

Cluster Essays on World Youth Cultures

“Different, Youthful, Subjectivities”: Resisting Bhangra¹

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WHEN WIDESPREAD PUBLIC outrage could not stem the satellite invasion of the Indian skies, Indian parents took the next best step. As self-appointed guardians of Indian culture and morality, they banned “obscene” programmes from their living rooms. On top of most parents’ hit list were the music channels MTV and Channel V, which they saw as polluting their wards’ imagination with alien American images. Predictably, the same channels have proved to be the most popular with Indian youth. Moreover, the MTV experience in India has belied *globophobes*’ fears by heralding a folk and regional music revival, even though these might have come packaged in the global beat of World Music. This paper will follow the mutation of the Punjabi harvest dance Bhangra into World Music by tracing its “return back home” to grasp the significance of global musical flows in the formation of “different, youthful, subjectivities” at one particular site in Transl-Asia.²

Although difference is assumed to play a significant role in the constitution of youth subcultural identities, subcultural theory has traditionally thematized difference in relation to age, generation, and class. Both British subculture and American counterculture are engendered by class antagonisms even though British subculture’s working-class thrust might conflict with American counterculture’s middle-class location. As class ceased to be an important signifier in “information” societies, difference came to be thematized along gender and race lines. Ethnicity, however, continues to be a major omission of new sub-

cultural theory of Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Essentialist accounts of identity in modernity, ranged along unities of language, nation, region, fail to explicate the identity politics involved in the construction of South Asian youthful subjectivities. Multicultural settings necessitate the investigation of youth subcultures along lines of race, gender, and ethnicity along with other traditional markers. The imbrication of race, class, gender, and ethnicity in Br-Black (British Black) or Br-Asian (British Asian) youth cultures, for instance, expels them from the working-class/high culture opposition. Similarly, middle-class youth on the Indian subcontinent meets with its working class counterpart in a public space that cuts across traditional class divisions to construct Indian youth subcultures. This calls for a different conceptual structure, which can account for the gliding, elective identities of the postmodern era. These identities are produced in a space in which the local, the national, and the transnational are intertwined with one another. This postmodern space created by advanced telecommunication technologies, new media, and global capital produces cultural products that are circulated through transnational networks to a worldwide audience.

Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* provides one such model for the consideration of transnational community formations and shifting subjectivities in the new global process (35). Appadurai views the present globalizing wave as dominated by mass mediation and migration. He accords primacy to the imagination in the construction of the self in a world dominated by mass media and images. Appadurai's notion of mediascape incorporates both the method of the dissemination of images through new telecommunication technologies as well as the world created by these images. Electronic media establish the image as the prime reality in the mediascape, though these images are differently inflected depending on their mode, their hardware, their audiences and the interests of those who own and control them. Mediascapes transmit a large and complex repertoire of images, narratives, and ethnoscares to global viewers, in which the world of commodities and world of news and politics are profoundly mixed. As a result, mass audiences

throughout the world experience themselves as a complicated and interconnected repertoire of print, celluloid, electronic screens, and billboards. As the production of locality in a world dominated by images cannot be accounted for through the old sense of place, Appadurai and Breckenbridge substitute for it the term *site*. They define the site as “a spatial vortex, in which complex historical processes come into conjunction with global processes that link such sites together” (15). They see such sites as generating prismatic structures, which are local but also fundamentally interactive with other such structures. The localities constructed through such sites replace earlier centre-place models with a “global structure for the continuous (and potentially infinite) flow of images and ideologies through particular sites.” They also introduce the notion of deterritorialization to delink spatiality and territory in the production of sites (15).

Raminder Kaur and Virinder S. Kalra “propose the imagined spatial arena of Transl-Asia not as a fixed area of the world but as a continuous movement of imagined and actual arenas. To a greater or lesser extent, South Asia is one of the many reference points of Transl-Asia, but not necessarily its originary location” (223). Transl-Asia and Bhangra music illustrate Appadurai’s notion of the mediascape. Transl-Asia is an instance of deterritorialized space with multiple sites interlinked through advanced technologies. However, despite the unceasing flow of images and ideologies through these sites, they are inflected by the sociocultural realities of their particular neighbourhoods. Bhangra music now plays a significant role in the construction of this transnational global community. The producers and consumers of Bhangra are distributed across a space that cannot be demarcated along nation-state, linguistic, and sectarian boundaries. Similarly, while each site of Bhangra musical production in Transl-Asia — Mumbai, Toronto, New York, or Birmingham — is embedded in its particular history, it is interactive with others. If Br-Asian Bhangra artists collaborate with folk artists, folk and national are similarly hybridized by their contact with Western tunes. This leads to the formation of virtual communities that cut across nation-state borders even though each site might

annex the global to its own particular needs. The diasporic public sphere and electronic media play the same role in the production of transnational postmodern subjectivities that the Habermasian public sphere and the print media did in the constitution of modern subjectivities and the nation-state. Bhangra flows through the electronic media across a diasporic space constructed by transnational music channels. Bhangra music produced anywhere in Transl-Asia is simultaneously available in Jalandhar, Mumbai, Southall, and New York to consumers divided along linguistic, class, gender, and racial or national lines. Despite the divergence in the conditions of production, distribution, viewing, and reception, it creates a shared Bhangra mediascape around which diverse youthful communities are constructed.

The identity politics of youth subcultural movements centred on the symbolic capital of Bhangra music is enabled by the convergence of improved technologies, new media, and global capital on a newly valorized margin. The rural Punjabi harvest dance is deterritorialized and decontextualized in the process of its valorization. But its disengagement from an originary neighbourhood not only facilitates its reinvention as World Music but also radically alters identity formation patterns in post-modern virtualities. The cultural essentialism of Bhangra as the dance of a specific linguistic community is replaced by a new identity politics in which multiple identities are constructed in relation to Bhangra as a cultural signifier. I will attempt to isolate the disjunctures in the mediation of the musical flow of Bhangra from three such sites in Transl-Asia — the Br-Asian, middle-class urban Indian and Punjabi — before focusing on its role in the construction of “different, youthful, subjectivities” in India. I have named annexations of Bhangra at these sites, *Vilayetibhangra* (British Bhangra), *Desibhangra* (Indian Bhangra) and *Punjabibhangra* (Bhangra of Punjab) though each is formed in relation to and influences others in complex ways.³

Vilayetibhangra demonstrates how ethnic difference as embodied in folk forms can be co-opted in the construction of an anti-racist discourse through a multi-ethnic solidarity. Bhangra’s attachment to an Asian identity in Britain is an instance of

the identity politics of new social movements (Hetherington 29-30). The identity politics of Br-Asian youth subcultures requires the displacement of given identities rooted in language, religion, nation, and so on, with elective identities. Kaur and Kalra cite identities clustered around Bhangra as gliding identities in which youth from Gujarati and Bengali language groups identify themselves with Bhangra bands using Punjabi language. Bhangra, as Asian music, thus participates in the politics of the submergence of difference in the category "Asian" for constructing a strong anti-racist Asian resistance. But while underlining the importance of Bhangra as an ethno-cultural signifier around which Br-Asian identities have been constructed, one must keep in mind Sanjay Sharma's warning, "musical sites of Bhangra/post Bhangra...are spaces to be struggled over and won in our understanding that the signifier 'Asian' can be one of many temporary positionalities that offer us strategic places from which to speak in this racist Britain" (34).

Sharma's emphasis on the "temporary" status of the "positionality" suggests that identities clustered around a generalized difference can be alternated with particularized difference if so required. The involvement of Bhangra with different community formations illustrates this alternating movement perfectly. Apart from its centrality to Asian anti-racist politics, it participates in black anti-racist discourse as well as a micronationalist celebration of Punjabi identity. In the first two, it subsumes difference; in the third, it accentuates difference. The celebration of Bhangra in the construction of a distinctive Asian identity and its cross-cultural link with black discourse often makes one forget that Bhangra simultaneously inscribes a specific Punjabi identity, as reflected in the multiple identity strands in its Br-Asian practitioners. For this reason the retention of Punjabi language lyrics that has been cited as an act of linguistic resistance must be viewed as a double coding strategy. Virinder S. Kalra's analysis of the subversive lyrics of Bhangra songs overlooks that their complex double coding permits only Punjabi speakers to access certain meta levels (82). One must also remember that though Apache Indian went on to become South Asian community's most celebrated ethno-cultural signifier and

was actively involved in British black anti-racist discourse, his “return to roots” yearnings produce a linguistic rather than political locality.⁴ Similarly, despite Bally Sagoo’s eclectic remixing of all Indian music, he locates home in the Punjabi language.⁵ Many in the British brigade proudly acknowledge their debt to Punjabi folk singers like Kuldeep Manak and Malkit Singh.⁶ At the same time, their desire to make a global impact reflects Asian yearnings to play in a multicultural global space. For instance, Bally Sagoo has launched his own label, *Ishq*, to promote not only Asian but also music from anywhere on the globe. As Bhangra artists maintain, Bhangra’s emblematic status as the ethnocultural signifier of Asian identity prevents them from entering the mainstream. But the expansion of Bhangrascape, through its enthusiastic reception by youth of all nationalities, linguistic groups, religions and races, might soon clear a space for Bhangra in the mainstream. If the present Bhangra rage continues and spreads across more continents, Bhangra might soon attain the status of global music like rap or reggae that is heard from New York to New Delhi.⁷ The intermingling of global and regional strands outlined above should not be problematic in postmodernism. For postmodernism permits the coexistence of multiple elective identities that engage with the specific politics of particular neighbourhoods. Sharma makes this point using Stuart Hall’s concept of “new ethnicities,” which “speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture without being contained by that position” (Sanjay Sharma 41). One can be Br-Asian, Indian, and Punjabi without having to be one or the other.

The emblematic status of Bhangra in constructing Asian youth subcultural subjectivities has resulted in the suppression of other narratives and homogenization of ethnic difference. This is a matter of considerable concern among Br-Asian artists. Therefore, contributors to *Disorienting Rhythms* strongly underline the need for Br-Asian youth subcultures to steer clear of cultural essentialisms of the sort attached with Bhangra for resisting neo-orientalist strains in British cultural studies. While most essays in this collection acknowledge Bhangra’s role in providing the South Asian youth in Britain a distinctive voice,

they oppose “an ethnic identity politics that is absolutist or essentialist, that offers only management of identity by singularly empowered individuals” (Sharma et al. 3). Sanjay Sharma finds mainstream academic accounts “underwritten by a problematic of cultural authenticity that suppresses other possible narratives of Bhangra” (35). Rupa Huq, similarly, objects to Gillespie claiming that “it [bhangra] has become a focal point for the public emergence of a British youth culture which transcends traditional divisions and aspires to a sense of ethnic unity.... It is form and style that British Asian youth can claim as their own and be proud of: neither gori (white) nor kala (black) it has made Asian youth both audible and visible for the first time” (Gillespie qtd. in Huq 63). Huq is particularly irked by “the coming together of the tribes” rhetoric that homogenizes ethnic difference (63). Therefore, while acknowledging Bhangra as an “*affirmative moment* in the formation of an Asian identity discourse in the early 80s,” Sanjay Sharma reiterates that Bhangra is “*one of the processes for some Asian youth positioning themselves in British society*” (35-39; emphasis added).

While the contributors to *Disorienting Rhythms* have made an impressive effort to reclaim Bhangra from its essentialist or unitary definitions, they occlude other musical counternarratives emerging from other linguistic regions. For example, the Gujarati dance music *dandiya* can be furnished with a similar subversiveness. Second, their exclusive concern with British Asian Bhangra erases the cultural resistance of Bhangra mutations at other sites. It would be interesting to focus on the plural, contingent nature of identity formations realized through Bhangra on other sites of Transl-Asia. Though these identities are necessarily produced in conjunction with Br-Asian reinvention of Bhangra, they might be inflected by specific socio-political nuances of their particular neighbourhoods.

As Kaur and Kalra point out, the global flow of youth music cultures makes it impossible for them to be contained by national boundaries despite their emerging from particular national neighbourhoods. Yet each neighbourhood brings its own particular inflection that challenges homogenization. *Vilayetibhangra*'s resistivity has its origins in a working-class youth subculture that resists the white ruling-class culture from a space

outside of, and in opposition to, the ruling-class culture and is rooted in the specific problems of working-class racial minorities in the West. The sounds mixed most frequently with traditional Bhangra beats, the black rhythms of rap, reggae, and so on, hint at the strong bonding between the black and the brown working classes in Britain.⁸ The historic collaboration between Apache Indian and Maxi Priest, with Priest intoning the Punjabi lyrics hints at the emergence of an oppressed minority counter-discourse with a non-elitist focus. *Vilayetibhangra's* black allegiances recall black cultural nationalism with a similar emphasis on Asian cultural values, language and culture. Houston A. Baker Jr., in "Hybridity, the Rap Race and Pedagogy for the 1990s," celebrated the transformative black energies in the hybrid sounds of rap that manipulated high technology for human ears and the human body's innovative abilities. Describing rap as "an international, metropolitan hybrid," Baker calls it the "form of audition" that refuses to sing anthems of "white male hegemony" (Baker 544). Br-Asian Bhangra music is also an "international, metropolitan hybrid" that appropriates regional folk difference for the global to contest the hegemony of European high culture.

The 1990s Bhangra revival in India, following its resurgence in Britain, illustrates how different sites in transnational space have an impact on one another, though the sociopolitical conditions of particular neighbourhoods might spawn different forms of resistivity. The factors that contributed to the 1990s Bhangra resurgence in Britain — the postmodern valorization of difference, the introduction of ethnicity as a marker in cultural studies, globalization, improved communication technologies, and the exoticization of World Music by the music industry — are all well known. The transnational character of Bhangra music ensures that some issues in the Indian revival intersect with those in Britain. But the 1990s Bhangra wave in India was produced by the combined onslaught of improved satellite technologies, privatization of Indian television, and the boom in the music industry. The most important factor, however, was the packaging of Bhangra as World Music.⁹ Bhangra came back riding on the wave of Greek, Arabic, and Latino music along with Yanni and

Ricky Martin. While Bhangra's valorization is linked with its being perceived as Kool, it signifies an instance of Folk rather than Asian Kool to middle-class urban Indian youth.¹⁰⁰ Back home in India, Koolness is not classified along a black/Asian opposition but a classical/folk, national/regional, urban/rural divide. Ethnic folk is not used to oppose white High culture; it confronts the aristocratic, classical, national culture with regional, folk difference.

The emergence of Asian Kool addresses the British stereotyping of Asians and takes place in the racial politics of Britain. The invocation of a positively inflected difference in the construction of an anti-racist counterdiscourse is far removed from the consumption of difference at metropolitan centres in India. In contrast to its privileging in anti-racist discourse in the West, vernacular difference was erased in the progressive march towards nationhood and modernity in India. Notwithstanding its "Unity in Diversity" rhetoric, Indian nationalism marginalized difference by following a unilinear route to a culture insensitive to modernization. Despite its ritualistic paeans to ethnic diversity, the centralized institutions of the Indian nation-state created a homogenizing narrative of the nation that was resisted only in regional rural pockets. The narrative of the nation erased linguistic, regional, religious difference to constitute a middle-class Indian subject with the aid of a centralized power structure, bureaucracy, legislature, and education.

The difference in the constitution of subjectivity in the modern nation state and in postnational communities is important in understanding how middle-class urban Indian youth subcultures approach difference. The middle-class urban Indian youth was nurtured on ideals of nationhood and cosmopolitanism that inferiorized vernacular difference. The middle-class urban Indian youth's encounter with the valorization of difference in the global leads to a revaluation of regional vernacular traditions that resists nationalist marginalization of the regional. But vernacular regional difference had to be exoticized as World Music to be attractive to this group.

This contrasts sharply with the critique of the packaging and commodification of ethnic music as World Music among its

Br-Asian practitioners. Viewing World Music's popularity as a fallout of the current celebration of ethnicity in both popular and academic discourse, Sharma, Hutnyk, and Sharma state, "Ethnicity is in. Cultural difference is in. Marginality is in" (1). They detect a neo-orientalist strain in the interest in Asian music: "Consumption of the Other is all the rage for late capitalism. Finally, it appears that the 'coolie' has become cool." The present privileging of difference in the West is reminiscent of previous naturalizations of otherness as in the turn to African primitives or Indian spirituality. As stated earlier, the present trend also responds to certain crises in the West, for example, the perceived demise of Western pop/rock music as it loses its market share. The margin is once again at the service of the centre. First, it exists as a site for the recovery of those "authentic" sounds that the West is believed to have lost. Second, it provides unlimited material to the novelty hungry music industry in search of new tunes after having stretched the limits of Western rock/pop. Linking World Music's enthusiastic reception to its othering and commodification, critics such as Ashwani Sharma disagree with Chambers's optimistic suggestion that "the shifting, contingent contacts of musical and cultural encounters" may disrupt hegemonic ordering given the power structures in which they work (18). The coining of the term World Music, according to Sharma, is part of a complex marketing strategy using difference as a unique selling proposition (22).

The packaging of ethnic music as World Music in the global space demonstrates two contradictory strains. On one hand, World Music is endowed with authentic, real and human values that the technologized West is believed to have lost. This perpetuates the cult of authenticity in which the so-called "traditional" sounds are privileged over eclectic experimentation. In the process, traditional taste hierarchies often get inverted in the global space and the folk as a low cultural form is exoticized over the classical. On the other hand, migrant productions are essentialized as they fit into the politics of hybridity. The solution is to filter authenticity through the frame of hybridity. The reworking of traditional music with Western technology is, therefore, presented as enhancing the music. Sharma cites the

example of Bally Sagoo to illustrate the commodification of ethnic difference. He shows how the positioning of Bally Sagoo as the migrant subject, drawing on ethnic difference to produce new hybrid music, overlooks Sagoo's particular grounding in traditional Bhangra and black music cultures. Sharma concludes by warning that the celebration of hybrid "ethnic" is a neo-orientalist move in the co-option and containment of "Otherness" for the reproduction of hegemonic culture (Sharma et al. 25). Br-Asian youth subculture's production of a subversive Asian counterdiscourse, rejecting cultural essentialism of the metropolitan as well as local variety, is a testimony to its resistance to containment. A considerable body of work focusing on the specific forms that Br-Asian cultural resistance takes is available in British culture studies. One needs to turn to the potential for resistance at other sites in Transl-Asia. In light of this, we now examine the middle-class urban Indian youth's encounter with Bhangra as World Music.

Desibhangra is robbed of its subaltern resistivity by its largely middle-class constituency. Unlike Br-Asian youth who use Bhangra to mark ethnic difference, Indian middle-class youth turns to Bhangra as World Music to participate in the centre. If Br-Asian youth appropriates World Music as an ethnic vernacular idiom, Indian youth tunes into it to enter a cosmopolitan global space. Bhangra music is sanitized of its strong working-class, anti-racial antecedents as Indian middle-class youth appropriates it for the articulation of a different subjectivity. One important difference between *Vilayetibhangra* and *Desibhangra* is the class and language divide between the producers and consumers. Unlike Br-Asian Bhangra artists, whose music is deeply implicated in the politics of their largely working-class neighbourhoods, the middle-class urban Indian audience consumes the musical productions of regional folk artists.

Compared to Br-Asian youth, Indian middle-class youth's return to ethnicity has been more problematic due to its being embedded in the discourse of modernization. In the negative reading of ethnicity in both nationalism and modernity, ethnicity was a culturalism one discarded to progress towards a modernity presented as acultural. Postmodernism's valorization of

ethnicity offers, instead, an alternative route that leads in a global direction even as links with home are reaffirmed. While there is no conscious identity formation around musical genres on the subcontinent, the mere exercise of choice for a certain kind of music contains a germ of resistance. Angela McRobbie has argued that youth cultures need not be produced under conditions of working-class purity (15). Tony Bennet, similarly, suggests that the relations of culture and power should not be seen as necessarily generating resistance or resistances (168). They might “generate other forms of critical reaction or interaction that are not intelligibly described as resistive” (168). The cartography between “compliance and resistance” that Bennet identifies can account for the complex flow of Bhangra through highly differentiated power relations (169). *Desibhangra*’s resistivity, emerging out of the uncertain zone of compliance and resistance, cannot produce the consciously anti-racist politics of *Vilayetibhangra*. Indian youth subcultures mimic American countercultural angst *sans* its affluence. While Indian middle-class youth might affect American countercultural postures, the background of poverty and unemployment nips potential revolt. Produced at the boundaries of compliance and resistance, middle-class Indian youth subcultural resistance assumes less overt forms marked along generational rather than class, race, or ethnic markers. Deprived of opportunities for overt political action, middle class Indian youth subcultures resist by acts of petty rebellion such as expressing a preference for a lifestyle of which the previous generation disapproves. Since the parental generation is committed to a nationalist agenda, the generational war in the Indian subcontinent is fought over the selective adoption of “Western” lifestyles — language, attire, music. As Ulf Hannerz has noted in the case of Nigerians, middle-class urban Indian youth thereby aspires to participate in the Centre (qtd. in Pinney 11). Unlike Br-Asian youth, it does not use the space created by World Music to assert ethnic difference but to participate in metropolitan culture. The poignant incongruity brought out by Arjun Appadurai in the replication of cosmopolitan cultures at Third World sites may be seen in middle-class urban Indian youth’s turn to World Music in an imitative gesture. Indian youth turn to its own music with the gaze of the

Western Self that imbues Indian music with an exotic Otherness. It reproduces the Self's exoticization of the Other unaware that it occupies the Other's space in the Western imagination. While *Vilayetibhangra* draws on ethnic difference in forming Br-Asian subcultures to separate itself from white cultural hegemony, *Desibhangra* exoticizes difference to identify with the dominant culture. Middle-class urban Indian youth cultures other regional ethnic cultures just as white American youth counterculture valorized and othered non-Western cultures. For middle-class urban Indian youth, folk music is the carnivalesque zone of pleasure and release. In an ambivalent fascination for "authentic" values of the "folk" similar to American countercultures, it succumbs to the authenticity narrative with which World Music is underwritten. In the middle-class urban Indian youth's imaginary, folk cultures are imbued with a vitality and authenticity that parental cultures are believed to lack. It opposes these parental cultures through a metropolitan appropriation of "folk" values. Thus, middle-class urban Indian youth culture constitutes a "different, youthful, subjectivity" along generational lines rather than class or ethnicity unlike Br-Asian youth subcultures. But a move away from cultural essentialism in favour of elective identities similar to *Vilayetibhangra* may also be observed in the formation of middle class urban youth subjectivities. As in *Vilayetibhangra*, middle-class urban Indian youth demonstrates that you don't have to be Punjabi to dance to Bhangra. Besides, middle class urban Indian youth, without intending to, deconstructs the cultural narrative of the nation and reverses its high/low hegemony.

Unlike *Vilayetibhangra* that opposes Western high culture from the space of popular culture, *Desibhangra* belongs to Appadurai's contested public cultural space in which the regional, the national, and the global intersect. Appadurai uses the term "public culture" to describe a *zone* of cultural debate that is interlinked with globalization:

From this point of view, the contestatory character of public culture has much to do with the tensions and contradictions between national sites and transnational cultural processes. These tensions generate arenas where other registers of culture encounter, interrogate,

and contest one another in new and unexpected ways. Thus national culture seeks to co-opt and redefine more local, regional, or folk cultural forms. Commercial culture (especially in the cinema, television, and the audio industry) seeks to popularize classical forms. Mass cultural forms seek to co-opt folk idioms. This zone of contestation and mutual cannibalization — in which national, mass, and folk culture provide both mill and grist for one another — is at the very heart of public modernity in India. (5)

Appadurai's emphasis on contestation, rather than dialogue, can help one understand the different ways regional folk, national, and diasporic cannibalize one another. While much has been made of the expatriate and national co-option of folk in their particular agendas, folk's complicity has been overlooked. The folk plays along with the postmodern privileging of the margin in the global and the reinstatement of the regional in the national to stake its own claim in the national as well as the global politics and economy. The fetishization of music is brought about in the case of Bhangra by a complex market capitalism in which music labels, artists, and the media collaborate with improved technologies to alter the conditions of the production, distribution, and reception of music. The logic of the marketplace works respecting no class, no regional, no national affiliations. The selection and recording of music, its packaging, the media of dissemination are all imbricated in a marketing strategy that cannot be explained as an appropriation of the margin. Bhangra is a perfect example of mutual cannibalization in which national, mass, global, and folk provide both "mill and grist for one another." If Br-Asian Bhangra artists co-opt ethnic difference in their anti-racist agenda, folk Bhangra artists need their patronage to gain international recognition. If international music labels market difference as a unique selling proposition, homegrown music enterprises are only too happy to capitalize on the market for World Music.

Given the connivance of Punjabi folk artists in the commodification of ethnic difference, *Punjabibhangra*, like *Desibhangra*, cannot be equipped with conscious resistance. Instead of following the current fashion for looking for resistance in the most unlikely places, one might fruitfully pursue an alternative path in understanding *Punjabibhangra's* negotiation of diasporic and

national appropriations. While *Punjabibhangra* participates in its own commodification by opening itself to global forces, it is inscribed with a multiple coding that invites different forms of involvement. This signification system permits Punjabi speakers a level of involvement that might not be possible for those not embedded in the Punjabi socio-cultural context. The essence of Bhangra lies in the performative aspect of interactions between the performer and the crowd that produce a peculiar form of identification and recognition. When performed as a celebratory ritual to mark an auspicious moment in the life of the community, it is shielded from the profane space of the global commodity market.

Punjab is one of the regional vernaculars suppressed by the master narrative of the nation. Political resistance to the centre in the demand for a separate state in the 1980s was the most violent expression of regional discontent. The Punjabi language's music revival, on the other hand, contests the national master narrative at a linguistic level by challenging the Hindi hegemony at the centre. The resurgence of folk also upsets the classical folk hierarchy masquerading as an interdependence in nationalist discourse. Folk resistance, even of the weak kind, needs to be distinguished from folk patronage in museums, tourism, and festivals through which the centre fossilizes heritage. Bhangra folk artists, notwithstanding the element of auto-exoticization in their performances, have annexed the global to unseat classical Indian musical cultures both on the national and the international stage. The new media, technologies, and markets have created a global space that has been emancipatory for folk voices. The folk have annexed this space to usher a new life of folklore into the information age. Apart from changing the centre/region dynamics, *Punjabibhangra* has played a vital role in the construction of the sacred in the Punjabi diaspora in India and abroad. There is a considerable migrant Punjabi population not only in UK and Canada but also within different parts of India displaced by the Partition of India in 1947. Deprived of a homeland in physical space, these Punjabis reconstruct a sense of place through ritual performance to which Bhangra is central. *Punjabibhangra* marks out a space

in which Punjabi speakers across the globe construct a place though the reenactment of collective memories. As ritual, *Punjabibhangra* allows room for the performance of Punjabi identity irrespective of the purity or hybridity of the folk genre employed.

Even though *Desibhangra* and *Punjabibhangra* are not consciously resistant, generational and regional opposition in Indian youth subcultural politics helps to deconstruct the culturalist masternarrative of the previous generation. The cultural essentialism of Indian classical and folk traditions constructed along the high/low divisions has erased other accounts. Though Indian nationalism has always emphasized great and little tradition interdependency, the recognition of folk has been contingent on its acceptance of an inferior position. Middle-class urban Indian youth subcultures, while exoticizing and othering the folk, unwittingly destabilize the classical folk hierarchy. Similarly, *Vilayetibhangra* creates a global space that proves to be emancipatory for traditionally disavowed cultures, which might now constitute transnational localities that conflict with the politics of the nation-state. It also permits a virtual sphere for the expression of a youthful revolt against middle-class values on a national and international level. This is, of course, possible only if suppressed narratives exploit the new global space's celebration of difference while effectively resisting its commodification.

NOTES

- ¹ Bhangra is a harvest ritual of the Punjab region in North India. Brightly dressed villagers dance vigorously in a large circle, accompanied by powerful drumming and also by clapping and singing. Dancers in pairs give spontaneous solo displays that include virile jumps and even acrobatics. Though at one time danced primarily by men, it is now performed by the entire community. It dates back to around 400 BC originating in the worship of the Hindu god Shiva by Punjabi farmers. The present forms of Bhangra evolved a few hundred years ago. Twelve pure forms of Bhangra marked along gender, sectarian, national lines have been traced along the Doab region of Punjab cutting across India and Pakistan. These have made a smooth transition to non-agrarian settings and the farmer's joy at a bountiful harvest is transferred to any celebration. Bhangra performance contexts include the two harvest festivals Lohri (January 14) and Baisakhi (April 13), some Sikh religious festivals and all birth related rituals like in wedding *sangeets* (musical evenings) and *baaraats* (wedding procession), *naamkaran* (naming ceremony) and *mundan* (tonsure). Though a communal participatory ritual, professional Bhangra performers may also be invited to stage shows as well perform at family or community gatherings. The

- earliest Punjabi immigrants to UK carried the harvest ritual across to the new land. But the Bhangra fever began in the mid-1980s with the arrival of Apache Indian who mixed it with black music. Apache Indian is not only responsible for constructing the most visible ethnocultural signifier of Asian identity in Britain but also for "returning it back" home. Its success abroad caused an impulsive movement back home, kicked off by the irrepressible Sikh Daler Mehdi.
- 2 See Raminder Kaur and Virinder S Kalra, who coined the term "Transl-Asia." "Different, Youthful, Subjectivities" is borrowed from the title of a Chapter in McRobbie's *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*.
 - 3 Given the strong collaboration between Bhangra artists and the facility with which both the artists and their music traverse the globe, these categories must be defined in terms of how each sites annexes the global rather than generic categories.
 - 4 Born Steve Kapur to Indian parents in Handsworth, Birmingham in 1967, Apache Indian truly arrived in 1993 when he jumped to the top of the charts. Suffusing the ever popular Ragga style with the extremely influential UK Bhangra beat, Apache Indian's sound was typical of the flavour of the thriving Handsworth musical scene. Apache Indian has been cited as the first true International Asian pop artist. Though not as visible today, he has also achieved an emblematic status as the best known signifier of Br-Asian identity, almost as well known as vindaloo. <http://www.karmasound.com/artists/apache/pressreleases/bestof.htm>, 15.00 hrs, 28 Apr. 2001.
 - 5 Bally Sagoo is best known in India for his remixes of Hindu film music and internationally as a crossover artist. But while speaking of his new album *Star Crazy 2*, he mentions going "home" to the Punjab to record the album. He also presses home the point that, unlike the previous two, this one was clearly aimed at Punjab. See House and Dar's talk with Bally Sagoo and Radical Sista in "Re-Mixing Identities: 'On the Turn Table,'" (82).
 - 6 Malkit Singh is a well-known singer from Punjab who has become an international celebrity, thanks to the Br-Asian's recognition of him as a strong influence and Bally Sagoo's remixes of his songs. Kuldip Manak belongs to an earlier generation of folk artists who operated within Punjab.
 - 7 I have made a distinction between global music and World Music. While World Music is a label to denote all non-Western music as a marketing ploy, global music is a truly international music with its producers and audience spread all over the globe.
 - 8 In the collaboration between Apache Indian and Maxi Priest, the fact that Priest sang in Punjabi was cited as an example of multicultural translation.
 - 9 World Music was a label created by music companies in the eighties to market non-Anglo American music to Western consumers. Its packaging as World Music helps music companies exoticize non-Western ethnic music to capitalize on the fad for ethnicity. The phenomenal growth of World Music is contingent upon its othering and the cult of authenticity. The valorization of certain artists as representatives of authentic ethnic national musical cultures answering a Western desire to return an organic wholeness located in indigenous languages and traditional instruments is reminiscent of previous primitive returns. This essentialist privileging of an imagined authenticity is matched with a paradoxical ethic of hybridity whereby ethnic music is electronically enhanced.
 - 10 "Kool" is the projection of a desire for vitality, joy and style on a black otherness. However, while the perceived "koolness" of black culture led to its adoption by youth subcultures, the myth of Asian cultures as erudite, spiritual, and hardworking imbues them with a rather uncool aura. The arrival of Bhangra on the Br-Asian musical scene has been one of the main factors in dissociating Asian culture from the perceived squareness of Sitar music, Yoga, and classical dance.

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