



# Figures, Facts, Feelings

A Direct Diasporic Dialogue

by Parthiv Shah

*For Appa, Subramanian*

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**by Parthiv Shah**

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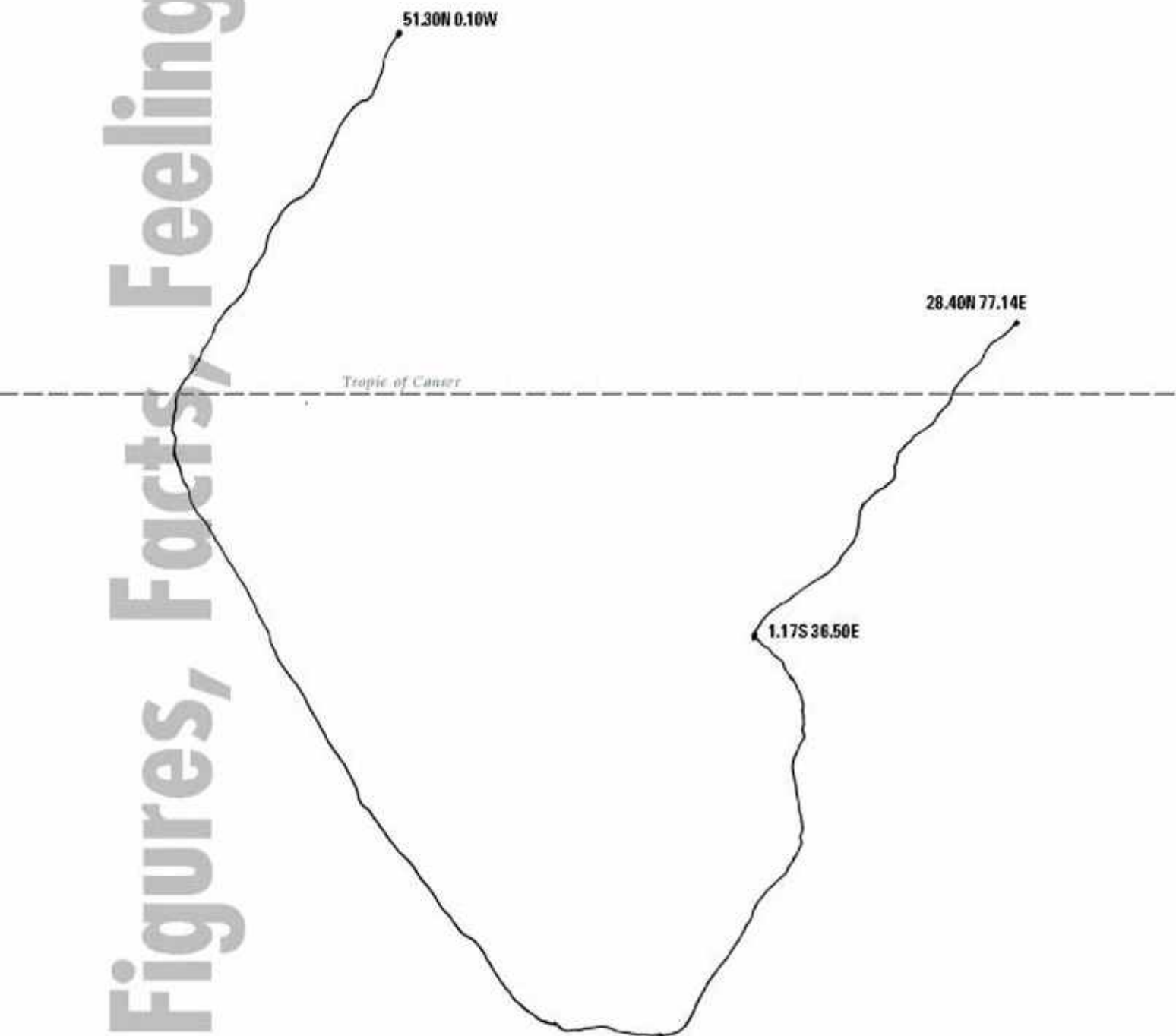
Parthiv Shah

# Figures, Facts, Feelings

**A Direct Diasporic Dialogue**

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# Introduction

## Parthiv Shah

It has always intrigued me that the Indian diasporic community had much stronger views about India and their own Indian identity than Indians in India. I always thought that being *traditional* is very important to them. To my creative instincts the issue of cultural identities was fascinating. And there I was in middle of it; two years ago I received the Charles Wallace Award from the British Council, India. The award was given to me to further my potential and expertise in the field of visual communication. I went as a visiting scholar to the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University. At the department of anthropology, besides questions such as how to represent "other" we also ended up discussing how exile has become very much part of human history, for whatever reason. The later half of the twentieth century realised this fact more than ever before. Diasporic movements and settlements allowed new interpretations of 'home', 'nation' or

'nation state'. I kept wondering how one could study this phenomenon until one grey afternoon it struck me that I should study "Indians" abroad.

England has a large number of South Asians. Prominent among these, are people of Indian origin. A sizeable number of these families have moved from Africa as well. There are several pockets where this population is more concentrated - usually industrial townships. People of Indian origin have been living in UK for much longer than any other European nation. The cross section of people representing the Indian fabric was fantastic. An array of generations, professions, backgrounds. The most striking feature to me was the need to reiterate one's "Indian" identity or the negation of it. The evolution of this diaspora has been varied, intriguing and of significant socio-anthropological interest.

My interest in people, cultures and communication grew

tremendously, I decided to pursue it further by taking up this project to find out how difficult it is to represent "other" and in this case they were not so different from me. One possible way to study this was to ask them few common questions and ask them to design a frame for themselves to say how they would like to be seen by others in a distant land.

The exhibition of photographic and textual material invoke a rather direct, face-to-face diasporic dialogue with different people from India residing in the UK. They come from different socio-economic and educational background. Each one of them was given a choice to select her/his place in the house from where she/he would like to project 'self' in front of the camera. And each one was to willingly fill in a form giving some mundane-sounding details such as their favourite film, book or food, the kind of stuff we find in popular film magazines where stars would respond to a questionnaire. But this gets a little critical as the 'photographed' individuals would also have to comment about the respective problems in India and UK and about their

cultural dilemma. The thirty four individuals to be presented belong to different age-groups, some of whom have not even visited India since their birth.

As a photographer, I was definitely tempted to visually document this culture. A popular visual medium, the photograph is one with which most people comfortably identify with. I selected this visual medium for its appeal. Photographic representation is a very common thing for an Indian as it is in their nature to see things visually. The reason for this was an oral and visual tradition of communicating and imparting information which prevailed for centuries.

Today the photograph has acquired centerstage, be it marriage, birthday, picnic or any other private or public occasion. As a tool too, a camera is handy and records the event quickly. For me it was easiest medium to use without invading into their life too much. Instead they liked it. Infact some of them felt important to be part of the project as a chosen one, some of them felt like being a model or a filmstar. The photograph tells a lot: the backdrop, time of the day, dress and

positioning tells us a story and in this project I wanted to tell a story in minimum possible space and in the manner they like it.

However, the possibility of a subjective bias irked me in pursuing the idea further. Since the whole phenomenon of the Diaspora is one of identities, my own perception and interpretation as a photographer I thought might colour the process. Knowing fully that I will be finally editing these photographs or that my inputs will come as an exhibition/graphic designer while mounting the exhibition. I asked my subjects to choose their own frame and what they think they best identify with, the idea being that they decide how they would like to be perceived by others specially so far away in India.

Besides visual representation of their exterior I decided to find out what's happening within them and for that I created a form which was common to all the participants. I applied two different metaphors for using this form/questionnaire as a tool for my project.

-As a migrant, one would be filling up all kinds of forms may

it be for immigration or for ethnic rights. I decided to use this as a tool with which they are familiar. - I also realised that there were some common links such as food, language and popular Indian feature films which this community showed. A sort of connection with the Motherland. The most likely candidate for a force of bonding would be, of all things, the Hindi feature film, a phenomenon unique to the Indian diaspora: and to evoke this feeling I created similar questions used by film glossies. While getting photographed or answering the questionnaire some of them felt like stars themselves and this gave them opportunity to talk about things they never voiced. For me it was interesting to see how people from different age group, professional, religion and sometimes even in same family answered them.

The idea is to montage photographs and the relevant texts in such a way as to design images that might give a non-academic dimension, so to say, to the post-colonial diasporic question. More direct and down to earth. A straight dialogue between the 'photographed', 'photographer'

and the 'reader/viewer', ultimately everyone participating in an ongoing global dialogue. The project met with a tremendous response. Most people who participated showed a sense of wanting to communicate to this other world. In an era of globalisation, where cultures are merging and society is becoming a large melting pot with multiple flavours the issue of the diaspora stands out in itself. Added to this the Indian diaspora today constitutes an important, and in some respects unique, force in world culture and therefore augments more understanding. My image-text exhibition- "Figures, Fact, Feelings" is an effort in meeting this objective.



Which has something to say

Pardes / Titanic

Anita

Mother India

The World of Apu

My Fair Lady

Pyasa

Bombay

Godfather

Bicycle Thief

Evita

Sarbans Dani Guru Gobind Singhji

Mother and Son ( Russian )

Pakeezah

Subarnarekha

Star Trek - 6

# The Currencies of Diaspora Photography

Christopher Pinney

No matter  
how artful the photographer,  
no matter how carefully posed his  
subject, the beholder feels an  
irresistible urge to search such  
pictures for the tiny spark of  
contingency, of the Here and Now,  
with which reality has so to speak  
seared the subject...

*(Walter Benjamin,  
A Small History of Photography)*

One influential argument has proposed that photography's power derives from the "rendevouz" between a new form of the state in the mid-nineteenth century and this new technology's "paltry pieces of paper". In contrast to more conventional assumptions which attribute photography's peculiar property to its technical ability to produce traces of the real (through what C.S. Peirce termed "indexicality"), this approach diagnoses photography as a fundamentally cultural practice. The chief proponent of this view, John Tagg, has suggested that

"photography as such has no identity...its function as a mode of cultural production is tied to definite conditions of existence, and its products are meaningful and legible only within the particular currencies they have" (1988:63).

If Tagg's model is founded on a process of metropolitan concentration - on the anxious exchange at the European centre of images that frequently took the colonial "periphery" and the domestic terra incognita as their subject, how might we understand the power of Parthiv Shah's images operating, as they do, in the quite different currency of twenty-first century transnationalism?

A striking paradox of early photography lies in the way in which its truth claims frequently depended on what the images did not show. Back drops - suspended sheets or other more elaborate devices - served as filters to blank out a background reality deemed to be too dense and confusing, and hence

threatening to the clarity of photographic truth. The paradox of this new technology's pursuit of a painterly austerity as part of its desire to transcend the limitations of painting is testified to by numerous contemporary accounts that relate how truth demanded the artifice of a "real" composure.

Such strategies appear impossibly quaint today and we are far more likely to assent to a view of photography that stresses its inclusivity, its converse inability to completely filter reality: however hard the photographer tries to exclude, the camera lens always includes. The photographer can never fully control the resulting photograph, and it is that lack of control and the excess which results that makes photographic images so rich.

This, perhaps, explains how an excess survives in Parthiv Shah's images despite the control given to the subjects of the images to "frame" their portraits as they pleased. Although some of the subjects of the portraits declare in their Bollywood-style questionnaires that they have selected the images we see here because "this reflects an aspect of myself",

"that's how I would like to be seen" and "this is what my image is", what the great German critic Walter Benjamin described as photography's "tiny sparks of contingency" ensures that these photographic images necessarily embody something that is beyond the control of the subject.

Photographs are necessarily contrived and reflect the culture that produces them, but no photograph is so successful that it filters out the random entirely. This inclusivity and inability to exclude increasingly make photographs of value. Walter Benjamin, so Adorno noted, had a "preference for ... everything that has slipped through the conventional conceptual net for...things which have been esteemed too trivial by the prevailing spirit for it to have left any traces other than those of hasty judgement". Echoing this, Siegfried Kracauer argued that "The place which an epoch occupies in the historical process is determined more forcefully from the analysis of its insignificant superficial manifestations than from the judgements of the epoch upon itself...The basic content of an epoch and its

unobserved impulses reciprocally illuminate one another".

Among the striking qualities of Parthiv Shah's photographs is their unwillingness - their necessary inability - to subordinate their content to the desires of their subjects. The proclamation of "self-representation" as intrinsically desirable and the belief that photography could ever sustain such an exclusionary centring of the subject is revealed in these photographs to have the same fragile aspiration to a singular self-presence that earlier photographic practices exhibited.

The tensions in Shah's photographs are between subjects posing themselves in front of backdrops they have determined, composed of objects that may be densely interconnected by their own personal memories and associations. For the viewer, however, the backdrop manifests as excess, the coding of numerous imaginary conflicting narratives that pull and tug at the simplicity of the subjects' own composure.

The complexity of these backdrops recall the South African photographer Zweluthu Mthethwa's portraits of Cape



Town's informal settlement residents (self-) posing in fabulously coloured domestic interiors. These backdrops (often the product of recycled advertising posters and commercial packaging) produce a surreal vibrancy, and a sense of heroic tenacity by the subjects of the portraits in the face of an increasingly commoditised world. The "drama of colour" also facilitates - as Michael Godby has argued - the assertion of individual human values through its negation of a "sociological" practice of black and white photography.

The complexity of Parthiv Shah's subjects' backdrops - their refusal of a certain austerity and centering - produce a doubling effect of diaspora, a secondary fragmentation of (firstly) transnational bodies and (secondly) everything in these images that passes out of the orbit of these mobile bodies. The complex divergent narratives of these backdrops suggest a reordering/disordering, a movement from stasis to motion, black and white to colour, of the endless tracking of persons and objects. The questionnaires too, might be read in this manner. Their mimicry of the Bollywood

star's interrogation produces a tension between systematicity and randomness, with questions pitched at such a level of abstraction that any answer becomes permissible, even desirable.

Taking a lead from South Asian historians such as Partha Chatterjee we are becoming increasingly concerned with culture and its "fragments". Weariness with the systematising "hasty judgements" of the past is increasingly producing a privileging of the margins, of those key markers of significance that slip through the "conventional conceptual net". Within this emergent paradigm, photography can help invoke what Walter Benjamin called an "optical unconscious". The photographic optical unconscious, however, reveals "diaspora" not to be a singular relocation between point A and point B, but rather a process of flux and of profound movement. Parthiv Shah's photographs can help us to "see" what our conventional wisdom no longer permits us to hear.

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- Christopher Pinney is attached to the Department of Anthropology at University College London. He is the author of *Camera Indica: the social life of Indian photographs* (Reaktion/University of Chicago Press 1997).**

Great place to visit, to settle after retirement

Rural, crowded and compassionate

Image of India: Secularism

From Photographs

My home

Rivers, spaces, congested,  
overcrowded streets, bazaars,  
architectural ruins, oceans

A warm Country with  
warm Hospitality

Motherland

Great spaces, Millions of people

Good progressive country

Too many

One of the good places on earth

Oriental, Romantic, spiritualised, fixed essentialised

Beautiful / progressive / poverty

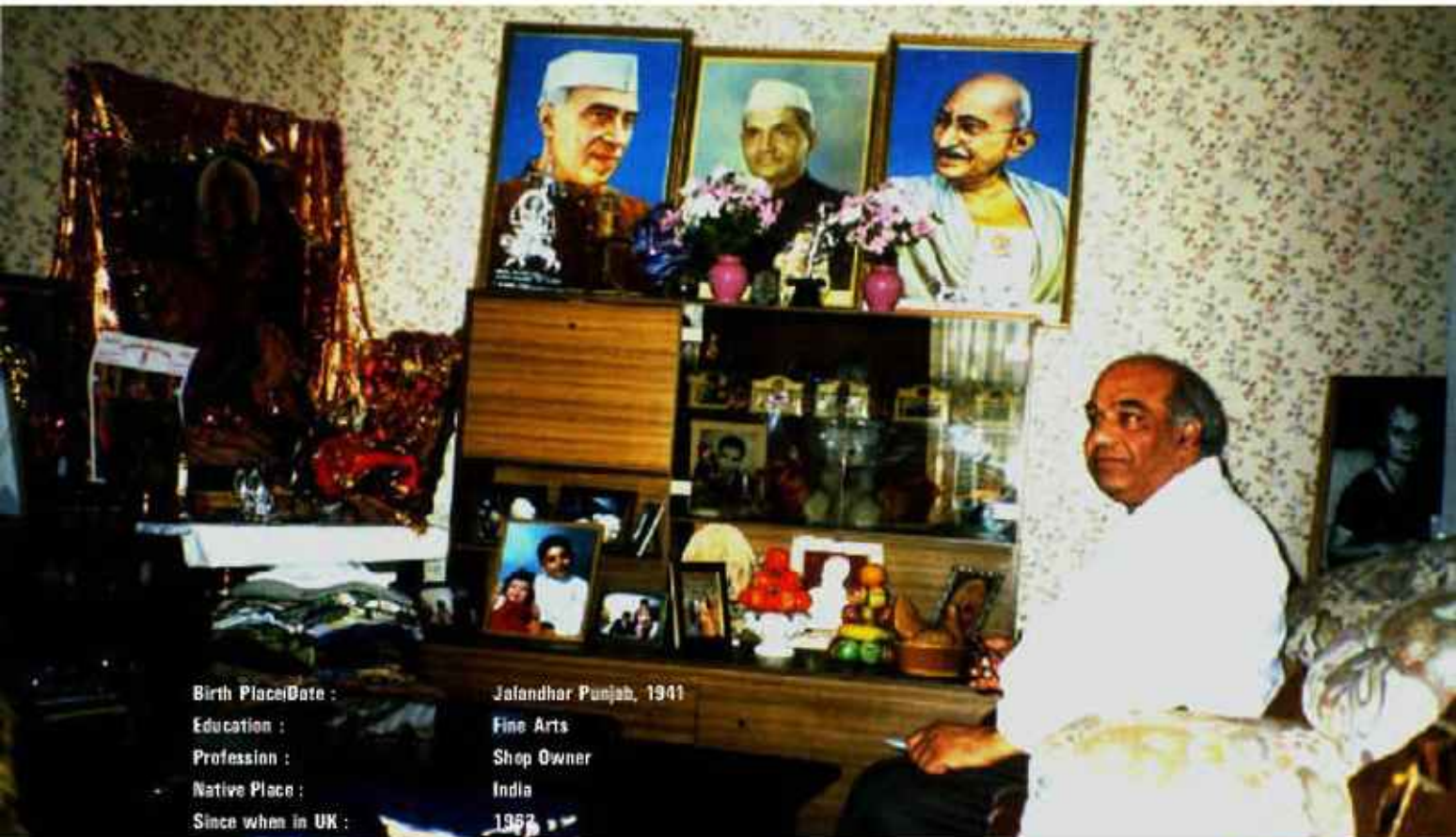
Vast, colourful, aromatic, varied,  
sultry, cultural, troubled

Belonging/Home/  
Ochre/Spirituality

Full of life

Faraway





Birth Place/Date : Jalandhar Punjab, 1941  
 Education : Fine Arts  
 Profession : Shop Owner  
 Native Place : India  
 Since when in UK : 1962

Parents Profession : Doctor  
 Last Visit to India : 1994  
 Image of India : Beautiful / progressive / poverty  
 Favourite place in India : Mandhali, Jalandhar  
 Favourite place in the world : England  
 Favourite food : Punjabi  
 Favourite Film : Mother India  
 Favourite Book : "Geeta"  
 Favourite Music : K.L.Saigal  
 Problem in India : Religious conflict, Nepotism  
 Problem in UK : Discrimination / Unemployment  
 What do you think of this project : It would help in conveying a different image  
 Why have you selected this frame : Indian House  
 What will you do with this photo : Put it in an album



*Favourite Film :*  
**Mother India**



## Abhaey Singh

Name : Abhaey Singh  
 Birth Place/Date : London, 19th Sept. 1978  
 Education : Management with Spanish, University of London  
 Profession : Student  
 Native Place : London  
 Since when in UK : Since Birth



Parents Profession : Restaurenteer, Businessmen  
 Last Visit to India : 1989-90  
 Image of India : Good, Bad, Ugly, Beautiful  
 Favourite place in India : Shimla  
 Favourite place in the world : Driving Seat in the mountains roads of Nanda in Spain  
 Favourite food : Can't decide (maybe Keema Parantha)  
 Favourite Film : My Fair Lady  
 Favourite Book : The Fountainhead  
 Favourite Music : Can't decide, probably Interpretations, Qawwali, Ravi Shankar  
 Problem in India : Can't decide (no.1 anathema politicians)  
 Problem in UK : A little ignorance here and there and the weather  
 Cultural dilemma : One too many  
 What do you think of this project : Spiffing idea appealing to all native Indians  
 Why have you selected this frame : I am a self confessed car nut  
 What will you do with this photo : Look at it!

Cultural  
 dilemma :  
 One  
 too  
 many

Image of India : Good, Bad, Ugly, Beautiful



## Baani Singh

Birth Place/Date :	London, 15th August, 1977
Education :	11 GCSES, 4 A levels, currently in second year of BA degree in English
Native Place :	Parents both from India London
Since when in UK :	Since birth
Parents Profession :	father - restauraunter Mother - CRE Commissioner + other
Last Visit to India :	Summer 1990
Image of India :	Vast, colourful, aromatic, varied, sultry, cultural, troubled
Favourite place in India :	Rashtrapati
Favourite place in the world :	London
Favourite food :	Fruit
Favourite Film :	Mother and Son - Russian / 1996
Favourite Book :	Under the Jaguar Sun, Italo Calvino
Favourite Music :	Reggae, Techno, Trance, Febie + Sars, Dawwall
Problem in India :	Corruption, Criminal control, Politics, Natural Disasters, Double Standards, Hypocrisy
Problem in UK :	Materialism, Egoism, Lack of Empathy, Compassion
Cultural dilemma :	Trying to apply inherent Indian values in a Western Society surrounded by people with very different values trying to balance East and West
What do you think of this project :	Interesting, would be interested to see the results to see what the subjects have to say
Why have you selected this frame :	The colours of the door interested me. I love art and bold colour
What will you do with this photo :	Keep it.



*Image of India :*  
**Vast, colourful, aromatic, varied,  
 sultry, cultural, troubled**



Behroze Gandhi

*Problem in UK :*  
**English Football supporters**  
**and Bangladeshi neighbours**

Name :	Behroze Gandhi
Birth Place/Date :	Bombay, 1945
Education :	BA (H) Bombay University, PGCE Univ. of London, Certificate in Film Studies, London Univ., Media Studies Degree, PCL London
Profession :	Television Producer
Native Place :	India
Since when in UK :	1973
Parents Profession :	Art Dealers



Last Visit to India :	Feb. 1998	<i>Cultural dilemma :</i> <b>Popularising          Indian Culture          for British          television</b>
Image of India :	Dirt and Pollution	
Favourite place in India :	Matheran	
Favourite place in the world :	Matheran	
Favourite food :	Pasta and Olive oil	
Favourite Film :	Subarnarekha	
Favourite Book :	don't have one	
Favourite Music :	Bhimsen Joshi	
Problem in India :	BJP et.al	
Problem in UK :	English Football supporters and Bangladeshi neighbours	
Cultural dilemma :	Popularising Indian Culture for British television	
What do you think of this project :	Could be a great TV programme	
Why have you selected this frame :	my most creative mode at present	
What will you do with this photo :	frame it	



**Education :**  
**MB, MS, FRCS, FRCSE, FISC, MSc., DSc.**



*Why have you selected this frame :*  
**To Misinform and to Misrepresent**

<b>Birth Place/Date :</b>	<b>Kanpur India, 12-9-46</b>
<b>Education :</b>	<b>MB, MS, FRCS, FRCSE, FISC, MSc., DSc.</b>
<b>Profession :</b>	<b>Surgeon, Medical Engineer</b>
<b>Native Place :</b>	<b>India</b>
<b>Since when in UK :</b>	<b>1963</b>
<b>Parents Profession :</b>	<b>Mother Housewife, Father - business</b>
<b>Last Visit to India :</b>	<b>2 days ago!</b>
<b>Image of India :</b>	<b>Inefficiency , Incompetence, Apathy</b>
<b>Favourite place in India :</b>	<b>Mandu</b>
<b>Favourite place in the world :</b>	<b>Venice in Italy</b>
<b>Favourite food :</b>	<b>Aloo</b>
<b>Favourite Film :</b>	<b>Bicycle Thief</b>
<b>Favourite Book :</b>	<b>Ishwari Upanishad</b>
<b>Favourite Music :</b>	<b>Indian Classical</b>
<b>Problem in India :</b>	<b>Corruption, Lack of Infrastructure</b>
<b>Problem in UK :</b>	<b>Hate for "other" human beings</b>
<b>Cultural dilemma :</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>Why have you selected this frame :</b>	<b>To Misinform and to Misrepresent</b>
<b>What will you do with this photo :</b>	<b>Frame it if signed by the photographer!</b>

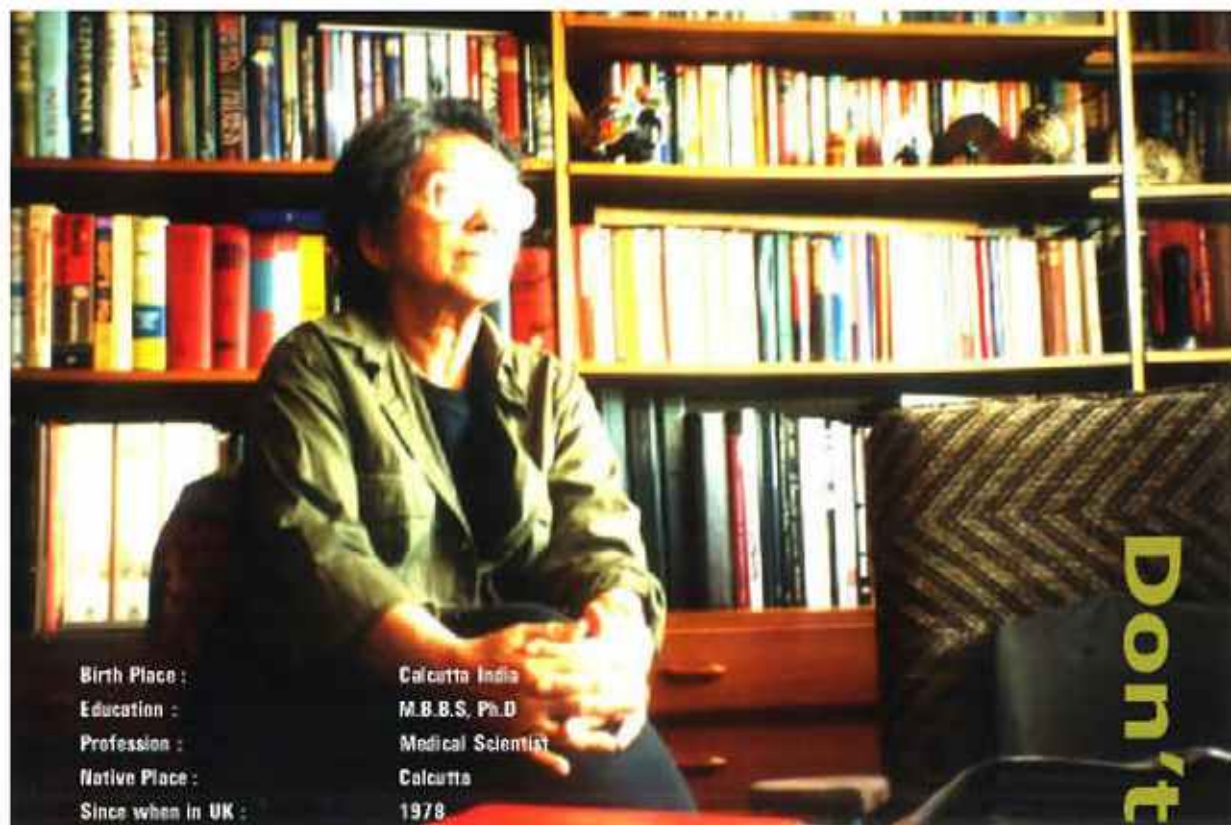


Favourite food :  
Anything which is not blended



Cultural dilemma :  
Generation Gap

Birth Place :	Dibrugarh, Assam
Education :	BA Hons. English
Profession :	Photographer
Native Place :	India , Calcutta
Since when in UK :	1980
Parents Profession :	Father - lawyer
Last Visit to India :	1995
Image of India :	Great spaces, Millions of people
Favourite place in India :	Whole India
Favourite place in the world :	India
Favourite food :	Anything which is not blended + Like non veg
Favourite Film :	Which has something to say
Favourite Book :	Poetry, Religion, Anthropology
Favourite Music :	Any music which is not loud
Problem in India :	As far as values are concerned it has retrograded
Problem in UK :	"Theatcherism"
Cultural dilemma :	Generation Gap
What do you think of this project :	I am trying to understand it
Why have you selected this frame :	I like to be here
What will you do with this photo :	I am not sure



Birth Place :	Calcutta India
Education :	M.B.B.S, Ph.D
Profession :	Medical Scientist
Native Place :	Calcutta
Since when in UK :	1978
Parents Profession :	Physician
Last Visit to India :	1995
Image of India :	Rivers, spaces, congested, overcrowded streets, bazaars, architectural ruins, oceans washing the shores
Favourite place in India :	Outskirts of Calcutta
Favourite food :	Dal, Rice, Chapati
Favourite Film :	Cinema Classics (Satyajit Ray), Western
Favourite Book :	Contemporary English writers (England , USA)
Favourite Music :	Classical Western, Rabindra Sangeet
Problem in India :	Poverty, inequity, lack of planning for decent living for everybody
Problem in UK :	Too much interest for getting everything right for SELF, and the more the better
Cultural dilemma :	Don't fit in
What do you think of this project :	Interesting
Why have you selected this frame :	I feel Comfortable
What will you do with this photo :	Keep it in files

**Don't fit in**  
*Cultural dilemma :*

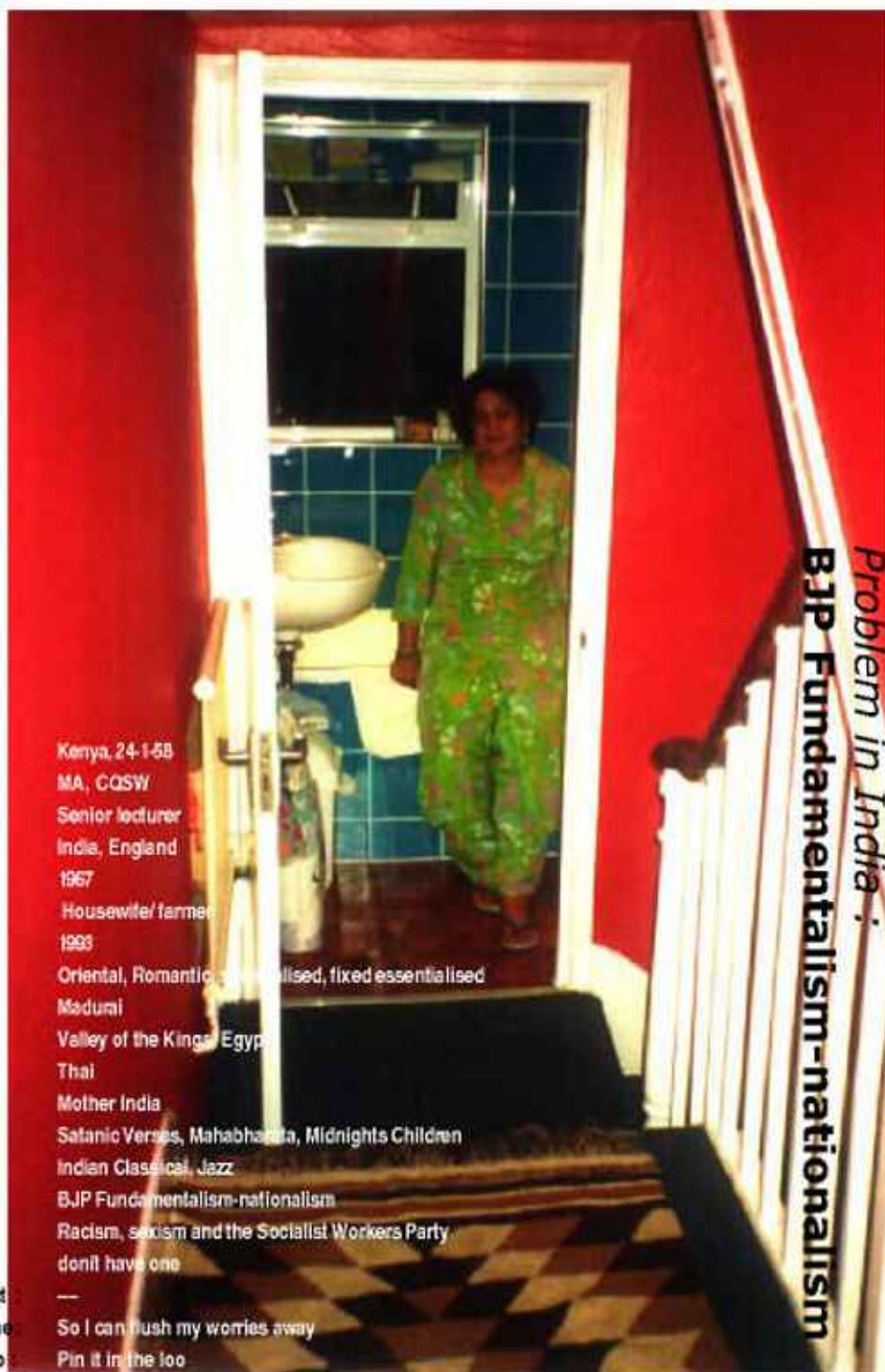


Gurcharan



Birth Place/Date :  
 Education :  
 Profession :  
 Native Place :  
 Since when in UK :  
 Parents Profession :  
 Last Visit to India :  
 Image of India :  
 Favourite place in India :  
 Favourite place in the world :  
 Favourite food :  
 Favourite Film :  
 Favourite Book :  
 Favourite Music :  
 Problem in India :  
 Problem in UK :  
 Cultural dilemma :  
 What do you think of this project :  
 Why have you selected this frame :  
 What will you do with this photo :

Kenya, 24-1-58  
 MA, CQSW  
 Senior lecturer  
 India, England  
 1967  
 Housewife/ farmer  
 1993  
 Oriental, Romantic, essentialised, fixed essentialised  
 Madurai  
 Valley of the Kings, Egypt  
 Thai  
 Mother India  
 Satanic Verses, Mahabharata, Midnights Children  
 Indian Classical, Jazz  
 BJP Fundamentalism-nationalism  
 Racism, sexism and the Socialist Workers Party  
 don't have one  
 —  
 So I can flush my worries away  
 Pin it in the loo



*Problem in India :*  
**BJP Fundamentalism-nationalism**



# On being there - *The Making of an Exhibition*

**Parthiv Shah in conversation with Vivan Sundaram**

The concern is of being there, in ways more than one. The dialogue opens between a photographer-cum-graphic designer, who is in the process of building an exhibition, and an artist, who is excited at the prospect of using photographs and design to make a statement in the area of installation art. Placed on the table, between the two, is a postcard size album full of 34 photographs and an equal number of questionnaires filled by the subjects who have posed for the photographs. The subjects of the photographs are old and young; men and women. Their professions are different and so also their interests. But there is one factor that binds them all is the experience of being there instead of here. And this makes all the difference. Posing in front of the car, in the living room with the framed pictures of Gandhi-Nehru-Shastri, showing with pride the place of work or having a little fun getting oneself photographed in the washroom\_ they are all people of Indian origin who go by

the name of NRIs. This collection of 34 here is of the British variety. Away from the roots, they take root again and grow. The journey is not easy for it has moments of isolation, rejection, alienation and the constant urge to look back. But the snapshot sent home must be a happy and prosperous one as there has to be solid, material proof of the benefits of being there. The dilemma of a cultural identity remains even in the new-found comforts and prosperity. So the photographer, who is also there on a Charles Wallace Award from the British Council, intervenes but gently into their lives and photographs these people as they would wish to be photographed. And they fill in forms with their biographic details and move on further to something more profound as the cultural dilemma they face. But the intervention of the photographer is not over. He must be there again to sift and design the material to make a statement in art. Nirupama Dutt reports on a dialogue of a mid-October

Sunday morning, which paves the way to the show, between photographer and graphic designer, Parthiv Shah, and artist Vivan Sundaram.

Vivan: Flipping through the little album that you are carrying with you, I feel that these are in a way formal portraits with the subject establishing a relationship with the photographer who wants them to pose. They seem to say that this here is me, this is my house and this is my status. It thus becomes an 'informally' formal photograph. But for Sunil Janah and Behroze Gandhi who know you, they are not looking directly at the camera and seem to be more informal in their in their setting.

Parthiv: From the very beginning, I made it clear to the people that I was taking these photographs for an exhibition. And I told them that they were free to pose as they wished, choosing their own location and mood. Many interesting things came out of their choice of the location. Only if the job was prestigious or that they thought so, did they seek to be photographed in their place of work. Back home in Gujarat in

my father's village, there is not a home from where someone has not gone abroad. And they would send home these pictures, posing with a car, standing outside their bungalow or even the Eiffel Tower. Never did they choose to be photographed in the leather factory, textile mill or at the shop where they might have been working. It was a way of showing that see we have gained this by being there. Very few chose their place of work. Most of them chose to be photographed in the interiors of their homes, where they were most comfortable. For them they had created a little India.

Vivan: What was the actual nature of framing?

Parthiv: The people chose the place where they would like to sit. At times they told me what they wished for to be included in the photograph. Like there was this girl who wanted the television to be included in the frame as also her statue of *Meera Bai*. I did not tell them that now please sit at the computer for I want to photograph you working at the computer. Of course, I move maybe a little to the left or a little

to the right, including this or excluding that. But there was very little else that I could do.

Vivan: So obviously the people are saying that the place they inhabit should be part of the portrait.

Parthiv: Very much so. Sometimes they would move from one room to the other, rejecting one place and choosing another. For instance there was this grandfather who wanted me to take his picture as he plays the harmonium and teaches his grand-daughters Indian music. There is a statue of the *Nataraja* in the back drop. This is how he would like to be seen. And there was this person who opened his locked sitting room with its pictures of gods and goddesses, the blow-ups of Gandhi, Nehru and Shastri. Like in India some people keep the drawing rooms locked and open them only when the guests come, he too opened it specially for the photograph. This he said was his favourite room and after work he came and sat here. Interestingly, not many dragged their children or others into the photograph. Only one woman told me that she wanted



the pictures of her daughters on the wall behind her. They realised that it was a project about themselves and they willingly participated in it.

Vivan: What decided your choice of questions in the forms that they have filled out?

Parthiv: As immigrants, they have to fill all kinds of forms. So I gave them just another form beginning with the mundane details and then moving on to something like 'cultural dilemma' or their 'image of India'. Had I started with cultural dilemma, they may have got somewhat intimidated. Then I took a few common factors, which bind them together, like films, food and music. The choice of the younger people in music and books was quite different as can well be understood. But among the older people most opted for old Hindi film music and when it came to the film they mentioned 'Mother India' or Gandhi's 'My Experiments with Truth'. Now I don't know how many have actually read this book, but many felt that it was the right book to name. Since all of them see Indian films and read film magazines, the

form seemed something like what Shahrukh Khan signs in a glossy along with his mug shot and list of favourite and not-so-favourite things. In the forms the contradictions of their lives and beliefs also come out. Thus the photographs and some of the information is frozen in time. One writes of the image of India "It is a beautiful place but people who run it are not". They wish to identify with India and feel for it and here is centred the whole question of diaspora.

Vivan: Now Parthiv, the area which interests me most is that how to present a photograph. The way it is shown adds to the meaning and the building of a new visual experience. There can be a very thin dividing line between exhibition design and making a statement in the area of installation art. Installation art in India is very recent but even in the West it is only a couple of decades old. So when more and more artists are engaged in this practice, viewers will gradually learn to experience the complexity of its intentions. Framing in painting is hundreds of years old. The entry of photography in the museum/gallery space is a very

recent phenomenon, even in the West.

Parthiv: That's because its recognition as art is recent. Or for that matter even poster design. We practically never get to see poster exhibitions in India.

Vivan: I feel there are two aspects to this. Photography is only 150 years old. I am not talking about art photography but photography, which constitutes whole levels of visual information and goes into making statements. As also its historical presence. Next comes the institutionalisation of photography. Now every museum abroad has a section for photography and a curator. It is a different matter that it may take 50 years for the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) to have a curator for photography. The second aspect is the uses of photography. I say 'use' because it is a key word to this discourse. You don't have to be a great photographer to make poignant statements. You can even use someone else's photographs to establish a relationship between framing and de-framing. In giving a particular support, by that I mean the manner or

material on which the photograph is presented, changes the way we look at and read the image. Photographs for me have an exceptional pliability, say as compared with paintings, in the way they can be presented.

Parthiv: Vivan, normally in a photo exhibition the photographs have a certain picturesque quality. I feel quite challenged by the unconventional condition these pictures pose. I hope to make the display as informal as possible so that more people can relate to it. The way these people have posed is that they wish to talk to the audience or the viewer. Formal framing may make them too distant.

Vivan: The aspect of extreme informality of presentation runs the risk of the viewer misunderstanding the casual nature of the display for the photograph not to be taken seriously.

Parthiv: The informality will have to come through with simplicity. Although this simplicity has to have a conscious, definite design. I think that is where the catch is.

Vivan: Since you have a background of graphics and exhibi-

tion design, it is very exciting to see how you will present this material.

Parthiv: I am thinking of going in for different sizes. I may highlight certain areas. I could have a series of the pictures in which the grandfather is playing the harmonium for his grand-daughters. I am scanning all the pictures and then I will work on them on the computer to make digital prints.

Vivan: It just strikes me, what would have happened if you had taken one picture of the subject as she or he wanted it to be taken and for the second you would have said that I, Parthiv Shah, will now take a picture as I want to? It would have been interesting to see the difference.

Parthiv: That did not happen but if I had taken a picture the ambience may have been very different. I would not have photographed a grocery shop owner in his drawing room but in his shop. Or taken a photograph of him dealing with a British girl. So the results would have been very different. See normally I conceive only the frame, this time

I guess I was conceiving the entire project!

Vivan: That is what I feel. It is this difference which must show in your presentation. Since you are a graphic designer, you can work out layers and super-impositions. Something else must accompany the photograph. Captions, poetry, narrative and ethnographic information can accompany the photograph. You intervened at one point in taking the photograph and now you have to intervene at another in their presentation. There is no escape from being there.

**Vivan Sundaram studied Fine Arts at the MS University in Baroda. He is an artist of international repute and has exhibited his works all over the world.**

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# Om Sweet Om

## Alok Rai

The most remarkable fact about these pictures is that they do *not* lend themselves to any facile generalizations. The range and variety of the human race itself is represented here - different generations, born in different continents, responding to widely different histories and experiences. Though they all have some sort of connection - close, distant, imagined, denied - with India, the resulting ensemble of images is an intimate, fully human experience that should speak, I believe, across national boundaries, and even diasporic ones.

Collectively, however, these pictures create an oddly disconcerting impression. Of course, this has nothing to do with the pictured individuals, who appear to be a representative sample of the average run of humanity, leading very different lives, with their own delightfully individual rhythms, their preferred contexts of self-representation: there is an elegant young Sikh who poses beside his beloved auto; there is a

lady who is parked on the loo, "so that she can flush the shit away"...

It is important to *not* make sense of this early, inchoate impression too quickly. Thus, it is easy to focus on the incongruities of these lives - but then, many of the persons are *themselves* conscious of the incongruities of their *pardesi* lives, living between cultures, straddling disjunctions. Too easy in fact, because lurking in that easy irony is the smug assumption that somehow, the experience of incongruity is limited to the condition of exile, of being a paradoxical citizen of that nowhere place called Diaspora. It doesn't require too much sensitivity or imagination to realize that, in that sense, many of us who have never left home are still exiles - unbeknownst to ourselves perhaps, perhaps even from ourselves. Shoring bits and pieces, fragments of significance, hoping that they add up to something less divided than our own selves.

Staying with the strangeness, then. There is an absence that haunts these images - there is the grey, watery light, the enveloping verdant green; the objects are there: the Anglepoise lamp, the Nataraja that sits atop the ubiquitous off-white radiator, the dust-free disorder of Khilnani's study even, which would be inconceivable in India - and yet, there are no English people here. Of course I am wrong - *these are English people*. Not merely in the formal bureaucratic sense. They are English also in their body-language, their gestures, the way they incline their heads and move their hands. One hears much about the ways in which this dynamic community of immigrants has made an impact on the life of their adoptive country, writ itself into its environment - but there is a palpable sense in which that environment has also writ itself into them.

There is something paradoxical about a community of exiles - or perhaps only about *this* community of exiles. Thus, it is possible to think of a community of exiles who share a common experience of oppression, a community that springs from some shared

trauma. The Jewish Diaspora is the most obvious and cited example of this, but the melancholy history of our time provides many, many other examples. One of the people pictured here, a Khalistan sympathiser, makes the delightful observation - "India is a beautiful place, people who runs it not" - and truly, they run it not. But the histories that are gathered here actually spring from very diverse contexts and situations. Apart from the people who are in exile because of the, so to speak, "push" factors - tyranny, oppression, thank God for delicate, technical euphemisms! - there are also those who responded to the "pull" factors, the magnet of Western prosperity. Or is there, really, a Fourth Law of Exile: behind even "pull" there is always a little push, too?

But the remarkable thing about the Indian diaspora pictured here, this community of exiles, is that the actual histories get filtered out, relegated to private enclaves of memory. Meanwhile, they meet on the ground of a common, shared Indianness that, oddly, seems more accessible the further one moves away from India. The question of "roots" is

something that is inescapably bound up with the dialectic of longing and belonging, of alienation and the longing to belong which is the staple of diasporic existence. And yet, there is a thoroughly modern attitude which dismisses this entire concern with "roots", with origins. After all, it is said, it's trees that have roots, men have legs. It is their histories which define them, not their origins: ask not where I'm coming from, ask where I'm going to... But. There is an unmistakable sense that these are people who have no use for their often painful, futile histories - devoid of the larger significances with which centuries of elaboration have endowed the Jewish experience of persecution and exile.

Roots, then. But roots of the kind that do not demand too much soil, that do not demand the heat of the summer sun and the drenching of the monsoon: shallow, undemanding roots, perhaps even aerial ones. That is why I was so happy to light upon the plump and maternal Mrs Dave, clutching her Ganesha - "my favourite god". She stands in front of a cannily laden set of



shelves, packed with the where-withal for the individual nostalgia kits that must suffice for the reassuring ambience of a culture. Gods nestle by the side of agarbattis, trishuls and mounted Oms share space with pouches of paan masala. One beautiful image has an elegant Mr Shah lovingly making a paan while outside the window, the merciless English rain weeps. But on the other side of that rain, no doubt, the carefully folded ingredients help Mr Shah to recreate the garish glitter of the subcontinental paan shop, with its inevitable crowd of happy wasters.

In a sense, of course, it must be a deeply clarifying experience - a sort of collective version of "Desert Island discs", a civilisational equivalent of the Mariner probe in which NASA scientists agonised about the contents of the semantic kit that was to be sent on the probe into outer space - for communicating essential information about ourselves to possible aliens. These individuals must work out for themselves what it is that is essential and, necessarily, portable - for communicating with their own alien selves, out

there, out here. Thus, there is the restaurant interior that has large banana leaves in the background - but there is another picture of someone who, descended from a family of professional *karmakandi* priests, poses with his pet potted banana - an iconic substitute, he avers, for the great god Vishnu himself, relocated in an English living room.

One must never put down roots in a foreign land, Orwell wrote - in England, remembering Burma. For if one does so, for whatever reason, then one is cursed forever with a kind of double homesickness. With two homes, one is forever homesick, always longing, never ever belonging - not at least in the unconscious, *unelective* sense, which is the only kind that matters, at the end of the day.

Alok Rai teaches in the Humanities Department of the Indian Institute of Technology. He holds advanced degrees from Oxford and London. In addition to academic publications, he writes frequently on matters of wider social and cultural interest in the hope of promoting public reflection on our common, shared lives - in the old-fashioned hope that such reflection is part of the essence of being human beings at all.

Italian  
 Curries  
 Oondhiyoo  
 Kidney Beans  
 Pasta and Olive oil  
 Milk, Roti  
 Puri, Kheer  
 Gulab Jamun, Jalebi  
 Khichdi and Yogurt  
 Rice, Rasam, Sambar and Mango Pickle  
 Gujarati Style Vegetarian Food  
 Aloo  
 Chicken Biryani  
 Parantha  
 Sarson ka Saag Makke ki Roti  
 Keema Parantha  
 Punjabi  
 Vendakka Pacchadi  
 Chinese  
 Anything Vegetarian  
 Dal, Rice, Chapati  
 Anything which is not blended  
 Thai





Birth Place :	Sarhala Ranuna, Distt. Jalandhar
Education :	5th Standard
Profession :	Careworker
Native Place :	Sarhala (Khalistan)
Since when in UK :	1959
Parents Profession :	Farmers
Last Visit to India :	1982
Image of India :	My Motherland
Favourite place in India :	Sarhala
Favourite place in the world :	India
Favourite food :	Milk, Roti
Favourite Film :	Guru Gobind Singh
Favourite Book :	Guru Granth Sahib

## Image of India: My Motherland

Favourite Music :	Tumba ( Instrumental Music)
Problem in India :	Government policy (Divide and Rule)
Problem in UK :	Racism
Cultural dilemma :	Law prevents parents to perform for kids
What do you think of this project :	Towards better understanding of people
Why have you selected this frame :	I believe in this image 24 hrs.
What will you do with this photo :	Keep it in my house



Favourite food: **Milk, Roti**



Mrs. Dave



Since when in UK : 19.4.1967

Last Visit to India :

7.1.1992

Birth Place :	India
Education :	SSc
Profession :	Shopkeeper
Native Place :	East Africa
Since when in UK :	19.4.1967
Parents Profession :	Shopkeepers
Last Visit to India :	7-1-92
Image of India :	Beautiful
Favourite place in India :	Agra
Favourite place in the world :	Germany
Favourite food :	Chapati, Shaak
Favourite Film :	Anita
Favourite Music :	Old Hindi Songs
Problem in India :	No
Problem in UK :	No
Cultural dilemma :	Generation Gap
What do you think of this project :	Good
Why have you selected this frame :	My favourite God is Ganesha
What will you do with this photo :	Put it in the album

Problem in India :

**No**

Problem in UK :

**No**





*Problem in India:*

**Lack of committed public servants**

Birth Place/Date :	Madras, India , 44 yrs.
Education :	MBBS (London), MRCP (London)
Profession :	Medical Practitioner to the University of London
Native Place :	Madras India
Since when in UK :	1967
Parents Profession :	Father Doctor, Mother - teacher
Last Visit to India :	1996
Image of India :	My home
Favourite place in India :	Mahabalipuram
Favourite place in the world :	Same
Favourite food :	Rice, Rasam, Sambar and Mango Pickle
Favourite Film :	Godfather
Favourite Book :	Swami and friends (R.K.Narayan)
Favourite Music :	Lalgudi Jayaraman
Problem in India :	Lack of committed public servants
Problem in UK :	Lack of wider vision for the rest of the world
Cultural dilemma :	Difficulty in fitting in UK and still able to maintain one's identity
What do you think of this project :	Excellent idea
Why have you selected this frame :	This reflects one aspect of myself
What will you do with this photo :	Keep it for my children

*Cultural dilemma:*  
**Difficulty in fitting in UK and still able to maintain one's**

**identity**



Parvati Raman

Birth Place :

Madras India, 46 years

Education :

BA (Hons.) African History and Anthropology,  
completing Ph.D



*Favourite food :*  
**Vendakka  
Pacchadi**

*Problem in UK :*  
**Capitalism**



Profession :

Lecturer in Anthropology

Native Place :

Madras

Since when in UK :

1958

Parents Profession :

Father Journalist; Mother Bharatanatyam Dancer

Last Visit to India :

July 1998

Image of India :

Beautiful but troubled

Favourite place in India :

Mahabalipuram

Favourite place in the world :

Same

Favourite food :

Vendakka Pacchadi

Favourite Film :

The World of Apu (Ray)

Favourite Book :

Song of Solomon (Toni Morrison)

Favourite Music :

John Coltrane

Problem in India :

Communalism and Right Wing nationalist Government

Problem in UK :

Capitalism

Cultural dilemma :

?

What do you think of this project :

Very interesting

Why have you selected this frame :

It is a reflection of my research and politics

What will you do with this photo :

Give it to my daughter

Favourite place in the world :

**India**



Birth Place/Date :	Calcutta, India, 1948
Education :	BSc., MSc.
Profession :	Consultant, HIV/AIDS
Native Place :	Calcutta, India
Since when in UK :	1957
Parents Profession :	Father teacher, Mother retired
Last Visit to India :	April 1998
Image of India :	Idea of Home
Favourite place in India :	Anywhere
Favourite place in the world :	India
Favourite food :	Indian meat dish
Favourite Film :	Don't have one
Favourite Book :	Don't have one
Favourite Music :	European, instrumental
Problem in India :	Poverty
Problem in UK :	"White people"- cultural ignorance, racism
Cultural dilemma :	None
What do you think of this project :	The self image perception is very interesting
Why have you selected this frame :	Focussed in work
What will you do with this photo :	Send to mother, use in newsletter, publicity

*Problem in UK :*

**"White people"**  
- cultural ignorance, racism

*What do you think of this project :*

**The self image perception is very interesting**



## Purnima Chavda

Birth Place :  
 Education :  
 Profession :  
 Native Place :  
 Since when in UK :  
 Parents Profession :  
 Last Visit to India :  
 Image of India :  
 Favourite place in India :  
 Favourite place in the world :

Mombasa, Kenya  
 BSc: Electronics  
 Teacher  
 Porbandar  
 24 years  
 Clerk and housewife  
 1998  
 Creative people  
 Hardwar  
 My home

## Image of India : Creative people

Favourite food :  
 Favourite Film :  
 Favourite Book :  
 Favourite Music :  
 Problem in India :  
 Problem in UK :  
 Cultural dilemma :  
 What do you think of this project :  
 Why have you selected this frame :  
 What will you do with this photo :

Gulab Jaman, Jalebi  
 Pakeezah  
 Gayatri Mantra  
 Classical  
 Overpopulated/ polluted  
 Too much technology, not enough basic socialising  
 Too many religions  
 Good - makes people look at a different angle  
 I like elephants, his name is Raju  
 Tell my friends about the project





**Birth Place :** Uganda , 41 yrs.  
**Education :** A Levels  
**Profession :** Radio Broadcaster  
**Native Place :** Parents (Perbander), Self (Uganda)  
**Since when in UK :** Feb. 1971  
**Parents Profession :** Shop Owners  
**Last Visit to India :** Nov.1997  
**Image of India :** A warm Country with warm Hospitality  
**Favourite place in India :** Bombay  
**Favourite place in the world :** Bombay  
**Favourite food :** Khichdi and Yogurt  
**Favourite Film :** Mug-Le-Azam  
**Favourite Book :** Biography of Shri Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Saraswati Chandra  
**Favourite Music :** Hindi old songs and Gujarati Ghazals  
**Problem in India :** Corruption  
**Problem in UK :** Unity amongst ethnic minority  
**Cultural dilemma :** Generation gap  
**What do you think of this project :** Excellent  
**Why have you selected this frame :** Related to the job  
**What will you do with this photo :** Treasure it

Favourite food :  
**Khichdi** and Yogurt

Why have you selected this frame : Related to the job



Cultural dilemma :  
Feeling **Un**cultural



*Problem in India :*  
**Never enough  
time**  
*Problem in UK :*  
**Same**

Birth Place :	New Delhi
Education :	Literature, Political theory
Profession :	Writer and Academic
Native Place :	New Delhi
Since when in UK :	Erratically since 1979
Parents Profession :	Diplomats
Last Visit to India :	Jan. 1998
Image of India :	Too many
Favourite place in India :	The mountains
Favourite place in the world :	Somewhere in India probably
Favourite food :	Bread of any kind
Favourite Film :	A touch of Evil
Favourite Book :	Short Books
Favourite Music :	Vocal
Problem in India :	Never enough time
Problem in UK :	Same
Cultural dilemma :	Feeling uncultural
What do you think of this project :	I'd like to see the results
Why have you selected this frame :	For fresh air
What will you do with this photo :	Look at it



# Ways of being

## Rajeev Bhargava

An elementary norm of good social science requires us to catch the perspective of human subjects, to look at the world from their point of view, to get under their skin and understand their conceptual world. In an important sense then the fundamental objective of social science is to grasp the self-descriptions of subjects. Some argue that to achieve this one must peel off personal and self-related perspectives, stand afar, and rise to an aloof, absolute objectivity. But as any honest researcher in the field knows, this is fanciful myth. A basic condition for understanding other subjects is to share their background world, begin to live with them and to then let them speak for themselves. Not standing afar, but rather standing in their world enables us to notice that what is shown or said is an act of the subject expressing something about her.

Documentary film making and photography are motivated by

objectives similar to those of social science. Their internal standards of excellence also overlap. This is why documentary photographers negotiate and sometimes stretch the boundary between art and social science. Parthiv Shah belongs to this distinguished class of artist-scholars and, among other projects, has taken upon himself to understand the world of the Indian diaspora in England. He knows that in trying to do so, he cannot entirely suppress his own subjectivity. Yet, he has to fashion it so that he does not misunderstand or misrecognise his subjects. He must allow them to speak for themselves, or rather, present themselves on their own terms. So as not to intimidate them, he uses an ordinary camera. To free them from inhibition before the photographer, he more or less hands it over to his subjects. By giving them the power to choose how they are framed, he lets them represent

themselves. This entire, very complex process in which representations merge into and are seen as self-presentations is possible only because Parthiv is an Indian, has travelled to England and entered the half-Indian world of his half-British subjects.

Parthiv Shah finds British citizens of Indian origin more Indian and more traditionally transfixed than Indians living in India, and, quite possibly, the manner in which they hold their identity, a bit flat, upfront and uncompromising. The non-negotiable element in their cultural identity is in part accentuated because, when faced with real or perceived threats from the dominant culture, a minority community vigorously asserts its identity but also because identities become particularly tenacious when the connection between people and the culture of their original homeland becomes tenuous. But neither the force nor the apparent inflexibility of its assertion has been a permanent attribute of the cultural identity of the Indian

diaspora in England. Assertions have not always taken the form they have assumed today. Indeed, the assertion of cultural identity by immigrants is of recent origin anyway and presupposes the opening of a space for the recognition of marginal cultures. Despite all its problems, it heralds the acceptance of multiculturalism in Britain both as fact and as aspiration. This developing multiculturalism is presupposed and lies partially embedded in the self-presentations captured by Parthiv Shah's photographs. My aim here is to leave the subjects of Parthiv's photographs undisturbed but dredge up the background of their self-presentations; in short, to take a cursory look at how British society has come to be where it stands today.

In a sense, Britain has always been a multicultural society. The Scots, the Welsh, the English, and, to some extent, the Irish, each with their own language, history and collective memory have a long tradition of living together on British soil. But when in the 50s male labour with rural

and artisan backgrounds was invited from South Asia to plug acute shortages of unskilled and semiskilled labour in the economy, Britain became a deeply diverse society and therefore multicultural in a special way. Diversity from now on was deep because a community of South Asians conspicuously distinct from existing cultural communities began for the first time in living memory to be present amidst them. Asians were different from the rest of Britain in almost every detail of everyday life. Add to this the profound religious differences between 'white' Protestants and South Asian Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs and radical diversity was a foregone conclusion. Colour and prolonged colonial rule inevitably magnified these difference and generated new cultural hierarchies. In an environment where cultural similarities were invariably unnoticed and dissimilarities jumped to the eye, deep diversity was not only out there as an objective reality but was *felt* by everyone. From then on, British society had become



deeply multicultural.

It is one thing for a society to be deeply multicultural and quite another for it to respond self-reflexively to this fact. How did Britain engage with this newly emergent social reality, immigrants face up to this new situation and earlier ethnic communities react to South Asian immigration? It is not difficult to imagine how rural Punjabis who arrived in England carrying a specific cultural baggage coped with their new metropolitan surroundings in a completely different cultural setting. Fear, feelings of alienation and intimidation, acute anxiety and a sense of loss was only to be expected. Having made the choice to come such a long distance, they might have liked to modify their inherited cultural identity. But even if they wanted to, they could not but be rural Punjabis. What they could do was to hide this identity from the public gaze and keep it indoors, within their homes where clocks and calendars froze and identities hardened. South Asian immigrants were publicly present only when they could not

avoid it. They carried their identity uneasily, on trains, on pavements, in buses and onwards to their work place. Professor Bhiku Parekh, on whose accounts I have relied a fair bit for what I say here, relates an anecdote which captures well the point made above. On one of his many train journeys from London to Hull, the town where he lives and teaches, he encountered an elderly Pakistani couple with their adolescent daughter. As the train moved out of London, he noticed the girl nervously making strange signals to them. She wanted to prevent her parents from speaking in Urdu. When they failed to heed her plea, the daughter angrily asked them to shut up. "Just as you do not expose your private parts in public, you do not speak in that language in public either". Parekh makes the telling point that though no one had taught her this, she had grasped that significant markers of their cultural identity ought not to enter the wider public domain. Culture, for people like her, must remain an intensely private affair.

Not entirely, though. Since most immigrants came from much the same region, caste and religion, it was natural for them to find succour in each other. Long working hours anyway required sustained mutual help. A degree of social cohesion was necessary for economic reasons too. Therefore, the consolidation of small ethnic communities was inevitable. Bolstered by the strength that grows from togetherness, these communities then began to have a restricted, highly localised public presence. In different parts of Britain, little Amritsars and Lahores resurfaced walled off from the rest, particularly from middle and upper class Britain. In these little townships, creations of people with practically no experience of even Indian city life, sculpted by newly urbanised hands trained in Britain, refashioned 'dhabas' began to sprout that offered 'lassi' but in good British measure, in pints!

More change followed when years of hard work yielded enough to allow some expenditure on durable consumption goods. The acquisition and use of



British goods for the first time allowed immigrants to feel British with a degree of cultural self-confidence. The arrival of East African refugees – traders, businessmen, professionals – already British citizens, who met fellow Britons on relatively equal terms, who brought along with them skills to cope with an alien environment, and who possessed the requisite culture to feel at ease in urban middle class Britain, nudged fellow-Asians to assert themselves in the public sphere. Britain began to now feel a different kind of Asian presence. Not coloured individuals aspiring to situate themselves in the mainstream furrowed long ago by a tiny, 'white' elite, not even anxious ethnic groups tucked away and ghettoized in remote, invisible suburbs, but cohesive, fairly self-assured communities on the verge of forceful assertion in the wider public domain.

The response of the 'white' elite to this development was quick and predictable. First, the idea began to circulate that the culture of pre-immigration Britain was too well-entrenched to adapt to

newly arrived cultures. Therefore, the burden of adjustment must fall squarely on the shoulders of South Asians. Second, other unified cultural communities were seen as a major obstacle to national integration. Therefore, if ethnic communities were allowed any further consolidation, their assimilation with the rest of Britain would be in jeopardy. A programme of cultural engineering to anglicize children soon ensued. Third, it was feared that further immigration would strengthen the internal linkages of inward looking ethnic communities and prevent their absorption into British society. Therefore, Britain required controls, not only to prevent the influx of new immigrants but to check the entry of family members of those already settled in Britain. Asian parents were prevented from joining their 'British' children and young persons denied the right to choose an Asian spouse. (Remember the infamous virginity tests?) To turn Asians into true British nationals, a fairly massive intrusion into their private domain was believed to

be necessary. If culture is directly connected to nationality and nationality related to the wider public domain where it is constructed, cultural identity could no longer remain a matter of private concern. It had to possess a robust, public content. An ambitious Powellite programme of a narrow, uncompromising Tory nationalism thus began to swing into action.

Mercifully, this was not the only response. Liberal sections of the white elite tried to distance themselves from this strategy of homogenization. They pleaded for greater inter-cultural tolerance, argued that the government should leave the family and culture of Asians alone and guaranteed protection to their private, intimate space; a robust cultural identity for Asians in the private and, if not a culturally neutral identity, a weak 'British' identity in the wider public domain was endorsed. Asians could keep their cultural identity as long as it was not brought into the public domain. I reckon British society moved to and fro between an assimilative

programme seeking the complete transformation of Asian public identity and a libertarian one that retreated nervously to a private/public distinction.

Allow me to recapitulate the principal points made so far. British society had three responses to the new presence of South Asian immigrant cultures. First, to reassert a hierarchy between the culture of the dominant community and the cultures of freshly immigrated communities. Here cultural difference is maintained but only within this relation of domination. Subordinate culture is ghettoized, permitted to exist with unease and embarrassment, always at the mercy of the dominant culture, and in a corner away from its gaze. Second, to make uncompromising assimilation into the dominant culture a condition for the continuing survival of immigrants. Immigrants could stay only if they abandon their culture. Cultural dominance is non-negotiable and must continue even if it eradicates other cultures. Third, to maintain difference between

cultures by affording protection to precisely those private spheres where culture has a right to exist. But in public space as far as is possible, cultural neutrality must be maintained. The phrase 'as far as is possible' is critical because complete cultural neutrality is unrealizable. Cultures that already occupy public spaces can hardly be expunged. The English language, for instance, can not be replaced by a new neutral lingua franca, but we can try to ensure that further biases do not creep in. And it is part of maintaining this bias-free public domain that all new cultures be excluded. The price of equality, to the extent feasible, is the privatization of culture.

It is interesting that, barring a few exceptions, most of Parthiv's subjects chose to be photographed either within the precincts of their suitably Indianised homes (the singer with the harmonium teaching classical vocal or ghazals, the man sitting proudly against the background of large portraits of heroes of the national movement, the women with Ganesha) or in culturally

neutral public spaces that only obliquely suggest their British character (the hint of an odd Victorian building or the mild but lush landscape in the backdrop). It appears that British citizens of Indian origin have both adapted to mainstream public culture and retained their inherited, traditional identities in the privacy of their homes

In the last decade or two, a new response that embodies an aspiration to the deeper multiculturalism I earlier referred to, perhaps less visible in Parthiv's photographs, has also developed. What it amounts to is this: equality of citizenship requires that cultural identity be publicly respected and endorsed and not be tucked away in the corners of our homes. Since the capacity of a culture for self-renewal and growth depends on how self-confident its members are and this cultural self-confidence hinges on public recognition, public attitudes and institutions must adapt to every culture; rather than being disdainfully dismissed, these cultures must be encouraged to evolve in desirable

directions. This hardly means that the public sphere must accommodate every expression of cultural identity. (Liberals rightly fear this nightmarish scenario, though they mistakenly present their case as if any public expression of cultural identity is disastrous) It does mean, however, that the burden of change is not placed exclusively on immigrant cultures. The obligation to change rests equally on dominant and marginal cultures. South Asian communities are as much a part of British society as other communities and have the right to shape and determine its direction. The public assertion of appropriately held cultural identities is what deep multiculturalism is all about. Will Parthiv be there to catch it?

Rajeev Bhargava teaches political theory at Jawaharlal Nehru University. His publications include an edited book (with Aniya Bagchi and R. Sudarshan) on Multiculturalism, Liberalism and Democracy. He was a visiting fellow of the British Academy, 1999 and is Leverhulme fellow, 2001.



# A Direct Diasporic Dialogue -

## the ineluctable laws of acquiescence and compliance

**Niyatee Shinde**

A Direct Diasporic Dialogue raises ontological questions that question what cultural identity is all about. To begin with, it is an inquest into what identity means. Identity as an ideological notion that is meant to make a distinction between this and that, resulting from a tendency to constantly make a differentiation between the other and the self. There is the extended notion that in reality it is the identity of a culture; an identity that can never be bestowed or accepted. Rather it is the process of formation dependent on and in symbiosis with surrounding forces that are in a state of flux. It is in fact a complex notion that becomes more so when placed within the framework of a constantly evolving process of globalisation. This and the tensions fast developing between what is apparently a global homogenization and the demand for a local cultural identity. While Direct Diasporic Dialogue frames Indian residents in UK; situating them within frames of

their own choice, it explores a history and a relationship. The latter dependant on the former and entirely in relation to a colonial heritage. Those, who people the images, represent a wider populace, and are really in confrontation with a present day situation located within a repository of the past. They live in a Diaspora - born in India and migrated to UK or are first generation Indians, born and brought in England, with an ever-present nostalgia for the 'traditional' sounds, sights and smells associated with their native soil yet immersed with a modern 'foreign' situation. Their lifestyles seem simple and poignant at times. At other times they seem in an irredeemable situation, subtly holding on to strands that are culturally more familiar, living the foreign locally yet being familiar with the locally foreign. The dialogue contained in this exhibition is about the personal, the cultural and most importantly about the photographic. Photography, by nature, represents

others without allowing them any input into how they are portrayed. Critics have been particularly harsh on documentary photographers who record the life and traditions of foreign cultures. In reaching out to the Indian community 'settled' abroad, seen as that ethnic minority; in imaging them in settings and frames of their own making, 'settling' them in comfortable ways they wish to be seen, there is an attempt to read into what the cultural framework of these people and what their situation is all about. In the anxiety of self-portrayal, we realise that they do indeed reveal much more. What is interesting is the strategic and indulgent role of the photographer. The beauty of his image shave allowed him (and us) to sneak a glimpse into a world earlier bound by several stereotypes. The pictorial dialogue contained in this set of images does not in documentary fashion record the life and traditions of 'minorities' within foreign cultures rather it explores very personal, humane grounds finally allowing those photographed to convey their own perspective to their situation. Besides, through this visual

methodology is a questioning into what is the true identity of those photographed. Is it about a physicality, a singular cultural perspective or the parameters of a multicultural spirit? What is perhaps more appropriate is the attempt at fictitious identity that comes with the choice of a setting. This direct diasporic dialogue then is really a paradoxical portrayal. Perhaps what can be read in this incorporation of the photographer's attempt and the co-operation of those photographed is a thrust at the ineluctable laws of acquiescence and its flip-side of compliance.

**Niyatee Shinde** is a photo-historian and writer on photography. She has contributed essays, critiques and features on photography in national and international publications. She has compiled the history of Indian photography and a focus on the work and life on the 19 century photography Deen Dayal. Two publications on these subjects are in the making. NS has represented India at several international photography conferences. Presently she is the Director at the Birla Academy of Art and Culture in Mumbai.

Image of India : Belonging/ Home / ochre/  
s p i r i t u a l i t y

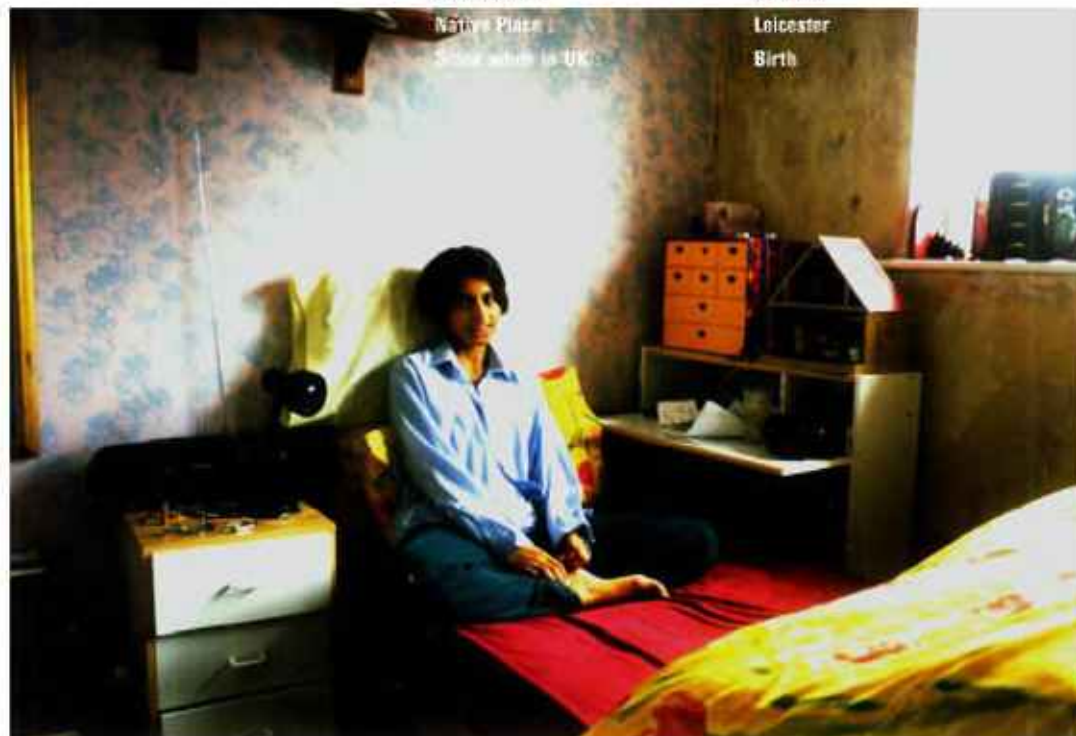


Birth Place :	Uganda, 49 Years
Education :	MA Medical Anthropology
Profession :	Clinical Researcher
Native Place :	Indore
Since when in UK :	1964
Parents Profession :	Father Civil Service; Mother Teacher
Last Visit to India :	1995
Image of India :	Belonging/Home/Ochre/Spirituality
Favourite place in India :	Darjeeling
Favourite place in the world :	Mountains and Deserts
Favourite food :	Savoury - vegetarian
Favourite Music :	Shohrai
Problem in India :	Untidiness
Problem in UK :	Insular reluctant to new ideas and innovations
Cultural dilemma :	"Marginal" native everywhere
What do you think of this project :	Long Overdue
Why have you selected this frame :	Thats how I would like to be seen
	Thats how people see me
What will you do with this photo :	Frame it!!



Dhara Vyas

Birth Place/Date : Leicester , 17 yrs. old  
 Education : A levels (Advanced)  
 Profession : Student  
 Native Place : Leicester  
 School where in UK : Birth



Problem in India : Don't know enough about it



Problem in UK :  
**Bad** weather

Parents Profession : Teacher / Journalist  
 Last Visit to India : 1998  
 Image of India : Faraway  
 Favourite place in India : Don't know  
 Favourite place in the world : Florence  
 Favourite food : Pasta  
 Favourite Film : Evita  
 Favourite Book : Midnight's Children Salman Rushdie  
 Favourite Music : Dance / Swing Soul  
 Problem in India : Don't know enough about it  
 Problem in UK : Bad weather  
 Cultural dilemma : Religious conflicts  
 What do you think of this project : Good idea  
 Why have you selected this frame : Because I want to go to bed comfortable  
 What will you do with this photo : Stick it up



Birth Place/Date :	Daman, 43 yrs.
Education :	BSc.
Profession :	Teacher
Native Place :	Daman
Since when in UK :	1977
Parents Profession :	Farmers
Last Visit to India :	1997
Image of India :	Home
Favourite place in India :	Daman
Favourite place in the world :	Daman
Favourite food :	Pasta
Favourite Book :	Down Under
Favourite Music :	Chants of India
Problem in India :	Education need to be improved
Problem in UK :	Racism
Cultural dilemma :	Passing on faith in God to today's generation
What do you think of this project :	Interested
Why have you selected this frame :	I sit and work and listen to music in this place
What will you do with this photo :	Give it to my husband



Birth Place :	Sambhal (UP)
Education :	B.Com (Hons)
Profession :	Journalist
Native Place :	Delhi
Since when in UK :	1985
Parents Profession :	Lecturer (Retd.)
Last Visit to India :	1997
Image of India :	Secularism
Favourite place in India :	Delhi
Favourite place in the world :	Venice
Favourite food :	Chicken Biryani
Favourite Film :	Umrao Jaan
Favourite Book :	Holy Quran
Favourite Music :	Hindi Film Songs
Problem in India :	Corruption and Population
Problem in UK :	Racism
Cultural dilemma :	Generation Gap
What do you think of this project :	For better understanding
Why have you selected this frame :	Comfortable
What will you do with this photo :	Keep it in an album

*What do you think  
of this project :*  
**For better  
understanding**

**Secularism**



**Cultural dilemma : discrimination between cultures due to a lack of understanding**



Birth Place :	Manchester
Education :	GCSE, 10
Profession :	Student
Native Place :	England
Since when in UK :	All my life
Parents Profession :	Social worker
Last Visit to India :	5 years ago
Image of India :	full of life
Favourite place in India :	Punjab
Favourite place in the world :	Africa
Favourite food :	Chinese
Favourite Film :	Thelma
Favourite Book :	Matilda (Roald Dahl)
Favourite Music :	Swing
Problem in India :	Conflict between Hindus and Muslims
Problem in UK :	Government - lack of organisation
Cultural dilemma :	discrimination between cultures due to a lack of understanding
What do you think of this project :	It will help look at different peoples perspectives
Why have you selected this frame :	I feel more relaxed in this place
What will you do with this photo :	Put it in my album

**Problem in India : Conflict between Hindus and Muslims**





Trying to live as a true Indian in UK

*Cultural dilemma:*

Birth Place :	Mbale - Uganda
Education :	LLb. Solicitor, MBA
Profession :	Solicitor
Native Place :	Mbale, Uganda, East Africa
Since when in UK :	1970
Parents Profession :	Retired Shoemaker
Last Visit to India :	1991
Image of India :	Exciting and vibrant
Favourite place in India :	Raval - my father's birth place
Favourite place in the world :	Raval
Favourite food :	Curries
Favourite Film :	Once upon a time in the West
Favourite Book :	Biography of Mahatma Gandhi
Favourite Music :	Pop music, Soul and Country
Problem in India :	Corruption and oppression of the poor by the rich
Problem in UK :	Increase in violence and drugs
Cultural dilemma :	Trying to live as a true Indian in UK
What do you think of this project :	Don't know
Why have you selected this frame :	It reflects inner me
What will you do with this photo :	Keep it





Birth Place : England (Leicester)  
 Education : Secondary School  
 Profession : Student  
 Native Place : Loughborough  
 Since when in UK : All my life  
 Parents Profession : Dad - lawyer, Mom - Admin  
 Last Visit to India : Never been  
 Image of India : Colourful Lively  
 Favourite place in India : don't know  
 Favourite place in the world : Not Sure  
 Favourite food : Chocolate  
 Favourite Film : Parda ( Titanic



Favourite Book : Horror books by various authors  
 Favourite Music : All types  
 Problem in India : Poverty  
 Problem in UK : Not a lot of Indian things to do  
 Cultural dilemma : Finding a middle way between being an Indian and living in Britain  
 What do you think of this project : Intriguing  
 Why have you selected this frame : Because my bedroom is my favourite place  
 What will you do with this photo : Either keep it or give it to a friend

*Problem in UK :*  
**Not a lot of Indian things to do**

*Last Visit to India :*  
**Never been**





**Bhikubhai Chibubhai Gandhi**



## Problem in UK : Unemployment

Birth Place :	Navsari, India, 59 years
Education :	Under graduate in Economics
Profession :	Fully fashion Knitter (Hosiery)
Native Place :	Navsari, India
Since when in UK :	1962
Parents Profession :	Business
Last Visit to India :	May 1998
Image of India :	Good progressive country
Favourite place in India :	Navsari
Favourite place in the world :	USA
Favourite food :	Vegetable
Favourite Film :	Religious
Favourite Book :	Gita
Favourite Music :	Bhajan
Problem in India :	Water, Electricity, Roads
Problem in UK :	Unemployment
Cultural dilemma :	Gap between young and old people
What do you think of this project :	Good for people
Why have you selected this frame :	Its good personality
What will you do with this photo :	I will keep it for memory

Problem in India: **Water, Electricity, Roads**

*Problem in UK:*  
**Gaining Single Currency**



*Image of India:*  
**From Photographs**

Birth Place/Date:	England , 18 yrs
Education:	Finished A levels
Profession:	Student

Native Place :	Britain
Since when in UK :	Born in Britain
Parents Profession :	Father - Engineer; Mother - Housewife
Last Visit to India :	Never
Image of India :	From Photographs
Favourite place in India :	Kashmir
Favourite place in the world :	Canada, Alaska
Favourite food :	Italian
Favourite Film :	Star Trek - 6
Favourite Book :	Dum - Frank Herbert
Favourite Music :	Classical Indian, Sufi, Qawwali
Problem in India :	Poverty
Problem in UK :	Gaining Single Currency
Cultural dilemma :	Nothing as such
What do you think of this project :	A very good idea
Why have you selected this frame :	I thought it might be a good idea
What will you do with this photo :	Nothing!



*Problem in India :*

**Pollution and Corruption**

*Image of India :*  
**Making good progress**

Birth Place :	Punjab, India / 50 years
Education :	Matric. Other training courses in UK
Profession :	Caseworker
Native Place :	Punjab
Since when in UK :	1974
Parents Profession :	Army
Last Visit to India :	November, 1997
Image of India :	Making good progress
Favourite place in India :	Nainital and Shimla
Favourite place in the world :	Not seen all of it yet
Favourite food :	Aloo Parantha
Favourite Film :	Shor (Hindi)
Favourite Book :	No time to read
Favourite Music :	Qawwali
Problem in India :	Pollution and corruption
Problem in UK :	Weather and social life
Cultural dilemma :	Can't think of any
What do you think of this project :	Good idea
Why have you selected this frame :	Because I spend most of my time here
What will you do with this photo :	Keep it as a memento



*Problem in UK:*  
**Insular**

Birth Place :	Nakuru, Kenya
Education :	BSc (Hons.) Computer Science
Profession :	Microsoft analyst
Native Place :	Nakuru, Kenya
Since when in UK :	1968
Parents Profession :	Factory Worker
Last Visit to India :	1998
Image of India :	Rural, crowded and compassionate
Favourite place in India :	Clangute Goa
Favourite place in the world :	San Francisco
Favourite food :	Puri, Kheer
Favourite Film :	Pyasa (Guru Dutt)
Favourite Book :	Clarissa
Favourite Music :	M People
Problem in India :	Population
Problem in UK :	Insular
Cultural dilemma :	One foot in the East and the other in the West
What do you think of this project :	Excellent, informative idea
Why have you selected this frame :	Place of work, Russell Square
What will you do with this photo :	Keep it with my collection

*Cultural dilemma :*  
**One foot  
in the East  
and the other in  
the West**



## Shamsher Bahdur Singh



Birth Place/Date :	Punjab, 1954
Education :	Primary School in Punjab, Secondary School in England
Profession :	Care worker and development officer for an elderly project
Native Place :	Dixt, Jalandhar Punjab
Since when in UK :	1966
Parents Profession :	Father - Foundry Worker, Mother - House wife
Last Visit to India :	1991
Image of India :	India is a beautiful place, People who run it are not
Favourite place in India :	Amritsar, Chandigarh, Agra and Gwalior
Favourite place in the world :	Anandpur Sahib
Favourite food :	Sarson ka Saag Makke ki Roti
Favourite Film :	Sarbans Dani Guru Gobind Singhji
Favourite Book :	Sachi Sakhi
Favourite Music :	Listening to Gurbani Kirtan
Problem in India :	India should give the constitutional right of self determination to people
Problem in UK :	Racism and Immigration laws
Cultural dilemma :	Freedom of choice
What do you think of this project :	Very good
Why have you selected this frame :	Because I am what I am
What will you do with this photo :	I will frame it

Image of India :  
India is beautiful place,  
people who run it are not

Birth Place :	Zanzibar (Tanzania)
Education :	BSc, B.Ed, PGCE
Profession :	Local Authority Officer
Native Place :	Gujarat
Since when in UK :	1986
Parents Profession :	Hindu Karmakandi Priest
Last Visit to India :	1995
Image of India :	Motherland
Favourite place in India :	Rajkot Vadodara
Favourite place in the world :	England
Favourite food :	Gujarati Style Vegetarian Food
Favourite Film :	Hindi Film - Bombay
Favourite Book :	Swami Vivekananda's Books
Favourite Music :	Indian
Problem in India :	Dishonesty, Environment
Problem in UK :	Weather, Education system



*Image of India :* **Motherland**

Cultural dilemma :	It is an unsolved and long standing problem
What do you think of this project :	A good project enabling to communicate between two countries
Why have you selected this frame :	I am a very religious person The banana plant is a live God for me. It is the favourite plant of Lord Vishnu
What will you do with this photo :	It will remain with me always





*Image of India :*

Birth Place :	England (Nottingham)
Education :	Secondary School
Profession :	Student
Native Place :	Loughborough
Since when in UK :	All life
Parents Profession :	Dad- pharmacist, Mum - Childcare worker
Last Visit to India :	Never
Image of India :	Lively, exciting and colourful
Favourite place in India :	Never been
Favourite place in the world :	Haven't visited anywhere
Favourite food :	Ice cream
Favourite Film :	Titanic
Favourite Book :	Double Act by Jacqueline Wilson
Favourite Music :	Pop music, Soul music
Problem in India :	Poverty
Problem in UK :	Weather (Mostly cold)
Cultural dilemma :	Adapting to living as an Indian while living in Britain
What do you think of this project :	Seems interesting
Why have you selected this frame :	Because of the colourful wallpaper and plant behind me
What will you do with this photo :	Might send to a friend, keep it

**Lively,  
exciting  
and  
colourful**

*Favourite place in India :*

**Never been**



**Birth Place :** Forthall Kenya, Africa  
**Education :** 8 'O' levels , Teachers Certificate, Diploma in Race and Communal Relations  
**Profession :** Director, Racial Equality Council  
**Native Place :** Porbander, India

**Since when in UK :** December 1968  
**Parents Profession :** Businessmen  
**Last Visit to India :** Dec.1997  
**Image of India :** Great place to visit, to settle after retirement  
**Favourite place in India :** All places, Gujarat is nice  
**Favourite place in the world :** West Indies  
**Favourite food :** Anything Vegetarian  
**Favourite Film :** Mother India and other patriotic films  
**Favourite Book :** Mahatma Gandhi  
**Favourite Music :** Old Hindi film Songs  
**Problem in India :** Stability in Government, Corruption  
**Problem in UK :** High unemployment in Asian Community  
**Cultural dilemma :** Younger generation unaware of culture  
**What do you think of this project :** A very good idea, good luck  
**Why have you selected this frame :** Good image  
**What will you do with this photo :** Treasure it!

*Cultural dilemma :*  
**Younger generation  
unaware of  
culture**

Image of India : Great place to visit, to settle after retirement

**Cultural dilemma : Its difficult to convince younger generation about Indian Culture**



Birth Place :	Valod, Gujarat, Age 52
Education :	BSc.
Profession :	Shop manager
Native Place :	Valod
Since when in UK :	1977
Parents Profession :	Father - Teacher, Mother - Housewife
Last Visit to India :	1995
Image of India :	One of the good places on earth
Favourite place in India :	Valod
Favourite place in the world :	India
Favourite food :	Undhiyoo
Favourite Film :	Devdas
Favourite Book :	Geeta
Favourite Music :	Old Hindi Film Songs
Problem in India :	Population / Corruption
Problem in UK :	Racism
Cultural dilemma :	Its difficult to convince younger generation about Indian Culture
What do you think of this project :	Good
Why have you selected this frame :	This is what my image is
What will you do with this photo :	I will keep it in my album

**Favourite food :**  
**Undhiyoo**





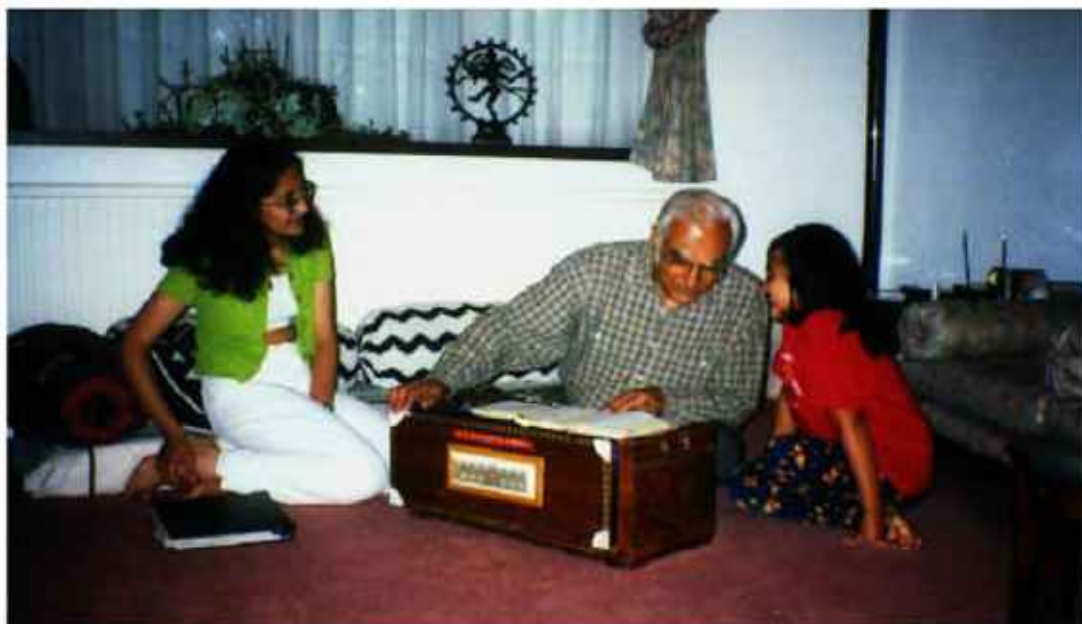
**Cultural dilemma :**  
**Want to stay in India**

Birth Place :	London
Education :	8th Grade
Profession :	Student
Native Place :	Bombay
Since when in UK :	Birth
Parents Profession :	Travel Agent
Last Visit to India :	1997 December
Image of India :	Brilliant
Favourite place in India :	Bombay
Favourite place in the world :	Bombay
Favourite food :	Kidney Beans
Favourite Film :	Lamhe (Hindi)
Favourite Music :	Hindi Film Songs
Problem in India :	No problem
Problem in UK :	Attitude of people
Cultural dilemma :	Want to stay in India
What do you think of this project :	Lets your feelings out
Why have you selected this frame :	Because I am a music maniac!
What will you do with this photo :	Enlarge it and put it in my bedroom



Chandu Mattani

Cultural dilemma :  
Generation Gap



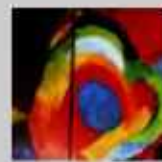
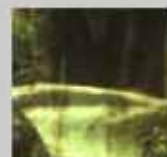
Birth Place/Date :	Mandvi Kutch, India , 64 years
Education :	High School
Profession :	Company director
Native Place :	Mandvi Kutch India
Since when in UK :	March 1977
Parents Profession :	Shop owner in India
Last Visit to India :	Jan 1998
Image of India :	Excellent
Favourite place in India :	Notthdwarda, Rajasthan
Favourite place in the world :	Mandvi - my birth town
Favourite food :	Indian sweets
Favourite Film :	Raj Kapoor's Sangam
Favourite Book :	Harkishen Mehta's : <i>Jad Chetan</i>
Favourite Music :	Indian Classical
Problem in India :	Over crowded
Problem in UK :	Generation gap
Cultural dilemma :	Same as Above
What do you think of this project :	Excellent
Why have you selected this frame :	It gives me pleasure
What will you do with this photo :	Keep in personal collection

Problem in India :

Over crowded







# The Diasporic condition and *Bahu*-spora

Wheels within Wheels

Amrit Gangur

*Babul ki duaen leti jaa,  
jaa tujko sukhi sansaar mile!  
Mayke ki yaad kabhi naa aaye,  
sasural mein itnaa pyaar mile!!*

Go with the blessings  
of your father,  
may your life be happy  
May you get so much love at your  
in-laws that  
You may never remember your  
mother's home!!  
[First lines of a song from a Hindi  
film *Neel Kamal*]<sup>1</sup>

## PROLOGUE:

The popular Indian film has been dabbling with the theme of the Indian diaspora off and on; particularly in the past one decade or so there have been quite a few Hindi films that have directly touched upon this aspect in their own Bollywoodian way.<sup>2</sup> However unlike Indian communities across the world might be, they all maintain some sort of tenuous link with their mother land. Obviously, one of the most likely candidates for a form of bonding is the Hindi feature film, a phenomenon unique for the Indian diaspora: what Hollywood is to Western Europe, the

Bombay Hollywood (Bollywood) is to the Middle East, East Africa as also the Indian diaspora in the UK or the USA.<sup>3</sup> The Indian 'arranged marriage' is said to be yet another facet of a 'common culture'. Newspapers published by Indian communities flourish everywhere, and they invariably carry a section with matrimonial ads. Though ads help Indians to 'locate' one another, they pose difficult questions about 'otherness'; both the 'otherness' of Indians in relation to the British or the Americans, and the 'otherness' of certain Indians in relation to other Indians. I shall refer to such ads in Indian newspapers later.

Over about a past decade, the circulation of the word 'diaspora' has also picked up much more volume and velocity, in and out of the intellectual discourse. Of late, the word ("NRIs", as the Indian political economy would cleverly dub it) has got a certain edge after political changes in India, the first or the second generation

Indian diaspora abroad is being increasingly lured to her/his 'mother land'. Hindus all over the world are showing alarming signs of susceptibility to a resurgent and militant Hinduism. In fact, it is even argued that they know the meaning of Hinduism better than do Hindus in the 'motherland'. And at the time when the talk of 'globalisation' is very much on the agenda, all this creates an interesting historical anarchy - perhaps premeditated and orchestrated one.

What interests me further is media sometimes consciously or unconsciously using the word *diaspora* even for the migrants within the country. "Kutchi or Tamil diaspora in Mumbai", for instance!! Families of men and women who migrated from Kutch or Tamil Nadu to Mumbai to find a better job and living situation (real or perceived) within the Republic of India as its legitimate citizens. And for contributing towards nation building with their sweat and toil! Obviously, no visa required to cross over boundaries of the states. No passports. <sup>4</sup> But that reminds me of the Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray once seriously contem-

plating of introducing the entry-permit (visa, in other words) system for people coming from outside the state of Maharashtra, and much more.<sup>5</sup> In a press conference he announced, "I don't care whether people call me Hitler or a Nazi, we'll go ahead forcefully with our plans to demolish all new huts of the outsiders to stop further influx of people into the City." The Sena supremo made this statement when his attention was drawn to a statement reportedly made by a British urban planner, Nigel Harris, that the Sena's demand was similar to the Nazis' pre-World War II demand for "more living space for the Germans."<sup>6</sup>

All this frightening history including the usage of the word 'diaspora' by the so-called modern media led me to think about discovering diasporas within diasporas and expand the diasporic landscape as far as possible. As broad. And deep. Just to drain the word out of its demarcations and get the state of being called the Diasporic Condition.

My attempt eventually leads me to popular Indian films and its

depiction (maybe stereotypical) of an iconic diasporic condition - the traditional Hindu *bahu!* Diaspora, presumably, is a collective or plural term but I would like to risk my paradigms to include the singular entity, who, when multiplied arithmetically on a real social slate, makes a massive 'diasporic' community within the Hindu society, within its own nation. And by the same logic, outside too.

Diaspora and the Diasporic Condition:

"Diaspora", the word, is derived from the Greek verb *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over). When applied to humans, the ancient Greeks thought of *diaspora* as migration and colonization. By contrast, for Jews, Africans, Palestinians and Armenians, the expression acquired a more sinister and brutal meaning. Diaspora signified a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamt of home but lived in exile. Other people abroad, who have also maintained strong identities have, in recent years, defined themselves as diasporas, though they were neither active agents of colonization nor passive victims



of persecution. The case of Indian indentured labour is, however, different. The Indian excursus to the Carribean, for instance, took place under highly oppressive conditions.

Indentureship recruitment, the Indo-Trinidadian scholar Kenneth Permasad reminds us, "took place in an India reeling under the yoke of colonial oppression." Colonialism induced massive transformations in Indian economy and society, and the increase in famines under colonial rule, the destruction of indigenous industries, and the proliferation of the unemployed all attest to the heartlessness of colonial rule.<sup>7</sup>

As a historical concept, *diaspora* appears first in Jewish history that began with the expulsion of Jews from Israel in 70 C.E. when the Romans destroyed the Temple in Israel. The historical momentum of the diaspora results from this expulsion, and significantly from the memory of a promised land. Following the expulsion, there are years of wandering in search of a proper place to settle. And finally diaspora acquires its special meanings because of the belief that return to the promised land might some day be possible.

#### The Diasporic Condition:

The main factor constituting the diasporic condition is geographic dislocation or migration - forced or of one's own volition for whatever reason. This dislocation manifests itself as banishment or exile, collective trauma having an element of predicament, sense of loss and urge to reclaim and looking back.<sup>8</sup> And as the journalist Sabnam Minwalla noted, "Academics have long pondered the nature of the elastic bonds which tug emigrants back to the land of their origin - a mechanism which has worked unerringly in the case of an Indian diaspora scattered across continents and generations."<sup>9</sup> Migration can be generally divided into two types: one caused by purely political pressures, e.g. German-Jewish migration to Britain in the 1930s as also Polish and Hungarian migration in the last twenty years; and the other caused by economic and demographic factors. Political immigrants may often belong to the higher social strata in their own countries and bring with them capital and professional skills. Migration is also caused by the pressure of population on land and capital

in the country of the migrants and the possibility of achieving higher standards of living in the 'host' country. Many a time, the migrant is also unaware of the actual situation in the land s/he is going to settle. Or unsettle.

My paradigmatic *bahu-diaspora* contains most of these elements in one way or another - more within socio-economic parameters burdened by traditions and beliefs, by the socially oppressive hierarchy and male dominated social structures. I find a certain predicament and a sense of banishment in the orthodox, traditional Indian *bahu* - the helpless bride setting on her journey from her parents' home to her husband's, which is populated by his own folks - parents, sisters, brothers, etc. Interestingly, she neither knows the man she has married nor his home nor his folks. We find this *condition* reflected in Indian popular cinema - in melodramatic mise-en-scenes or in songs that would moist mostly female eyes in the audience as they know the pain better. The song from *Neel Kamal* echoes the *diasporic bahu* predicament and pain. It's her predicament, may not be unpleasant

always, but certainly a trying situation. She is also a passive victim of social persecution.

For such a young bride, the journey from *babul/ma:yka* (father/mother land) to *sasural* (in-laws/alien land) is a sort of passage of exile, the *diasporic condition* that expects her to integrate and immerse herself completely with/into the living culture of her husband's family.<sup>10</sup> It's a one-way adjustment and a dialogue. In many a case, she has to suffer the tyranny of her husband's mother or sister - power centres in the alien site/family-nation. It's an alien culture she is expected to adapt herself totally. The validity of her passport/visa to this alien land is the amount of dowry she has carried with herself. A Hindi proverb says, *Ma:yke ka kutta bhi pyara hota hai* meaning "Every damn thing belonging to a woman's maternal home is dear to her."<sup>11</sup> Perhaps this is yet another unexpressed facet of the diasporic condition.

Interestingly, the *bahu-diaspora* (on the reverse side) also presumes an element of racism which is abundantly evident in

the matrimonial ads in national dailies. Here are some examples: Convented, Graduate, 3-year Course German, Pharmacist, Delhi Govt., own home, plot, unencumbered, non-smoker, teetotaler, gentle, handsome, Rajput, seeks well employed, qualified, bonde-n-beautiful woman of substance. Wanna love-n-spoil be loved-n-spoiled. Widow, divorcee welcome. Civil marriage acceptable. Box BT-6031-CA, *Hindustan Times*.<sup>12</sup> National dailies such as the *Hindustan Times* galore in such matrimonial ads - alliances always wanted from fair complexioned, caring, homely girls by boys of their families belonging to a particular caste, sub-caste or gotra (lineage). The *bahu-spota* becomes even more cruel when a bride is chosen from India by a Indian diasporic family and taken to a foreign land - to the real diasporic land - without she even adequately knowing about her husband or her family. Sometime, she and her family are misled, lured by the European or American dreams. Seven seas away from her home and family, she finds herself in a very peculiar situation in the strange diaspora.

Eseentially, I think, the *diasporic condition* could prevail anywhere despite geographical dislocations. One could be an 'exile' in one's own country. The *bahu-spota* is yet another form of diaspora - a historic *diasporic condition* found very much in real and reel life in India or elsewhere. Popular Indian film reflects all such realities and contradictions in its own peculiar way!!

<sup>10</sup> A 1968 film directed by Ram Mahashwari

<sup>11</sup> Films such as *Pardesh*, *Dil Wale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*, *Aa Ab Laut Chale*, *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* et al

<sup>12</sup> This fact is also very much evident in the responses Parthiv Shah has received from his 'photographed' respondents - in individual questionnaire form each one filled in. Re. Shah's Photo Project in the UK.

<sup>13</sup> Ironically, even now people going back to their original 'home lands' within India say that they are going to their 'deesh', the country. There are always countries within a country hence diasporae within diaspora - containing within itself the omnipresent Other.

<sup>14</sup> Bombay: *The Myth of the Migrant*, Illustrated Weekly of India, June 16, 1985.



<sup>6</sup> The Daily, Bombay, June 8, 1985.

<sup>7</sup> Indian Diaspora website.

<sup>8</sup> As Sulman Rushdie described emigrants as 'haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back.'

<sup>9</sup> The Times of India, July 8, 2000. Ms Minwalla studied the Indian diasporic situation in the UK recently and published a series of articles on this subject.

<sup>10</sup> Remember the first wedding song in *Mother India* (Dir. Mehboob Khan, 1957). Through it the bride says - I was fated to go to another land (pardes) leaving behind my babul's courtyard ... Many films include such songs about leaving babul/mayka for saawal or pardes.

<sup>11</sup> Hindi-English Dictionary, Eds Mahendra Chaturvedi, Dr EN Tiwari, National Publishing House, New Delhi, June 1984. The lexicon meaning of 'mayka' is mother's home, maternal house/village/city/place (of a married woman).

<sup>12</sup> I have deliberately chosen to pick up this ad from Phillip Adam's delicious book *a billion voices: a journey through the bizarre, the chaotic, the exquisite, the anarchic, the little known side of india*, ABC Books, 1999.

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# 'Indian values' and the diaspora: Yash Chopra's films of the 1990s<sup>1</sup>

Rachel Dwyer

The Hindi cinema has received increasing academic attention in recent years, as befits its importance as India's dominant form of public culture, and also as a major cultural form which resisting western hegemony has created its own form of globalisation. This paper makes some tentative steps to look at the increasing popularity of Indian cinema among the British South Asian diaspora, raising issues of 'Indian values' largely concerned with eroticism and sexuality, to examine the formation of a transnational viewing public, which complicates the notion of 'Indianness'.

In this paper I discuss the work of Yash Chopra, arguably Bombay's most successful director, whose career spans more than four decades, who is certainly its most powerful producer. His name among Hindi movie goers is almost synonymous with the romantic film, where he has created a distinct aesthetic in terms of visuals, music and narrative, and is known for his presentation of the 'ideal Indian woman'. In particular, I wish to focus on his films of the last decade or so, which include

*Chandni* (1989), *Lamhe* ('Moments', 1991), *Darr* ('Fear', 1993) and *Dil to pagal hai* ('The heart is mad', 1997). I shall also touch on a film he has produced, his son's debut film, *Dilwale dushmaniya le jayenge* ('The braveheart will take the bride', 1995), one of the top box office grossers of all time. These films are significant in the wider history of the Bombay movie industry, as they mark the box office dominance during the 1990s in India and overseas of the big budget, glossy romantic film, of which Chopra's company Yash Raj Films is the yardstick of success. I examine some of the new features of these films below, concentrating on their presentation of the NRI (non-resident Indian) as hero and upholder of 'Indian values', and at the unprecedented box-office success these films have had among the South Asian diaspora, largely in the UK and in the USA, and what this means for the Bombay producer.

The romantic revival of the 1990s

It is widely accepted that 1988 marked a turning point in the history of Hindi films, as the

release of Mansoor Khan's *Qayamat se qayamat tak* (QSQT) ('From apocalypse to apocalypse') began the revival of the romantic musical film which had seemed to be under such pressure from the action movies of the 1980s. This break has been overemphasised, but a new type of romantic movie undoubtedly emerged in the 1990s, when the focus shifted from the male, urban underdog struggling against society to romantic stories. However, far more important was the rise of the theme of love as friendship, in which a young boy and girl become friends, falling in love only as their friendship deepens. Although this relationship had been depicted earlier (Raj Kapoor's *Bobby* (1973)), it became widespread only in the late 1980s, as films saw friendship replacing the theme of love as passion, an aesthetic also found in the Urdu love lyric (*ghazal*), which in the form of song lyrics and language of love had dominated cinema to date. Language in cinema had already been changing over the years, from a flowery Urdu to forms of more colloquial Hindi, whose drama came more from its theatrical delivery and sometimes vivid realism rather than its poetic nature. In the 1990s, English phrases become more widespread, a film such as *Maine*

*pyar kiya* ('I have fallen in love', 1989, dir. Sooraj Barjatya), requiring the heroine to say 'I love you' in English, rather than use the film's title, but the Hindi language itself was altered by the young writers who write their dialogues in English then translate them directly into Hindi.

The couple was no longer elite or feudal, nor innocent rustics, but urban college kids, living in social situations where boys and girls mixed freely and as some sort of equals. Reconciliation of the lovers to their families remained an important theme, but now the couple won the family over through persuading the parents that they were truly observing family values, which their parents may have somehow forgotten.

While these roles were taken by a new crop of stars, it may be that the new star of these romantic films was the music. Although music had always formed an integral part of the Hindi film, right from the very first 'talkie' in 1931, and was a popular item on the radio, it was only with the advent of the cheap audio-cassette in the 1980s that a mass market for film music was created.<sup>2</sup> Music was given a further life independent of films when cable and satellite

television came to India in 1991, since the bulk of the output of many channels is formed by film material, in particular the showing of song sequences.

AR Rehman, whose music for *Roja* ('Rose', 1993, dir. Mani Ratnam), was an instant hit, made film music fashionable to an even wider audience, as his music incorporated the already hybrid film music into an even more eclectic popular music. Combined with the appeal of British Asian music, in particular the new variation of the traditional Panjabi *bhangra*, which was reimported to India, film music became fashionable even among those who professed scorn for the popular Hindi film,<sup>3</sup> even if they claimed that their pleasure was, in part, ironic. *Deshi* ('native, Indian'), became 'cool' for the MTV generation, and MTV Asia itself found it had to include Indian music to compete with music channels such as Channel [V], who created a new stylish image for the Hindi film.

A new cinema audience in India A major component of this new audience for films and film music was formed by the 'new middle classes', which emerged with economic liberalisation in the early 1990s.<sup>4</sup> They enjoyed different patterns of leisure,



consumption, and spending power, and were soon targeted by the astute film producers, who were aware that this class could pay much more for their tickets than the rural audiences, allowing for more appropriately upmarket, modernised cinema halls that could also do justice to the new technology Dolby digital soundtrack. At this time in India the VHS-rental market was killed in the 1990s by cable and satellite Asian TV channels and the practice of 'video holdback', begun in India in 1994 by Sooraj Barjatya for the release of his film *Hum aapke hain koun...* ('What am I to you?'), which broke all box-office records.

Although the family audience remains the major target for the producers, the 1990s saw the 'college crowd', a new, young audience for these films. Hindi film became seen as 'cool', largely because of the music, which was no longer regarded as 'naïf' but as cool and hip. The other attraction was the rise of new stars who became pin-ups and heroes for the younger generation. The clothing and lifestyles of the film stars become increasingly admired and a major attraction in film viewing.<sup>5</sup>

The diasporic audience  
During the 1960s and 1970s, Hindi films were screened in the

UK in cinema halls, mostly on Sunday mornings and other 'off-peak' times,<sup>6</sup> a practice which ended in the 1980s, largely due to the advent of the VCR. This market in turn was killed in the 1990s by cable and satellite Asian TV channels such as Zee TV and 'video holdback' (see above) was followed in the UK as cinema halls once again began to screen Hindi films.

Bombay's producers and directors were once again quick to pick up on social trends in the UK. They, as other affluent Indians (see below), tend to holiday in London at least during the Indian summer months of June and July. London is perhaps a surprising choice of destination, but the film people have many friends and relations in London, and they enjoy the shopping, the restaurants and going to the cinema halls. Many of the film personnel view two or three films a day during their visit, follow films reviews and monitor box office success, although few of them interact with non-South Asians in the UK. They also meet distributors and exhibitors of Hindi films to discuss box office revenues and other such business matters.

It was such an awareness of this market as a major source of revenue which led to Yash

Chopra setting up distribution offices in London in 1997 and New York in 1998, following his opening a Bombay distribution company a few years earlier. There is a non-South Asian audience for these films elsewhere in the world, but in Europe and America it is almost exclusively for the people of South Asian descent. Nevertheless, even this audience has managed to push several films into the Top 10 box office rankings in the UK, and into the Top 30 in the USA. The overseas market is of crucial importance to the top-ranking producers, since ticket prices are higher (*DTPH* tickets were initially £15 in London, i.e. Rs 1000, ten times the top Indian ticket price), and earn the producers hard currency, making it easier for them to take their units overseas in future productions.

Perhaps the most surprising element in this return to cinema was that the audience was no longer the older generation, one often supposed to comprise bored housewives and the elderly, who watched Hindi films to while away the time and because their English was too poor for them to enjoy British television. Instead a new generation of Hindi film goers emerged from the British South Asian diaspora. This younger audience is educated in



English and brought up in a British cultural environment, at least at school and often in its patterns of media consumption. Few of them know Hindi well, for the British South Asian diaspora is largely Punjabi or Gujarati speaking, with a significant number of Sylheti speakers from Bangladesh. There are very few mother-tongue Hindi speakers in this diaspora, although many people of Pakistani origin learn Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, which in its colloquial spoken form is largely identical to Hindi, the national language of India.<sup>7</sup> This younger generation of people of Indian origin knows Hindi almost exclusively through watching Hindi cinema, and young people are often encouraged by their parents to watch movies in order to improve their language skills.<sup>8</sup>

Going to the cinema is only a part of the whole experience of the Hindi movie in India, where movie viewing is supplemented by other media, including music (see above), star magazines,<sup>9</sup> and television programmes. These are all widely available within South Asian community shops, but perhaps more important is the access to the numerous websites on the Internet, which provide links to wider discussions about movies, stars, song lyrics, samples of music and excerpts

from films.

Given the long association of the two countries, in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial situations, it is not surprising that Indian culture has pervaded British culture for several centuries at many levels from language to food to fashion. The 1980s saw an outbreak of *Raj* nostalgia<sup>10</sup> alongside the emerging importance of English literature from India that was to gather impetus in the 1990s (in particular Rushdie, Seth, Roy and Chandra). This was followed by a particular fashion in the UK for 'Asian cool',<sup>11</sup> ranging from clothing and music and the club scene, as Asian musicians, such as Talvin Singh won national awards, to television programmes such as 'Goodness Gracious Me!', shown at primetime, and internationally successful films such as 'East is East'. This was largely driven by the British South Asian community, but was followed by many others, most notably the international icon Madonna who wore a *bindi* and henna on her hands.

The Hindi film was often referred to in music remixes and in fashion, but very few non-South Asians go to see Hindi movies. The Hindi film producers are keen to reach this wider audience but it remains to be seen if they

will be attracted to this very different form of cinema.

Although most DVDs of Hindi movies are subtitled in English, the films shown in the cinema halls are rarely subtitled, but Yash Chopra and others are now considering releasing subtitled prints of their films.<sup>12</sup>

Yash Chopra and glamorous realism

Film makers such as Yash Chopra, have made films which present a style he has called 'glamorous realism', the 'Yash Chopra' touch: a unique visual aesthetic which is manifested in locations, sets and the way he presents his stars; instantly recognisable, this has been frequently imitated in the Indian movies, notably his trademark shots of misty valleys, snow-capped mountains, lakes and rivers, women in chiffon, fields of flowers and the lifestyle of the super-rich.

It is clear that one of the pleasures of these films is Yash Chopra's presentation of the idealised woman as an object of visual desire. This pleasure is not only for the heterosexual male viewer but also for those wishing to enjoy looking at the style that makes the ideal woman, and to relate to her in a variety of complex ways.<sup>13</sup> One of these is undoubtedly the consumerist and

associated pleasures offered by the glamorous realism of Yash Chopra's films.

The lifestyle of the super-rich depicted in these films is increasingly 'modern' or 'western'. Yash Chopra first depicted modern, lavish interiors in his first colour film, *Waqt* ('Time', 1965) and set the model which others have followed. (This lifestyle is emulated by the movie Mughals themselves, some of whom model their houses on film sets.) The theatre group in *DTPH* lives in a Manhattan-style loft apartment, complete with a Pepsi machine, a fireman's pole, with a cityscape of skyscrapers being seen through the windows. The gender rules are relaxed: women have their own apartments; men and women go to bars to drink tequilas lammers, boys and girls go clothes shopping together; girls get drunk with no condemnation of their behaviour. The young crowd have birthday celebrations and go to Valentine's parties - celebrations recently condemned by the Hindu right as Christian imports.

Clothing codes have shifted in this decade.<sup>14</sup> While men have worn western clothing throughout the history of Indian cinema, western clothes for women were associated with

western values and often suggested a certain moral laxity, to say the least. In these films, western clothing is worn as fashion: in *Lamhe* Pooja wears miniskirts and western clothes, while in *DTPH* the dancers are clad in minimal lycra, and American and British designer sportswear. Yet it is striking that in *DTPH*, the hotpant-wearing Nisha is seen as barely female by Rahul, whereas his beloved Pooja wears floating chiffon saris or Punjabi suits which approximate its features.

These clothes are part of the audience's pleasure in film viewing. Certain stars, such as Karisma Kapoor, are known to wear the most fashionable clothes and many women go to see her films just to see her latest outfits. The practice of copying stars' clothes seems to be a universal phenomenon,<sup>15</sup> and feeds into the consumerist pleasures of the film, as plans are made for shopping expeditions to purchase elements of the movie's glamour.

The films make it clear that a consumerist lifestyle, which may be regarded as 'modern' and 'westernised', is seen as aspirational, an ideal to be emulated. Romance is part of this consumerist lifestyle, as it becomes associated with activities such as travel, going out

and giving presents, which are seen as essential components of courtship. Travel is one of many ways in which Hindi films depict space and place, and by exploring it I raise issues of consumption, places suitable for love and romance, and ideas of space and the transnational Indian.

In addition to movement of media (mediascapes<sup>16</sup>) and other such flows, we also see the actual movement of people. Migration is nothing new to India, where merchants and traders have been active in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia for thousands of years. However, it was in the nineteenth century that we saw large scale migration on a worldwide scale, to East and South Africa, the Caribbean and so on. Migration to the UK was at its peak in the 1950s and 1960s, supplemented by the arrival of the 'twice migrants' from East Africa in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although there has been little subsequent large-scale group migration, individual members of the educated elite have continued to migrate to North America, where South Asian communities and networks have developed.

To be part of a transnational family is almost a hallmark of being middle class in India, since nearly every middle class South



Asian has at least one family member living in the diaspora. This situation, along with traditions of South Asian hospitality and familial responsibilities has allowed an ever increasing number of Indians to travel overseas. Once this was the preserve of the superrich, but now is a real possibility for the middle classes, with their increased consumerist activities, leisure time and a whole culture of travel in India and overseas and has become another shared feature of this social group.

Travel and romance have been linked in western culture<sup>17</sup> as consumerist activities. This is also seen in Hindi films, where travel is associated with consumerism, ranging from shopping in the airports' duty-free shops, eating and drinking out, medical treatment in Swiss clinics, to expensive sports such as sailing and skiing. They also allow for a new range of costumes, cars, and specific reference to travel. Travel is also specifically associated with romance, as Rohit promises Chandni a honeymoon in Switzerland, whereas in the film only the two men go to Switzerland in the actual diegesis of the film. However, in their fantasies, we see an almost unconscious reference to travel as

Chandni is seen in Switzerland in romantic songs and other such sequences, without any attempt to include her travel within the story. This is also seen in *Darr*, where Kiran's college seems to be in India according to the narrative, but is filmed in Switzerland; Rahul's fantasies are shown in Switzerland, while in the second part of the film the story has the three protagonists actually visiting Switzerland. This wandering in and out of such spaces is also seen in *DTPH*, and *Lamhe*, with variations in the latter to present Rajasthan as a tourist space, not surprisingly, given its situation as one of India's major tourist attractions. In 1993, Yash Chopra made one of the first NRI films *Lamhe*,<sup>18</sup> where women represent the NRI's links with India, in particular through his nostalgia for a beautiful woman. His son's film *DDLJ* concerns two young NRIs whose romance develops in Europe and then in Punjab.

Space is not only connected with consumerist pleasures, but also with romance. India's great lyric traditions have associated romance with nature; the Sanskrit traditions with the rainy season, gardens, cuckoos and lotuses; the Urdu with spring, gardens, nightingales, tulips and roses. Western Romanticism, which pervaded

Indian literatures from the nineteenth century onwards, had its own specific romantic associations with nature.<sup>19</sup> The early Hindi films showed Kashmir as the ideal location for romance, and it was only in the 1970s that this came to be displaced by Europe, above all Switzerland, with Scotland gaining popularity in recent years, along with 'new' locations in Germany, North America and New Zealand, among others.

These places also constitute some sort of privacy for the romantic couple, a private space in the public domain, where they are away from the surveillance of the family which prevents, encourages and controls romance, love and marriage. The couple can dance in these spaces, not only because of the beauty of the backdrop, whose spectacle undoubtedly appeals to the audience, but also because this is beyond the time and space of their normal, everyday lives.

The attraction of these places may not be so important to the diasporic audience, but the films also give meaning to locations in India. Chandni is from a small town in north India, presumably Punjab, while her romance with Rohit shows the sights of Delhi as a backdrop, referred to specifically in a song (*Mehbooba*,



Beloved'), while her career and relationship with Lalit develop in Bombay. *Lamhe* shows Rajasthan as a place for love and romance for the NRI, while the younger girl falls in love in England. *Darr* uses little outdoor space in India, except as a place of fear, as the fiancé and the girl's family are unable to protect their own privacy and private space whether at home, in their garden or in Switzerland. In *DTPH*, overseas space is not only a holiday destination, but also an economic space, somewhere one travels to find work and money, whether Germany or Japan. India is projected as a Manhattan cityscape or as a country resort for a dance school.

It also seems that the important thing about this space is that the Indian can wander around anywhere in the world, be at home wherever she or he desires. He or she can pick up and put down the west, because what really matters to them is a sense of home, somewhere to belong, a *watan* or *desh* ('homeland'), sanitised and acceptable, with no trace of it being in any way inferiority to or more 'backward' than the west. This remains a key appeal of the film to the Indian, whether he or she lives in India or in the diaspora.

These films promote the idea of

the transnational Indian,<sup>20</sup> who may enjoy foreign travel but whose heart lies in India. Yash Chopra made one of the first NRI (Non-resident Indian) films, *Lamhe* in 1991, in which the male lead was a UK based NRI,<sup>21</sup> it was *DDLJ* in 1995 that marked the high point of this (sub-)genre that became so popular in the 1990s, the hero and heroine being UK NRIs, the first half of the film shot entirely in Europe. Although some of the audiences I have seen these films with in London clap as the tourist sights of London are shown on screen, the interaction with the film is far more complicated than simply the pleasure of seeing a figure with whom they can 'identify' on screen.<sup>22</sup>

When I discuss Hindi films with people in the industry, whether to do with the reasons why Euro-Americans (other than the South Asian diaspora) do not watch these films or why the films have remained so popular with members of the diaspora who barely know India, the major theme that comes up is one addressed directly by the films themselves, namely that of 'Indian values'. But what are these 'Indian values' and why do they mean so much to the younger generation in India and to the diaspora? The key features are not those of the modern or

postmodern world, but those of almost a feudal world, family (*khaanduan*), honour (*izzat*), modesty (*laaj*), and increasingly, religion, rather than work, companionate marriage and self-knowledge or the pursuit of happiness.

The treatment of the nation (*desh*, *watan*) has seemed to change in recent years. The early movies also discussed Indianness, but in a very different way. Here the emphasis was on national values, and a relationship between the state and the citizen, whereas in recent years, with almost every movie paying lip service to being 'Hindustani', 'Bharatiy' or 'Indian', the notion of what 'Indian' means seems to be negotiable. Yash Chopra's films of the 1990s were among the first films to portray Indianness as something inherent, not a relationship to the state nor a question of domicile, in that one can be Indian whether one is a citizen of India or whether one lives in the diaspora.<sup>23</sup> These films show that being Indian, is to do with a survival of values, a certain emotional structure, with the mother tongue used for intimacy, although English is used in many other contexts, including the formulaic expression 'I love you'.<sup>24</sup> Being Indian is 'cool', and does not involve pretending to be western,

even the half-Italian Indian returning home to his 'roots', as Sameer Rossellini in *Hum dil de chuke sanam* ('My heart's already given', 1999, dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali) comes to India to learn classical music.

The younger generation of British Asians has grown up watching Hollywood films and British television, in which South Asians were rarely visible before the late 1990s. They say they prefer Hollywood films for action, but they much prefer their romantic films to come from Bombay, finding Hollywood and British romance unappealing. Their private sphere remains 'Indian', where the idea of romance and love needing to be negotiated by other ties of family, religion and honour. The other relations of the diaspora to the Hindi film remain to be explored, and are likely to throw up interesting issues around emotional structures, but we may begin to ask questions such as: Does 'Indian' mean something other for this diaspora than the nation in which one lives? Are these people bound by ties other than those of the modern? Is this a postcolonial, transnational, global community, linked through media, transnational class, language etc? Is Hindi cinema one of the world's major globalising cultural forms which is not

American and is not in English?

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However we may try to answer these questions, it is clear that the glamorous realism of Yash Chopra and his production house, remains the main way of seeing Indianness for these new middle classes in India and in the South Asian diaspora, challenging the boundaries of the nation while complicating ideas of authenticity and tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier and longer version of this paper is appearing in 'West Coast Line', Fall 2000 ([www.sfu.ca/~west-coast-line/](http://www.sfu.ca/~west-coast-line/))

<sup>2</sup> Manual 1993

<sup>3</sup> See Dwyer 2000a, Chapter 3, also Chapter 4, on 'taste' and the Hindi film.

<sup>4</sup> See also Dwyer 2000a.

<sup>5</sup> See Dwyer 2000b on fashion in the Hindi movies.

<sup>6</sup> See Sardar 1998.

<sup>7</sup> The so-called 'Hindi' film is often in a form of language closer to Urdu, in particular in the song lyrics.

<sup>8</sup> This is a reversal of a trend seen in India, where popular magazines in English are read as part of a self-help way of learning English.

<sup>9</sup> See Dwyer 2000a, Chapter 6.

<sup>10</sup> Rushdie 1991.

<sup>11</sup> This was true of the USA to lesser extent. See for example *Vogue* (USA edition), June 1999, which featured a fashion shoot in India, using a western model shot alongside MTV VJ and actor Rahul Khanna and various 'Bollywood' celebrities, including Yash Chopra.

<sup>12</sup> Yash Chopra earlier considered dubbing his movies. See Dwyer [2001].

<sup>13</sup> Stacey 1993 on fans and Hollywood stars.

<sup>14</sup> See Dwyer 2000b.

<sup>15</sup> Stacey 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Appadurai 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Illouz 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Dwyer [2001].

<sup>19</sup> See Dwyer 2000c.

<sup>20</sup> See Dwyer [2001].

<sup>21</sup> See Dwyer [2001].

<sup>22</sup> Shively 1992 in an audience ethnography showed that Native Americans identify with the 'cowboy' rather than the 'Indian' when watching Hollywood westerns.

<sup>23</sup> Raj Kapoor famously raised the issue of clothing (consumerism) and Indianness in 1955 in the song 'Mera joota hai japaani... Phir bhi dil hai Hindustani' (My shoes are Indian... But my heart is still Indian)', a refrain which remains popular even today. See Dwyer 2000b.

<sup>24</sup> Barthes 1990.

<sup>25</sup> See Hall 1991a and b.

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