived frugally, their sole object being to return to India with their savings (Hess 1976; Leonard 1992). They were, however, met with hostility by Canadian residents who held "the tide of turbans" responsible for depressed wages. In 1907, a mob of white Canadians assaulted Indian immigrants in the town of Bellingham, Washington, beating them on the streets and dragging them out of streetcars. The eruption set off a series of anti-Indian riots in other towns; seven hundred Sikhs were driven out of Washington into British Columbia and California as fear of the "Hindoo invasion"

and new labor competition mounted among local residents (Daniels 1989; Takaki 1989b). Indians began moving to the United States after Canada legislated measures restricting Indian immigration; between 1907 and 1920, approximately sixty-four hundred Indian immigrants, primarily agricultural workers and a few small entrepreneurs, were admitted to the United States and settled on the West Coast (Hess 1976).

In the United States, however, Indian Americans soon became the newest Asian immigrant group to be targeted by the Asiatic Exclusion League, a San Francisco-based group that successfully pressured immigration officials to deny admission to Indian immigrants and that described "Hindus" as "enslaved, effeminate, caste-ridden and degraded" (Hess 1976, p. 162). In 1911, the U.S. Immigration Commission survey of Indian immigrants in California explicitly reflected this racist attitude in its statement that "the East Indians on the Pacific Coast are almost universally regarded as the least desirable race of immigrants thus far admitted to the United States" (Daniels 1989). In response to the pressures of the Asiatic Exclusion League to keep out this "new menace," an immigration restriction law in 1917 designated India one of the countries in the "Asiatic barred zone" from which immigration to the U.S. was prohibited. Between 1911 and 1920, the United States deported some seventeen hundred Indians, and fourteen hundred left voluntarily (Hing 1993), as hysteria over the "new Yellow Peril" mounted (Hess 1976; Takaki 1989a). Over the next twenty years, three thousand Indians returned to the subcontinent, including deportees; however, an equal number are estimated to have entered illegally through Mexico (Hess 1976).

I link Radhika's story to this historical context of migration and racial formation because the children who taunted her, like those who harassed other Indian American youth who grew up in the New York City area, were probably unaware of the long and problematic genealogy of the epithets they used. Obviously, the political and economic circumstances of Indian immigration have changed since the early twentieth-century Punjabi labor migration to the West Coast (although anti-immigrant sentiment has resurfaced there since Proposition 187 and subsequent restrictive measures passed in the 1990s). Nevertheless, for Radhika and others, these labels still convey a racially coded message to the new brown kids on the block that makes them feel unwelcome and leads them to devise ways to strategically manage their stigmatized ethnic identity in childhood, a move that has impor-

tant implications later in their lives and shapes the youth culture that is the focus of this book.

Post-1965 Immigration and Class Mobility

Radhika's parents were part of the late-1960s migration of technically skilled professionals and students from India that was propelled by the Immigration Act of 1965; her father was a computer programmer and her mother the supervisor of a word-processing pool. It was not until 1965, often considered a watershed year in U.S. immigration studies, that U.S. law revised the half-century-old policy of discrimination against Asian immigrants. The number of new immigrants from Asia, including from India and Pakistan, increased dramatically, giving rise to the second major wave of Indian immigration to the U.S.; the Indian American community expanded from approximately 50,000 before 1965 to 815,500 by 1990, and by 2000 had reached 1,687,765 (Fisher 1980; Hing 1993; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census). Moreover, new criteria for visas shaped the characteristics of post-1965 Indian immigrants and thus the socioeconomic background of many second-generation Indian Americans. The new immigration laws gave preferential treatment to professionals; hence the early wave of post-1965 Indian immigrants consisted of highly educated, skilled professionals who, in a relatively short time, acquired middle- to upper-middle-class status (Agarwal 1991; Helweg and Helweg 1990). On average, these "new immigrants" have had a relatively high median income (figures drawn from the 1990 U.S. Census range from $44,696 in 1989 to $49,309 in 1990, and recent reports suggest that the amount continues to rise) and are fluent in English, the result of their training in a postcolonial nation that has made English-language education available to the middle classes (Agarwal 1991; Hing 1993; Khagram, Desai, and Varughese 2001; Mazumdar 1995; Min 1995).

The image of Indian Americans—and of other Asian American groups—as a "model minority," however, is contingent on the class status and educational achievements of a privileged cohort of the overall immigrant group. The model minority image also may exacerbate the threat of competition in employment and education to older residents or citizens who may perceive resources in this country as "limited goods" (Suárez-Orozco 1995, p. 22). In a brutal example, economic frustration among unemployed laborers fanned racial antagonism and

South Asian–owned businesses in the "Little India" area of Lexington Avenue, Manhattan. (All photos not otherwise attributed are courtesy of the author.)

led to violent assaults against Indian Americans in Jersey City in 1987 (Misir 1996). The self-named "Dotbusters" gang went on a rampage against "dotheads," a derogatory term for Indians alluding to the bindi, an ornamental mark worn by some Indian women on their foreheads, pulling women's saris and leaving one man comatose and another beaten to death.[4] Radhika's parents, who are well-educated middle-class professionals, had fortunately never experienced such brutal racism which is often directed against those perceived as most vulnerable or those most visibly "in the line of fire," such as small business owners or service workers, particularly during an economic recession.

How the public imagines particular immigrant groups depends on particular struggles over class and constructions of race and citizenship that shape and sometimes constrain, the identity strategies that individual immigrants choose—strategies that are dialectically related to histories of arrival, entry, or exclusion. Notions of ethnic authenticity and performances of nostalgia, such as those that emerge in Radhika's narrative, always relate to the material experiences of immigrant communities at particular moments in time.

Interestingly, though Radhika was labeled "Hindu" on the streets of New York City, when she visited her parents' hometown in India she was identified as "American." Distinctions of style were used to mark her as a diasporic Indian, as Radhika observed: "Someone walking on the street with jeans and a T-shirt, I think you can automatically recognize it is an American!" Radhika acknowledged that some young people in her family's hometown, Poona (now called Pune), also wore jeans and T-shirts, but she commented: "They didn't dress the way I dressed, I mean, walking on the street with a men's T-shirt is [we both laugh], you know that person is not from India!" These stylistic markers and subtle gendered performances conveyed her national location without even the tell-tale signs of accent: "They didn't dress the way I dressed, I mean, walking on the street with a men's T-shirt is [we both laugh], you know that person is not from India!" (When I met her, Radhika was wearing an androgynous-looking T-shirt, jeans, and a baseball cap over her short, dark hair.) It is worth pondering that visual cues sufficiently coded to elicit the label "Hindu" in New York suggested "American" in Poona.

In addition to Radhika's early experience of racial harassment was a critique of certain social inequities that she associated with "Indian culture," both in the United States and in India, that contributed to her ambivalence about identifying as Indian. She was explicitly critical of Indian immigrants who emphasized upward social mobility, remarking that many seemed seduced by the "so-called American Dream." As a peer counselor at Hunter, Radhika saw the ways in which this ideology is negotiated daily in the decisions that Indian American youth struggle with in college as they try to enter fields that will realize their immigrant parents' aspirations to secure their foothold in the middle class. Most of these youth, according to Radhika, majored in biology, chemistry, math, and nursing, and some who came to her admitted that their parents' wishes heavily shaped their academic choices.

The second generation's attempts to work out their aspirations for social mobility are intertwined with the bifurcated economic trajectories of Indian immigrants entering the U.S. economy in the 1980s and 1990s. The entry of highly-educated, professional Indian immigrants has continued, but changes in immigration laws after 1965 also brought a third major wave of Indian immigrants that includes a substantial working- and lower-middle-class population as well as relatives of earlier immigrants who enter with family reunification visas, changing the presumed "model minority" profile of the Indian American community. Since 1983, more than twenty-five thousand Indian immigrants have entered the United States annually; in 1989, 85 percent of Indian immigrants entered under family reunification categories, while only 1 percent came with occupation-based visas (down from 18 percent in 1969) (Hing 1993). Together with Indian professionals who have turned to entrepreneurship, these later immigrants have created an Indian business community that owns motels and retail establishments (Khandelwal 1995). The material struggles of these often invisible Indian American challenge the model minority caricature: the 1990 U.S. Census found that 7.4 percent of Indian American families fall below the poverty line, slightly more than White American families (7 percent) (Hing 1993). The economic resources, class aspirations, and financial anxieties that second-generation youth inherit from their parents significantly influence their reworking of racial, ethnic, and gender ideologies as they move through adolescence.

Radhika did not seem to have a conflict with her parents over career choices and financial security; in contrast to the stereotypical Indian American career path of medicine or computer science, she was determined to be a "case social worker." Unlike some of her Indian American friends who were contemplating marriages and introductions to prospective spouses, Radhika was resolutely not interested in planning a domestic family life. She criticized what she saw as oppressive gender roles and double standards operating for men and women in Indian families, such as the practice of arranged marriage, as well as the class-based social divisions she perceived in middle-class households in India. Radhika's family, however, had a rather unconventional migration history, for her mother came to the United States before her father—a reversal of the usual gendered migration trajectory. Radhika's grandfather had migrated to the United States and was followed by his daughter, who then went back to India and got married. Technically,

this made Radhika a third-generation Indian American, a rare generational status in the relatively recent Indian American community on the East Coast.

For Radhika, this immigration history did not seem particularly remarkable, and she recounted the details of her family's journey rather vaguely, with broad temporal and spatial strokes. Of more interest to her were contemporary practices of parent-child relationships or employer–domestic servant interactions in Indian families. Some of her social critique may have been based on her exposure, on visits to India, to a particular slice of Indian middle-class life and may draw on the assumptions of a liberal "American" framework of social difference that leaves inequities of gender and labor in the United States unexposed. Radhika, however, was one of the few youth to whom I spoke who focused explicitly on political and economic issues and on social hierarchies in contemporary Indian society, rather than solely on traditional rituals and on cultural and linguistic competencies that were often viewed as signs of ethnic allegiance.

Ethnic Authenticity and Remix Youth Culture

Radhika's critical social perspective was another reason for her sense of alienation from Indian American youth who espoused a narrowly, if clearly, defined ethnic identity that was based on an uncritically bounded notion of Indian culture. An "authentic Indian" American, for her peers, was "someone who's proud of being Indian, who goes to all these Maharashtra Mandal [regional ethnic association] programs . . . hangs out with all these Indians"—all things Radhika did not do. She recalled, "Basically these couple of people that I've encountered have told me, 'Fake Indian! Why don't you be proud of your culture? You've got to be proud of your culture, why don't you watch Hindi movies and all this stuff?' It's like, it doesn't *interest* me, you know. They can't comprehend it, because what they've been told, what they've been brought up with . . . [is] if you have to be Indian, you gotta be proud of your culture."

Radhika's reflections point to a politics of ethnic authenticity that I found common among Indian American youth who assess "true" Indianness according to specific social and cultural criteria: watching Hindi films; speaking Indian languages, which Radhika did not do because she spoke only English at home; or going to "Indian parties" and

socializing with other Indian Americans, whereas Radhika's friends came from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. Underlying these cultural practices of second-generation youth was a collective nostalgia for India as a site of revered "tradition" and authentic identity.

One element of Indian American popular culture that did resonate with Radhika was bhangra remix music: Indian folk music mixed with American dance music and produced by Indian American deejays for dance parties held at clubs, restaurants, or college campuses. Radhika enjoyed bhangra remix because of its hybrid sensibility, although she had never attended any of the parties at which this music was played. The "Indian party scene" is a major component of Indian American youth culture in New York City and a significant context in which social networks are created and ethnic as well as racial and gender ideologies are produced and refashioned. Every weekend several parties are staged on college campuses and, more often, at clubs or restaurants in Manhattan rented by Indian party promoters and filled with droves of young South Asian Americans. Youth move to the beat of the latest remix—of bhangra but also Hindi film music—spun by Indian American deejays; they gather in cliques and couples, the women attired in slinky club wear (tight-fitting shirts and hip-hugger pants or miniskirts) and the men in hip-hop-inspired urban street fashion (the signature Tommy Hilfiger shirts and baggy pants), or in jackets and slacks if required. Many in the crowd are regulars on the party circuit, while others make occasional appearances.

These social events are almost exclusively attended by Indian and South Asian youth; a full-page article on this remix youth culture in the *New York Times* in 1996 noted that often "the only Black people are the security guards" (Sengupta 1996). This ethnically exclusive space reflects the social networks and college cliques among youth who participate in this "desi scene," and who belong to campus communities where those who are identified as "truly" Indian or South Asian are those who fraternize only with other South Asians. This subculture helps produce a notion of what it means to be "cool," for a young person in New York, that is (re)worked into the nostalgia for India yet not seamless with it. The role of remix music in the subculture of Indian parties is a critical site for analysis, opening up debates about reinventing ethnicities, performing gender roles, and enacting class aspirations.

Radhika's critique of ethnic authenticity rested partly on her reading national identity from style, as other youth do, and was not without its

Getting down on the dance floor at a "desi party." (Courtesy of Srinivas Kuruganti)

own contradictions and assessments of acceptable performances of "Indian" or "American" identity. Style, for her as for many youth, was a primary marker of gender-inflected nationality or ethnicity, as was social behavior. Her response to the "real Indians" was "Look at the way you act, the girls with all the makeup and jewelry, the way they wear their dresses, the short miniskirts and all of that, and what are they doing? They're just being American." In a sense, Radhika was countering others' critique of her inadequate Indianness with her own gendered and sexually coded notion of cultural authenticity. Radhika herself did not wear traditional Indian clothing; in fact, she refused to wear a sari despite her father's wish to photograph her in Indian garb. Yet she found problematic Indian American women's display of a sexually provocative style and feminine appearance that she viewed as

symbolically "American." Radhika's reflections on style and ethnicity are interesting for they demonstrate how female bodies are often used to represent national identity or ethnic loyalty, a gendered ideology that emerged in many of the narratives in this study and that powerfully conjoins notions of chastity and authenticity.

Radhika's story speaks eloquently to the role of boundaries marking insiders and outsiders in Indian American youth subcultures, and of the ways in which being Indian has always been defined against those who are not, ostensibly, truly Indian. She also noted the boundaries visible in campus social life *between* ethnic groups; for instance, even the cafeteria at Hunter College where we sat and talked was divided into ethnically specific clusters of students at different tables. This self-segregation along ethnic lines, with its underlying assumptions of ethnic belonging, made Radhika uneasy. She recalled her shock when a high school friend, on going to college, developed "a thick Indian accent" that Radhika had never heard her use before. Her friend, an Indian American woman, was now socializing only with other Indian Americans; when Radhika asked why, her friend explained that she felt "more comfortable" doing so and had "always been Indian." Radhika exclaimed, "I think she's not always been Indian, she didn't really focus on her Indian ethnicity." Her rejoinder points to the constructedness and dynamism of ethnic identity but also suggests that Indian American youth use certain markers of what it means to be Indian in order to contest one another's performances and narrations of ethnicity and to assert their own. The key questions that I address in this book are why the turn to ethnic identity and the emphasis on certain ideologies of Indianness become a common strategy for Indian American youth in the context of American college life, and, ultimately, how postmodern notions of shifting identifications are complicated by everyday practices of essentialization and boundary marking.

Radhika continued to resist ideologies of ethnic authenticity in college, despite her social isolation from her Indian American peers. She expressed pride in her marginalization rather than in ethnic solidarity through participation in popular culture practices and collective nostalgia: "All of them basically go to these Indian parties, watch Indian movies, all that stuff, I don't do any of that stuff! So to them, I'm abnormal, to them, I'm weird, to them, I'm an outsider. And I say, hey, I'm proud to be an outsider." Radhika is able to project a moment when she will arrive at a different articulation of her ethnic identity, for

she is "struggling" to reach a point when she will not want not to "diss" (disrespect) her "culture" and has already come "far" from a time when she refused to "be identified as an Indian or with an Indian background."

In addition to pointing to dynamic and conflictual discourses and practices of gender, racialization, and class and to the micropolitics of this Indian American youth subculture (Thornton 1996), Radhika's reflections raise a salient question: Why are possession of Indian language skills, socialization with other Indian Americans, and interest in Indian films considered *more* Indian than engagement with social and political issues relevant to contemporary India and to Indians in the diaspora? What are the social processes that enable a generational cohort of youth to view the desire for social change in India as a betrayal of identification as ethnic subjects, even as they participate daily in mainstream American social and economic life? Ideas of nation and ethnicity in this youth subculture are infused with nostalgia but also with complex and contradictory understandings of culture and power that are worked out through the discourse of ethnic identity as it has been shaped by 1990s multiculturalism. These rhetorical gestures—of ethnic authenticity, of gendered innocence or sexual waywardness, of ritualized coolness—are linked to the particular insertion of Indian Americans into the racial and class structures of the nation-state and into the transnational flows of labor, capital, and media images in the late twentieth century. It is this process, the negotiation of racial ideology and material dilemmas through gendered performances of "nostalgia" and "cool," that this book addresses.

The Study: An Indian American Youthscape

Radhika's story emerged from a study of second-generation Indian American adolescents that I conducted in New York City in 1996–1997. The aim of the project was to learn how second-generation youth negotiate the politics of ethnicity, race, and gender and recreate cultural beliefs and practices in their daily lives, using the resources of youth popular culture and of campus life. (See Appendix for details about the research methods.) The questions I ask here are: What are the meanings of this youth culture in the lives of Indian American youth? How do Indian American youth negotiate simultaneously the collective nostalgia for India (re)created by their parents and

the coming-of-age rituals of American youth culture? The book demonstrates that Indian American youth culture is a site where the vibes of "cool" are mixed with the strains of collective nostalgia, and where second-generation youth perform a deep ambivalence toward ethnicity and nationality, a tension that has often been downplayed in readings of youth subcultures and popular "resistance." The space this youth culture offers is not a purely hybrid or "third" space (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Bhabha 1990; 1994, p. 38) but is always embedded in the dialectic between the presumably divergent pathways of assimilation and ethnic authenticity. I found that this tension between coolness and nostalgia was most visibly enacted through paradoxes in the discourse and practice of ethnic authenticity, particularly those imbricated with ideologies of gender. The performance of authentic Indianness reveals the ways in which the surveillance of ethnic purity is inherently about the social control of purportedly transgressive sexualities.

This book focuses on a rapidly growing Asian immigrant community at a moment when it attained a significant presence in New York City. The most sizable wave of Indian immigrants, except for the pioneering agricultural communities established in the early twentieth century by Punjabi Sikhs[5] in California (Gibson 1988; Leonard 1992), came to the United States beginning in the mid-1960s. The Immigration Act of 1965 increased the visa quotas for Asian immigrants, particularly for technically skilled professionals and, in lesser numbers, for relatives of immigrants. Indian immigration increased rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s, with 1996 marking the second highest level in U.S. history, making India at the time the country with the third largest number of new immigrants after Mexico and the Philippines (*Little India Business Directory* 1997, p. 62).

The children of post-1965 Indian (or, for that matter, South Asian) immigrants have hardly been studied; while some studies have focused on older second-generation Indian Americans—for instance, in California and the Chicago area (Agarwal 1991; Gibson 1988)—and others have looked broadly at the Indian immigrant community in New York City (Fisher 1980; Lessinger 1995; Mukhi 2000), no research has focused on Indian American or South Asian American youth in New York City. Yet New York is home to the largest Indian American population of any city in the United States and, according to the 1990 census, had 94,590 Indian residents—a conservative estimate,

according to some—out of a total population of 815,447 Indian Americans (Khandelwal 1995, p. 181; Lessinger 1995, p. 17); in the year 2000, the Indian population in New York City had officially reached 170,899, making it the second largest Asian American group in the city after Chinese Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census). In 1995, the year before I did this study, New York City was still the most popular destination for Indian immigrants, with 3,638 out of 34,748 documented new immigrants choosing to settle in the Big Apple that year, according to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The experiences of Indian American youth are inadequately represented not only in academic research but also in popular literature and the mass media. Nevertheless, a specifically youth-focused Indian American popular culture in New York and in urban areas across the United States slowly began to take its place in the repertoire of youth culture practices in the late 1990s mediascape, or perhaps even "youthscape," to bowdlerize a term coined by Arjun Appadurai (1996). Indian American youth culture brings to light the often hidden contradictions of citizenship and belonging, work and leisure, multiculturalism and education, that second-generation youth manage daily, and it points to a larger, material and historical context that structures this youthscape.

I use the term *second generation* to refer to the children of immigrants who were born in the United States or who arrived here before the age of seven or eight.[6] This cutoff age may seem somewhat arbitrary, for identification as "immigrant" or "second-generation" involves subjective dimensions of belonging and displacement; however, the rationale for such a categorization is that second-generation Americans "come of age" in the United States, that is, share in the rites of passage of American high school and have socialization experiences very different from those who come here as young adults.[7] As the Indian American population becomes older and sees the emergence of growing third and later generations, an emphasis on generational categories will likely give way to emphases on how different communities are positioned in, and reconstituted by, local cultural and political contexts. While undoubtedly important in shaping very different kinds of experiences within the community and nation, generational boundaries are often overdrawn in the immigrant and mainstream media as well as in community forums, particularly in belabored discussions of the "generation gap," which recycle familiar tropes of conflicts between immigrant parents and their children. As Lisa Lowe (1996, p. 63) points out,

"The reduction of cultural politics of racialized ethnic groups . . . to first-generation/second-generation struggles displaces social differences into a privatized familial opposition, . . . denying . . . immigrant histories of material exclusion and differentiation." While the family context is an important crucible for shaping future choices (Agarwal 1991; Kibria 1993; Rumbaut 1994; Serafica 1990), it is also important to pay attention to the cultural forms and narratives that youth create in order to make meaning of their worlds. This study deliberately highlights the experiences of youth themselves, rather than their relationships with their parents, in order to move away from this often pathologized focus on "intergenerational conflict" in immigrant families and popular psychology and to give long overdue attention to the subjectivities and cultural practices of second-generation youth.

"Stripped but with Freedom!": Citizenship, Pan-Ethnicity, and Class Mobility

In general, not enough critical attention has been paid to Asian American youth, and when they do surface in the mass media, it is often as either "nerdy" model minority students or dangerous gang-bangers. Indian American youth have tended to be subsumed under the former caricature, but the economic shifts in the national and global economy during the last two decades of the twentieth century, together with an increase in "knowledge-intensive," highly skilled professional and service jobs that require specialized training and educational credentials, have produced an hourglass labor market in the United States that is divided between high-paying, white-collar jobs and low-wage, often part-time, low-skill jobs. Second-generation youth can no longer expect to follow the socioeconomic trajectories of previous generations of immigrant families, who entered the middle class by building on their parents' financial capital (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Perlman and Waldinger 1997). The future lives of Indian American youth will likely take different routes than those of earlier second-generation Americans, not just because of the conditions created by the post-Fordist economy but also because Indian Americans and other immigrant communities of color experience different struggles over race and citizenship from those of their White predecessors.

Indian Americans are the fourth largest ethnic community in the Asian American population, comprising 11.8 percent of the total Asian

immigrant population in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau 1993). Yet the relationship of Indian Americans and South Asian Americans to the pan-Asian umbrella is sometimes marked by an ambivalence—among other Asian Americans but also among Indian Americans themselves—about their place in this coalition (Dave et al. 2000; Shankar and Srikanth, 1998). Like other South and Southeast Asian communities, such as Filipino and Vietnamese Americans, Indian Americans' entry into Asian American ethnic identity politics in the 1990s differed from that of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the groups who have long been most closely identified with the pan-Asian category forged by the Asian American movement of that era. Some of this dissonance in the experiences of Asian immigrant groups, as well as strategic alliance building among them, is enacted in community organizations, in advocacy groups, and on college campuses, where Asian American youth confront head on, and also intervene in, institutional ethnic identity politics.

A focus on second-generation Indian Americans is crucial to understanding how Indian Americans and other new immigrant communities will be inserted into the economic and social fabric of the nation-state. Will these young people fulfill their immigrant parents' class aspirations and "pledge allegiance to lawns and fences," or will they come to see themselves as "stripped but with freedom," as Diane Mehta (in Maira and Srikanth 1996) poetically comments on the ironies of upward mobility and cultural displacement? The paths followed by individuals in the second generation who are on the threshold of "adulthood"—a cultural formation associated with occupational/career decisions, creation of some sort of family unit or independent household, political participation, and involvement in civic institutions—will clearly have an impact on the future of the larger ethnic and pan-ethnic community. As Alejandro Portes (1997, p. 814) observes in his call for research focusing on second-generation experiences:

> The case for the second generation as a "strategic research site" is based on two features. First, the long-term effects of immigration for the host society depend less on the fate of first generation immigrants than on their descendants. Patterns of adaptation of the first generation set the stage for what is to come, but issues such as the continuing dominance of English, the growth of a welfare dependent population, the resilience or disappearance of cultur-

> ally distinct ethnic enclaves, and the decline or growth of ethnic intermarriages will be decided among its children or grandchildren.

This research is crucial in an era in which the decline of the welfare state and dependence on cheap immigrant and female labor lurk behind the rhetoric of the unassimilability of the new, nonwhite immigrants (Suárez-Orozco 1995). The experiences of second-generation youth—their educational trajectories, leisure practices, and language choices—were often a lightning rod in the charged immigration debates sparked by the nativist resurgence during the 1980s and 1990s, arising, for example, in confrontations over bilingual education and in moral panics about youth violence.

In the turn-of-the-millennium era of late capitalism, the intensified global circulation of people and goods gives a new edge to U.S. debates about national identity and national "character" that has pressing political and economic implications for immigrant communities. Much of the nativist anxiety about immigration has centered on heightened fear of labor competition in a post-Fordist economy marked by a shrinking number of stable blue-collar jobs and by increased reliance on "flexible" immigrant labor, sometimes undocumented, by corporations and smaller businesses that wish to keep their wage scales at rock bottom (Mollenkopf and Castells 1991; Harvey 1989). The public discourse about domestic labor and cultural cohesion being under siege by a "deluge" of "aliens" often constructs immigrants as threatening "others" and betrays the anxiety about demographic and cultural changes that fueled the anti-immigrant backlash of the 1990s in the United States as well as in Europe (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995).

The underlying material context of contemporary immigration, particularly the United States' economic dependence on the "new immigrants" from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, is often ignored in mass media discussions about the newest newcomers, with public debates framing issues in terms of cultural citizenship and national patriotism. Throughout the 1990s, questions about the national—and transnational—allegiances of Asian Americans and debates about their rights and representations repeatedly surfaced in the national media, from the Democratic fundraising campaign involving Asian American lobbyists and donors that plagued Bill Clinton and Al Gore during their respective presidential tenure and campaign, to the infamous indictment of Wen Ho Lee in 2000 on charges of spying for China, despite highly questionable evidence (Scheer 2000). Citizen-