Newsday

Indians, Pakistanis Clash at Parade

By Shankar Vedantam. STAFF WRITER| Aug 16, 1993
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One man was shot and at least one other injured at the city's Indian Day parade yesterday, when those celebrating the country's Independence Day clashed with youths waving the Pakistani flag. Police chased and arrested Mohammed Ashraf, 19, of Brooklyn, who a police source said is Pakistani. The victim, Gurmukh Singh, 23, was in critical but stable condition last night in St. Vincent's Hospital with wounds to the head, mouth and back. Singh is Indian, according to the source. "The victim was there to pick up girls, not harass the men," the source said. Thousands of brightly costumed men and women had sung and danced their way down Lexington Avenue to Madison Square on East 25th Street. About 4:30 p.m. a small group of youths waving a Pakistani flag arrived shouting pro-Pakistani slogans. There have been decades of political tensions between India and Pakistan. The Pakistani group exchanged angry words with Indian men in the crowd. The parade-goers, many of whom were women and small children, began to get restless and move away. Shots were fired and a man fell. Some witnesses counted three shots, others four. "Just like that - one, two, three," Tejas Bhatt said Enraged, a band of Indian youths chased the Pakistani group. "We beat them up two blocks from here," Manish Amin said. "We ran after them and finished them up."

Newsday

Shooting Angers Indians, Pakistanis

By Shankar Vedantam. STAFF WRITER| Aug 17, 1993

NY Newsday – Long Island, N.Y. | Combined editions | Section: News | Page: 27 | Text Word Count: 394

As 23-year-old Gurmukh Singh fought for his life yesterday at St. Vincent's Hospital and Medical Center of New York after Sunday's shooting at the India Day Parade, both Indian and Pakistani leaders condemned the incident. Tempers continued to run high yesterday, at least among some leaders in the Indian community, but both sides agreed that the shooting was sparked by a group of youths waving the Pakistani flag after the parade. "No mature person will ever do such a stupid thing," said Faiz Babar, a Pakistani community leader and the president of Third World Broadcasting Television Network, of the Pakistani youths waving their flag last Sunday. "They were showing off. It's like going to the 50th floor and wanting to jump - you know what's going to happen to you," he said. Police say that Mohammed Ashraf, 19, a Pakistani national living in Brooklyn, shot Queens resident Singh, an Indian, after Singh had earlier tried to prevent him from harassing women at the parade. Singh suffered gunshot wounds to the head, mouth and back and is in critical condition. Indian leaders dismissed the notion that the youths waving the flag were exercising their freedom of expression. "It's like if there's a Jewish congregation and somebody raises the swastika," said Dr. Pravin Pandhi, vice president of the National Federation of Indian Associations. The trouble erupted at a cultural festival on Madison and East 25th Street shortly after the parade, which celebrated India's independence day, when a group of youths waved the Pakistani flag and shouted slogans. Local Indian leaders criticized police for failing to "drive away" the Pakistani flag-wavers, as Ramesh Patel, president of the National Federation of Indian Associations put it. Patel also charged that the disturbance was premeditated by politically motivated groups. "Indians are mad as hell," he said. "The community is not ready to tolerate this nonsense any more." Pir Zada, founder of the Pakistan Federation of America, said that the Pakistan community felt very sorry the events took place and that it could not have been planned. There has been political tension between the two neighboring countries since their common independence from Britain in 1947. A bloody partition and three border wars later, simmering tensions often erupt into border clashes. The repercussions echo here. Some Indians and Pakistanis here said that their relationships are influenced by events halfway around the world.

A REDIFF PUBLICATION
India Abroad

Thousands Watch a Colorful Event

India Abroad | August 25, 1995

Several thousand Indians lined the streets on a warm afternoon on Aug. 20 to watch a procession of gaily decorated floats, some with youngsters jumping to the beat of raucous Hindi film music, to celebrate India's Independence Day. Led by the Blue Jays of Long Island, a pipes-and-drums band, and a phalanx of luminaries, including actress Rakhee Gulzar, former tennis star Vijay Amritraj, New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Ambassador Siddhartha Shanker Ray, Rep. Benjamin Gillman, and Peter Mathews, who ran unsuccessfully for election to the U. S. Congress, the parade marched down a fenced off Madison Avenue from 46th street to 26th street, where it dispersed for a cultural program. Some 200 participants from an array of tristate Indian organizations and business, represented by 16 floats, took part in the parade, said to be the largest and most colorful in any American city and the strongest cultural statement by the Indian community in the United States. Young girls dressed in traditional Indian clothes representing a number of Indian states performed dances on the floats. The parade, the 15th such event in New York City to be organized by the Federation of Indian Associations, was said to be as well attended as last year's even though it had a smaller number of floats and fewer important personalities. As policemen on foot and on horseback cleared the road, pushing away press photographers and reporters, the Mayor and other luminaries, accompanied by H.R. Shahm a prominent businessman, the FIA president Nitin Vora, and his wife, marched along holding Indian and American flags, and waving to the crowd. The processionists represented various facets of Indian American life - from the achievements of talented schoolchildren to the entrepreneurial success of the King of Spices, Inc. to the flavors of Indian cooking to the vigor of the Gujarati Samaj, Brahman Samaj and the Hare Krishan movement. Also sought to be depicted was India's secular character. The music, however, was a mixture of Indian pop culture (foot-tapping songs such as "Tere Angeney Mein" and more recent hits that had even Ambassador Ray swaying to their tune), patriotic songs (from old Raj Kapoor movies) and devotional hymns (a lilting Hare Rama, Hare Krishna chant). The dignitaries marched to the review stand on 29th Street, where the Mayor read out his proclamation declaring Aug. 20 India Day in the city. A similar proclamation by the Mayor of Jersey City, Bret Schundler, was also read out on his behalf by a representative. After a succession of speeches by Giuliani, Ambassador Ray, Congressman Gillman, Rakhee, Vijay Amritraj, and Consul General Gajanan Wakankar, the crowd heard a brief speech by Gurmukh Singh, the young Indian who was shot by a Pakistani during an earlier India Day parade. Thanking everyone for their help during his days in hospital, Singh said: "If need be, I will stand up for India again." The crowd cheered, A thousand colorful balloons were released in the air. "What is difficult to do in India is being done here," exclaimed a wide-eyed Rakhee, the grand marshal of the parade, as she stepped off the review stand after a round of speeches by the dignitaries. In a press conference on the Indian Day parade earlier, she had referred to the security threat that hampered Independence Day celebrations in India. Asked what she thought of her admirers, the actress replied: "That isn't important. What's important is that so many Indian have gathered here on a happy occasion." Speaking with India Abroad, Ambassador Ray said that an Indian student was once asked "why, after being in the U. S. for so many years, you continue to be so passionately fond of India? Her reply was `You can take me away from India but you can never take India away from me.'" He explained that the parade was an expression of this sentiment. Peter Mathews said he found the parade "exhilarating," adding that "India has another 500 years to go. This is only its 48th year. And as people like me are running for the U.S. Congress, we can help our motherland even more." The event ended with song-and-dance performances at 23rd Street and Madison Avenue.

https://www.nytimes.com/1996/06/30/nyregion/to-be-young-indian-and-hip.html
The New York Times

To Be Young, Indian and Hip

By SOMINI SENGUPTA | June 30, 1996

JAY DABHI, 20, steps out of the dim red deejay booth, lights a Newport and scans his territory, the main floor of Planet 28 in Chelsea. It is just after midnight on a warm spring Friday, and the discotheque is thick with smoke and attitude. Over to the right, in front of the mirrored wall, an ex-girlfriend of Jay's in a retro halter, puckering her red lips around a red straw, tries not to gaze at herself. On the sidelines, young men sporting carefully pruned goatees stand in crescent-shaped clusters. The house is packed with young Indians and Pakistanis in satin mini-skirts and perfectly slack blue jeans that hang just-so over their sneakers. This is a strictly "desi" crowd, desi being the Hindi word for "homeboy" or "homegirl." It seems as if everybody at Planet 28 is checking out everybody else. There is a crisp post-adolescent tension in the air. A bad-boy bravado. Jay, known in this scene as deejay Lil Jay, can taste it. "Gonna be a fight," he says from his perch. "Too many guys." He turns around, climbs over a man in dark glasses who seems to have passed out on a worn couch and returns to his booth. He scratches for a few bars, throws in the Fugees and then, some Junior Mafia, its "get muh-ney" chorus punctuated by a mystery voice that cries "India" on the downbeat, over and over like a mantra. The dancing masses nod in unison. Later, Lil Jay tosses a few surprises -- a Hindi song from the popular Bombay movie, "Disco Dancer" or a perennial "bhangra" favorite, a folk song from the wheat fields of Punjab, laid over a frenzied house track. A distinctly South Asian youth culture, rooted in hip-hop and Hindi pop, is flourishing in New York City, as children of the growing numbers of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent come of age. Lil Jay, along with the dozens of deejays and party promoters, is one of its creators and caretakers. The fruits of their subculture can be found this night at Planet 28 -- one of several clubs and restaurants rented out by party promoters and packed by crowds of South Asian teen-agers and college students. It can be found in the hip-hop groove Lil Jay mixes with a classic Hindi ballad, in the rumble that breaks out at Planet 28 between young boys in informal cliques, in the tapes and CD's produced in local studios and basements and sold in Jackson Heights music shops, in the culture clash between young South Asians looking to loosen the strictures of their subcontinental parents. Although this group is neither old enough nor has been around long enough to make an impact on the city's cultural mainstream, Jay and his friends offer a window into a new generation's acculturation. And an important part of this is the music and club scene that many people would write off as frivolous. Lil Jay's musical specialty is Hindi remix, a melange of pop songs from Bombay movie musicals and house, rap, reggae, tribal -- whatever gets the crowd dancing. Grounded on the principle of sampling and syncretism and spawned by the British-Asian musical brew "bhangra," Hindi remix is a fitting sound for Jay's generation -- South Asian youths nourished by two worlds, trying to create their American style. The task requires delicate balance, says Madhulika Khandelwal, the acting director of the Queens College Asian-American Center. "They're struggling with both parts -- how to package the Indian part and how to find their place in American society," she says. "I see in them a big confusion in where they fit in the racial schema in the United States." In recent years, a number of academic books and articles have wrestled with the way in which the children of today's immigrants are assimilating into American culture. Will the second generation, the scholars ask, follow many of their European predecessors and gradually assume American cultural norms and climb the economic ladder? Or as members of racial minority groups, will their experience be different? Whatever. So far, one thing is certain: this generation of South Asians wants to have fun.

'Hoody Down

Jay and his friends don't see themselves as white. Nor do they describe themselves as Asian, except when it is to their advantage, as when they have a hard time renting clubs. Indian parties have acquired a reputation for rowdiness -- partly as a result of frequent fights between cliques -- so "when we want a space, we don't say it's an Indian party, we say it's an Asian party," Jay says. At Planet 28, Jay correctly predicts a rumble. By 1 A.M., the line outside has grown long and impatient. On the main floor, the crowd moves to Jay's mix. Vodka tonics are poured, joints lighted up in the ladies bathroom. Downstairs, DJ Red, named after his naturally reddish locks, spins his specialty reggae. In a flash, two young men start pushing and shoving. One belongs to Punjabi by Nature, or PBN, a clique for those whose parents come from the northern Indian state of Punjab. The other is Afghani and hangs with Madina, a crew of Pakistani and Indian Muslims. Jay rushes downstairs to mediate, but the brawl quickly spills out into the street. A friend of Jay's grabs a beer bottle and shatters it over the head of a PBN member before the police arrive to break it up. Later that night a PBN carload cruises through his neighborhood. The PBN crew spots another teen-ager who was in the fight outside Planet 28. Shots are fired. A bullet grazes the back of the young man's head. Jay describes the night the next afternoon. He has called the PBN guys, urged them to chill. But he says he is tired of mediating, tired of watching the same thuggery every weekend. If it wasn't for the music and money, he would find something else to do. "They're boring," he says of the clubs. "Same people. Same fights. Same gossip." Gang rivalries have quieted down in the last year, Jay and his friends say. Some boys have matured. Others have gone to jail. Some cliques have disbanded and the activities of others are limited to occasional brawling and gunfights along with credit-card and illegal phone scams. "They're not real gangsters," Jay says. At Planet 28, Jalak Patel, 19, a frequent clubgoer, attributes the violence to machismo. "It's like an ego thing," she says. "They can't even say sorry if they bump into you. They have no class. They come all, like, 'hoody down. They don't care. They just want to fight." 'Hoody means tough. Its traces can be detected in a swagger, an accent, a hairdo, the rolling of an eye, a weapon. But it's hard to break the club habit. Jalak and a friend, Sonal Patel, 18, have been doing the scene since they were 15. Just about every weekend there's a new party to check out, a new promoter renting some new nightclub in Manhattan and charging $10 to $15 a head to get in. At Planet 28, the dance floor is bumping with 'hoodies. Tommy Hilfiger's red, white and blue gear -- the sartorial rage of the hip-hop nation -- dominates. Near the bar, a lanky young man has corn-rowed his hair in a style reminiscent of an earlier Snoop Doggy Dogg. But as in many nightspots popular among the desi crowd, the only black people are security guards. "Indian people are secluded," Jay observes. "They like to hang out only with themselves."

Knowing the Culture, and the Guys

Hetal Patel (no relation to Jalak or Sonal) hangs only in the desi scene. In the summertime, much of her time is spent in her Jackson Heights home watching Hindi movies on ITV, the local Indian cable station, or waiting for her favorite Bollywood stars (Bollywood is Bombay's Hollywood) to lip-sync their latest hits or dipping into an Indian chat room on the Internet. Hetal, 17, who is headed for York College in the fall, does not go to hip-hop shows or rock concerts. She rarely watches a Hollywood movie and buys non-Hindi pop music only occasionally. "I'm not interested," she says. She is interested in scenes like the one at the Nassau Coliseum one recent evening. A main attraction of the five-hour marathon performance by the Bollywood heartthrob Shahrukh Khan and other entertainers was the cruising that went on in the lobby before, during and after. "Oh my God," Hetal whispers to her sister, Krupa, "All my exes are here." Hetal is busy meeting and greeting tonight, coy with the boys who seem interesting or interested, short with girls she doesn't particularly like. "These are my own people," she gushes. "I feel we share something. We're all Indian. We all know our heritage. We all know our culture." Onstage, Mr. Khan prances about in snug black leather pants, lip-syncing to a hit from a recent film. Hetal and Krupa mouth the words, grooving in their seats. Later, Mr. Khan offers a shout-out to "the Gujaratis in the house." Hetal and Krupa scream and cheer for their parents' home state. Then, he offers a shout-out to "the Pakistanis in the house." The sisters whisper "Boo."

Outside Desiland

Far from Hetal's desi universe, Mike Khahera of Floral Park, Queens is steeped in the world of the hip-hop kingpin Afrika Bambaataa's Universal Zulu Nation. Nation members call themselves a youth organization, but its detractors, including Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani, call it a dangerous gang. Mike is 18 and burly, the youngest son of Punjabi immigrants. Fresh out of Martin Van Buren High School, he works at the local Taco Bell. He and his brother Mac, a student at St. John's, are waiting for Jay on their parents' front lawn one afternoon. Mike clutches a pair of Zulu Nation amulets. He waits until Lil Jay drives up before slipping them on. His parents are fiercely disapproving of his involvement in Shaka Zulu, the Nation's security squad, he says, so he doesn't wear the amulets around the house. Afrika Bambaataa, Mike announces, is interested in the sounds of bhangra and Hindi remix. Mike led him on a tour of Jackson Heights record stores last weekend and today, he wants to hook him up with Lil Jay. "Be cool," Mike's older brother, Mac, instructs Jay. "Say 'whassup, whassup!' He's real cool. He's got a lotta juice." It's an exciting prospect. Jay is itching to venture beyond the Indian scene, to have a broader, more diverse following. He asks Mike how to join the Nation, if they have a chapter for deejays. Mike, who was turned onto Zulu Nation by some non-Indian friends in Queens Village, has been asked to recruit some Indians to start a chapter in Jackson Heights, but he is a bit skeptical. Mike prefers his black and Hispanic friends over the Indian scene. "I just don't like chillin' with them," he says. "See, a lot of Indian people, they see me wearing Zulu stuff. They don't know nothing about Zulu Nation. But they'll be, like, 'Oh, he's trying to be black.' They don't ask. A lot of Indian people think they're better than blacks."

New Worlds? No Thanks

A few years ago, Jay wasn't hanging in the Indian scene either. Most of his friends were Hispanic. They lived in the same neighborhood. They looked alike and dressed the same: hair slicked back, jeans hanging perfectly over sneakers, fixed to the ankles by carefully concealed rubber bands. They liked the same kind of music: free style and house, KRS-One and Tribe Called Quest. "Back then," he said, "it was, like, the Indians didn't party." Then in October 1990, Jay reluctantly checked out a party at the Gujarati Samaj, a community center in Flushing frequented by his father and his uncle. That's where he heard Hindi remix for the first time. The next year, he heard the British deejay Bally Sagoo's seminal album, "Star Crazy." "After 'Star Crazy,' it all blew up," he says. "I was, like, wow! I had never heard Indian music mixed before. So I started doing it." He was barely 14, a scrawny kid who had to perch on top of a milk crate to reach the turntables. (The nickname Lil Jay has stuck ever since.) The Gujarati Samaj party scene exploded in the next couple of years. But the gang fights got so heated that no one wanted to party there anymore. Lil Jay slipped deeper into the desi scene. There were India Day parades to attend. Shows at the Nassau Coliseum to check out, if you wanted to pick up girls. Clubs to be at. Clubs to spin at. Albums to produce. The first was two years ago for a Queens rapper who calls himself Style Bhai. (Bhai is the Hindi word for brother.) The second, Jay's own remix collection, is due out later this summer. These days, he occasionally runs into his Hispanic friends from the neighborhood, gets a quick update under the rumble of the el along Roosevelt Avenue. But Jay's closest friends are Indian. He sees them on the Indian party circuit. They all have Indian girlfriends. And they won't say a word about the non-Indian women they have dated. Only one of Jay's friends dates a non-Indian, a young woman from Puerto Rico. Jay's girlfriend, Vicky Sheth, 19, is not only Indian; her family, like his, is from the Gujarat province. While dating a non-Indian woman would open up new worlds, the thought is also scary. "You would learn a lot, I guess," Jay says. "But you also couldn't share a lot. Like, I can talk to my girl in my language. We have a lot in common. If her parents say 'You can't go nowhere,' I understand. She's Indian."

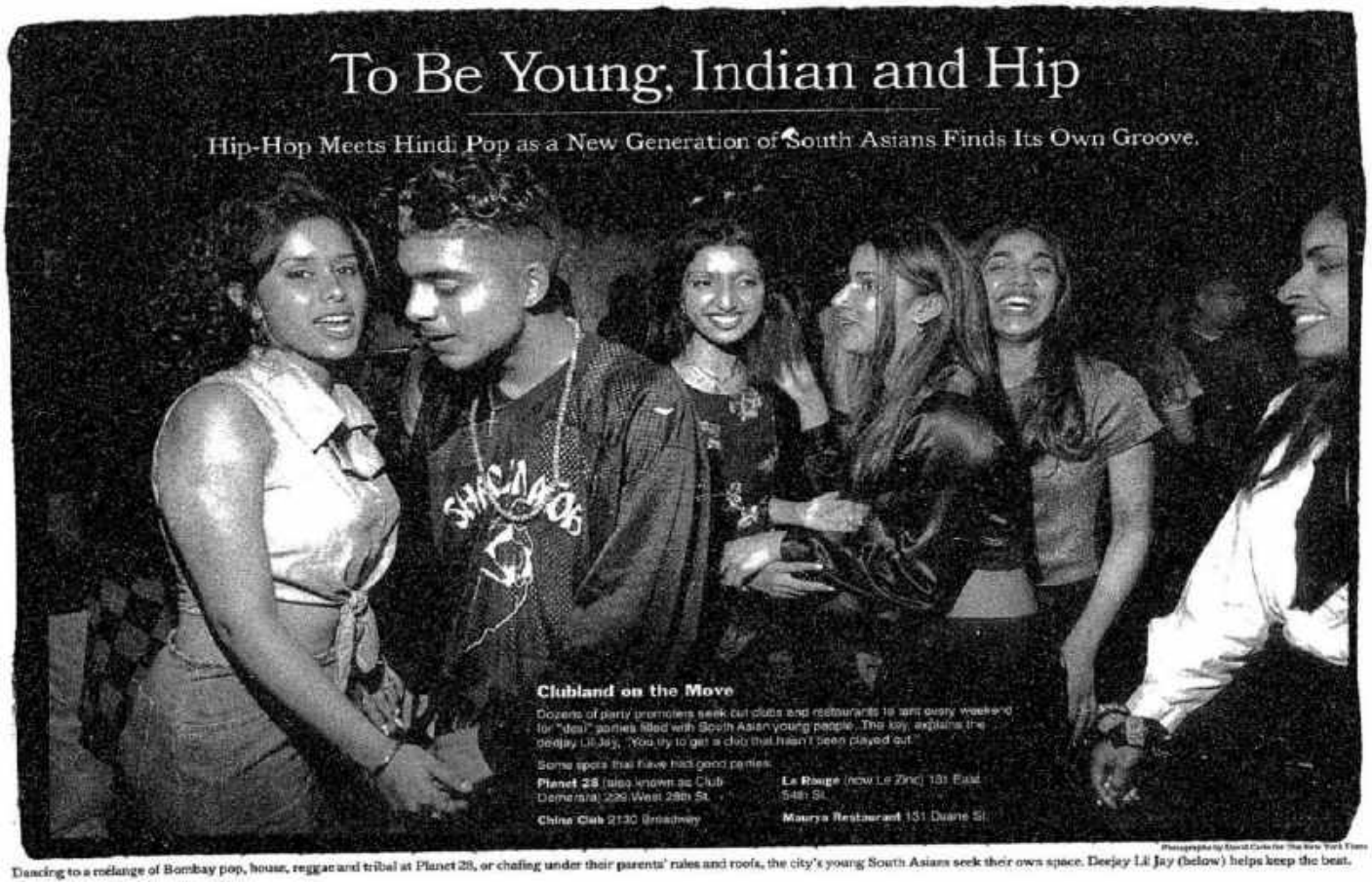
A Defining Difference

In most Indian families there is a decided difference between how boys and girls are raised. Jay's sister, Binita, 28, scowls when she compares her teen-age years with her younger brother's. Binita was held to curfews. Jay gets to come home at any hour. "He gets away with more than I ever did in my whole lifetime," she says. Sulabhi Dabhi stirs the Saturday afternoon tea for her husband, Pravin, in silence, wordlessly affirming her daughter's pronouncement. Jay is the Dabhis' only boy, the baby. He was born under a bright morning sun, she says, "so the nighttime is his time." Still, she frets and fusses over his safety. Will he get caught up in a rumble? Will he get shot? Her concern has dampened her initial enthusiasm for her son's immersion in the Indian scene. "Until he is here," she says pointing to the couch, "I am right here." Jay is his mother's boy. She, his advocate. He has inherited her delicate skin, her quick, dancing eyes and her passion for music. Occasionally, she brings home Hindi tapes for him to sample. She knows which voice belongs to whom, which song belongs to which film, its plot, its stars, the year it was made. "Who is that, Ma?" Jay says looking up from his tape deck. It's a melodramatic Hindi ballad jammed into a middle of a boisterous 11-minute house mix, one of nine tracks on Lil Jay's coming album. She holds up her right index finger, squints up at the ceiling. "Disco Dancer, na?" she guesses. "Must be Amit Kumar or Kishore. Yes, Kishore. 1982." She hands her husband his milky tea. Mr. Dabhi, an accountant at Atlantic Records, doesn't pay much attention to the goings-on in the music industry (except, he is fond of recounting, the time Donna Summer came into his office in search of a phone). And he cautions Jay against

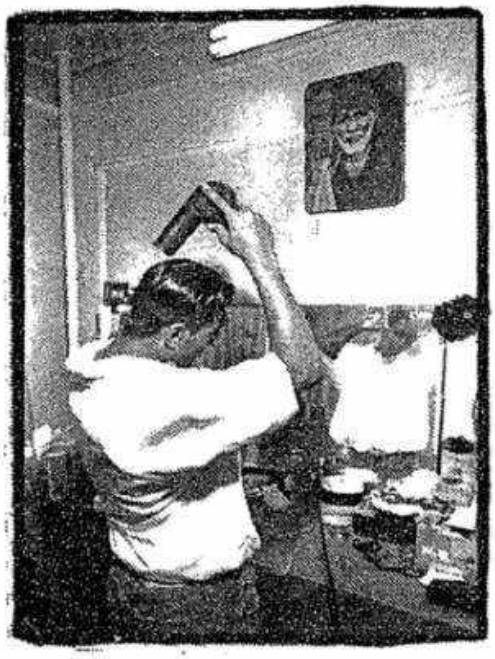
a career in music. "He wants me to own a candy store," Jay says. Mr. Dabhi demurs. "It's up to him," he says. "My main goal is that he gets a degree, at least one degree. I always tell him, 'No one can take that away.' " Jay groans as his father recalls his earlier years of toil in America -- first earning his business degree and now working at Atlantic and running his candy store on Roosevelt Avenue on weekends. "C'mon, we're Indian," Jay pipes up. Jay is anything but certain about his future. He cannot see himself behind a candy store counter, or poring over accounting ledgers. He tells his father he will graduate with a business degree from St. John's University, where he is a sophomore, but he cannot drum up the least bit of enthusiasm for a business degree, or the career it might lead to. Jay is deep into his music. And he makes a good living at it, as much as $300 a party. Still he is dead-set against pursuing it professionally. Too unstable, he says. He'd like a salaried job. A paycheck every week. A wife and some babies. A house in Queens, maybe on Long Island. Preferably a mixing studio in the basement. With a summer job at a capital management company in Manhattan, his girlfriend, also a sophomore at St. John's, seems well on her way into corporate America. "You know what's the biggest influence on me and my friends?" he says later. "Parents, but also girlfriends. Girlfriends nag. They're always like 'Go to school. Go to school.' " For Jay, the reopening of school in September will mean the start of the serious party season. Passing out fliers. Searching out new clubs. Making money. He hopes that by then, his own remix album will be out. He'll take it himself to Indo-Pak music shops around town, and maybe hire a distributor to take it to South Asian groceries and record shops around the country. Marketing Hindi remix beyond the desi circuit is beyond his wildest imagination. "They won't buy it. Will they?" he wonders. "Even white people?" His album will feature one original track: his friend Dee Rock rapping over Alisha's high soprano hit, "Made in In-di-aah." There's a Caribbean lilt in Dee Rock's rhymes, offering homage to the deejay. "Lil Jay dropping bombs like the U.S. on Hiroshima." The rest are remixes of American and Indian pop. "All illegal," Jay says gleefully. Underground remix tapes are a risky business. Indian music producers have recently begun suing Indian-American remix artists for lifting their songs without permission, and deejays, Jay says, have lifted each other's remixes and packaged them as new music. Sitting in his living room, Jay plays his demo tape. One track weaves the delicate voice of Bombay singer Asha Bhosle with the booming refrain, "Shake what your mama gave 'ya." Jay doesn't understand much more than a few stray words. He furrows his brows and tries to translate. "Come dance? Come dance hard? Or something like that," he says tentatively. "So that's why it goes with 'shake what your mama gave ya.' " Then he giggles and peers into the kitchen to make sure his Mama doesn't hear him.

A version of this article appears in print on June 30, 1996, on Page 13013001 of the National edition with the headline: To Be Young, Indian and Hip.

Photos: Dancing to a melange of Bombay pop, house, reggae and tribal at Planet 28, or chafing under their parents' rules and roofs, the city's young South Asians seek their own space. Deejay Lil Jay (below) helps keep the beat. (pg. 1); Many people write off the Hindi music and club scene (top) as frivolous, but for Jay Dhabi, a.k.a. Deejay Lil Jay, (right), and his South Asian friends, it is a big part of fitting into the city. (Photographs by David Corio for The New York Times) (pg. 11)



Dancing to a melange of Bombay pop, house, reggae and tribal at Planet 28, or chafing under their parents' rules and roofs, the city's young South Asians seek their own space. Deejay Lil Jay (below) helps keep the beat.



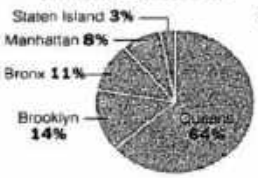
A CLOSER LOOK

Indian-American Twentysomethings

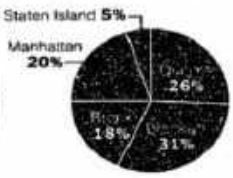
A statistical snapshot of the 11,986 Indian-Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 living in New York City compared to all New Yorkers 18 to 25.

WHERE THEY LIVE

Indian-Americans

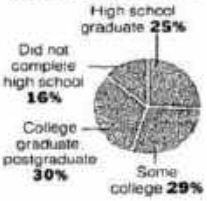


All New Yorkers



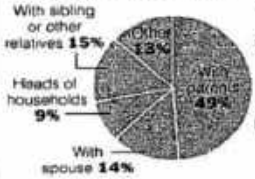
EDUCATION

Indian-Americans

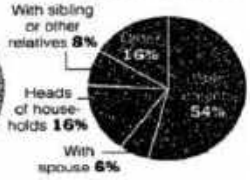


WHOM THEY LIVE WITH

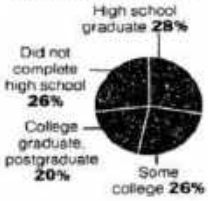
Indian-Americans



All New Yorkers



All New Yorkers



Source: 1990 Census

The New York Times

Photographs by David Cicconi for The New York Times

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the village VOICE

A new crowd in the city

INDIAN, PAKISTANI KIDS THREATEN COMMUNITY'S 'PERFECT' IMAGE

By Ana Arana | The Village Voice | November 25, 1997

They wear baggy pants, favor hairstyles called fades, play loud hip-hop music, and fight with other youngsters. That's all familiar, but look again: these are new players in inner-city life. These are Indian and Pakistani kids mimicking the tough street hustlers of other locales. In New York and New Jersey's Indian and Pakistani neighborhoods, they are the tough guys, the homeboys, the members of wannabe gangs made up of high school kids and young adults. Even as the weather turns colder they're out every night-but especially on weekends congregating on street corners near the ethnic shopping areas throughout the region, where thousands of families flock to the shops to buy their weekly specialty foods. In the midst of the weekend bustle, these youngsters revel in challenging everything that's culturally Indian and Pakistani-or South Asian, a term that includes all the different communities from the Indian subcontinent. They smoke marijuana and drink beer - a serious offense in their sober and religious communities. They harass the girls who come shopping with their parents, violating strict rules on how to treat women. They exasperate the local merchants at nearby stores, who fear their presence will scare off customers. They're in Jersey City and Edison, in Jackson Heights and Elmhurst, and in Brooklyn's Midwood. The groups adopt symbols and names that define their religion or locality. One group that police claim is now disbanded was known as the Punjabi-by-Nature-Boys and wore Sikh symbols - two swords in semicircle; they used to hang out in Flushing, Queens. The Medina Boys, named after the Muslim holy city, is made up of Pakistanis who mostly reside in the Jackson Heights area. The Malayalee Hit Squad is named for the North Indian area where most of its members' families come from. The 74th Street Boys got their name from the Jackson Heights street lined with Indian and Pakistani bazaars. The gangs are loosely organized and do not engage in heavy criminal activities as other ethnic gangs do, according to community organizers. Police in New York declined to talk about the groups, although community activists say the department monitors them closely. For the South Asian community-which includes Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis-these gangs are scary, in their own way. "Until very recently, the community was a perfect success story-it was a model community," explained Madhulika Khandalukal, an Indian American sociologist. But there's a revolution in music, dress, and behavior of young people, she said, and the gangs-a tiny fraction of the community at large-need to be dealt with by the community. There's a possible downside to talking about these problems, though, Khandalukal said. It could result in the creation of new stereotypes. And that's what most South Asians fear the most: damage to their reputation as a well-mannered, hardworking, and high-achieving ethnic group. Because of that disturbing prospect, few experts in the community are willing to talk openly about youth problems and alienation. Yet the problems of disaffection and youth unhappiness transcend community boundaries. An unsigned letter circulated on the Internet a while ago in which two American-born Indian youths questioned their parents' demands on them and talked about their inability to feel totally Indian or totally American. The angst was more soul-searching than that of the gangs, and less destructive, but a handful of community organizers who have begun to work with South Asian youth say there are deeper issues of alienation and identity crisis. "They're an American reflection of what's going on," pointed out Rekha Malhotra, a 25year-old American of Indian descent who grew up in Flushing and

Long Island. "They're defining a new sense of self," Malhotra said. "They're not white, they're not black. They're picked on by everyone. They have conflicts with their parents, who still behave as if they don't belong here." She remembers being called a "smelly Indian by other kids when she was among the first Indian kids in Flushing. It wasn't until she enrolled at Queens College and met other Indian Americans that Malhotra found that she wasn't alone in feeling invisible in this society, where ethnicity is well defined and Indians and Pakistanis don't fit within the available definitions. Malhotra sees the kids at South Asian parties, which have become popular in New York and New Jersey, and where she works as a disc jockey. Some come to dance to Bhangra, Indian music from the state of Punjab. But others want to hear hip hop music, and dance to it with people like themselves. At New York's SOB's recently, Wall Street types mixed in with homeboys dancing alone, as videos with Indian and religious icons flashed on a background screen. There were middle-class girls who danced with other girls, and college boys. But by the end of the night, the homeboys were in the majority, and hip hop was the music of choice. "This thing of identity crisis and feeling different is not new in America," Malhotra said. "But for Indians and other South Asians it is." She added: "The parents want the gangs to go away and want to say they're only poor kids. But [the groups] also include the sons of doctors and other professionals. They're only an expression of the difficulties youth are facing. The formulation of the gangs is to be together. It includes second-generation kids who want to belong and are reacting to the idea that Indians and other South Asians are nerds or Gandhi types." Malhotra and others trace the origin of South Asian gangs to the late 1980s and early 1990s, when gangs of white youths beat unsuspecting South Asians and vandalized shops in Jersey City. The so-called Dot Buster Gang attacks opened the eyes of the young South Asian population and led to the creation of consciousness raising groups in colleges. In the streets, and at the high school level, it led kids to the realization that they would have to fight back so they did not get beaten up in school. Meanwhile, in the Midwood section of Brooklyn, an 18-year-old Pakistani youth, who came to this country 10 years ago, said he quickly learned his tenuous place in the culture. (He did not want his name used, and is apparently not a gang member himself.) Few in his neighborhood can find his country on a map, but they all seem to hate him, he said. Until he learned to fight back, he was chased, robbed, and harassed. Blacks, Hispanics, and whites pick on us. We don't walk the streets alone, he said. He and about 20 other Pakistani youth attending James Madison High School have complained about the harassment to school officials, but he said they haven't responded. The area where he lives is a bustling, tightknit community that's run like a small village. Concentrated along Coney Island Avenue and defined by Avenue H and 18th Avenue, it is the largest Pakistani community in New York. It's primarily a working-class community of cabdrivers, restaurant workers, and service industry employees. Women walk the streets in traditional dress; squeezed between aging Victorian homes and stucco apartments, there is a small mosque. The 1990 census determined there were about a million South Asians in the United States. But community leaders estimate there are about 2 million more who have entered the country illegally. The census figure included the bulk of professionals and upper-class Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis who immigrated to the U.S. in the early '60s, and their American-born children. In the tristate area, the various communities live side by side in neighborhoods such as Elmhurst, Flushing, and Astoria-the first stop for the new arrivals or less affluent residents; Jersey City, Edison, and Union City, where new arrivals and old-time residents live; and Long Island, where the more affluent families have settled down. The Midwood section of Brooklyn is the largest Pakistani neighborhood in the city. The various communities do not socialize. Class and ethnic and religious lines that are important at home dominate social interaction here. Those differences are sometimes acted out by the youth gangs-which use names and tags delineating their ethnic or religious differences. One major dividing line is between U.S.born youth and those who came to this country as immigrant children. "Our problems are not single-issue,' pointed out Sayu Bhojwani, a 29-year-old Indian who runs the South Asian Youth Action center in Elmhurst, Queens. Petite and bespectacled, Bhojwani looks like a high school senior herself. Through SAYA, she has visited most New York schools with large South Asian populations. "We're running up against our own good stereotypes," she said, adding that the group had a hard time getting funding sources to help them get started. The reaction, she said, often is, "Indians? But Indians and South Asian kids don't have problems." South Asian parents can also be clueless. Bhojwani, who has a master's in English education from Columbia University Teacher's College, said

simple issues like dating, or feeling displaced because nobody in television looks like you, are issues parents don't get. "In India, there's no teenager culture." Sandhya Sassi and Prachi Modi are two spunky girls who are board members of SAYA. Born in New York, both are 17. They are the type of offspring every South Asian parent is proud to have. Straight A students, they attended the Bronx High School of Science, where there are 200 other American-born Indian students. Asked to describe the social scene at the school, Sandhya said that she and other Indian girls stayed together, and dated other Indian boys. "Most of the school is like that," she said. Both girls said they feel Indian, but their parents want them to be more Indian. But there is a gulf between the problems these two girls have and the youngsters who came to this country 10 years ago. U.S.-born South Asians and recent immigrants don't necessarily mix. American-born Indians call recent immigrants "FOBs," or Fresh Off the Boat. And foreign-born Indians refer disdainfully to American-born Indians as "ABCD," or American-Born Confused Desi (Desi means hick or a country boy). The Nav Nirmaan Foundation is a South Asian social service group based in Elmhurst, Queens, that deals with immigrant children who have gotten in trouble. The agency gets its referrals from local schools or social service agencies. Many of the children have behavioral problems, or are alcohol or drug abusers. Nav Nirmaan often tries to treat the entire family when it gets a youth referral. Many of the troubled children live with parents who abuse alcohol or in a home where there is domestic violence. The group holds free weekly alcohol and substance-abuse counseling sessions. Some of the behavioral problems are connected to youth's feelings of inadequacy in their new country. A lot of the kids who join gangs just want to become Americans quickly. Also, in many cases involving recent immigrants the parents are overwhelmed with their new reality, and have relinquished their parental roles. Children often speak better English and serve as translators for their parents. This role reversal, according to therapists and youth activists, alters the balance of power in the family structure-a dangerous result within South Asian traditional families. Two hundred Bangladeshi students at Long Island City High School are lucky to have found Abul Azad, a Bangladeshi teacher who's taken over the fatherly role that parents can't fulfill. Azad's been a teacher for four years, and his students respect and obey him. Himself an immigrant who first arrived in the United States in 1980, he understands their needs. "Bangladeshi kids are very respectful. If you teach them the right things, they are wonderful,' he said one afternoon as he tested students on Bengali language. His close involvement with the children brings good results. All Bangladeshi graduating seniors went to college last year, although they had enrolled with limited English skills in their freshman year. Azad explained: "These are the children of the cabdrivers, the restaurant workers, who came to America alone and only in the last 10 years have been able to bring their wives and kids to this country. The youth are not expected to have problems adjusting to their new lives, because they are being taken care of. But it's hard on the kids. That's why the school is so important."

A NEW CROWD IN THE CITY

BY ANA ARANA

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American Born, British Born, Canadian Born but still Desi

Hassan I. Ahmed | Feb 28, 2000

The author explores the new, improved Desi culture in foreign lands...

I consider myself a bit of a wanderer. Having lived in London, England for three years and living in New York for the last three, I consider myself fairly well versed in Western culture. But as the article title might suggest, I really dont want to discuss the pros and cons of western culture. What has really fascinated me over these last six years has been the evolution of "Desis" and the "Desi culture" in Western countries. I always firmly believed that when two rich cultures were brought together, you would get synergies whereby the best qualities of both cultures would be seen in the person. Why is it so then that when you meet an average desi, born and brought up in America, you see a dress sense, taste in music, and general appearnace inspired by Afro Americans and regional hatred and arrogance, crookery, and deceit inspired seeking inspiration from the desi culture. Thus making my initial hypothesis fall flat on its face. What always intrigues me is to see a mass of desis in New Yorks infamous desi parties. You meet all sorts of personalities. Let me just talk about a few of them and highlight a few typical conversations..... First this guy walks up to me, wearing extremely baggy jeans, earrings in both ears, a big glass of scotch in hand and of course wearing a big gold Allah chain. "Yo where are you from bro?" I turn around and tell him that I am from Pakistan. He then asks me whether I am a FOB (Fresh off the boat) or born and raised in America. Having just been given these two illustrious categories, I tell him that I am a FOB. He then starts blurting out how he is getting older now and wants to give up his ways and go to Pakistan and get an arranged marriage with someone from his fathers village. He then see's a friend of his, who walks up to us and he introduces her to me. She happens to be from India, Bengal to be more precise. She starts talking to me and tells me that even though she is from Bengal, she can not speak a word of Bengali. She seems to be extremely proud of that. "All Bengali guys are ugly, I want to go out with a good looking Punjabi guy", she tells me. Now, a comment like that has always surprised me, specially coming from a person who claims to have no links to India. What does she know about Punjab, let alone Punjabi men. While I stand listening to her, a fight breaks out right behing me. I see three guys throwing punches at this fairly large desi guy. I ask the girl what is going on. She tells me that two rival gangs, the Medina Boys and Punjabi By Nature, are fighting it out. Two big bouncers walk in and the fight gets broken up. The Bengali girl keeps talking to me. She then spots a friend and tells me that she must introduce me to her. She whispers that her friend is originally from Pakistan, and is a permanent fixture at desi parties, but happens to be a Maulana's daughter who does hijab during day. By now I feel like I have seen enough, say good bye and leave. I always thought that leaving Pakistan and heading out West I had left hypocrisy behind me. I thought that the desi's living abroad would have the best of both worlds. Unfortunately, as I said earlier, they have acquired the worst!!!

Footnote: I am a Columbia Universtity Graduate, working in New York city for a Management Consulting firm.