Decoding ethnicity in the Jackson Heights South Asian shopping strip
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Introduction
The Jackson Street shopping strip exemplifies an emerging typology of the cultural landscape of South Asian immigrants in the United States. The physical and social articulations of this landscape are very different from the traditional urban ethnic enclave. In a typical 20th century immigrant enclave, ethnic practices were territorialized and circumscribed within well-defined spaces that Herbert Gans called “urban villages.” Immigrants in Chinatowns and Little Italys tended to live, work, shop, and meet within these enclaves, and their social, political, cultural, and economic institutions were located there. In Jackson Heights, however, one finds South Asian-owned stores interspersed with non-ethnic businesses. The residential neighborhoods surrounding the retail strip are very diverse as well. Local residents include Latinos, Asians, and older Jewish, Italian, and Greek neighbors—a settlement pattern clearly different from traditional ethnic enclaves.

Major roads and public transit routes such as the F, R, and 7 subway lines connect this neighborhood to a large hinterland. The retail and wholesale stores in Jackson Heights are nodes within a larger, networked, regional ethnic landscape that includes residential areas (ranging from Elmhurst, Flushing, and Richmond Hill in Queens to upscale suburbs in Connecticut), places of worship (the Hindu Geeta Temple, the Jain Temple, the Satyanarayan Temple in Elmhurst, the Islamic Mosque in Corona, and the Chiruthuva Tamil Koi Church in Richmond Hill), cultural and social organizations, and service businesses such as real estate offices, tax consultancies, astrologers, and travel agents. The ethnic entrepreneurs and immigrant customers maintain transnational identities, interact within extended social networks, and engage in a global economy while catering to what Ivan Light calls local ethnic niche markets.

In 1973 Sam and Raj, an appliance store, opened at 37-08 74th Street. The Indian Sari Palace (37-07 74th Street) followed in 1976. In 1977 Shaheen’s (7209 Broadway), a fast-food and sweet restaurant, moved from Woodside to 7209 Broadway. By the 1980s the two blocks of 74th Street between Roosevelt Avenue and 37th Road saw a number of stores selling goods and services for the South Asian immigrant community. The number of such businesses went from 71 in 1990 to 104 by 1996. The 1990s saw the emergence of mini-malls “with more than one business now sharing a single storefront, or through the replacement of one of the few remaining non-Indian businesses with an Indian one.” In the late 90s Patel Brothers (37-27 74th Street) took over the old Woolworth store, Jackson Diner (37-47 74th Street) expanded into the former Keyfood Supermarket, and Butala Emporium (37-46 74th Street) moved into the larger premises vacated by Patel Brothers. According to Madhulika Khandelwal, “between 1990 and 1996 the number of clothing stores increased from 18 to 22, jewelers from 5 to 11, electronics and appliance stores from 9 to 12, grocery stores from 8 to 14, and restaurants from 8 to 17.” The Eagle Movie Theater (73-07 37th Road) reopened under Pakistani ownership, and other service businesses such as immigration (law offices, dentists, a ‘smoke shop,’ and barber shops have appeared in the neighborhood together with new fast-food restaurants, and small sari and jewelry shops.

Constant change, instability, renewal, and incessant mutations are typical of this neighborhood. Many factors affect this transforming landscape: the exigencies of the new global economy and the local ethnic economy, the changing demography of its clientele, and the need to make profits with low but escalating overheads.
The passage of the 1965 Immigration Act encouraged highly skilled and educated middle class South Asians to come to the United States. By the 1980s, however, we see a demographic shift within the South Asian immigrant community. As a result of family reunifications and various crises in Africa and Fiji, a large number of immigrants and refugees with mercantile, managerial, and unskilled labor backgrounds entered the country. Increased South Asian immigration from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka during the 1990s added to this diversity. South Asian immigrants spoke an increasing number of different languages, came from different countries, and followed different religions. According to the 2000 census, 6.1 percent of the Jackson Heights population was Indian, 1.4 percent was from Bangladesh, 1.1 percent was from Pakistan, and 0.1 percent was Sri Lankan.

The nature of the stores and merchandise changed along with the demographics. By the early 1990s, more stores catering to Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Bangladeshi clientele opened up. Today, a walk along 74th street takes you thorough sections aimed at each of these groups.

Khandelwal notes that there has been a qualitative change in the business ambience too. Customers from the lower-middle and working classes have increased and as a result, middle-class and affluent immigrants from the suburbs increasingly avoid Jackson Heights. Many of the pioneering store owners who belonged to the educated middle class have moved to the suburbs.

The appearance of “dollar stores” such as America’s 99-Cent Store (77-14 Roosevelt Avenue) reflects this class-based transformation.(8)

Non-South Asians travel to Jackson Heights to experience exotic otherness – to see what The New York Times called “Bazaar with the feel of Bombay, right in Queens” and to savor the atmosphere as “India casts its subtle spell on Queens.”(9) To South Asian immigrants the exoticism of Jackson heights provides an ideal setting where they can socialize their American-born children and introduce them to their native culture. Experiencing South Asian-ness from multiple vantage points, what Herbert Gans calls the consumption and (re)production of symbolic ethnicity, is central to understanding.

As you tour Jackson Heights, consider that you are moving amidst flows of merchandise, people, popular culture, money, and signs that crisscross the region, nation, and the world.(10) Can traditional methods of analysis used in the field be sufficient to decode such landscapes? In addition to physical/spatial analysis, how can we decode the experiential (multi-sensory) and imaginative/cognitive cues. As you tour this neighborhood consider the following points.

- Territories: Identify edges of territorial zones that reflect contested social claims over space, such as signs on the storefronts, official city signs, and aspects of a store’s layout such as back rooms and the location of counters.

- Order: Carefully examine the visual and sensory order to find out why certain spaces that seem cluttered to you may make sense to in-group customers.

- Flows: Examine the stores and the merchandise and then consider the multiple transnational networks that sustain this economy.

- Legibility: As you examine the visual culture of this neighborhood, consider how various social constituencies may interpret cues in the built environment differently.

- Change: The constant transformation and turnover of stores will be apparent when you use this tour guide. You may not find some stores that are mentioned here. This tour was written in February-March 2006 and since then stores may have moved, shut down, or changed hands.
Tour One:

**Visual Culture of Storefronts and the Street**

Examine the highly visible store names, storefront decorations, and signs along the street. Many of these stores existed before the arrival of the South Asian immigrants, who have made minimal permanent changes to this physical landscape. Rather they set up impermanent signage to mark territory. Intentionally or unintentionally they changed the smells, sounds, and other evocative experiential qualities of the neighborhood. They coded the place with multi-sensory experiential cues that are interpreted differently by different people, creating what Michel Laguerre calls "a minoritized space." Underlying the signs of difference imprinted on the storefronts is a social process. It is a process by which the storeowners and immigrant customers reclassify themselves and their clients. Store workers differentiate regular customers from occasional ones, working-class shoppers from the elite, immigrants from the second generation, Muslims from Hindus, women from men, co-ethnics from Americans of other ethnicities, and linguistic and regional groups from one another — articulating finer grained identities and allegiances.

**Renaming**

Renaming is a very common yet highly contested process. In 1992 the Jackson Heights Merchant’s Association petitioned the city to call this shopping strip “Little India,” and to install architectural markers along 74th Street. The storeowners’ proposed use of ethnicity as a marketing strategy was what Sharon Zukin calls “symbolic economy.” But the renaming was contested. When Mayor David Dinkins arrived to participate in the Diwali festival that summer, he encountered a white audience member who carried a placard reading, “Wrong. I live here. This is my American Home. Not ‘Little India.’”

Look for city street signs along 74th Street, which indicate that the street was officially renamed Kalpana Chawla Street after the Indian-American Columbia shuttle astronaut. Informally South Asians call this neighborhood Jai Kishan Heights — an adaptation of the “Jackson Heights” name to sound like the Hindu God Krishna. According to Khandelwal, South Asian Indians sometimes call 74th Street “Gandhi Street.” Such names may not have resonance for non-Hindus or South Asians who are not from India. These contested renamings are examples of how this neighborhood is cognitively remapped as an ethnic space within a multi-ethnic metropolis.

**Store Names**

Store names are evocative markers of ethnicity too. Storeowners use naming strategies that customers easily identify with, such as place names of cities such as Bombay, Madras, and Delhi. Another strategy is to use store names that are very common in South Asian countries. To the in-group immigrant shoppers, names such as Apna Bazaar and Dana Bazaar (for grocery stores), Sona Chaandi (for jewelry stores; sona means gold in many South Asian languages), and Roopam (for dress stores; the word roop refers to beauty) are instantly recognizable. Some stores such as Raj Jewelers of London and New Singapore Emporium reference their international business network. Names operate as spatial, cultural, and national markers, repeated in South Asian shopping streets across the world.

**Visual Culture**

Pause in front of one of the music stores along 74th Street. The posters near the entrance show famous actors and actresses from the Mumbai movie industry, also known as Bollywood. To many American-born South Asian teenagers, these movie idols are ethnic role models who provide them an opportunity to maintain their ethnic identity in a fashionable and modern way. Many of these movie posters (and the storylines too) also reproduce patriarchal gender roles within the ethnic community.
Look out for the word "Indo-Pak-Bangla" next to some store names suggesting that the store caters to Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi clients and their specific needs. You will also find different South Asian scripts, especially Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali, in the store advertisements and store names. In many stores selling appliances and luggage (such as Asli Sona Appliances, 37-42 74th Street) you will find advertisements for phone cards, travel agents, and airlines. Consider the numerous ways today's immigrants can remain connected to their country of origin and maintain transnational social relationships.

### Merchandise
Pause in front of Butala Emporium (37-46 74th Street) and examine the window decorations and signs on the storefront. In addition to exotic handicrafts you will also notice various Hindu religious paraphernalia and god-ids. The store carries handicrafts, beauty care products, herbal supplements, incense and essential oils, musical instruments, sporting goods, utensils, religious paraphernalia, and books. Now walk through the store, which was originally a newsstand that relocated here in the 1990s after Patel Brothers left these premises for a larger store. Look for how-to books on Indian cuisine, culture, and religions. These books and pamphlets are used as guidebooks by immigrant parents to teach their American children about South Asian culture. They provide easy ways to "reconstruct" normative versions of South Asian culture. For alternative versions, visit the music section and look for hybrid genres such as bhangra-rap and chutney-Caribbean music.

Stop in front of India Sari Palace (37-07 74th Street) or any other dress store on 74th Street. The storefront mannequins show dresses from different regions of India worn in different regional styles. These ethnic dresses, popular during weddings and festivals, cater to different regional groups and varied tastes. South Asians identify taste, fashion trends, price ranges, and fabric quality by looking at the clothed mannequins. Notice how the mannequins with Anglo features are made to look ‘ethnic’ using beauty marks, hair styles, and makeup color shades.

### Tour Two: Recreating Home: The Culinary Landscape
South Asian cuisine varies and the misnomer “Indian food” reflects a simplification for commercial profit. Among the kinds of cuisines found here are South Indian, North Indian/Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, and Indian Chinese. You can identify the regional cuisine by carefully examining restaurant names and by reading menus. For instance, the word udipi in Udipi Palace (now called Anand Bhawan under new management) refers to a temple town in South India. This name suggests to Indians (or those who are familiar with this name) that this restaurant serves South Indian vegetarian food. The Bangladeshi restaurant Mitali has Bengali signs indicating its regional cuisine. Since the 1990s the neighborhood has seen the emergence of several restaurants selling North
Indian/Pakistani fast food. A special kind of North Indian snack called chaat has become very popular and new chaat cafes have appeared in urban ethnic shopping strips across the United States.

Compare the front of a restaurant to its back. The front caters to immigrants, tourists and other cosmopolitan customers. This space is decorated with handicrafts, posters, and colorfully painted walls. The backs of these restaurants are spaces where one finds low-paid labor -- the seamy underbelly of globalization and the new economy. Some restaurants are family operated and you will find family members working in the kitchen. Other restaurants employ low-paid South Asian, Mexican, and Central American immigrant labor in the kitchen.

Shaheen Sweets and Cuisine
In 1971, Shaheen Sweets (7209 Broadway) was the first South Asian restaurant to open in this neighborhood. This store is more than a sweet store; it is a community center for local South Asians. On a weekend this is a popular destination for Pakistani men.

Tariq Hamid, the son of Shaheen's founder, now provides the sweets only while another businessman runs the food concession. Before the partition of India and Pakistan, Abdul Hamid, Tariq's father, ran a roadside sweet stand in the town of Qudian, India. Later he opened a pharmacy when he moved to Pakistan. In 1968, he moved to America and his family followed shortly thereafter. While working in Queens as a security guard, Abdul Hamid remembered that he knew how to make Indian sweets, and he and his wife started making sugary confections at home for local parties and shops. Shaheen's sweets are made with a base of butter and sugar, and may include milk, flour, nuts, or paneer (cottage cheese).

Jackson Diner
The Jackson Diner (37-47 74th Street) used to be a local diner before the South Asians arrived on the scene. An Indian immigrant started working here and introduced Indian dishes into the menu; eventually he bought the business and converted it into an Indian restaurant. In the 1990s the diner expanded into the former Keyfood supermarket premises, and later the owners opened restaurants in other parts of New York, Queens, and Long Island.

South Asian Chinese King
At the turn of the 20th century many Hakka Chinese emigrated to India to escape the Opium wars. Indian Chinese is a unique blend of Cantonese cuisine and Indian spices. Indo-Chinese restaurants, like South Asian Chinese King (72-23 37th Avenue), have seen growing popularity in the United States. Look for the dish called "American Chop Suey," an Indian Chinese concoction.

Grocery Stores
An ethnic grocery store spatially recreates “home and informality” for in-group customers by its interior layout and signage. The experience inside the store is multi-sensory. To South Asians the visual clutter and sensory overload serve as a heart-warming reminder of their homelands -- a nostalgic familiarity set in contrast to the impersonal layout of American retail chains.

American Chop Suey
By Ms. Shilpa Sethi, Guwahati, Assam, India

Ingredients:
- 450 grams cabbage
- 4 teaspoons oil
- 1 teacup boiled noodles
- 1 teacup fried noodles
- ½ teaspoon Ajinomoto powder
- 100 grams beans sprouts
- 3 onions
- 2 carrots
- 10 French beans
- 1 teaspoon chili sauce
- Salt to taste

For the Sauce:
- ¼ teacup brown vinegar
- 4 tablespoons tomato ketchup
- ¼ teacup sugar
- 2 tablespoons plain flour
- 1 teaspoon water
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce

Method:
Slice the onions. Cut all the vegetables (except bean sprouts) into long thin strips. Place all the ingredients of the sauce in the frypan, mix well and put to boil. Go on cooking and stirring until the sauce is thick. Heat the oil thoroughly in the casserole and add the vegetables and ajinomoto powder. Cook on high flame for 3-4 mins. Add the prepared sauce, boiled noodles, chili sauce and salt and cook for a few minutes. Add half of the fried noodles and mix well. Serve hot, topped with the rest of the fried noodles. (Serves 4)

From Shilpa Sethi, "American Chop Suey" in HindustanLink.com, June 4, 2005
For customers the sensory environment begins at the storefront. You will find a community bulletin board near the entrance of many grocery stores, with posters of South Asian film stars, religious symbols, and brochures for tourist destinations in India jostling for space with advertisements. Here one also finds announcements of community festivals and upcoming cultural performances, rental notices, and calls for roommates. Khandelwal points out, "it was grocery stores that reminded immigrants about events on their religious calendars and provided information about performing rituals." (13) Look for the religious and festival accoutrements and advertisements displayed prominently near the entrance. On the store shelves, religious diversity is evident in the culinary range. Some grocery stores carry non-vegetarian fare. Meat market sections in these stores have prominent signs saying "halal meat" for Islamic customers.

The spatial arrangement of the merchandise aisles and the sales counter, dimensions of the aisles, and behavior of the storeowners give the interior of ethnic grocery stores spatial ambiguity and behavioral flexibility -- alternately private, communal, and public depending on the context. The interior adapts to the demands and tastes of a wide variety of customers and the layout of the store allows for various levels of intimacy and personal relationships.

**Patel Brothers**

Patel Brothers' slogan claims, "Serving since 1974 bringing motherland closer" by bringing the "world of warmth in our tradition of making the customer feel at home." The interior of the store at 37-27 74th Street is self-consciously ordered with neat, titled, rows of merchandise. Patel Brothers is a chain and has branches in more than six states. It imports merchandise from all over the world, spices from India and Pakistan, grains from the subcontinent, fruits and produce from Florida and California, and mangos from Mexico, Honduras, and the Philippines. Venture into the spice, beans, and lentils section. Many immigrants come here to buy spices and grains in bulk. Since the 1980s, as the immigrant community became more diversified, the South Asian grocery stores have been arranging goods according to regional and national cuisines. Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan culinary spices and ingredients are now located in distinct sections in different aisles.

**Tour Three**

**Dress, Gender, and the Immigrant Body**

Skin color, looks, dress, demeanor, body language, and adornments are public cues that mark an immigrant. Increasingly, since 9/11, the brown-skinned South Asian is racially visible in public and inevitably marked for surveillance and suspicion. But even before the post-9/11 racialization, the South Asian immigrant body has long been a site of contesting interpretations, experiments, and inventions of new identities.

South Asian men in Jackson Heights rarely wear the traditional costumes (except Sikhs, who are required to wear turbans to hold their hair) except for special occasions. More often it is the South Asian woman who is marked as different because of her dress in the public domain, although this is changing. While older Indian women wear saris,

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**Glossary of Dress Names**

For Her
San: Indian women (also Bangladeshi) wear saris, a six yard long unstitched piece of cloth that is generally wrapped around the body.
Lehenga: Swirling skirts
Choli: A short bodice.
Salwar Kameez: A pajama tunic combination popular among Afghans, Pakistanis, Indians and Bangladeshis.

For Him
Kurta: A long tunic (kurti for women).
Sherwani: A long formal jacket
Dhoti: A long unstitched cloth.
younger women find it difficult to wear them on a daily basis. Women of all ages do wear ethnic
dresses during special occasions such as marriages and festivals.

It is a mistake to read the public markings of difference merely as retention of ethnic practices, or
"traditional and unchanging reflections of social hierarchies, beliefs, and customs."(14) The materi-
als, styles, weave, decorations, and ways of wearing a sari vary with regional traditions. Saris are also
artifacts of taste and class distinction, differentiating the elite from the masses. In ethnic magazines
and in storefronts you will find dresses, saris, and jewelry advertised for the contemporary fashion-
conscious consumer. Look for advertisements announcing fashion shows in the clothing stores. Sari
wearing is not very popular among the younger crowd and has become more of a specialty item.
Among the younger American-born second generation, saris and other ethnic dresses provide oppor-
tunities for fashion and experimentation.

In the South Asian clothing stores, an ethnic dress is also a commodity traded in a transnational
economy. During the 1970s immigrants shopped for saris to take home to South Asia as gifts. Popular
among these travelers were the everyday-use, cheaper synthetic silk saris made in Japan. Due to
import regulations such saris were not available in India. By the late 1980s synthetic saris were being
made in India; hence there was less demand for Japanese fabric as a gift item to take back to the
subcontinent. Now, expensive (special occasion) and cheaper (daily wear) quality saris are imported
from the subcontinent for local consumption. Some of the dresses are stitched locally. During the
1980s refugees from Fiji and Africa who had previous experience running clothing and fabric busi-
esses in their countries came to the United States and entered the ethnic dress business.

India Sari Palace
Ramesh Havani opened his ethnic clothing business in 1976. Today India Sari Palace, 37-07 74th
Street, has grown into a 4,000 square foot superstore. "Where Trust is a Tradition" screams the adver-
sisement on the India Sari Palace website, repackaging the profit motif of the marketplace with the
reassuring qualities of trust and tradition. Like the grocery stores, the layout of this store helps recre-
ate a sense of informality while simultaneously permitting surveillance and control. In the store
windows look for embroidered, expensive silks that are too heavy for daily wear. Owning such a sari,
often displayed on the store mannequins, can be a status symbol. Inside you will find the less expen-
sive saris, made of thin silk with floral prints, for daily use at home.

Jewelry Stores
The sheer number of jewelry stores along 74th Street makes this neighborhood seem like a jewelry
district. These stores sell items made of 22-carat gold, a purer form of gold compared to the more
common 14-carat usually available in the United States. The designs are vastly different, also, from
the Mughal-inspired designs with delicate filigree work, to the gem-studded pieces called kundan
jewelry, to finely enameled meenakari work. Although the tradition of wearing and buying gold jewelry
can be traced through history, the contemporary jewelry market also demonstrates evolving trends
and fashions for the new generation. Gold is a status symbol. During marriages, wearing and gifting
gold is very common. Khandelwal describes gold as integral to South Asian culture. Immigrants
frequent these stores to buy jewelry for festivals, marriages, or to take to India as gifts.(15) In addition
to South Asians, these stores are frequented by immigrants from the Middle East, Southeast Asia,
and Africa.

Sona Jewels of London (37-10 74th Street) and Raj Jewelers of London (37-12 74th Street) belong to
global chains of jewelry stores (run by established gold merchant families) selling exclusively high
quality jewelry. Check for double doors, locked entries controlled by an intercom and surveillance
cameras. Compare the storefront of Sona Jewels of London with that of Mita Jewelers (37-30 74th
Street), which features posters and store name banners in contrast to the sparse design of the other
storefront. The kind of jewels displayed in the windows, the quality of building/cladding materials used, and the presence or absence of cluttered signage give in-group shoppers an indication of the kind of store, the quality of the merchandise, and the class, buying power, and age of the target clientele.

**Beauty Salons**

Since the 1990s, beauty salons offering traditional mehndi have sprung up along the ethnic strip. Mehndi involves drawing intricate designs on palms and feet using henna. Such body-art is popular during North Indian and Pakistani marriages. Hindi movies have popularized this art form, and now South Asian women from other regions and communities too wear mehndi during marriages. Its popularity among Hollywood actresses such as Madonna made mehndi into a popular culture phenomenon among second-generation South Asian Americans, who use mehndi as a temporary tattoo.

Gulzar Beauty Salon, 74-01 Roosevelt Avenue, is famous for hair removal by threading. You will find posters in beauty salons that show the idealized South Asian immigrant body. Images of famous models, movie actors, and actresses in these posters become objects of desire and serve as didactic visual artifacts to define the fashionably modern yet ethnic consumer body-image.

**Tour Four**

**Transnational Networks of Goods and People**

In 1955 Raj Kapoor made a Hindi film titled Shree 420. The movie, in the trademark style of the Indian Hindi movie industry from Mumbai, was replete with song and dance sequences. The lyrics of one song were: *My shoes are Japanese/My pants English/On my head a red Russian cap/Still my heart is Indian.*

Author Suketu Mehta argues that the Bollywood musicals define an imagined diasporic culture that is global in nature: "We Indians carry these songs around with us. They form our vocabulary of love and grief, from country to country. My aunt's family emigrated to Uganda from India a century ago; she now lives in England and has never been to India, but she listens mostly to Hindi movie songs. When I visited her house in Leicester once, I noticed that none of the children under 5 in her extended family spoke English. They spoke Gujarati and film Hindi; in their house, the TV was on almost all the time, with Hindi movies playing back to back on the VCR. The children, two or three generations removed from India, were living in this simulated Indiaworld."

The popularity of Indian Hindi movies has generated a transnational industry of gigantic proportions. This tour will take you to a community movie hall, a music/movie store, and a music store where the diasporic imaginary world of the Bollywood musical is sustained. The Bollywood movies can not be understood merely as a series of narrative tropes of familiar story lines reiterating appropriate behavior, gender roles, morals, patriarchal values, and cultural ideals. Rather, the Bollywood movie culture is experienced as an intensely physical and haptic process that is incessantly reproduced in space.

**The Eagle Theater**

Folklorist Ilana Harlow reports that the Eagle Theater, 73-07 37th Road, was built as the Earle Theater in 1936 by John Eberson.(17) By the 1970s the neighborhood had become seedy and the Earle screened pornographic movies. Tahir Mehmod and Shahid Mehmod, immigrants from Pakistan who owned theaters in Pakistan and were conversant with the business, bought the building and changed the name to Eagle Theater in 1995. The Mehmoods now own another movie hall near Flushing. The Eagle Theater has local walk-in customers on weekdays, but it is during the weekends that customers from all over the region drive in to watch Hindi movies. Movies shown at the Eagle Theater
originates from countries in the Indian subcontinent: about 90 percent are Bollywood films, 9 percent are Bengali and Nepali, and 1 percent are Pakistani.

The owners changed the seat upholstery and made space in the front for a small stage by taking out the front three rows of seats. This is because this theater doubles as a cultural space when local cultural groups rent out the hall for music, dance, fashion performances, and meetings. In the days before satellite TVs and cable pay-per-views, the Eagle Theater showed major cricket matches on the big screen. World cup cricket matches between India and Pakistan during the 1990s and in 2000 saw cricket fans in the community gather to watch the matches all night long. In this way the building has become an important landmark for South Asian immigrants. Compare its boarded-up and shabby exterior to the hypervisible storefronts in the neighborhood. The Eagle, being an in-group cultural space, needs no external markers as do the stores that depend on tourism and advertisements to attract South Asian, non-South Asian, new, and regular customers.

The spatial experience of watching a Hindi movie is important. Song and dance sequences puncture the narrative. Hindi movies are usually very long – more than 2 hours -- and include an intermission. During the intermission, as well as when the song and dance sequences come on, people move out of the hall to buy concession food, smoke, use the rest room, or just stretch and catch up on conversation. Hence the hall, lobby, concessions area, and the sidewalk area immediately outside the movie hall (for smokers) are inhabited continuously during the show. The snack bar or concession stand sells fried samosas and sweets in addition to candies, popcorn and soda. The Eagle Theater becomes a community space. The owner explained, “You don’t feel like you’re living in the U.S. You feel like you’re in Bollywood. On the weekend I feel like I am in Pakistan. The people, the cultures, the stores. It’s everything like in Pakistan.”

**Music Stores**

The display in music stores (Bollywood Instyle Indian Music Blasters, 73-08 37th Road, Sona Music, 73-10 37th Road, and many others throughout the district) is carefully planned by categories to separate ages and tastes. The Hindi movie classics from the 1950s and 1960s for the older customers are often located farthest inside. Hindu devotional music is very popular and is prominently displayed near the front. Contemporary movie music, remixes, bhangra, bhangra hip-hop, and indo-pop albums (drawing teenagers and younger customers) make it to the most visible section of the store or are stacked in the bins along the aisles.

Bhangra music is an example of a hybrid transnational popular culture born in the South Asian diaspora. Although this music genre traces its origins to folk music from Punjab, it was adapted by second-generation immigrants in the United Kingdom to create a unique music form. In New York City, the bhangra revolution was brought about by weekly bhangra jams in the Manhattan club Sounds of Brazil (SOB). As bhangra became popular in the US party scene, other forms of South Asian musical expression appeared. Today you have bhangra events all over the country: bhangra festivals, competitions, and bhangra workouts. No street fair, festival, birthday party, or marriage is complete without popular music. The larger music stores are more than physical locations; they also sell music over the internet and therefore operate within virtual digital diasporic networks.

**Appliance and Luggage Stores: The Landscape of Travel**

Immigrants who travel “back home” first visit Jackson Heights gift shops, appliance stores, and shops selling travel goods. This landscape also contains dress stores and jewelry stores, because immigrants buy dresses and jewelry as gifts for friends and relatives when they travel abroad.

Sam and Raj (37-08 74th Street) is a pioneer South Asian appliance store. Stores such as these carry 220-volt electronic appliances, since their customers are often planning to travel to countries where
the power voltage is 220-240 volts.(19) Travelers also shop for electrical converters and electrical attachments. Many South Asian appliance stores also carry luggage. Besides US name brands such as Samsonite and American Tourister, and Indian made brands such as VIP, one finds a large selection of generic bags. Some of this generic luggage is made in New York and costs considerably less than the name brands. Some luggage and electronic stores also act as collection points for large packages that are shipped abroad through container shipping -- a facility for customers who are moving back to another country.

Endnotes

3. The term South Asian is not used anywhere else in the world: it is an American construction and refers to racially inflected identity politics and ethnic classifications in the United States.

4. There are Colombian, Ecuadorian, Korean and Japanese ethnicities living in the area. A widening gap between newer immigrants and the older “white” neighbors – Jews, Greeks, and Italians – is manifested through continuing political conflicts since the 1980s. In 1989 such conflict led to the formation of the Jackson Heights Merchants Association, giving the storeowners a voice and representation within the local political structure.


8. Khandelwal, Becoming American, 27.


10. Khandelwal, interview conducted by City Lore, October 24, 2005


12. Arjun Appadurai conceives these interconnected global flows as scapes: ethnoscapes (people), technoscapes (technologies), finanscapes (capital), mediascapes (images), and ideoscapes (ideologies). See Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," Theory, Culture and Society, 7 (1990) 295-310.

13. India Abroad 10/30/92, referred to in Khandelwal, Becoming 31.


15. Khandelwal, interview conducted by City Lore, October 24, 2005.

17. Khandelwal, interview conducted by City Lore, October 24, 2005.


21. The popularity of electronics goods decreased among potential travelers to India in recent years, because such goods are now freely available in India due to economic liberalization and opening up of markets.

References


