

## CHAPTER 4 COMPILASIANS: FROM ASIAN UNDERGROUND TO ASIAN FLAVAS

### **Introduction**

The success of those British Asian popular musicians who were associated with the Asian Underground by the end of the 1990s had two imagined outcomes: 1) their success could establish British Asians as significant contributors to British society and popular culture, or 2) their success could eventually falter and, as a result, return British Asian popular musicians to the margins of British society. As Chapter 2 demonstrates, the second outcome proved to become reality; British Asian musicians associated with the Asian Underground did return to the margins of “British culture” as popularly conceived. Before they returned to the margins, recording companies released a plethora of recordings by British Asian musicians, as well as compilation recordings prominently incorporating their music. As shown in Chapter 2, the “world music” category in the context of the award ceremonies served many simultaneous, if at times contradictory, roles that helped define British Asian musicians’ relation to mainstream culture; the most significant of these roles included serving as a dumping ground for exotic others and as a highly visible platform highlighting British Asian musicians’ specific contributions to the music industry. Yet British Asian musicians’ participation within particular compilation recordings offers yet another significant forum that defines their cultural identity.

The first British Asian-oriented compilations had been motivated by attempts to capture the atmosphere of particular club scenes and package them for mass consumption; as a result, these compilations most often featured music by artists associated with respective clubs. Yet as a surfeit of

British Asian releases saturated the market, British Asian music lost its novelty. Subsequent events such as the 2001 summer riots in Oldham, Leeds, Burnley, and Bradford in Britain and the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States a few months later further dampened the British public's enthusiasm for British Asian culture as a whole. The distinction between more glamorous constructions of British Asian identity and the reality of more disadvantaged populations, including the Bangladeshis discussed in the previous chapter, also faded. In due course, most British Asian music came to be considered and marketed either as "world music," (as discussed in Chapter 2) or came to occupy a new niche as exotically tinged lounge electronica through compilation recordings.

These compilations are the focus of this chapter; they are, in effect, comparable to the "Exotica" recordings associated with 1950s and 1960s recordings by Martin Denny and Les Baxter, which as David Toop notes, "contrived a view of global culture that was so distorted, so outlandish, so dismissive of reality, as to be both surreal and absurd."<sup>1</sup> These recordings emerged after the Second World War raised Americans' interest in Asia—particularly in the context of tourism and imperialism; Latin American culture was gaining visibility, most notably through the large number of émigrés now settling in the United States.

While this music evoked the exoticism of Latin American, African, and Pacific Islands musics, it did so in a way that had little if any direct connection to people from those cultures; the musics from these cultures were in fact blended together to erase any specific, realistic referents. Shuhei Hosokawa remarks that exotica music was often intended to evoke a particular mood

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<sup>1</sup> David Toop, *Exotica: Fabricated Soundscapes in a Real World* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1999), 39.

and/or affect, as opposed to any particular geographic location or cultural reference.<sup>2</sup> Exotica recordings employed a standard repertoire of musical devices, which Rebecca Leydon catalogues as the following: “Latin, Cuban, and African rhythms, exotic percussion, ostinato bass patterns, rich colouristic chromaticism, and, especially, textless *vocalise*, jungle noises and bird calls”—all consistent with the atmosphere of 1950s pseudo-Polynesian “tiki” cocktail lounges, where they were heard.<sup>3</sup>

By the late 1990s, these exotic devices reemerged in ethnically themed neo-exotica electronica lounge music compilations, now in the form of South Asian stylistic markers. The sounds of the tabla, sitar, tamboura drone instrumentals, Indian classically-influenced vocal ornamentation, and references to Asian languages were so prevalent that they were already familiar influences in mainstream popular music produced by British Asians as well as by non-Asians including Morcheeba, Thievery Corporation, The Prodigy, Kula Shaker, and Madonna. British Asian musicians were by virtue of their ethnic identity automatically associated with this ubiquitous sound; their ethnicity established their cultural authority to produce a distinct type of Asian-themed British electronica music that mainstream audiences considered particularly authentic, insofar as the Asian influences in British Asian music was perceived to reflect the musicians’ mixed cultural heritage. Yet in many cases, these influences could do little more than suggest an exotic theme in the ears of uninformed audiences; without any translation, the Bengali lyrics that

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<sup>2</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, "Martin Denny and the Development of Musical Exotica," in *Widening the Horizon: Exoticism in Post-War Popular Music*, ed. Philip Hayward (Sydney, NSW: J. Libbey, 1999), 76.

<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Leydon, "Utopias of the Tropics: The Exotic Music of Les Baxter and Yma Sumac," in *Widening the Horizon: Exoticism in Post-War Popular Music*, ed. Philip Hayward (Sydney, NSW: J. Libbey, 1999), 45.

appear within some of Nitin Sawhney's songs can only function as an exotic signifier.<sup>4</sup>

British Asian musicians' proximity to this newly fashionable music positioned them as the exemplars of a newly visible and chic ethnic minority, which appeared at the time to be establishing itself as a permanent influence on British culture. Commercial promoters of this music were quick to recognize British Asian-produced music as a fashionable product that dovetailed with existing South Asian trends in fashion, as well as literary fiction, television programs and films. Many British Asians, excited by this new attention they were receiving within mainstream popular culture, embraced the glamour of their new chic status, and—perhaps uncritically—identified with the music associated with their media-driven image. In this way, Asian Underground music, as it was filtered through mainstream journalism and advertising, came to serve as a virtual trademark for the British Asian second generation.

Both British recording executives and British Asian youths viewed this music as somehow encapsulating the British Asian experience. Mick Clark, managing director of the Higher Ground record label, commented in 1997 on his label's release of one of the first compilations featuring British Asian musicians, *Eastern Uprising*: "These kids have obviously grown within two cultures, and the music reflects their Asianness and Britishness."<sup>5</sup> Both British Asian youths and music industry executives understood this music to relate to the everyday lived experience of upwardly mobile young people of South Asian heritage in Britain. At the time, some white British youth attempted to

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<sup>4</sup> The lyrics of these songs and their implications are addressed in pp. 350-55.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Sexton and Kwaku, "Compilations Offer Cross Section of Asian Scene," *Billboard* 109, no. 13 (1997): 87.

emulate and appropriate their British Asian peers' musical tastes, speech, and fashions in a manner that parallels many white American youths' contemporary propensity to appropriate African American trends in hip hop culture.

The liner notes to these compilation albums constitute a particularly valuable document of how both British Asian musicians and their record labels sought to define British Asian culture at this time. Unlike their role in traditional world music albums, these compilations' liner notes do not necessarily serve to provide the background and context necessary to introduce unfamiliar music to inexperienced listeners. The notes thus often incorporate alternate spellings drawn from the jargon of club culture; often written from the perspective of respective British Asian producers and musicians, these liner notes often exhibit a high degree of self-consciousness with respect to the role that they play in defining a scene—particularly within commercial forums; in many cases, they constitute an almost obsessive self-documenting.

Yet as South Asian musical influences entered the mainstream and grew more prevalent, they gradually weakened their associations with British Asian identity. Thus what was at one time recognized as “the Asian Underground sound” came to lose its relevance as a signifier of British Asian culture to both British Asians and the culture at large, which reflects both changes in the market for British Asian cultural products as well as the suspicion cast on British Asians' status as legitimate British citizens after 2001. This chapter investigates how compilations of British Asian music can be read as documenting the dissolution of the specific category of British Asian music

and identity, and their co-optation into the vague and more politically ambiguous category of the exotic other.

To establish the context for the creation of these compilations and their rise in popularity, this chapter first presents a survey of early British Asian “Asian Underground” oriented compilations. In this first section, we witness how these compilations developed from the existing club scene and how the act of recording these compilations impacted the scene. The next two sections present two specific cases studies that demonstrate how the rising popularity of these compilations affected a specific label, Outcaste Records, and musicians Talvin Singh and Nitin Sawhney, respectively. Founded in 1994, Outcaste Records broke new ground in its exclusive devotion to British Asian musicians. It established its presence with the club as well as with two highly regarded compilations in 1997 and 1999, both emblazoned with its motto, “The New Sound of Asian Breakbeat Culture.”<sup>6</sup> As the market for British Asian musicians declined after 1999, Outcaste Records began to release music by non-British Asian musicians as along with music genres that had little if anything to do with their original focus on “Asian breakbeat culture.” While Outcaste Records’ foray into other genres has enabled the label’s economic survival, its departure from its original focus implies the sinking value of British Asian electronica music as a marketable product within the recording industry.

The chapter then outlines the participation of Talvin Singh and Nitin Sawhney on these compilations. These musicians have already been discussed at length in Chapter 2, and in this chapter, I return to consider how their cosmopolitan identities—already blurring cultural and political borders—are

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<sup>6</sup> See glossary for definition.

subsumed within the aesthetic project of exotica. As it integrates sounds from different cultures, exotica creates a world without borders. However, in this context, Singh and Sawhney's self-consciously constructed cosmopolitan identities as informed, globally minded citizens are compromised as their music serves to provide a diluted rendition of South Asian culture that blends all the more easily with other cultures—to construct an imaginary realm. In effect, their music's inclusion helps construct an aesthetic experience that surveys the diversity of culture from a detached perspective that discourages listeners' engagement with reality.

Sawhney and Singh's participation merits special attention in the context of demonstrating how compilations dealt with British Asian identity, particularly after the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. The sequence of Singh and Sawhney's appearances on respective compilation recordings manifests the Asian Underground's gradual transformation into the more profitable "chillout"<sup>7</sup> marketing genre, and in the process, proceeds to define the terms under which many British Asian electronica musicians continue to eke out a living.

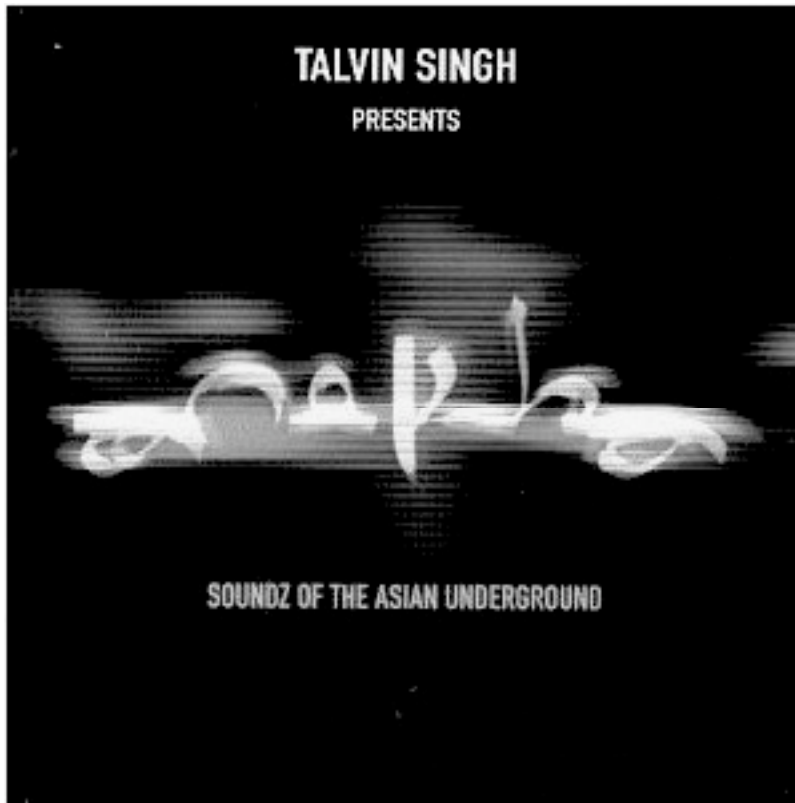
### **Taking the Underground Overground: The First Compilations**

The very first British Asian compilations shared a common mission in their intent to introduce unsigned and lesser-known British Asian popular musicians to a wider audience, and they did so via a promise to recreate the ambience of the clubs featuring those musicians. Between 1997 and 1998, the demand for British Asian electronica was high enough to lead to the release of at least six different compilations, all proclaiming to represent the "Asian

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<sup>7</sup> See glossary for definition.

Underground.” The very first British Asian “Asian Underground” compilation, released in Britain in late February 1997<sup>8</sup> was the compilation associated with Talvin Singh’s Anokha club, called *Talvin Singh Presents Anokha: Soundz of the Asian Underground*.



**Illustration 4.1** Album cover image, *Anokha: Soundz of the Asian Underground*

As noted in Chapter 2, the Anokha club and compilation were significant in publicizing this music to mainstream audiences, particularly through the style and entertainment press; as the first widely accessible tangible commodity, the compilation album was promoted extensively both

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<sup>8</sup> Release dates cited throughout this chapter are taken primarily from <http://www.cddb.com>, in conjunction with <http://www.amazon.co.uk>. In cases where the dates do not correspond, I have chosen the earlier of two dates.

before and after its release through numerous interviews and articles about the compilation and club. *Anokha* focused on original tracks produced by Anokha's regular musicians and DJs. As shown in the table below, most of these tracks could be categorized as electronica—particularly the substyle called drum and bass.<sup>9</sup>

Two selections, however, provided a dramatic contrast to the majority electronica tracks. One is the theme to the popular Hindi film *Mumbai* composed by Indian film composer A.R. Rahman from the movie *Mumbai* and scored for classical string orchestra; the other is a reinterpretation of an instrumental and vocal composition inspired by North Indian classical music, entitled “The Great Indian Desert”, composed by tabla virtuoso Zakir Hussain and appearing on his album *Music of the Deserts*.<sup>10</sup> These tracks established the range of *Anokha*'s leader, Talvin Singh as somebody as comfortable and fluent in British dance styles as in more “Indian” forms of music. A.R. Rahman is one of the most successful “Bollywood” film composers today; while Indian classical musicians typically disdain what they consider to be the forgettable work of most film composers, Rahman's talent has earned him the love and admiration of both popular audiences and elite classical musicians. Talvin Singh's inclusion of this track signals his familiarity with contemporary trends in Indian popular film music, which he introduces here to mostly unfamiliar audiences. As a classically trained tabla player, Singh's reworking of Hussain's composition is both a tribute to Hussain's artistry and a motion to establish Singh himself as a competent proponent in Indian classical traditions.

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<sup>9</sup> See glossary for definition.

<sup>10</sup> Zakir Hussain, *Music of the Deserts* (New Delhi: Living Media India, 1993), sound recording.

**Table 4.1 Sequence of tracks on *Anokha***

	<i>Artist(s)</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Style</i>
1	Talvin Singh featuring Amar	“Jaan”	Ambient/ drum and bass
2	State of Bengal	“Flight IC 408”	Electro, drum and bass
3	Lelonek	“Kizmet”	Drum and bass
4	Future Soundz of India	“Shang High”	Ambient/ drum and bass
5	State of Bengal	“Chittagong Chill”	Drum and bass, Electro
6	A.R. Rahman	“Mumbai Theme Tune	Classical string orchestral score
7	Talvin Singh featuring Leone	“Distant God”	Trip-hop/jazz
8	Amar	“Heavy Intro”	North Indian classical instrumental and vocals
9	Equal I	“Equation”	Drum and bass
10	Osmani Soundz	“Spiritual Masterkey”	Drum and bass/ trance
11	The Milky Bar Kid	“Accepting Trankuility”	Trance
12	Kingsuk Biswas	“K-Ascendant”	Trance/ drum and bass

The album’s concentration of electronica styles, and particularly drum and bass, found a visual analogue with publicity stills of Singh, who at the time sported spiky, blue-tinged hair. The album was thus also identified as a product of the non-Asian contemporary dance culture at the time. When interviewed by *Billboard*, Singh described *Anokha* as

basically British Asians embracing their own cultural atmosphere. We grew up listening to a lot of different styles of music, and I just admire a lot of artists I’ve listened to, such as State of Bengal, Lelonek, and Kingsuk Biswas. So it’s music which I really like and people should be

hearing, which has been happening for a long time but hasn't been exposed at all.<sup>11</sup>

Singh emphasized that British Asians had been making music for some time despite their music's not being well known. Singh makes a similar point in the liner notes to the album. In his notes, Singh draws particular attention to the teenaged (female) singer Amar, a regular vocalist at *Anokha* who often accompanied Singh's own compositions:

Amar: I hear that voice right within. Amar is Asian soul—21st century Asian soul. Ever since tuning into an Asian radio station & hearing a fully blown voice of a 14 year old singing a R&B tune in Hindi & with the internation [*sic*] & attitude of Indian music, I have been totally inspired. The voice of the British – Asian underground. Amar's got the ticket to take it overground.<sup>12</sup>

Singh's use of the term 'internation' evokes Singh's vision of Anokha's participating in something much larger than British Asian culture. In Singh's view, Amar's ability to integrate Asian influences into mainstream pop not only signifies her participation within British Asian culture, but also alludes to her participation within a more cosmopolitan, globally constituted sense of Indian identity that traverses India's geographic and political boundaries to link Indians with diasporic subjects around the world.

Insofar as the compilation *Anokha* constituted the first commercially released recordings of Amar and other live DJs and performers in residence at Anokha, the compilation did in fact deliver on its promise to package the atmosphere of the club, at least in respect to its music. Nearly all of the other artists featured on the album, with the exception of Indian film composer A.R.

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<sup>11</sup> Sexton and Kwaku, "Compilations Offer Cross Section of Asian Scene," 87.

<sup>12</sup> Talvin Singh, *Anokha: Soundz of the Asian Underground* (New York, NY: Quango, 1997), 1 sound disc. Singh alludes to the fact that teenaged singer Amar (Dhanjan) first achieved fame at 14 with her Hindi cover of American singer Whitney Houston's "The Greatest Love of All", an unofficial release that was a hit on British Asian radio stations. Unfortunately, Amar Dhanjan's 2000 solo release *Outside* (Warner) received only mediocre reviews.

Rahman, were regular performers at the club; while Lelonek, Leone, and Equal I are not ethnically Asian, they were (along with other prominent musicians such as the Icelandic singer Björk and drum and bass pioneer Grooverider) wholly integrated into the club's self-consciously stylish, futuristic, and avant-garde aesthetic.

As his comments on Amar suggest, Singh viewed his compilation as a means to publicize this music, previously restricted to a British Asian audience, and market it to a wider community—"overground"—that is, marketing to those who were not British Asian. Singh produced the album on his own independent label Omni Records, and then licensed the album to Island and PolyGram Records for domestic and international distribution. The album was marketed extensively in mainstream record stores including HMV, Our Price, Virgin, and Tower, but Island's marketing manager Cassie Wuta-Ofei noted that Island had "not been able to get it into Asian outlets" (small family run music, video, and/or grocery shops catering to the British Asian community) because these small shops had no contracts to stock inventory from PolyGram Records.<sup>13</sup> That *Anokha* could not be found in these shops distinguishes it as an album that was marketed towards a mostly non-Asian mainstream electronica music audience, as opposed to those Bhangra and film song remix albums by British Asian artists marketed towards exclusively British Asian audiences (which will be discussed later in this chapter). As noted in Chapter 3, music sold in British Asian outlets is not tracked by the mainstream record industry, so Singh's decision to release his compilation on a mainstream label was savvy, insofar as it almost guaranteed the music's

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<sup>13</sup> Sexton and Kwaku, "Compilations Offer Cross Section of Asian Scene," 87.

exposure to a wider audience. Ironically this wider exposure had the effect of directly excluding many consumers in the British Asian community.

While *Anokha* was the first official compilation released, others soon followed on its heels. It seems as if these compilations were attempts to document that the Asian Underground did in fact exist outside the walls of the Anokha club. The second significant compilation of British Asian music, *Eastern Uprising*, followed less than a month later in late March 1997 and tried its best to distinguish itself from its predecessor. The liner notes emphasized the fact that the music on the compilation was distinctly British, as opposed to “Asian”:

These are the state of the nation sounds being produced by a new breed of urbanite Asian. Freed from the dead end of industrial employment, liberated from convention and able to juggle duality and pluralism with more skill than a pre-coke Maradona, the new young guns go by the sleek sobriquet of ‘Desi’, meaning homegrown and authentic. The artists and recordings featured here represent a celebration of the emergence of a new, peculiarly British form of music. This is the first documentary evidence of the growing bands of groove-fixated shapeshifters, troubadours and jongleurs who rule the roots in metropolitan Britain; it won’t be the last. Welcome to Eastern Uprising, the Music of the Asian Underground.<sup>14</sup>

Sanjeev Varma (“Coco”) and his partner Sanjeev Rupal appear to have been motivated to produce the compilation for many of the same reasons that Singh cites above, yet they attempted to frame their own album as an explicitly British product. In their comments above, they speak little about their intentions to market underground artists to a wider audience, and instead propose the album as “documentary evidence” that the character of British music has changed. The use of the word “roots” is double-edged and strategic; the word is often taken to describe the “folk” underpinnings of various

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<sup>14</sup> Earthtribe and Various Artists, *Eastern Uprising* (London: Columbia Records, 1997).

western styles, but in this context, it refers also to the cultural heritage associated with very different musics, especially those associated with the South Asian and Caribbean immigrant communities in Britain.<sup>15</sup>

Varma was more explicit in an interview about the fact that he was motivated to release the album because he wished to inform outsiders about what was going on in the British Asian community, and, moreover, to seize the opportunity to profit from the emerging scene. As part of the South Asian-influenced electronica band Earthtribe, Varma and Rupal had been giving live performances for the last three years and noticed the following:

The first year, we saw no Asians at all [in the audience]... We were playing white clubs, at WOMAD, and so on. So we decided to do something about it, make a scene and exploit it. There were loads of [Asian] people making good music, but none of them making any money, so we went to the London Arts Board.<sup>16</sup>

As Varma notes, Earthtribe found their first substantial audience was not British Asian at all, and their ability to schedule gigs at “white clubs” suggested that their music had the commercial potential to appeal to—and “enrich”—a broader, non-British Asian audience. Varma then applied for a grant from the London Arts Board, a government sponsored organization, which resulted in Earthtribe’s receiving £5,000 to produce the compilation. The London Arts Board is part of the government-sponsored Arts Council England, which defines itself and its mission as the following:

Arts Council England is the national development agency for the arts in England. Between 2005 and 2008, we are investing £1.7 billion of public funds from government and National Lottery. This is the bedrock of support for the arts in England.

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<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed explanation of this double meaning, see Rajan Datar, *Roots -- Asian, Fusion, Reggae -- Music -- British Council -- Arts* (British Council, 2006 [cited January 22 2006]); available from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-music-roots.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Sexton and Kwaku, "Compilations Offer Cross Section of Asian Scene," 87.

We believe that the arts have the power to transform lives and communities, and to create opportunities for people throughout the country.

Our vision is to promote the arts at the heart of national life, reflecting England's rich and diverse cultural identity. We want people throughout England to experience arts activities of the highest quality.<sup>17</sup>

Musicians can be granted funding for recording and other expenses associated with a recording project, assuming that the project will actually provide benefit to the public and not serve simply as self-promotion. Earthtribe's status as a British Asian band evidently tapped into and satisfied the London Arts Board's intent to fund projects highlighting "diverse" communities, even if the project was later transformed into a strictly commercial project. After using the grant to initiate the project, Earthtribe then presented the project to Columbia Records, a major label, because of Columbia's prior success with British Asian artists such as Bally Sagoo on Columbia's subsidiary label, Higher Ground; they subsequently succeeded in licensing the compilation to that label.

*Eastern Uprising* presented a different version of the Asian Underground than *Anokha*. Its cover image and liner notes depicted everyday scenes from contemporary British Asian neighborhoods, which struck a contrast against *Anokha*'s futuristic, avant-garde style. Also unlike *Anokha*, *Eastern Uprising* featured only contemporary British Asian electronica musicians active at the time and reached beyond the chic clubs of London to include artists from other neighborhoods and cities, such as Joi, Earthtribe, and Asian Dub Foundation from East London; *Safri Goes to Bollywood*,<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Arts Council England: About Us* (Arts Council England, 2006 [cited January 22 2006]); available from <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/index.php>.

<sup>18</sup> The group's name "Safri Goes to Bollywood" puns on the better known early 1990s gay techno dance band, Frankie Goes to Hollywood--best known for their hit song "Relax." Balwinder Safri is a well-known Punjabi Bhangra singer; the song "Dum Maro Dum" is a remix of an early 1970s Hindi film song classic of the same name, originally sung by Asha

Core, and Patrina from Birmingham; Black Star Liner from Leeds; and Masters of Sound from Blackpool.<sup>19</sup> It did not include any classically influenced selections, such as A.R. Rahman’s “Mumbai Theme Tune” or “Heavy Intro.”

**Table 4.2 Sequence of Tracks on *Eastern Uprising***

	<i>Artist</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Style</i>
1	Joi	“Goddess”	Techno, Electro
2	Core	“Cocoon”	Trip-hop/ drum and bass
3	Earthtribe	“Sitarfunk”	Trance
4	Black Star Liner	“Harmon Dub”	Dub, Techno
5	Safri Goes to Bollywood	“Dum Maro Dum”	Techno remix of film song
6	Krome Assasins [ <i>sic</i> ]	“Return of the Shankar”	Techno
7	Tango Padre	“Temple of Boom”	Techno
8	Bedouin Ascent	“Ruffistahn”	Ambient
9	Asian Dub Foundation	“R.A.F.I.”	Dub, Electro
10	Masters of Sound	“Loaded Mantra”	Techno
11	Earthtribe	“Rude Boy”	Trance
12	Patrina	“Om”	Techno/Pop

Also unlike the *Anokha* album, the compilation did not focus on drum and bass oriented tracks as much as it did on dub, trance, ambient, and electro<sup>20</sup> influenced tracks. Core’s trip-hop track “Cocoon” includes an intermittent drum and bass background, but it is the only track upon which drum and bass appears. The often vigorous, aggressive sound of drum and bass is thus sidelined to help create a slower, smoother, and more mellow feeling throughout. Drum and bass had a particular urban audience but was by no means a mainstream subgenre in electronica; the inclusion of different subgenres on this particular album thus establishes the role of Asian-influenced music in electronica as a whole.

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Bhosle. The title translates into “take another toke,” and the song’s original psychedelic, hippie context has resulted in its lasting popularity with a younger generation.

<sup>19</sup> Earthtribe and Various Artists, *Eastern Uprising*.

<sup>20</sup> See glossary for definitions of “dub,” “trance,” “electro,” and “ambient.”

*Eastern Uprising* and *Anokha* were both extensively promoted *outside* British Asian communities and their respective markets. The juxtaposition of the releases *Eastern Uprising* and *Anokha* within four weeks' time were directly related to each labels' competition to release the first British Asian compilation album; this competition among labels translated into divisiveness and ill will among British Asian musicians. In an interview with a German magazine, the manager of Earthtribe, Dara (Khera)<sup>21</sup>, lamented that *Anokha's* earlier release had taken attention away from *Eastern Uprising*, released fewer than four weeks later. Dara was associated with the Sitarfunk club, in residence at the 333 Club on Old Street the last Friday of each month. That monthly Friday club began soon after Talvin Singh's weekly Monday club night, *Anokha*, which was housed at the Blue Note nearby. In the interview, Dara complained that his own compilation was upstaged by the media's focus on Talvin Singh and *Anokha*, as the first British Asian electronica compilation. Dara was explicit about the terms of his rivalry with Talvin Singh, namely his opinion that Singh had falsely represented himself in the press as the sole founder of a scene that was in reality much more collaborative:

The media, who had no concept of the music, and who were always in search of a leader, [found] Talvin [after he] set himself on his pedestal and said, 'Look, here's your leader!'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dara Khera and other music promoters and managers often drop their surname and identify themselves publicly by only their given names, as Khera does in this interview. Parentheses around surnames and subsequent references to only given names should be interpreted in this manner.

<sup>22</sup> "Dara's Anerkennung des Marketing-Genies von Talvin Singh nimmt sarkastische Züge an. Insbesondere die Medien, die keine Ahnung von der Musik hätten, "suchen immer nach einer Leitfigur und Talvin hat sich auf sein Podest gestellt und gesagt, 'schaut her ich bin es.'" (Translated by the author.) Armin Medosch, *Der Underground Ist Die Konstante: Sitarfunk Volume One: Eine Komprimierte Geschichte Des "Asian Drum & Bass"* (Telepolis: magazin der netzkultur, December 16 1998 [cited February 23 2004]); available from <http://www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/inhalt/musik/3317/1.html>.

In the interview, Dara seeks to establish what he calls an “alternative history” for how the Asian Underground was founded—a history that that incorporates his own seminal role. Despite his criticism of Singh, Dara notes that Singh was wise to recognize that Asian Underground scene could not be promoted effectively without a highly visible figurehead.

Dara’s backbiting reveals the intensity of commercial interest in the Asian Underground scene at this time and documents how that commercial interest contributed to its collapse. Later in the same interview, Dara narrates how Sony Music had approached him with an offer to create a compilation album with the title *Sounds of the Asian Underground*. After Sony approached him, Dara claims to have asked everybody around him if they were interested in participating, including Talvin Singh, who offered his help in producing the album. Dara explains that at that point he had no idea that Talvin Singh had already been approached by Island Records to produce a similar compilation with the same title. Only after the *Anokha: Soundz of the Asian Underground* compilation was released did Dara discover that his title had already been taken, which left Sony no choice but to rename Earthtribe’s compilation *Eastern Uprising*.

Dara’s feelings of betrayal continue throughout the interview as he later reduces Talvin Singh to a “good tabla player” who had no firsthand understanding of dance music styles.<sup>23</sup> In Dara’s eyes, Talvin Singh’s Indian classical background is suspect because it implies that Singh himself was relatively inexperienced in the British popular electronica music scene and riding on the coattails of those more closely involved with it. In doing so, Dara discredits both Talvin Singh’s cultural authenticity as a British Asian musician

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

and his authority to speak on behalf of other British Asians. He proceeds to account for what he feels to be *Eastern Uprising's* superiority over *Anokha* in a number of ways: he considers *Anokha* to be a compilation of separate pieces that make no sense as a whole and juxtaposes South Asian influences with dance music in a superficial manner—presenting standard drum and bass, with an intermittent “seasoning” layer of Asian elements, such as tabla, sitar sounds, or drones, over it.

As the producer of the *Eastern Uprising*, Dara promotes his compilation in commercially appealing language: “The Western and Eastern elements are not simply stuck together; rather, the catalyst of the dance floor actually fuses these elements together into a [new] psychedelic mix.”<sup>24</sup> The more aggressive, bass-heavy drum and bass styles featured in *Anokha* present a more dramatic contrast against traditional South Asian styles than the mellow techno and trance styles featured on *Eastern Uprising*, so Dara’s claims that the elements on *Anokha* do not seem to fuse in an organic way cannot be dismissed. On the other hand, Singh himself takes great care to integrate his solo tabla performances within the texture of drum and bass styles; in drum and bass influenced compositions such as “Traveller,” “Butterfly,” “OK,” and “Light” on Singh’s solo album *O.K.*, the tabla acts as an additional, interactive layer *within* the texture of the drum and bass rhythmic track. Far from a decorative superimposition, the tabla innovatively structures the drum and bass track itself.

Dara’s remarks reveal how major studio labels were competing to introduce what was then one of the most cutting edge (and thus potentially

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<sup>24</sup> “Die westlichen und östlichen Elemente nicht einfach zusammengeklebt werden, sondern durch den Dancefloor-Katalysator in einem psychedelischen Mix wirklich verschmelzen.” (Translated by the author.) Ibid.

most marketable) trends in British popular music. This competition may have fueled rivalries such as that between Dara and Singh, which threatened to unravel the mission of community work that was a professed element of their projects. The pressure to package the Asian Underground music for mass consumption required clearer distinctions in terms of artists and musical styles that may have worked against the original collaborative ethos of the scene. The mainstream music industry's tendency to market its music via the cult of personality very likely also contributed to this situation; the music industry tends to focus on one band or one person, and the collaborative nature of British Asian music challenges this approach. Two to three years later after all these events had concluded, the damage was significant enough that many participants were still seething with resentment.

### **The Early Days of Outcaste**

Five months after the release of the two albums, in August 1997, the Outcaste club would join *Anokha* and *Eastern Uprising* in issuing its very own compilation. Despite the relatively late release date, the club (and its associated label) had also been around for some time even if it had not received the same press coverage as *Anokha*. In 1994, three years before any major labels took interest in the British Asian scene, Outcaste had already established its own label for British Asian electronica artists. Its very name alluded to its status as an alternative to other British labels and a haven for those musicians who may not have been signed elsewhere; more specifically, the name Outcaste connoted the systematic exclusion of certain people from the Hindu system of social hierarchy prevalent in India, and their exclusion as

rebels (and social outcasts) within mainstream British youth culture.<sup>25</sup> It launched a related club with the same name in 1995; by that year's end, the Outcaste club was named one of the top 10 clubs in England by the influential British style magazine, *The Face*.

Dedicated to establishing a space for new Asian music outside the Bhangra scene, Shabs (Jobanputra) and co-organizer DJ Ritu were committed to mixing Asian elements with hip hop, drum and bass, dub, and jungle—a new sound at the time. The existing bhangra scene, against which Outcaste distinguished itself, had first developed in the late 1970s in Britain. Bhangra is characterized by its integration of traditional Punjabi folk songs with more contemporary synthesizers and drum machines. Appealing to both older and younger audiences, the traditional folk song most often features Punjabi lyrics, the swinging rhythm of the *dhol* drum or the smaller *dholki*, and the strumming of the single-stringed *tumbi* as accompaniment.<sup>26</sup>

The bhangra bands popular during the 1980s, such as Alaap, Achanak, and Heera, performed these songs live with the traditional instruments, at times substituting synthesized instruments for the *dhol* and *tumbi*. While Bhangra recordings, live performances, and clubs all had significant Asian audiences by the mid 1980s, the scene at the time had a unfashionably dated, tacky image from which major labels kept their distance. Sabita Banerji has ascribed Bhangra's marginality in part to its relative insularity and outdated image:

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<sup>25</sup> The caste system, often understood as a defining feature of traditional Indian society, has been shown to be a product of India's encounter with British colonial rule. See Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> The sampled strum of the *tumbi* is featured in the introduction to American rapper Missy Elliott's 2001 hit, "Get Ur Freak On."

While the Bhangra stars are pretending that [the mainstream music world] doesn't exist, the 'white' pop world, beyond Channel 4, the Asian Song Contest and open-minded dj's, has long pretended that they [Bhangra stars] don't exist, or has not been aware of their existence at all... The Bhangra image is designed to charm South Asians, smiles and hair oil gleaming, lurid lurex shirts stretch across 'prosperous' paunches over tight white trousers.<sup>27</sup>

The music was seen to appeal to an older, conservative Asian audience that existed entirely outside contemporary mainstream British culture. Until the 1980s, there were very few musical spaces where British Asians could gather and make music. Although Bhangra was firmly associated with and reaffirmed the cultural values of the Punjabi immigrant community in Britain, daytime dance clubs known as "daytimers" also provided a space for members of other immigrant communities such as Gujaratis and Bangladeshis to gather. While groups such as the British Bangladeshi Joi Bangla surfaced during this same time to address the need for forms of more specific cultural representation, British Asian youth nevertheless tended to identify with Bhangra across cultural barriers.<sup>28</sup>

Outcaste vowed to distinguish itself from this scene and define a more cutting-edge identity that would be attractive to musically progressive British Asians as well as to outsiders. As its first effort, Outcaste released Nitin Sawhney's solo album *Migration*—which integrated techno, jazz, Arabic vocals, and traditional Punjabi folk poetry—as its first album. Shabs was

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<sup>27</sup> Sabita Banerji, "Ghazals to Bhangra in Great Britain," *Popular Music* 7, no. 2 (1988): 213.

<sup>28</sup> See Ibid, Sabita Banerji and Gerd Baumann, "Bhangra 1984-8: Fusion and Professionalization in a Genre of South Asian Dance Music," in *Black Music in Britain: Essays on the Afro-Asian Contribution to Popular Music*, ed. Paul Oliver (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), Gurinder Chadha et al., "I'm British But," (New York: Third World Newsreel, 1990), Katy Gardner and Abdus Shukur, "'I'm Bengali, I'm Asian, and I'm Living Here': The Changing Identity of British Bengalis," in *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, ed. Roger Ballard (London: Hurst & Company, 1994). Rajinder Dudrah provides a more recent sociological analysis in Rajinder Dudrah, "Drum'n'dhol: British Bhangra Music and Diasporic South Asian Identity Formation," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (2002).

determined to extend Outcaste's audience beyond an Asian audience, specifically British electronica aficionados: "The music is aimed at the alternative market, not an Asian market in particular. We'd expect to attract the sort of person who'd buy a Tricky or Massive Attack album and was open and eclectic in their tastes."<sup>29</sup> The intention behind the label was to offer a home to musicians such as Nitin Sawhney, whose diverse styles had so far discouraged major labels from signing him. Shabs had stated that the label would "aim to be a cultural force to make sure Asian people get the props they truly deserve."<sup>30</sup>

The monthly Outcaste club, when it opened in 1995, was acclaimed as one of the more exciting developments in London's club scene. Noted acid jazz<sup>31</sup> producer Gilles Peterson presided over its June opening night; Peterson remarked that he intended to play music at the club that he couldn't "play anywhere else," presumably music that was looser and more experimental. Co-organizer Ritu was already known as the first British Asian DJ to work on London's dance radio station Kiss FM, and she was to start her own Bhangra show on the BBC World Service a few months later. Talvin Singh, then appearing as "Future Sound of India," also performed.<sup>32</sup> In its early days, many people were comparing both the club and label to Gilles Peterson's label

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<sup>29</sup> *Outcaste: Music: Albums: Beyond Skin* (Outcaste Records, [cited August 9 2004]); available from <http://www.outcaste.com/index.cfm?do=viewRelease&releaseID=4>.

<sup>30</sup> Sabuhi Mir, "Pop Music: Bollywood Beatz Bites Back at the Blue Note," *The Independent*, February 13, 1998, 15.

<sup>31</sup> See glossary for definition.

<sup>32</sup> "Star Caste," *The Independent*, June 9, 1995, 3. The article indicates that Talvin Singh would probably be releasing his own album on the Outcaste label, which testifies that the British Asian popular music scene was once more cohesive than its later fragmentation and internal tensions would indicate. Talvin Singh of course went on to begin his own club, sign the *Anokha* compilation to Quango, and his first solo album to Island records—none of which had any relationship to Outcaste.

called Talkin' Loud, famous for rejuvenating the London jazz scene in the early 1990s. One reporter wrote,

the feeling of pioneering enthusiasm around the collective convinces that Outcaste can make the same kind of cultural and musical impact [as Talkin' Loud] for this arginalized section of British creativity.<sup>33</sup>

Outcaste Records released its first compilation, *Untouchable Outcaste Beats*, in August 1997. Despite the fact that club Outcaste was already two years old by then, the album that represented the “scene” was relatively late in the context of British Asian compilation albums, being the third compilation to be released in less than five months. Rather than featuring only British Asian artists on its own label and running the risk of being compared to the other two previous compilations, the Outcaste compilation created a much more diverse mix of artists than either the *Anokha* or *Eastern Uprising* compilations because it included artists from a wider range of cultural backgrounds and chronological periods.

**Table 4.3 Sequence of Tracks on *Untouchable Outcaste Beats***

	Artist	Nationality	Original Release Date	Song Title	Style
1	The Dave Pike Set	U.S.	1969	“Mathar”	Sitar inflected Jazz/ Pop
2	Ananda Shankar	India	1975	“Streets of Calcutta”	Sitar inflected Rock
3	Dance Music Federation	Britain	1995	“Cybersitar”	Sitar inflected Electro/ Trance
4	Pressure Drop	Britain	1997	“Theme for the Outcaste”	Asian instrumental samples, dub, hip hop
5	Up, Bustle, and Out	Britain (?)	1995	“The Hand of Contraband”	Asian electronica/ funk/ jazz
6	Shri	India/Britain	1996	“Meditation”	Asian electronica/ trance/ jazz funk
7	Nitin Sawhney	Britain	1996	“Bengali Song”	Asian Electronica/ traditional Bengali song
8	Better Daze	U.S.	1997	“Stay Right Here”	Jazz/ pop with classical Indian inflection

<sup>33</sup> Garry Mulholland, "Intriguing Outcastes," *The Guardian*, August 30, 1995, T8.

**Table 4.3 (Continued)**

9	T.J. Rehmi	Britain	1996	"Mind Filter"	Asian electronica/trance
10	Wolfgang Dauner Quintet	Germany	1969	"Take Off Your Clothes to Feel the Setting Sun"	Indian inflected "raga" jazz pop
11	Badmarsh	Britain	1996	"Jungle Sitar"	Asian electronica/ drum and bass
12	Niraj Chag	Britain	1997	"The Firefly"	Asian electronica/ drum and bass
13	Nitin Sawhney	Britain	1996	"Streets"	Asian electronica/trance
14	Shri	India/Britain	1997	"Trains"	Asian electronica/jazz/ drum and bass

Outcaste's decision to include "vintage" tracks alongside their label's contemporary artists conveyed worked because both the older and newer tracks shared a laid-back groove accentuated by Asian instrumental sounds. Its ethos is not defined by contemporary British Asian identity, but rather, the consistency of a particular *sound*. As shown above, *Untouchable Outcaste Beats* opens with "Mathar," a sitar-solo jazz selection from a 1969 recording by the Dave Pike Set, a quartet based in Germany. Ananda Shankar's "Streets of Calcutta," another sitar-driven vintage recording from 1977, followed "Mathar." Ananda Shankar, son of dancer Uday Shankar and nephew to Ravi Shankar, the eminent sitar soloist, had from the late 1960s been experimenting with mixing his own classical training on the sitar with 1970s rock. "Streets of Calcutta," a riff-driven 1975 composition opens with a Moog synthesizer drone that vaguely recalls a *tamboura*; it then establishes a rock groove with a rhythmic bass guitar and an African-influenced conga beat, soon joined by a Hammond organ solo. Distorted guitars and a standard rock back beat on the snare delay the long awaited entry of Ananda Shankar's solo sitar, which sometimes alternates its taking the melody with a solo Indian classical flute.

The composition establishes Ananda Shankar as the Indian forefather of the contemporary British Asian popular musicians, and in doing so,

integrates him comfortably within the Outcaste ethos. Shankar is fully immersed in the sound of 70s rock and global youth culture at the time, but at the same time, appropriates that sound as his own by performing the sitar not as a substitution for the guitar (as in George Harrison's sitar solo on The Beatles' "Norwegian Wood") but as an instrument with a distinct idiom.

The effect of using these older generation recordings, particularly by Indian artists such as Ananda Shankar, alongside contemporary British Asian artists is to weaken the compilation's ties to an explicitly British Asian identity. Most of the other selections on the recording blend contributions by contemporary club musicians with South Asian-influenced tracks by Outcaste's own musicians, such as Shri, Nitin Sawhney, Badmarsh, and Niraj Chag. The third selection, "Cybersitar" by Dance Music Federation is a trance selection from the mid 1990s; the selection features sitar samples, alternating with digitized voices chanting "Cybersitar." The one exception to these more recent club compositions in the remaining songs is the Wolfgang Dauner Quintet's "Take Off Your Clothes to Feel the Setting Sun," recorded in 1969. The presence of these older generation recordings such as the Dauner Quintet track--and particularly those by Indian artists such as Ananda Shankar--alongside recordings by contemporary British artists shifts the focus from British Asian identity to the South Asian fusion sound as a historical phenomenon that has been established for some time, and has always been in vogue.

In conveying this idea, this compilation of recordings also discourages labeling this music as either Western Orientalist appropriations of Indian music, symptoms of Indian music's westernization, and/or British Asian musics' assimilation; it eschews geography altogether, in fact, which echoes

the geographic blurring of boundaries that accompanies the cosmopolitan formulation of the “Global Indian,” discussed in the second chapter. The Outcaste compilation situates “retro” artists such as Shankar and the Dauner Quintet in a new, updated narrative that posits them as enlightened pioneers of the present phenomenon—as cosmopolitans.

The general feeling of the Outcaste club, as conveyed by its associated compilation recording, presented itself as more open to different styles and genres, as opposed to the *Anokha* and *Eastern Uprising* compilations. The inclusion of kitschy tracks such as that by the Wolfgang Dauner Quintet suggested that Outcaste did not take itself too seriously; the sitar-tinged, jazzy pop song, “Take Off Your Clothes to Feel the Setting Sun,” evokes late 1960s hedonism with its recommendation that one can experience nature more closely through nudism. Although Outcaste also engaged in experimentation and serious music, it did not appear as concerned with conveying a cutting-edge, stylish image as much as the *Anokha* compilation did. The inclusion of pop-style, vintage tracks such as “Mathar” and “Streets of Calcutta” also implied that the music played by DJs at the club and the artists on its label were more varied musically than the relatively narrow range of Asian-influenced trance music featured on the *Eastern Uprising* compilation.

*Untouchable Outcaste Beats* was well received by both critics and regular listeners, partly because of its different genres and styles. The decision to include tracks such as “Mathar,” “Better Daze,” and “Take Off Your Clothes to Feel the Setting Sun” resulted in some controversy, however; some listeners did not agree with Outcaste’s decision to include these tracks solely on the basis that they featured the sitar and/or the tabla. American critic Jeff Chang wrote,

*Untouchable Outcaste Beats* rounds out its compilation with sides by non-Asians that just happen to feature sitars. Some of these, like the Dave Pike Set's 1969 track "Mathar" and the Bay Area group Better Daze's "Stay Right Here," are fine tracks. But what are they doing on this album? There are no liner notes to suggest any unity of vision. It would probably be unfair to charge this hard-working indie with an opportunistic attempt to cash in on all things Asian--we have Madonna and Kula Shaker for that.<sup>34</sup>

One may read Chang's comments as criticizing *Outcaste* because it had compromised its ethnic authenticity—and thus general integrity. By including tracks by Americans such as the Dave Pike Set and Better Daze, Chang suggests that *Outcaste* stoops to Orientalist appropriations of Asian influences by white pop musicians—such as Madonna and Kula Shaker—and reneges its professed commitment to promoting Asian artists.

*Outcaste's* decision to include these tracks could also be understood, however, as their attempt to place British Asian musicians, such as Nitin Sawhney and Badmarsh and Shri, within an already established and widely recognized facet of mainstream popular culture. Sawhney, Badmarsh, and Niraj Chag are perhaps distinguished by the fact that they may have been motivated to incorporate South Asian influences on the basis of their heritage, as opposed to Better Daze or the Dave Pike Set; yet it is important to recognize that all of these musicians, British Asians included, were making this music within a cultural environment in which the incorporation of South Asian influences was marketable. In its recognition of this phenomenon, *Outcaste* locates British Asian artists in this wider history and context, and it sidesteps the question of ghettoizing British Asian musicians.

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<sup>34</sup> Jeff Chang, *Punjabi Pop Grows Up: Catching up with Britain's Accelerating Asian Indies* (Metro Santa Cruz, January 24, 2003 1998 [cited December 21 2001]); available from <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/cruz/10.01.98/britasianpop-9839.html>.

## Concurrent Developments

With three major compilations offering three different takes on the so-called Asian Underground in a period of five months, the market would appear to have been saturated. Yet the demand for this music was strong enough to motivate two more compilations in October 1997, only a few months later. Vedic's *Rhythmic Intelligence*, released on the Belgian dance music label, Sub Rosa, was produced by a former Anokha DJ, Vedic (Vikas Sharma), and featured many of the same musicians as appeared on the *Anokha* compilation, including Lelonek, Osmani Soundz, and Kingsuk Biswas, here appearing as "Bedouin Ascent." Also appearing on the album are the Asian Dub Foundation Sound System, Ansuman Biswas (Kingsuk Biswas's brother, a performance and installation artist later featured in the 000 exhibition discussed in the previous chapter,) and Earthtribe. Sub Rosa's status as a small independent label based in Belgium limited their recordings' distribution; so although *Rhythmic Intelligence* received excellent reviews from critics—many of whom felt it to be superior to Talvin Singh's *Anokha*—it was overshadowed and outsold by the *Anokha* and the *Untouchable Outcaste Beats* compilations.

October 1997 also witnessed the release of *Star Rise: Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Michael Brook* remixed. The album featured remixes of the Pakistani Qawwali singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Canadian guitarist and ambient music producer Michael Brook's collaborations on the Real World albums *Mustt Mustt* (1990) and *Night Song* (1995.) The album cover's blurb billed *Star Rise* as, "From the Asian underground, the new stars emerge to interpret the

greatest singer of Qawwali music."<sup>35</sup> Qawwali music is associated with Muslim audiences in South Asia and technically constitutes a Sufi devotional practice. As Regula Burckhardt Qureshi has noted, Qawwali has also been "widely recorded and media-disseminated for as long as the life of the Indian record industry itself."<sup>36</sup> Traditionally sung by men and accompanied by a male chorus, hand clapping, harmonium, and tabla, the genre is usually sung in Urdu, a language associated with Muslim communities. Qawwali's repetitive, vigorous rhythms and frequent displays of vocal virtuosity have extended its audiences beyond Muslim communities, however, into the secular domain.<sup>37</sup> The most prominent Qawwali singers include Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the Sabri Brothers, and Aziz Mian among others. After Peter Gabriel of Real World Records asked Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan to contribute to the soundtrack of Martin Scorsese's 1988 film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Gabriel had Nusrat record multiple solo albums for Real World Records.<sup>38</sup> These albums were widely distributed throughout Europe and the United States and became instrumental in creating a worldwide audience for Qawwali music, and particularly Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, within the category of world music.

The album's remixes featured *Anokha* compilation artists including Talvin Singh and State of Bengal, but it also made an effort to include artists now associated with the Outcaste, Nation, and Narada/Real World labels including Nitin Sawhney, Joi, Asian Dub Foundation, and Aki Nawaz ; in doing so, it represented an unprecedented coalition of divergent

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<sup>35</sup> Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Michael Brook, *Star Rise* (New York: Real World Records, 1997), 1 sound disc.

<sup>36</sup> Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, "His Master's Voice? Exploring Qawwali and 'Gramophone Culture' in South Asia," *Popular Music* 18, no. 1 (1999): 63.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*: 66.

<sup>38</sup> Nigel Williamson, "Industry Pays Tribute to Qawwali Master Khan," *Billboard* 109, no. 35 (1997): 10.

interpretations of the Asian Underground scene. The compilation received a great deal of press, especially as one of the recordings commemorated Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan immediately after his death on August 16, 1997. While British Asian remixers such as Bally Sagoo had worked with Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's music in the past, *Star Rise* was considered more significant because it was directed to a much broader, non-Asian audience.

The musicians featured on the album were given the opportunity to include their personal thoughts on Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan in the liner notes; nearly all the musicians remarked that they had always respected Nusrat from a young age, and in most cases, they viewed him as a pioneer and father figure for their own work. Nusrat's formidable presence as a world-famous South Asian musician who collaborated with established Western stars such as Eddie Vedder (Pearl Jam) and Peter Gabriel, coupled by his impassioned and virtuosic performances, earned him near universal respect of his audiences, British Asian youth included; he was somebody who had achieved worldwide fame without sacrificing his cultural heritage. The likely sound of Nusrat's voice in the homes of young British Asians (especially British Muslims) would have made a deep impression on them as they were growing up. Most interestingly, by 1997 Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's releases on the Real World label had established him as a world music star, but the British Asian musicians who participated were acknowledged as something completely different than the typical "world music" artists. Rather than collapsing diasporic music and South Asian traditional music into the same category, the compilation actually accentuated the contrast between the British, Asian Underground influence on the respective songs and the traditional, South Asian Qawwali sound; the gritty, impassioned voice of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan

soared above digitally produced electronica textures that in most cases remained in the background. Because so many of the Asian Underground musicians related to Nusrat so profoundly, they seem to have been honored to ask to work on the project; similarly, the musicians' connection to Nusrat may have prevented Real World Records' being accused of exploiting the British Asian musicians so that they too could jump on the Asian Underground compilation bandwagon.

### **The second wave: February 1998**

The commercial success associated with the first wave of compilations released in 1997 had demonstrated to the music industry that British Asian compilations were indeed marketable. Many labels became eager to produce their own recordings with British Asian artists, if they had not already done so. The success of Outcaste's first compilation motivated the label to release a follow-up compilation, *Outcaste Too Untouchable* in February 1998, six months after the first release. The compilation follows a similar formula to its predecessor, reintroducing artists as Indian sitarist Ananda Shankar, Outcaste's own Badmarsh and Shri, Nitin Sawhney, and Niraj Chag, and the British dance music producers Pressure Drop.

The compilation also introduced a selection, "Jullander Shere," by Cornershop, a group fronted by British Asian singer Tjinder Singh. Cornershop's *When I Was Born for the Seventh Time* was one of the most critically acclaimed independent label albums in 1997. Given that the band had already established their identity as a politically conscious garage band in previous albums, they were able to steer clear of the Asian Underground moniker, even if their album included South Asian elements and electronica

influences. The version of “Jullander Shere” is a mostly instrumental, *dholki* and dub-infused remix of Cornershop’s 1995 hit, “Jullander Shere 6 A.M.,” which originally featured Punjabi language vocals. As is typical in many electronica compilations and reissues, some artists will offer an alternate version of the track from the one most people would recognize from a previous recording; technically a “remix,” in this instance, a former vocal and instrumental track loses its vocal track and gains an acoustic *dholki* rhythmic track, and the profound reverb associated with dub-influenced music.

The compilation also plays homage to some earlier pioneers who integrated Indian influences with contemporary popular genres. Trilok Gurtu, an Indian percussionist highly regarded for his experimental fusions of Indian classical music with jazz, funk, and Western African rhythms, is also featured on the compilation. His late 1980s selection, “Deep Tri,” features a jazz-influenced bass and rhythm section with tabla solos that are rooted in the Hindustani classical tradition; Trilok Gurtu’s mother Shobha Gurtu, a well-known singer of North Indian light classical music in India, sings throughout, accompanied by jazz piano and Indian classical-influenced violin.<sup>39</sup> As an Indian fusion percussionist, Trilok Gurtu has been an active collaborator with musicians from different traditions around the world for over two decades; he is therefore often cited as a major influence by younger British Asian musicians, such as Talvin Singh. (Singh actually included a selection by Gurtu on his 2001 compilation album, *Back to Mine*.<sup>40</sup>) This conscious juxtaposition of newer artists beside those from the older generation follows the first

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<sup>39</sup> Shobha Gurtu (d. 2004) is most remembered for singing the genre of *thumri*, romantic songs addressed to the god Krishna and were originally danced to in the *kathak* style by courtesans. Light classical pieces typically follow the conventions of raga-based improvisation, but they do so less strictly than the more traditional vocal genres of *khyal* and *dhrupad*.

<sup>40</sup> Talvin Singh, *Back to Mine: Talvin Singh: A Chilled Personal Collection for after Hours Grooving* (DMC, 2001).

compilation in attempting to forge a link between this most recent generation of British Asian electronica musicians and earlier figures embodying the Indian fusion musician archetype.

This second compilation also looks back on late 1960s and early 1970s “raga rock” numbers, namely Ananda Shankar’s cover of the Rolling Stones’ “Jumpin Jack Flash” and Ravi Bill Harris and the Prophets cover of James Brown’s “Same Beat,” which replaces Brown’s horn riffs with the sitar; the latter’s relaxed, swinging, jazz-influenced pop connotes a late 1960s or early 1970s production. Shankar’s 1969 cover is a relatively straightforward rendition of the Stones’ classic, with the exception of Shankar’s solo sitar substituting for the lead vocals and guitar solos in the Stones’ original version. Shankar’s version blends the sitar melody with a backup chorus, Moog synthesizer, Hammond organ, and standard rock drums; once again, his appearance on the compilation also highlights connection to the archetype of the Indian fusion musician, which arguably began with his father Uday (see Chapter 1).

The Massive Attack remix of “Mustt Mustt” also references an established South Asian musical figure, via recent trends in British club culture, as performed by Massive Attack—a Bristol-based group that pioneered the trip-hop sound. Their remix of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan’s “Mustt Mustt” (“Lost in his work”) was very popular in trip-hop oriented dance clubs during the early 1990s, and its success was undoubtedly a significant factor in Real World’s decision to introduce British Asian remixes of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan for the 1997 album *Star Rise*. “Mustt Mustt” had appeared in its original form along with the Massive Attack remix on the 1990 Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Michael Brook collaboration *Mustt Mustt* (Real World Records). Massive

Attack's remix splices phrases of Nusrat's voice amidst a penetrating dub bass, organ, and ambient electronica—with the addition of considerable reverb -- to translate Brook and Khan's Qawwali fusion into a more standard trip-hop selection. Indeed, Asian-accented trip-hop sounds dominate the compilation, specifically those by The Calling, as well as those by Outcaste label artists Nitin Sawhney and Niraj Chag.

The months that followed witnessed the release of even more British Asian electronica compilations, attesting to the continuing demand for British Asian electronica in 1998. The next compilation to be released was produced by Earthtribe, the same group who had produced the *Eastern Uprising* compilation. *Sitarfunk Vol. 1* was released in November 1998. With a psychedelic, digitally manipulated image of a sitar's neck on its cover, Earthtribe proclaimed this compilation as "The Fresh Sounds of the Underground." Released on the Sitarfunk label, Earthtribe produced this compilation of music and musicians featured at its occasional club, also called Sitarfunk. Once again picking up the "Underground" reference, Earthtribe featured their own tracks, as well as those by recent British Asian artists signed on other labels; these artists included Indian Rope Man, on Fat Boy Slim's Skint Records; T.J. Rehmi on Nation Records; and Mo Magic, on Outcaste Records. The compilation also expanded its original roster to feature other non-British Asian electronica producers and bands incorporating South Asian sounding ethnic samples, including Transglobal Underground; Up, Bustle and Out; Toucan Zahir; and Stoppa+Nobby—all relatively well recognized names in the ethnically influenced techno and trance ("ethnotechno") scene at the time; unlike the British Asian musicians, these bands and their music had a different audience—composed of mostly white

musicians and audiences who indiscriminately enjoyed ethnically tinged electronica, without worrying where it was from. Only two months later in late January 1999, Outcaste issued its third compilation, *Outcaste New Breed UK*. The compilation featured selections by Outcaste's signed artists Niraj Chag, Mo Magic, and Ges-E + Usman that promised to represent "a new crop of artists ready to tell the world their story." Shabs, label director, proclaimed the album, "A New Breed for a New Time."

The rapid succession of compilations between the release of *Anokha* and *Outcaste New Breed UK* witnessed a variety of different labels, vying to capture the legitimate claim to the "Asian Underground," or—even more marketable—its newest, most cutting edge incarnation in 1997 and 1998, as a more "ethnically authentic" subspecies of ethnotechno. The labels needed at least partly to keep up with or preferably stay ahead of other their competitors in integrating the latest trends into their releases. This plethora of compilations released within a short period marks the highpoint of commercial demand for British Asian music; this rush to release albums was hastened by the recognition that the trend would not last. Ironically, this surge of albums hastened the demise of these albums' sales by saturating the market. In this early phase, we witness the growing enthusiasm and commercial demand Asian influences and fashions, and in turn, the market generated by the first compilations for specifically British Asian music. At its end, we witness the first signs that this market will not sustain itself. Moreover, while the success of albums featuring a single British Asian artist or band can often be explained in terms of audiences' reception of particular musical styles, compilations are more easily explained in terms of their

various attempts—alongside other cultural products such as fashion—to formulate and market a cohesive sense of British Asian identity.

### **Outcaste: British Asians for Bollywood**

To go back a few years, after releasing its first three compilations, Outcaste had mostly concentrated its efforts on producing solo albums by the artists signed to the label: Badmarsh, Shri, Nitin Sawhney, Niraj Chag, Mo Magic, and Ges-E + Usman. In this early period 1995-1999, Outcaste’s compilations served primarily as a vehicle to establish the label’s identity in the music industry as a haven for experimental, forward-looking British Asian artists, and to promote those artists who were signed to its label. The following table lists Outcaste’s albums and compilations released between 1995 and late 1999.

**Table 4.4 Outcaste releases between 1995 and 1999**

8/1995	Nitin Sawhney	<i>Migration</i>
10/1996	Nitin Sawhney	<i>Displacing the Priest</i>
5/1997	Shri	<i>Drum the Bass</i>
8/1997	Various Artists (compilation)	<i>Untouchable Outcaste Beats</i>
3/1998	Badmarsh & Shri	<i>Dancing Drums</i>
8/1998	Various Artists	<i>Outcaste Too Untouchable</i>
2/1999	Various Artists	<i>Outcaste New Breed</i>
9/1999	Nitin Sawhney	<i>Beyond Skin</i>

While the initial phase of the Outcaste production was devoted to British Asian artists and music, the label took a significant departure into other genres after 1999. In the next five years, Outcaste broadened its label’s offerings—and for the first time—began to release compilations of music from popular Bombay films. Given that the label had prided itself on charting new territory with artists whose work rarely fell into established genres, their

decision to veer into Bombay film music—the most commercially established of South Asian music genres in South Asia—as well as in the diaspora—demonstrated their awareness that the market for British Asian music was approaching its limits; if Outcaste was to survive and retain its niche market, it needed to reinvent itself.

Popular Hindi films such as *Dil Se*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, and *Taal* (all released in the late 1990s) achieved a new level of commercial success; these “Bollywood” films represented only a few of the over thousand films produced in Bombay (Mumbai) each year. These films all broke “top ten” mainstream box office records in Britain and many other markets outside India.<sup>41</sup> The success of Bollywood films is often related to the success of their soundtracks; these soundtracks accompany song and dance sequences within respective films, and these sequences are the main attraction for many audience members. Since the 1950s, these films have had an extensive distribution network and are watched in South Asian diasporic communities throughout the world, as well as by non-South Asians throughout Asia, Eastern Europe, and North Africa. Music constitutes a core experience through which these films are consumed; Bollywood film music circulates through media including film screenings, music video broadcasts on satellite television, DVD and videocassette compilations of music videos, radio broadcasts, audio recordings, ring tones, and Internet downloads. In consuming this music simultaneously via identical technologies, both Indian nationals and diasporic South Asian communities construct a shared vocabulary and cultural experience that dissolves the traditional “lag” and

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<sup>41</sup> Satinder Chohan, “When Holly Met Bolly,” *The Guardian UK*, December 2 1999, <http://film.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,3937150-110608,00.html>.

“loss in translation” that has traditionally accompanied the transmission of the homeland’s culture to its diaspora. These films have come to serve as an important medium through which the diaspora affirms its connection to India and South Asia, and vice versa, as explored in recent scholarship.<sup>42</sup>

The success of these films and their soundtracks in Britain motivated some labels to produce their own compilations of Bollywood film songs, especially after Bollywood films proved financially lucrative overseas.<sup>43</sup> Manteca Records, a small independent label based in London, produced two of the earliest compilations of this type, *The Best of Asha Bhosle*, and *I Love Bollywood*, in 2000 and 2001 respectively.<sup>44</sup> As the second largest market in the world for Bombay films, Britain witnessed £30 million of ticket sales for

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<sup>42</sup> See Kaleem Aftab, "Brown: The New Black! Bollywood in Britain," *Critical Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2002): 88-98. Ashish Rajadhyaksha, "The 'Bollywoodization' of the Indian Cinema: Cultural Nationalism in a Global Arena," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1 (2003). Aswin Punathambekar, "Bollywood in the Indian-American Diaspora: Mediating a Transitive Logic of Cultural Citizenship," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8, no. 2 (2005). Madhu Kishwar, "The Idea of India: Bollywood as India's Cultural Ambassador," *Manushi* 139 (2003). Nandini Bhattacharya, "A 'Basement' Cinephilia: Indian Diaspora Women Watch Bollywood," *South Asian Popular Culture* 2, no. 2 (2004). Anthony C. Alessandrini, "'My Heart's Indian for All That': Bollywood Film between Home and Diaspora," *Diaspora* 10, no. 3 (2001). Marie Gillespie and Tom Cheesman, "Media Cultures in India and the South Asia Diaspora," *Contemporary South Asia* 11, no. 2 (2002).

<sup>43</sup> The earliest instance of film song compilations released in England was in 1990 in the form of the three-volume compilation associated with the BBC 4 television series "Movie Mahal." Published by the Gramophone Company of India, *Golden Voices from the Silver Scene* concentrated on the golden age of songs from the 1950s and 1960s. For more on the "Movie Mahal" series, see Paul Oliver, "Movie Mahal: Indian Cinema on ITV Channel 4," *Popular Music* 7, no. 2 (1988). For more on the transnational reception of film music and the history of film music compilations released outside India, see Nilanjana Bhattacharjya and Monika Mehta, "From Bombay to Bollywood," in *Planet Bollywood: The Transnational Travels of Hindi Song and Dance Sequences*, ed. Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, forthcoming). For more on specifically British Asian reception of Bollywood music, see Ashley Dawson, "'Bollywood Flashback': Hindi Film Music and the Negotiation of Identity among British-Asian Youths," *South Asian Popular Culture* 3, no. 2 (2005).

<sup>44</sup> Asha Bhosle, *The Best of Asha Bhosle: The Golden Voice of Bollywood* (London: Manteca World Music (a Union Square Music Label), reissuing recordings owned by Gramophone Co. of India Ltd. (Calcutta) under license from Saragema Plc, 2000), *I Love Bollywood: 15 Classic Tracks from Bollywood's Greatest Songs* (London: Manteca World Music, 2001).

Bombay films in 2001 alone. That same year, four Bombay movies appeared within the weekly lists of Britain's top ten grossing films.<sup>45</sup>

Outcaste's shift in direction toward offering Bollywood compilations was a marked departure from the identity it had so far established as the purveyor of "the new sound of Asian breakbeat culture." Many of the original British Asian Underground musicians had established their careers by consciously departing from and scorning what they felt to be the inane, kitschy nature of most Bollywood music (and its more conservative Asian audiences) in favor of more electronica music, deemed to be more "serious." This tension should be viewed as a symptom of the larger tension between tradition and modernity and its relation to South Asian identity, as explored in previous chapters. Electronica, specifically breakbeat, for the original British Asian Underground artists represented the more modern influence as opposed to Bollywood film music, which was considered more conservative despite its frequent incorporation of Western popular mediums partly because of its association with older audiences out of touch with contemporary club culture.

Seemingly aware of this inconsistency between its original and most recent guise, Outcaste attempted to smooth over its transition as it tepidly initiated its foray into Bollywood compilations with the release of *Bollywood Funk* in March 2000. In the liner notes, Shabs attempted to situate this new direction within Outcaste's previous association with innovative music made by British Asians:

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<sup>45</sup> In addition, Karan Johar's *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham (K3G)* debuted at number 3 in the weekly grosses chart for 4 November 2001, and at number 2 in the takings per screen list, losing out that week only to Warner Brothers' heavily promoted *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone*. See Kaleem Aftab, "Brown: The New Black: Bollywood in Britain," *Critical Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2002): 88-89.

After years of research we here at Outcaste finally agreed it was time to present you with a fresh musical look into the mad, crazy world of Bollywood... Whether you watch Bollywood or not, this is an album of quality music that finally proves that Bollywood sure is funky.<sup>46</sup>

Shabs strategically enlisted Imran Khan, former editor of the stylish, avant-garde 2<sup>nd</sup> *Generation* magazine, a regular personality at Asian Underground-type events, and a frequent radio commentator, to provide blurbs for each of the songs, mostly taken from 1970s and 1980s films. These notes were geared to an audience steeped in British and American popular culture and perhaps even British Asian electronica, but unfamiliar with Bollywood's conventions:

"Dance Music" (from *Hare Rame Hare Krishna*)  
Indian film LPs often named instrumentals after what happened in the scene. Trouble is this means that there are over 200 tracks in Indian film libraries named "Dance Music." If you're hunting for the original of a track it helps to know the name of the film. Asking for dance music down Brick Lane will draw a lot of blank looks.<sup>47</sup>

In this blurb, Khan assumes that the reader is well versed enough in London's culture to know and where and what Brick Lane is, and why one would go there to purchase Bollywood recordings. Khan describes another selection from the same movie, "Dum Maro Dum," as including "a backbeat and guitar lick James Brown would be proud of"<sup>48</sup>—language self-consciously attempting to prove Bollywood's "funkiness" or relevance to mainstream, non-Asian popular culture.

Outcaste's next Bollywood related offering, *Bollywood Breaks*, even more explicitly attempted to forge a concrete link between Asian breakbeat culture

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<sup>46</sup> Various Artists, Shabs (compiler), and Imran Khan (liner notes), *Bollywood Funk* (London: Outcaste Records, 2000), 1 sound disc.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

and Bollywood.<sup>49</sup> Released in January 2001, Outcaste's DJs explained the project as the following in a press release:

For the committed beat freak, some of the finest musical moments [in Bollywood] occur during the interstitial sections, where the musicians were set free to play rhythm-heavy, instrumental versions of the film's big songs. As DJs, we at Outcaste... [noticed] some potent grooves lurking in these soundtracks... we've searched out some of the best breakbeats to be found in Bombay and distilled them into their purest, heaviest form.<sup>50</sup>

Targeted towards both DJs "in constant pursuit of fresh breaks" and the casual listener, the recording aimed to recover British Asian electronica compilations' original mission by reproducing the atmosphere of the Outcaste club night for a much wider audience. Given its reduction of otherwise nostalgic Bollywood selections to a source of beats and breaks, the album seemed calculated to appeal to an audience other than those people who actually listened to Bollywood music regularly.

These first two Bollywood compilations at least attempted to address the fact that Outcaste's main audience was not one that was necessarily even interested in Indian Bollywood music, and in fact, more probably indifferent to that music. The two compilations that followed—compilations of straight Bollywood music--do not acknowledge British Asian electronica at all, presumably because the label felt that had already established its transition to Bollywood with *Bollywood Funk* and *Bollywood Breaks*. Outcaste's newest Bollywood compilations were targeted to reach a much wider British Asian audience, outside of British Asian electronica fans, as well as non-Asians interested in the many contemporary references to Bollywood in mainstream

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<sup>49</sup> Outcaste, *Bollywood Breaks* (London: Outcaste Records, 2001).

<sup>50</sup> Outcaste Records, "Bollywood Breaks Sampler [Press Release]," (London: Outcaste Records, 2001).

popular culture at the time. These compilations featured a mix of recent hits as well as old classics in two bestselling volumes: *The Very Best Bollywood Songs Volume 1* and *The Very Best Bollywood Songs Volume 2*, released in June 2001 and January 2002.

The commercial success of these compilations proved that Outcaste was prudent in its decision to appeal to an audience beyond younger, British Asian listeners. Despite the popularity of Bollywood movies, *The Very Best Bollywood Songs Volume 1* was the first Bollywood album to make the mainstream compilation top 40 list; at position 29, it beat the popular Ministry of Sound club compilation's *The Annual* as well as a new album by Phil Collins. Unlike most other "specialist" music, the album was stocked by mainstream supermarket and retail chains Sainsbury's, Asda, Tesco, and Woolworth's. Nicole Lander, head of media at Woolworth's, remarked:

The album has literally flown off the shelves in areas where there is a large Asian population such as Southall, Slough and Balham. The whole Bollywood scene is already popular and we think it is going to be even hotter this summer.<sup>51</sup>

The Woolworth's in Southall, one of the oldest Asian neighborhoods in London, sold forty copies of the album in the first hour it was available. DJs Harv Nagi and Sunny Sharma noted that the previous *Bollywood Funk* and *Bollywood Break* compilations issued by Outcaste hadn't sold as many copies, because they weren't as widely available; their limited availability in turn suggest that large stores such as Woolworth's had not invested in these recordings because they doubted the recordings' marketability. As noted above, those compilations appealed more to British Asian electronica audiences and less to those listeners who were actually seeking Bollywood

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<sup>51</sup> Indira Das-Gupta, "Bollywood CD That Is Breaking Sound Barriers," *The Evening Standard*, June 14, 2001, 17.

music. However, this time around with straight Bollywood song compilations, Sunny noted:

We found it easier to approach people about selling it this time round because the West [mainstream British culture] seems to be embracing all things Bollywood at the moment. So in that respect it is not so surprising it has done well.<sup>52</sup>

With these last two compilations consisting of straight Bollywood songs, Outcaste was able to appeal to both a more traditional and conservative British Asian audience who would likely watch Bollywood DVDs at home but never step into a club, and also curious non-Asian listeners who were largely ignorant about Indian culture or Bollywood. In doing so, they diverted their focus from the “new sound of Asian breakbeat culture,” its artists, and its limited audience, and ensured its survival and relevance in the immediate future.

### **More detours**

The lack of focus in Outcaste’s catalogue in its releases after 2000 suggests that the label was seeking to redefine itself in order to survive after the market for British Asian electronica had collapsed, as documented in Chapter 2. *The Bombay Jazz Palace*, was released in late July 2001, weeks after *The Very Best Bollywood Songs, Volume 1*. Compiled by DJs Harv and Sunny, collectively known as “Sutrasonic,” *The Bombay Jazz Palace* presented “14 Indo-Jazz Funk Classics” that looked more backwards than forwards. Its liner notes explained, “Outcaste Records’ journey to find and present new Asian music continues – on this part of the trip we have stopped at the beautiful and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

mystical Bombay Jazz Palace.” The compilation selections included a majority of tracks by “Indophile Westerners,” as well as a handful of “jazz-literate Indians.”<sup>53</sup> The self-exoticizing reference to a mystical palace in Bombay could be viewed as ironic, if not for the fact that there was little room for irony in a market already exhausted with Asian influences in music. The compilation of course did not present any “new” music at all, but rather Indian-tinged jazz selections from the 1970s and earlier. While some of these groups such as Ananda Shankar and The Dave Pike Set appeared on the original first two Outcaste compilations, coupled with the reference to a mystical palace in Bombay, there was little if any continuity with any of Outcaste’s previous release.

Outcaste’s compilations that followed explored “Asian Flavas,” flamenco, Latin, and Brazilian music—genres associated with traditional British Asian Bhangra audiences, and world music aficionados, respectively. These compilations, issued from mid-2002 onwards, ushered in a period in which Outcaste greatly expanded its focus beyond British Asian culture; while the genres featured in the compilations may seem somewhat random, market trends at the time suggest that they were potentially profitable areas to develop. The label began to focus on more “urban” R&B and hip-hop influenced sounds in its *Essential Asian Flavas* compilations, the first of which was released in January 2003 after the combining of styles from bhangra, R&B, and hip hop had become a more mainstream sound. Shabs explained:

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<sup>53</sup> “Indophile Westerners” constituted the majority of the musicians featured, including Paul Horn & Nexus, Volker Kriegel, The Dave Pike Set, Georges Garvarencz, Dave Mackay & Vicky Hamilton, Lalo Schifrin, Grupo Batuque, Yves Hyatt, and Shocking Blue; “jazz-literate Indians” constituted Shankar Family & Friends, Shankar-Jaikishan, Ananda Shankar, and Muhavishla Ravi Hatchud & the Indo Jazz Following. See Harv and Sunny aka Sutrasonic [Harv Nagi and Sunny Sharma], *The Bombay Jazz Palace* (London: Outcaste Records, 2001).

[It] took a bunch of American producers to take some Bollywood beats and vocals and turn the UK Asian music scene on its head. Timbaland and DJ Quick in particular have been at the vanguard of this American movement which continues apace in the clubs. This album seeks to reflect this change in Asian music.<sup>54</sup>

Here Shabs refers to the then recent spate of American hip-hop and R&B hits featuring samples from both Bollywood soundtracks and British Asian Bhangra artists.<sup>55</sup> *Essential Asian Flavours* included one of the biggest Bhangra hits to date, notably Panjabi MC's original mix of "Mundian To Bach Ke," (as opposed to its more frequently played remix, "Beware of the Boys" that featured American rapper Jay-Z), as well as more recent hits by popular Bhangra producers Richi Rich and Panjabi Hit Squad. These newer Bhangra/R&B and hip-hop fusions were joined by a few older breakbeat and electronica-oriented selections by Outcaste artists Badmarsh & Shri, Nitin Sawhney, selections from the *Bollywood Breaks* album, British Asian fronted trip-hop group Trickbaby, and Scottish film composer and ambient producer Craig Armstrong.

The result was a hodgepodge that juxtaposed tracks from the mid to late 1990s alongside the "newest sounds." DJ Ritu, co-founder of Outcaste and A&R person for the label until 1997, noted in a BBC review that the compilations' promise of new music was somewhat disingenuous:

This CD claims to be "the perfect guide to the latest and best of the new Asian urban sound". It opens with the classic bhangra track "Mundian To Bach Ke" by Panjabi MC, first released in 1999 and recently a hit in the UK's Top Twenty. A reminder that there is nothing new about the

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<sup>54</sup> Various Artists, *Essential Asian Flavours: Hits, Beats & New Grooves* (London: Outcaste, 2003).

<sup>55</sup> Established American hip-hop producer Dr. Dre had recently (illicitly) sampled four minutes of one of a Bollywood film song sung by Lata Mangeshkar on the R&B song "Addictive" by Truth Hurts. Another American hip-hop producer, Timbaland, prominently sampled a song by British Asian Bhangra singer Panjabi MC on rapper Missy Elliot's hit "Get Ur Freak On."

"Asian Urban Sound". It's been around for years and just ignored by the mainstream music industry.<sup>56</sup>

As a noted bhangra DJ with a show on the BBC, DJ Ritu's later comment that the bhangra tracks on the album were "definitely not essential" is especially damning; she notes, "Not one of [these artists] has made it big, even on the Asian scene. It's questionable as to whether any of them will be heralded as classics in years to come." Ritu goes on to criticize the awkwardness of the tracks' sequence; she considers the album thematically incoherent because it ends with a Turkish/Arabic-influenced track by Istanbul-based Orient Expressions, followed by a Bollywood track, and then an "Asian lament." Most critical by far, however, is her pronouncement that Outcaste has sold its soul and attempted to cash in on a trend, an opinion that echoes Jeff Chang's views on Outcaste's first compilation, *Untouchable Outcaste Beats*:

The variety of Asian music styles featured on the CD is pleasing but Outcaste are [*sic*] definitely on shaky ground when it comes to bhangra... Given how much they've pioneered over the years in creating new Asian sounds, its [*sic*] a shame to see this attempt to bandwagon onto the current bhangra explosion. Outcaste's inexperience is transparent.<sup>57</sup>

While DJ Ritu recognizes Outcaste's achievement in supporting acts such as Badmarsh and Shri and Nitin Sawhney (both of whom she was responsible for signing,) she does not consider Outcaste's attempt to reinvent itself as an "Urban Asian" music label legitimate. She notes that the compilation editors relied too much on already released tracks that had proven commercially successful, that the quality of production on some of the "newer" tracks was

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<sup>56</sup> DJ Ritu, *BBC -- World Review -- Various Artists, Essential Asian Flavours: Hits, Beats, and New Grooves* (bbc.co.uk, January 13 2003 [cited August 11 2005]); available from [http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/world/reviews/vars\\_essential.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/world/reviews/vars_essential.shtml).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

mediocre and unprofessional, and that the compilation editors' failure to recognize these shortcomings indicated their inexperience in the genre. Outcaste had distinguished its identity from other music scenes and labels by nurturing innovative forms of music, and perhaps Ritu felt both betrayed and embarrassed by its sudden shift in allegiance.

Also driven by the latest trends, which incorporated R&B and hip hop influences within British Asian Bhangra, *Essential Asian Flavours Vol. 2* was released in May 2003. In his liner notes, Shabs wrote:

Urban Asian sounds are now soundtracking our lives through films, musicals and TV ads and the world's top producers continue to use Asian music in their quest for original sounds and rhythms... Once again we have tried to bring you the hottest cuts of the moment alongside some older classics that have influenced the scene."<sup>58</sup>

The second volume of the compilation followed the first in including more Bhangra-oriented hits, interspersed among a few downtempo, less dance music oriented selections by Mykel Angel, Zeb, and Badmarsh & Shri, as well as breakbeat/drum and bass selections by Nitin Sawhney and 4Hero.

The *Essential Asian Flavours* compilations' new emphasis on bhangra was particularly ironic given that the label's existence was in fact in many ways motivated by the fact that there were British Asians who were not playing bhangra and having a difficult time being signed elsewhere. In 1996, just two years after Shabs established Outcaste as a label, he noted:

[Outcaste] was born from frustration really. After Apache Indian, it was obvious to me we were in an age when young Asians were questioning the sort of stereotypes our music and culture were steeped in. Was all Asian music bhangra? No. Was it all going down the ethno techno route? No. Basically what we're trying to do is plot the reference points

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<sup>58</sup> Various Artists, *Essential Asian Flavours Vol. 2: New Hits, Fresh Grooves & Desi Beats* (London: Outcaste, 2003), 1 sound disc.

and formulate a new sound. We want to nurture young artists from an Asian background who want to break some boundaries.<sup>59</sup>

Nitin Sawhney has also remarked on his difficulty in being considered as a musician who did not fit into predefined genre categories. In interviews, Sawhney has recalled that when he telephoned respective labels to introduce himself, “they said we don’t do Bhangra. And I’d say neither do I.”<sup>60</sup>

Outcaste’s re-appropriation of Bhangra as a British Asian sound points to their considering a more marketable, less specific sense of British Asian identity—as opposed to a highly specific formulation such as “the new sound of Asian breakbeat.” This new focus on Bhangra (and its close associations with contemporary R&B and hip hop) suggests that they were no longer interested in formulating British Asian identity as ground-breaking; rather, they were proposing the South Asian influences hear within British Asian music as an already familiar sound that staked its claim to sounds through its assimilation into other genres even more firmly established within British mainstream culture, such as hip hop and R&B.

### **Claiming another continent**

In July 2002, Outcaste released the first of two volumes entitled *Futuro Flamenco*. Compiled by Latin music DJ Martin Morales, the decision to focus on flamenco was once again motivated by the latest trends in popular culture, and Outcaste’s presumable equal opportunity desire to financially exploit these cultural trends:

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<sup>59</sup> "Talent: Nitin Sawhney - the New Sound of UK Asian Music," *Music Week* (Miller Freeman Publications) (1996).

<sup>60</sup> Sandip Roy, *Beyond Skin* (littleindia.com, February 2004 2004 [cited March 18 2004]); available from <http://www.littleindia.com/India/feb04/skin.htm>.

With flamenco inspired fashions hitting the catwalks and high streets, flamenco guitar hooks increasingly appearing on hit pop records and flamenco being emphasised as 'the new Salsa' by the likes of the Medfest (Barbican Festival in June featuring Flamenco acts) and dance teachers around the country, this live and compilation project aims to reach all those touched by the Iberian vibe.<sup>61</sup>

Morales's selections included "avant-garde guitar [...], rare flamenco funk [...], smooth house tones ... [and] quirky electronica-led songs."<sup>62</sup> Following the release of the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume in February 2003, Outcaste established a monthly Futuro Flamenco night, DJed by Martin Morales, which was still running in August 2004.

Expanding its new Latin focus, Outcaste next ventured into compilations of Brazilian music, "Indica Brazilia," and tango. The first Brazilian themed album, *Indica Brazilica*, attempted to link back to Outcaste's previous South Asian focus. The compilation featured a mixture of "Bollywood-inspired" Brazilian selections, bossa nova infused selections by British Asians, and Brazilian classics. The liner notes' attempt to connect the two regions was, however, weak at best. Furthermore, departing from the typical function of world music recording liner notes—to elucidate the cultural context of respective foreign cultures—these notes were almost entirely unrelated to the actual music on the compilation:

Listen to Brazil's most popular working-class party music – Forró – and you can hear strains of the Sabri Brothers, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, or the other great Pakistani Qawwali harmonium players. Think of impressionable young geniuses like Caetano Velgano [*sic*] and Gilberto Gil returning home to Brazil after a lengthy stay in London in the late 1960s taking all of Ravi's influence during his rise in the rest.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Outcaste Records, *Outcaste Records: Music: Futuro Flamenco* (Outcaste Records, 2002 [cited August 14 2005]); available from <http://www.outcaste.com/index.cfm?do=viewRelease&releaseID=19>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Outcaste Records, "Indica Brazilica [Press Release]," (London: Outcaste Records, 2003).

Compiler John Roberts, a Latin and Brazilian music DJ, constrained by the theme of the album, could only explain the inclusion of Gil and Veloso in terms that related to Indian culture:

It's worth remembering that, during the late 60's and early 70's, when Gil and Veloso were living in London's Notting Hill in exile from Brazil's military junta regime, there was the first flowering of UK youth's fascination with all things Indian. Portobello Road's head shops were doing a brisk trade in incense, patchouli oil and Indian sacred texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, whilst Ravi Shankar was playing sell-out concerts at the Royal Albert Hall. And one thing's for sure: impressionable young geniuses like Caetano and Gil wouldn't have returned home without taking all that in.<sup>64</sup>

Roberts admits that Gil and Veloso had no direct relationship to Indian music and culture; nor do the selections included on this CD recall Indian musical influences. Rather, Roberts makes the convoluted claim that these Western jazz musicians' mere presence in London meant that they had identified with London's hippies and their fascination for Indian culture, and thus absorbed Indian culture itself— an arguable assertion at best. There were few if any concrete connections that could be made, but the compilation appears to need to have at least attempted to substantiate its spectacular claim to link these already exoticized cultures.

Outcaste's releases between September 2001 and March 2005 alternated almost entirely between Asian "flavas" and Latin-influenced music, with the exception of *Laughter Through Tears*, an album released in November 2003 by Oi Va Voi, a London-based band that integrates Eastern European music, particularly klezmer, with drum and bass. A discography of Outcaste's compilations between July 2002 and March 2005 is shown in the following table.

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<sup>64</sup> Various Artists, *Indica Brazilica: The Very Best Brazilian Beats and Asian Flavas* (London: Outcaste Records, 2003), 1 sound disc.

**Table 4.5 Outcaste Releases between July 2002 and March 2005**

September 2001	<i>Bombay Jazz Palace</i>
February 2002	<i>The Very Best Bollywood Songs Vol. 2</i>
July 2002	<i>Futuro Flamenco Vol. 1</i>
January 2003	<i>Essential Asian Flavas</i>
February 2003	<i>Futuro Flamenco Vol. 2</i>
May 2003	<i>Essential Asian Flavas Vol. 2</i>
September 2003	<i>Essential Latin Flavas</i>
September 2003	<i>Indica Brazilica</i>
October 2003	<i>Essential Asian Flavas: The Future Cutz</i>
October 2003	<i>The Classical Indian Collection</i>
February 2004	<i>Brazilian Love Songs</i>
April 2004	<i>Essential Brazilian Flavas</i>
April 2004	<i>Outlandish presents... Beats, Rhymes &amp; Life</i>
June 2004	<i>Blues Love Songs</i>
July 2004	<i>Essential Latin Flavas Vol. 2</i>
August 2004	<i>Tango Club</i>
February 2005	<i>Essential Asian R&amp;B</i>
March 2005	<i>The Very Best Asian Flavas</i>

Outcaste's venture into *The Classical Indian Collection* at first glance does not appear to fit into either the Latin or Asian Flava category; yet *The Classical Indian Collection* attempts to situate itself in the realms of Asian Flavas and jazz already explored in previous compilations. The album explores "the connections between Indian and Western classical music" as manifested in "symphonic classical fusions, from Indo-jazz projects, from the soundtracks to Hindi movies and from the down-tempo, more clubby fusions of the Asian diaspora."<sup>65</sup>

A survey of Outcaste's catalogue of compilations reveals how the label's original focus on nurturing and promoting British Asian electronica artist transitioned into offering a broad, fresh outlook on various ethnically

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<sup>65</sup> The compilation features older selections by Ravi Shankar, John Mayer, Alice Coltrane, as well as newer fusion projects such as that between slide guitarist Debashish Bhattacharya and guitarist Bob Brozman, Asian Underground tabla player with Indian classical flutist Rakesh Chaurasia, and the Kronos Quartet's arrangement of a Bollywood film composer RD Burman's classic "Aaj Ki Raat." Notes by John Lewis, in Various Artists, *The Classical Indian Collection* (London: Outcaste Records, 2003).

oriented cultural trends. The first two Outcaste club compilations had assembled artists from a variety of cultural contexts and different generations in such a way to suggest that contemporary British Asian musicians were part of a much longer tradition that extended as far back as the archetypal figure of Ananda Shankar, if not his father Uday Shankar. In its later compilations, Outcaste summarily moves away from conveying the significance of the pioneering work of such figures within South Asian and South Asian diasporic music and its role as a nurturing environment for innovative British Asian musicians in its efforts to release music associated with a growing number of ethnic identities.

### **Global Chill-out**

John Lewis's pronouncement that *The Classical Indian Collection* provides "chill-out"<sup>66</sup> music reveals that the compilation was explicitly designed to tap into one of the most commercially successful trends in world music and electronica music in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As shown earlier, after 1999, the market for Asian Underground compilations cooled. After Talvin Singh won the Mercury Prize in 1999, Warner UK signed seven British Asian acts that same year. DJ Ritu has noted that every single British Asian act signed to Warner UK was dropped within a year later, in most cases without having released anything because the record companies "didn't know what to do with them, or how to market them."<sup>67</sup> Mustaq of the band Fun^da^mental commented, "Nobody could keep the momentum going. Everybody had an album out at the same time, the same year. [It was like] a

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<sup>66</sup> See glossary for definition.

<sup>67</sup> Vivek Bald, "Mutiny: Asians Storm British Music," (United States: 2003).

big dollop of curry dropped, everybody ate it... then nothing afterwards.”<sup>68</sup> After the Asian Underground scene exhausted itself, previously released selections by British Asian musicians began to appear more frequently on ethnic-tinged “chillout” music albums.

The notion of “chillout” developed from the concept of the “chillout room,” a soothing space in a club where ravers, high on ecstasy, could go to rest and recover while listening to slower-tempoed, subdued electronica. Reynolds has described the original chillout clubs, which developed in the late eighties and early nineties:

It was the perfect place for “getting your head together” after a night’s raving. In stark contrast to the stressful staccato assault of the average ‘ardkore rave (strokes, cut-up beats), Telepathic Fish [a London club] was a wombadelic sound-and-light bath. The seamless mix of mostly beat-and-vocal-free atmospherics was maintained at just the right volume for conversation. The lights, oil projections, and “deep-sea décor” soothed eyes sore from the previous night’s brain blitz... All lambent horizons of celestial synth, psalmic melodies, and wordless seraphim-on-high harmonies, 1993 albums like *Silence* and *Air* transformed one’s living room into a sacro-sanctuary of sensuously spiritual sound.<sup>69</sup>

Reynolds notes these sessions began in 1988, when “clubs still closed at 3 am.” “Long before the Ecstasy glow wore off,” people were gathering in homes as a ritual to help ease the “comedown” from the drug. Given that people very much enjoyed this scene where they could talk over laid-back music, they began to gather in these spaces without even attending raves beforehand. These clubs thus began to take on a life of their own.<sup>70</sup> By the mid 1990s, the music associated with chillout clubs had evolved into a recognizable musical genre as well.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 196-97.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 195.

José Padilla, a Spanish DJ based in Ibiza, is widely considered the father of the chillout genre, mostly due to his having released what is regarded as the first chillout compilation recording, *Café del Mar*, in 1994. Café del Mar was a well known club in Ibiza; ravers would gather there to watch the sunset, and Padilla's soothing blend of "down tempo" electronica music were considered a perfect complement to the sunset.<sup>71</sup> The first *Café del Mar* compilation spawned an entire series of chillout music compilations of the same name, joined a few years later by the *Hôtel Costes* compilation series, associated with an upscale Parisian hotel.

However, the most prolific of these chillout compilations are the *Buddha-Bar* compilations, originally released in 1999 and based on the Buddha-Bar lounge in Paris. The Buddha-Bar in Paris had by 1999 built a stylish reputation for itself, integrating luxury with Eastern accents, including an overwhelming 20-foot-tall golden Buddha:

The Buddha Bar in Paris has emerged as one of the landmarks of the global musical bazaar that is contemporary electronica, particularly the growing chill-out scene comprised of mostly relaxing music that provides a backdrop for cocktails and conversation. The Buddha Bar, an ultrahip nightspot created out of a vast warehouse, is to the vibrant Parisian world-music community what Studio 54 was to New York's disco world: a stylish cocktail, dinner, and dance palace, this one replete with carefully crafted soundscapes and dominated by a majestic 20-foot-tall golden Buddha. It also is a trendsetting musical mecca in its own right, the modern hot club of France.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Rowan Shaeffer, *Album Review: Various :Café Del Mar: The Best Of* (counterculture.co.uk, 2004 [cited August 13 2005]); available from <http://www.counterculture.co.uk/album-review/various-cafe-del-mar-the-best-of.html>.

<sup>72</sup> Greg Cahill, "Just Chillin': Buddha Bar Fizzles; Six Degrees Sizzles," *North Bay Bohemian*, April 25, 2002, <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/sonoma/04.25.02/buddha-bar-0217.html>.

The liner notes to the first volume of the *Buddha-Bar*, compiled by Claude Challe and Ravin, evoke the exotic, dreamlike Eastern atmosphere the *Buddha-Bar* attempted to create:

One just has to sit back and enjoy the ride through this magical universe. The auditor is invited to partake in an eclectic, initiatory voyage, timeless and without boundaries into an atmosphere where space is filled by beauty, sweetness, and love's serenity. This music is for the traveller whose voyages lead him to discover the mysticisms and rhythms of the world. The Buddha Bar is a place which makes one feel good, as it takes its clients on a voyage into the world situated between dreams and reality.<sup>73</sup>

Resembling other club-type compilations in its attempts to convey the feel of the actual Buddha Bar lounge to the listener, the liner notes feature a three page foldout photograph of the interior of the Buddha Bar, dominated by the enormous sculpture of the Buddha.<sup>74</sup> The *Buddha-Bar* compilation series has, at the time of this writing in August 2005, released seven volumes and countless offshoots compiled by a group of DJs including Claude Challe, David Visan, and Ravin; these releases such Eastern-influenced and/or orientalist titles as *Buddha-Lounge*, *Lover-Dose*, *Flying Carpet*, *Siddartha*, etc. Each volume consists of a two-disc set, the first of whose music is more ambient-oriented, and the second of whose music is more dance-oriented. In the first volume, the discs are named "Buddha's Dinner" and "Buddha's Party" respectively.

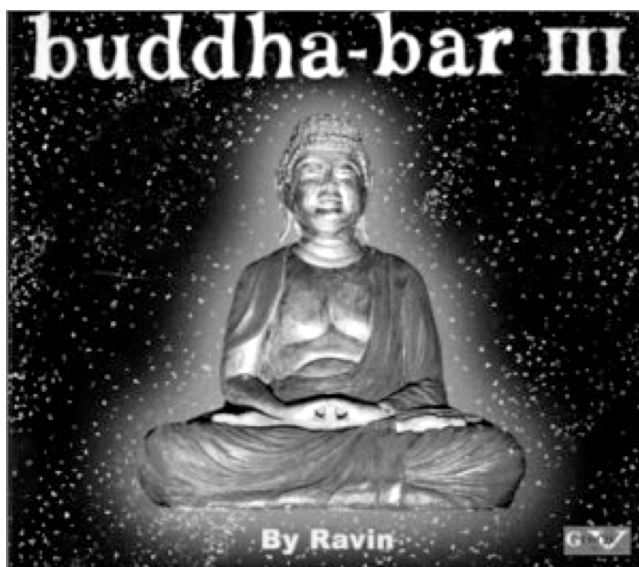
As it has proliferated through the multiple volumes of *Buddha-Bar* compilations, its offshoots, and its imitators, the music featured in the *Buddha-Bar* compilations constitutes a musical genre in itself. The *Buddha-Bar* compilations typically feature a continuous mix of "down tempo" electronica music, slower paced (under 90 bpm), relaxed tracks often tinged with ethnic,

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<sup>73</sup> Various Artists, Claude Challe, and Ravin, *Buddha-Bar* (Paris: Mercury / Universal, 1999), 2 sound discs.

<sup>74</sup> The liner notes add that the Bar "is named after the enormous Buddha, a replica of the Musée Guimet Buddha, commissioned for the site."

world music influences from either South Asia, East Asia, North Africa, the Middle East, or Latin music. Released in 1999, just as British Asian musicians were emerging within the mainstream market, the first volume of the *Buddha-Bar* featured a mix of lush orchestral arrangements, ambient electronica amongst a few selections with South Asian influences, notably those from South African jazz flautist Deepak Ram and a subdued remix of a popular Qawwali song by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. The following volumes of *The Buddha-Bar* and other compilations were, however, to feature many more selections by British Asian musicians.



**Illustration 4.2** Cover image, *Buddha-bar III* (George V, 2001)

While recordings featuring a continuous DJ mix are standard today, they work against the preservation of artists' individual identities. As Simon Reynolds has noted, club-goers and dance music listeners often disregard specific artists' identities in their attempts to experience the "total flow of the DJ's mix"—more specifically, the DJ's ability to assemble music to transport

listeners to another space.<sup>75</sup> Thus, the inclusion of British Asian artists within this genre necessitated that their music be disembodied from any identifiable creator, and, hence, cultural identity.

### **Cosmopolitan consumerism**

Nitin Sawhney and Talvin Singh were the musicians who were most successful in their entry into commercial mainstream markets, and they had done so by emphasizing their claims to British Asian identity. Thus their frequent appearance on these chillout compilations from 1999 onwards presented a radical transformation in their identities, for their participation in these compilations was predicated on the very erasure of those identities that they had struggled to define. Having once established themselves as stylish residents of London, they were now subsumed into stereotypically orientalist depictions of the East as a mystical, psychedelic paradise.

The escapism associated with the “chill out” room in British clubs in the 1990s, and its evocation of the mystical Orient as its destination, recalls the rich history of opium dens in London at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Curtis Marez has noted in his analysis of the role of opium dens in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century English opium den provided its patrons with an environment in which they surrounded themselves with non-Western objects in a drug-induced haze and escaped into oblivion.<sup>76</sup> Wilde’s novel opens on a similar note as it presents its protagonist’s reverie on a nature scene, which he perceives in terms of its relationship to an exoticized “Japanese” aesthetic:

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<sup>75</sup> Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy*, 4-5.

<sup>76</sup> Curtis Marez, “The Other Addict: Reflections on Colonialism and Oscar Wilde’s Opium Smoke Screen,” *English Literary History* 64, no. 1 (1997): 277.

From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-colored blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as this; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio [*sic*] who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion.<sup>77</sup>

Marez notes that Wilde's evocation of Eastern cultures here implies that they are "dead and dying" in order to justify their appropriation (along with the consumption of opium) "so as to inject European culture with new aesthetic life." While these "dying" cultures could be removed from their original contexts and given a new British one, it was harder to remove opium from its original context—for at the time, the consumption of opium was a function of its production in British India, Britain's occupation of Hong Kong, and increasing Chinese settlement in London, often stereotyped as "the yellow peril."<sup>78</sup>

While the psychedelic trance music scene known as "Goa trance" is usually associated with different music than that played in chillout clubs, the particular species of Orientalist representations of "the East" associated with Goa trance is also intimately associated with the consumption of mind-altering drugs that promise oblivion, and which separate Asian elements from

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<sup>77</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 18. Quoted in Marez, "The Other Addict," 277-78.

<sup>78</sup> Marez, "The Other Addict," 278. Later in the same paragraph, Marez makes the remarkable observation that *Dorian Grey* borrowed heavily from a catalogue of musical instruments at the South Kensington Museum, now known as the Victoria and Albert Museum, which houses artifacts from Britain's former imperial possessions: Carl Engel, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Musical Instruments in the South Kensington Museum* (London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode Publishers, 1874).

their real life contexts. Arun Saldanha has noted that the Goa trance scene in Goa itself exemplifies the inequities produced by Western colonialism in Asia: “the taken-for-granted right to travel to remote Third World villages and do whatever you like there, the stereotypical images of a spiritual and laid-back India, the poverty of the local people compelling them to accept what’s going on, [...and] the racist exclusion of domestic tourists at the parties.”<sup>79</sup>

The imagery of “Goa trance” seems to have permeated the realm of chillout compilations and in turn defined the terms of British Asian musicians’ participation in these compilations. Timothy Taylor has noted that within the context of Goa trance, the album and flier iconography draws on Buddhist or Hindu images mixed with a psychedelic background.<sup>80</sup> As shown below, Talvin Singh contributed a remix for *Café del Mar, Vol. 4*, released in June 1999; in the next four years, tracks from his September 1999 solo album *O.K.* appeared on a variety of different compilations whose titles progressively moved towards more explicit references to Buddhism and Hinduism.

**Table 4.6 Compilations incorporating selections from Talvin Singh’s *O.K.***

Release Date	Song from <i>O.K.</i>	Title of Compilation
9/00	“Jaan”	<i>Trance Planet, Vol. 5</i> (Triloka)
8/01	“Traveller”	<i>Café del Mar, Vol. 6</i> (Mercury)
10/01	“Light”	<i>Asia Lounge: Asian Flavoured Club Tunes</i> (Audiopharm)
4/02	“Traveller”	<i>Instant Karma</i> (Warner)
6/02	“Veena” <sup>81</sup>	<i>Buddha Bar III</i> (Universal)
7/02	“Light”	<i>Karma Collection</i> (Ministry of Sound)

<sup>79</sup> Arun Saldanha, “Disorganisation and the Postcolonial Politics of Silence in Goa” (paper presented at the The International Social Theory Consortium Second Annual Conference, Brighton, July 5-8 2001).

<sup>80</sup> Timothy D. Taylor, *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology & Culture* (New York and London: Routledge 2001), 167.

<sup>81</sup> While included here to represent Singh’s participation on the compilations, it should be noted that “Veena” is an independent composition that does not appear on either of Singh’s albums.

The uniting of South Asian musicians with psychedelic contexts within the West is far from new, as it was established as early as the 1950s.<sup>82</sup> During the 1960s, the Beatles' status as icons of youth culture and their brief but prominent association with Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the Maharishi motivated the public to make "specious connections between sitar music, the Maharishi, drugs, and the Beatles."<sup>83</sup>

Within the context of British Asian identity after 2001, the increasing emphasis on Buddhist and Hindu imagery in these compilations merits discussion. These Buddhist and Hindu images reference effectively erase many British Asians' identity as Muslims; they help create a less threatening, more "ancient" (in the mode of Wilde's "dead and dying") version of South Asian culture that becomes easier to appropriate. As Pnina Werbner has noted, beginning with the Rushdie affair (the burning of *The Satanic Verses* and the subsequent fatwa,) political crises such as the Gulf War, the September 11, 2001 attacks, (and ostensibly the Iraq War and the July 7, 2005 transit bombings in London that fall beyond the purview of her article), British Asian Muslims have come under scrutiny.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> David Reck notes that the beat poets (especially Ginsberg) during the 1950s looked to Zen Buddhism, and to a lesser extent, Chinese, Tibetan, and Hindu religious philosophy as "inspiration for their own alternative life-styles and world-views... [They were] "by the early sixties... chanting mantras in front of the Pentagon or ICBM missile silos and adding words like 'karma' to the common vocabulary. There was simultaneously a shift from interest in East Asia (China Japan) to India and Tibet." Later Reck describes how Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert claimed "that their research had showed hallucinogenic experiences under LSD and other drugs paralleling certain Hindu and Tibetan Buddhist religious experiences attained through chanting, ritual, and meditation: enhanced consciousness, inner perceptions of a deeper reality, visions of light and color (even of specific deities or mythological happenings), timeless peace, the Great World Nirvana." David R. Reck, "Beatles Orientalis: Influences from Asia in a Popular Song Tradition," *Asian Music* 16, no. 1 (1985): 91.

<sup>83</sup> Jonathan Bellman, "Indian Resonances in the British Invasion, 1965-1968," *Journal of Musicology* 15, no. 1 (1997): 125. Bellman's article pays particular attention to the particular role of the Beatles in the linking of raga rock to psychedelic themes. Bellman, "Indian Resonances," 125-59.

<sup>84</sup> Pnina Werbner, "Theorising Complex Diasporas: Purity and Hybridity in the South Asian Public Sphere in Britain," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 5 (2004): 898.

Domestic events such as the 2001 riots have also called British Asians' cultural citizenship into question. Riots in Oldham, Leeds, Burnley, and Bradford between May and July 2001 prompted a new wave of inquiries into British Asian youth's experiences of racism, economic deprivation, citizenship, and national belonging. The fact that the most vicious of these riots occurred in Bradford, home to a large British Pakistani population, motivated analysts to consider the role of Islamic identity in these riots. Historically, more conservative constructions of Islamic identity have come into conflict with the local practice of traditional customs in respective locations. Werbner notes,

Most Pakistani Muslim religious leaders in Britain tend to enunciate a discourse of religious purity in which popular culture—music, dance, and expressions of sensuality—is rejected as sinful and 'Hindu', that is beyond the pale.<sup>85</sup>

Recent political events, especially those since 2001, have further distinguished "Hindu" cultural practices from "Muslim" cultural practices within the British Asian diaspora; this distinction has also influenced British Asian Muslims' recognition as British cultural citizens. As Yasmin Hussain and Paul Bagguley observe,

Although young South Asian people identify strongly with Britain as citizens, this is constantly negated by their experiences of British racism, which has focused on their ethnicity and since 2001 has especially focused on Muslims.<sup>86</sup>

Some attempts were made after September 2001 to draw attention to British Asian musicians' more positive relationships to Islam, most notably in an article appearing in *The Guardian* newspaper, interviewing Sam Zaman (State of Bengal), Aki Nawaz (Nation Records and Fun^da^mental), and *ghazal*

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Yasmin Hussain and Paul Bagguley, "Citizenship, Ethnicity, and Identity: British Pakistanis after the 2001 'Riots'," *Sociology* 39, no. 3 (2005): 416.

singer Najma Akhtar.<sup>87</sup> Zaman notes that for him, “being a Muslim is simply about getting a balance to life.” Nawaz remarks that music and Islam are only conflicted when one involves the ego and is not inherently problematic as a “function of expression and passion.” Nawaz also claims that his band Fun^da^mental is only acknowledged as contributing to British multiculturalism when they omit references to Nawaz’s Islamic faith: “As soon as people realize we’re serious about it, papers like *NME* [*New Musical Express*, the music weekly] don’t want to know.” Akhtar observes that only her more conservative British Asian cousins have objected to her singing as a Muslim:

My own cousins... are part of a generation of young British Muslims who take Islam very seriously. I think because it helps them identify with their roots and because the politics of the west encourages it. When you see what is happening in Palestine, it is ammunition for young Muslims, and the more Islam is painted in a bad light the more young people want to explore it. You get Hindus or Jews who are just as dogmatic about their religion and identity, but that is rarely publicized here.

British Asian Muslims’ immediate associations with these political crises of course discourage their successful incorporation into a narrative of blissful oblivion. The extraction of any potentially troubling references to British Asian Muslims within these latest compilations is accomplished through the emphasis on Hindu and Buddhist imagery, and also through the frequent exclusion of British Asian music even remotely associated with Islam, such as Qawwali or *ghazal*—or more pointedly, British Asian Muslim musicians. In this environment, “Indian” (non-Muslim) musicians such as Talvin Singh and

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<sup>87</sup> Will Hodgkinson, “Music as Food for the Soul,” *The Guardian*, June 21, 2002.

Nitin Sawhney were offered as a convenient synecdoche for British Asian music as a whole.

### **Bengali Music without Words**

While the classically influenced Talvin Singh's music was frequently incorporated into chillout compilations, it was Nitin Sawhney who most dominated the chillout compilations. Between 2000 and 2004, songs and remixes by Nitin Sawhney appeared on no fewer than thirty-four different compilations, as outlined in the following table.

**Table 4.7 Compilations featuring tracks by Nitin Sawhney 2000-2004**

2/00	<i>Stoned Asia Vol. 2</i> (Kickin)
4/00	<i>Lover-Dose: Mixed by Claude Challe</i> (Universal)
10/00	<i>Future Funk Vol. 5</i> (Wagram)
10/00	<i>Outcaste: The First Five Years</i> (Outcaste)
11/00	<i>World Chill: Laid-Back Grooves for Global Minds</i> (Manteca)
2/01	<i>Ambient Ibiza Vol. 2</i> (Secret Service)
5/01	<i>Buddha Beats</i> (Bar De Lune)
6/01	<i>Mystic Groove</i> (Quango)
7/01	<i>Krishna Beats</i> (Bar De Lune)
8/01	<i>Café del Mar Vol. 6</i> (MCA)
9/01	<i>Chill Out Bombay</i> (Varese)
1/02	<i>Indian Summer: A Sublime Mix of Spiritual Beats</i> (Ministry of Sound)
1/02	<i>Zen and the Art of Chilling Vol. 1</i> (Juno)
4/02	<i>Buddha Bar IV</i> (Universal)
7/02	<i>The Karma Collection</i> (Ministry of Sound)
7/02	<i>Spiritual Life Music</i> (Spiritual Life Music)
8/02	<i>Chill Out in Paris</i> (George V)
8/02	<i>Asian Groove</i> (Putumayo)
9/02	<i>Spirit of India: A Pure Selection of Electronic Vibes</i> (Wagram)
9/02	<i>Trance Planet Vol. 6</i> (Triloka)
10/02	<i>Best of Buddha</i> (Dyn/ Bar de Lune)
11/02	<i>Hôtel Costes Vol. 1</i> (Pschent)
3/03	<i>Bombay Beats</i> (Dyn/ Bar de Lune)
3/03	<i>Karma Culture: 21 Asian Pearls</i> (Allegro)
4/03	<i>Pure Garage</i> (Warner)
4/03	<i>Tantra Lounge</i> (Water Music)
4/03	<i>Torch: A Six Degrees Collection of Modern Torch Songs</i> (Six Degrees)
5/03	<i>Yoga Chill: Global Sounds for Yoga and Meditation</i> (Silva Screen)
7/03	<i>Decadance Pure Global Chillout</i> (Deca Dance)
9/03	<i>Essential Asian Flavas</i> (Outcaste)
9/03	<i>World Beats</i> (Bar de Lune)
9/03	<i>Indica Brazilica</i> (Outcaste)
11/03	<i>Siddharta: Spirit of Buddha Bar Vol. 2</i> (George V)
3/04	<i>The Very Best Asian Flavas</i> (Outcaste)

While the *Outcaste* and *Pure Garage* compilations cannot be considered examples of the chillout category, the vast majority of entries above—with exoticizing titles such as *Tantra Lounge*, *Buddha Beats*, and *Chill Out Bombay*—do fall into that category. Certain songs of Nitin Sawhney’s appear to be especially popular on these compilations. “Homelands,” a subdued track from Sawhney’s 1999 album *Beyond Skin* that integrates Qawwali, samba, and flamenco, appears in at least five compilations. The other two songs that prove to be very popular are “Sunset,” which blends the Bengali classical vocals of Jayanta Bose with soul music and “Bengali Song,” which also features Jayanta Bose, supported by a drum and bass and jazz-influenced accompaniment.

The fact that both “Sunset” and “Bengali Song” feature Bengali lyrics might lead us to expect an evocation of Bengali culture as well as Bangladeshi identity in these songs, but for most listeners (both British Asian and white,) these songs’ lyrics make no ties to any specific, concrete cultural referent, which suggests that they may not even belong to any actual culture at all. The lyrics are never translated, even within the liner notes of the original album; nor are the translations locatable on the Internet—in contrast to the availability of translations of the Portuguese lyrics that appear in some of Sawhney’s songs, including “Homelands.”

The popularity of these songs cannot therefore be attributed to the poetic beauty of their lyrics; rather their popularity is most likely a result of the fact that the songs evoke a familiar and comforting sound—recognizable, British popular musical styles—with the exception of Bose’s intermittent vocals. Bose sings in a warm, gentle baritone that blends easily with the other instruments and styles; while his melodic ornamentation betrays an influence

of Indian classical music, his melodies are for the most part rather straightforward, hummable, and easy to digest.

The simplicity of Bose's melodies belies the richness and complexity of language in Bose's Bengali lyrics, however. While they carry no meaning for most listeners, they do have meaning for Bose and other Bengali listeners, steeped in a culture that places particular value on the art of poetry. Bose's lyrics on the song "Sunset" in translation from the original Bengali follow:

If it were possible to stop in my tracks  
I would have disappeared at the afternoon's end with the setting sun.  
I would have accompanied the sun and have gone to sleep one last time  
under the night's vast, starry firmament.<sup>88</sup>

Bose's Bengali lyrics are sung in between multiple instances of the following English-language refrain sung in a soul style by British singer Eska

Mtungwazi:

If I were never to leave you  
If I were always alone  
If I were never to see you  
If I could set the sun

Keep moving  
Keep changing  
Keep flowing in the sun  
Lovers rise, oceans rise  
People rise in the sun<sup>89</sup>

While Bose and Mtungwazi's lyrics do relate to one another, their relation is neither synonymous nor complementary; rather, their juxtaposition creates a subtle opposition. The vivid imagery of Bose's lyrics evokes the act of dying, while Mtungwazi's lyrics emphasize the fact that the setting sun—far from disappearing for good—always returns to rise once again the next morning.

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<sup>88</sup> Translated by the author with the aid of Ajoy Bhattacharjya. Nitin Sawhney, *Prophesy* (V2 Music Limited, 2001).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

Without Bose’s lyrics, the song loses its darkness and ambiguity and is reduced to a song advocating perseverance amidst life’s obstacles. Without the darkness, the song becomes much more uplifting and easy to listen to as its easy going music, for the lyrics no longer convey any potentially troubling themes such as the inevitability of death. Most listeners are of course excluded from the meaning of Bose’s lyrics; I shall revisit the implications of this exclusion below in conjunction with another of Sawhney’s Bengali language songs, entitled simply, “Bengali Song.”

Sawhney’s “Bengali Song” has also proved a pleasant favorite, as demonstrated by its appearance in no fewer than eight compilations. “Bengali Song” appeared original on Sawhney’s 1996 solo album, *Displacing The Priest*, and shortly thereafter reappeared on Outcaste’s *Untouchable Outcaste Beats* in 1997; the compilations in which “Bengali Song” has since appeared are listed in Table 4.8:

**Table 4.8 Compilations featuring Nitin Sawhney’s “Bengali Song”**

6/99	<i>Stoned Asia Vol. 1</i> (Kickin)
4/00	<i>Lover-Dose: Mixed by Claude Challe</i> (Universal)
10/00	<i>Future Funk Vol. 5</i> (Wagram)
11/00	<i>World Chill: Laid-Back Grooves for Global Minds</i> (Manteca)
2/01	<i>Ambient Ibiza Vol. 2</i> (Secret Service)
7/01	<i>Krishna Beats</i> (Bar de Lune)
1/02	<i>Indian Summer: A Sublime Mix of Spiritual Beats</i> (Varese)
9/02	<i>Spirit of India: A Pure Selection of Electronic Vibes</i> (Wagram)
10/02	<i>Best of Buddha</i> (Dyn/Bar de Lune)
3/03	<i>Karma Culture</i> (Allegro)

The title “Bengali Song” makes an explicit reference to the Bengali language and thus presumably Bengali culture, but it is ultimately even less descriptive than that of “Sunset”; the song features Bose’s vocals wafting in and out of ambient crowd sounds, and a drum and bass style background. He sings the

same refrain over and over again; after the refrain appears for the last time, it reveals itself as part of a longer verse. The shorter part of the refrain may be translated as “The flower blooms spontaneously.” At the song’s conclusion, we hear the lyric’s resolution:

The flower blooms spontaneously.  
It just blooms, and it does not bloom to please anyone in particular.  
No one knows who has beacons the flower to bloom, and no one  
knows who nurses the blooming bud.  
We merely observe that the gentle breeze caresses it.<sup>90</sup>

Without this translation, the song loses its identity among the many other ethnically tinged selections on these chillout selections on the surface. Bose’s lyrics connote exoticism, and devoid of translation, can mean little else.

Sawhney’s motivations for including Bengali lyrics in his songs when he has no personal affiliation with Bengali culture may be most practically explained by the fact that Jayanta Bose, a singer who specializes in Bengali texts, has proven to be a particularly gifted collaborator who complements Sawhney’s compositional and arranging style. Yet the politics of depriving the listener of translations on his solo albums have the inadvertent and more sinister effect of denying the Bengali culture’s right to representation. The lyrics’ import is problematic even with respect to those few able to understand Bengali, for these lyrics are for the most part sung in the traditionally elevated vocabulary reserved for poetry, as opposed to the vocabulary used in everyday colloquial speech. That elevated form of poetry is inaccessible to most second and third generation speakers of Bengali, who are rarely well versed in Bengali literature and poetry.

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<sup>90</sup>Translated by the author, with the aid of Ajoy Bhattacharjya. Nitin Sawhney, *Displacing the Priest* (London: Outcaste Records), 1 sound disc.

It should also be noted that Jayanta Bose, as a non-Muslim, presumably identifies more with the culture of mostly Hindu West Bengal (India) than with the culture of mostly Muslim East Bengal, presently Bangladesh. The emphasis on Hindu and Buddhist imagery in many of the chillout compilations has the effect of crowding out any allusions to Islamic culture, which for many Bengali speakers is integral to their identity. Thus, these compilations quite consciously distance themselves from potentially controversial topics such as Islam after September 11, 2001 within the local context of each song; but this distancing is of course magnified on the broader context of the compilation itself, which through its focus on creating a cohesive ambience, denies the reality of different cultural identities altogether.

## **Conclusion**

British Asian identity was actively constructed through the early British Asian compilation recordings and the Asian Underground club scene during the mid to late 1990s. Yet British Asian musicians' appearance in compilation recordings from 1997-1999 through the present progressively dissolves that sense of British Asian identity. Thus, the story of the British Asian compilation as narrated in this chapter starts with the idealistic community of experimental collaborators. Without over-romanticizing this early period, one must note that the proverbial nail that sealed the coffin on this collaborative scene directly corresponded to the increasing commercialization of the scene and the subsequent need to identify a marketable figurehead in the Asian Underground; this figurehead was Talvin Singh. Various labels plotted to carve their own niche in the Asian Underground market to stay abreast of

their competitors; before the scene collapsed, the market was flooded with Asian Underground type compilations, which in turn, alienated consumers.

The new version of British Asian identity constructed after 1999 was defined in connection with a new political environment that was less inclusive and required the excision of more problematic aspects of previous constructions of British Asian identity—such as Islam—and the reincorporation of familiar genres such as Bhangra. Musicians are very conscious of these changes. Given the rise and fall of the Asian Underground, the most recent stars of the *Asian Flavours* compilations are painfully aware of their eventual fate, and of the fact that the name *Asian Flavours* itself unfortunately evokes the notion of Asian music becoming the short-lived “flavor of the month.” Bhangra-inflected British Asian R&B singer Jay Sean offers his opinion below:

"We really are not bitter," he says. "We know that the record industry is just jumping on the bandwagon because they think that the whole Asian thing is cool. They are going mad about it because they don't want to miss the boat. If you look at what's happening in films, on television or even music, the whole perception is that the Asian thing is the place to be. We could get angry about it and think, 'Why are you interested in us now?' But we are just making the most of the opportunity that has been given to us and see it as a great chance to showcase our skills."<sup>91</sup>

Sean and other artists are now well aware that their success may not last, and they harbor no illusions—as opposed to perhaps their earlier Asian Underground cohorts—that their success constitutes anything more than a passing trend.

The ability of British Asian artists and labels to survive financially has seemed to require that they forfeit their claims to any forms of British Asian

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<sup>91</sup> Vivek Chaudhary, "The Big Bhangra," *The Guardian*, August 15, 2003.

identity that connote culturally specific political agency within British culture. Some artists such as Asian Dub Foundation managed to keep releasing albums between 1995 and 2000 without making this sacrifice, but only through their dedication on maintaining financial self-sufficiency.<sup>92</sup>

The market's enthusiasm for British Asian music was not helped by concurrent changes in the political climate that cooled the British public's enthusiasm for British Asian culture and their acceptance of British Asians as legitimate British cultural citizens. From May through June 2001, riots in Oldham, Leeds, Burnley, and Bradford highlighted the social, economic, and political inequities experienced by many lower-class British Asian Muslim youth and their consequent withdrawal from mainstream British culture. Coupled with the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, many British people were forced to confront for the first time the rather unpleasant reality that many British Asian Muslims believed they could only gain political agency if they looked outside British culture and embraced more radical and violent forms of Islam.<sup>93</sup>

The success of many chillout compilations related to their conveniently refraining from referring to Islam, and by extension, to British Asian identity; in refusing to specify British Asian identity, it erased its existence altogether. The structure of the *Buddha-Bar* compilations exemplify this type of erasure; while they sometimes include individual contributions by British Asian musicians, their songs are linked with others in a continuous mix; as one song flows into the next, the listener progressively loses the sense that the songs have discrete identity, and the album is more likely to be experienced as a

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<sup>92</sup> Bald, "Mutiny."

<sup>93</sup> See Hussain and Bagguley, "Citizenship, Ethnicity, and Identity."

whole. That “whole” corresponds to the overall aesthetic of the *Buddha-Bar*, which draws on influences that one can recognize as being “ethnic” but not necessarily associate with any concrete location; the inability to associate this aesthetic with reality links it to the exotica recordings of Les Baxter and Martin Denny, mentioned at the start of this chapter. As the compilation conveniently sidesteps topics of race, citizenship, and immigration, and potential terrorist threats, it delivers on its promise to offer its listeners an escape into an Orientalist idyll.

The dilution of South Asian influences on the *Buddha-Bar* and their merging with other cultural influences provide a space for the listener to survey miscellaneous cultures from a safe and privileged vantage point that conforms to the widely accepted understanding of cosmopolitanism as something enabled by “independent means, expensive tastes, and a globe-trotting lifestyle.”<sup>94</sup> In a review of 2003 trends in Parisian nightlife, journalist Jennifer Joan Lee alluded to this lifestyle as she described the surfeit of ethnically themed bars and clubs. After noticing that all these clubs’ décor combine familiar with ethnic elements and contrasting them against the reality of “immigrant drab” and their discrepant cosmopolitanisms, she concludes that these clubs define “the essence of ethnic chic: Be exotic, but not overly.”<sup>95</sup> To be “overly exotic” is to evoke reality.

The dissolution of a specific British Asian identity on these later compilations sharply contrast against recording labels’ early scrambles to release British Asian-themed compilations before their competitors. This

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<sup>94</sup> Bruce Robbins, “Comparative Cosmopolitanisms,” in *Cosmopolitanism: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 248. See Introduction, p. 19.

<sup>95</sup> Jennifer Joan Lee, “Ethnic Mingles with Chic on City’s Vibrant Night Circuit,” *International Herald Tribune*, October 9, 2003.

contrast directly reflects the diminishing demand for British Asian music and Asian-influenced trends from the late 1990s through the early 2000s. Yet these British Asian music and Asian-influenced musical trends must not be considered independently; they must be considered within the context of their association with British Asian identity—a marketable commodity in itself, whose value depended on rapidly shifting trends in fashion and politics.

It would appear that British Asian identity exerted an influence so powerful that it subjected British Asian music to its own perils, yet such a view does not represent the whole story—more specifically, the role that British Asian music and musicians played in the construction of British Asian identity itself. As discussed in Chapter 2, British Asian musicians and their recordings achieved a level of visibility within mainstream culture that very few other British Asians have matched; the desirability of British Asian culture was directly linked to its vibrant, “underground” club scene. Conversely, the deluge of British Asian-themed compilations and the saturation of those compilations’ markets reflected consumers’ weariness with Asian-themed music while they drew increasingly negative attention to Asian music’s obsolescence. In both of these instances, British Asian music explicitly contributed to the valuation of British Asian identity. In this way, British Asian music in the late 1990s and early 2000s may be understood as simultaneously reflecting and constituting broader trends in British Asian identity.