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Desis In The House: Indian American Youth Culture In Nyc (Asian American History & Cultu)

Sunaina Maira

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She sports a nose-ring and duppata (a scarf worn by South Asian women) along with the latest fashion in slinky club wear; he's decked out in Tommy gear. Their moves on the crowded dance floor, blending Indian film dance with break-dancing, attract no particular attention. They are just two of the hundreds of hip young people who flock to the desi (i.e., South Asian) party scene that flourishes in the Big Apple. New York City, long the destination for immigrants and migrants, today is home to the largest Indian American population in the United States. Coming of age in a city remarkable for its diversity and cultural innovation, Indian American and other South Asian youth draw on their ethnic traditions and the city's resources to create a vibrant subculture. Some of the city's hottest clubs host regular bhangra parties, weekly events where young South Asians congregate to dance to music that mixes rap beats with Hindi film music, bhangra (North Indian and Pakistani in origin), reggae, techno, and other popular styles. Many of these young people also are active in community and campus organizations that stage performances of "ethnic cultures." In this book Sunaina Maira explores the world of second-generation Indian American youth to learn how they manage the contradictions of gender roles and sexuality, how they handle their "model minority" status and expectations for class mobility in a society that still racializes everyone in terms of black or white. Maira's deft analysis illuminates the ways in which these young people bridge ethnic authenticity and American "cool." Author note: Sunaina Marr Maira is Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies in the English and Anthropology Departments at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; she is the co-editor of Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America, recipient of the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award in 1997. Her short fiction has appeared in literary journals and anthologies.

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