

Communicative Flows between the Diaspora and ‘Homeland’ The Case of Asian Electronic Music in Delhi*

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Indian cities are experiencing significant processes of social, economic and political change, bringing together new configurations of urban identities. This is hardly a new phenomenon. During Imperial rule, nineteenth and twentieth century Bombay, for example, experienced considerably rapid metropolitan reconfigurations (Morris 1991: 235–37). Indian partition is, of course, the most glaring example in contemporary Indian history. However, what is distinct about recent changes in urban India is how they have been shaped by the wide-ranging economic liberalization policies of the early 1990s spearheaded by P.V. Narasimha Rao’s Congress Party coalition. The previously socialist sheltered economy was ‘structurally reformed’ as the selected means to avert a near currency collapse.¹ Over the last decade, Indian urban centres have seen enormous growth in the forms of upmarket housing (Appadurai 2004: 263), stylish coffee bars such as Baristas and Café Coffee Days, the building of high-tech private hospitals (Ray 2003) and other developments targeting the burgeoning middle to upper classes. Indian metropolises have been experiencing massive inflows of national, international and diasporic capital that have transformed the cities at an astonishing pace. New Delhi is no exception to this trend; its society has been the site of deep shifts ranging from kinship to consumption over the last decade (Mathur and Parameswaran 2004). Some very striking shifts have arisen from cultural, political and economic interactions with the diaspora. As India’s capital, Delhi has also experienced unique political interactions with the diaspora. The lobbying by first-generation diasporic ‘non-resident’ Indians (NRIs) for dual citizenship is one example.²

This article studies a group of elite Indian youths who occupy an exclusive slice of Delhi’s urban space. The Asian electronic music scene in New Delhi is part of an international music scene initially spawned by diasporic second-generation Asians³ in London such as Talvin Singh, the Nasha crew, State of Bengal, Nitin Sawhney, Swaraj, Sitarfunk and the Anokha crew. It has now extended to other diasporic Asian centres such as New York, San Francisco, Toronto and Sydney, as well as Indian ‘metro’ cities such as Mumbai and Delhi. The music merges electronic

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beats ranging from jungle to drum and bass with subcontinentally inspired samples. Traditional vocals (especially Hindustani) and classical instruments customarily associated with the subcontinent such as the tabla, sitar, sarangi and shehnai are normal components (Banerjee 2000, Huq 2003: 33, Zuberi 2001: 230–33). The music is not static and fixed to one particular city, country or monolithic conception of the subcontinent. Rather, it articulates ‘routes’ (Clifford 1997, Gilroy 1993), which are a product of diverse cultural flows, crossing everywhere from Okinawa to Ahmedabad to Burnley.⁴ Interestingly, it also, as Sharma (2006: 326) argues, concomitantly articulates ‘roots’ in terms of ‘identity, belonging, and place’ for some Asian listeners.⁵ This observation is critical in that the music is far more than a simple reductive musical categorization. Rather, the music—as a cultural form—is a rich, meaningful ‘living legacy’ (Gilroy 1993) as well as being emblematic of some British Asian experiences. Asian electronic music is sometimes conflated with *bhangra*, another diasporic Asian music. Though not mutually exclusive (in that early *bhangra* DJs paved the way for Asian electronic music’s success in Britain), the former is musically distinct in that it is dominated by the percussive beats of the Punjabi *dhol* and culturally distinct in that it ‘embodies a diverse Punjabi cultural specificity’ (Sharma 2006: 326)—a growth that has occurred through the UK Punjabi wedding and private party scene, rather than exclusively through mainstream channels. Asian electronic music on the other hand has not been associated with any particular region, religion or language from the subcontinent. In Delhi it has been a product of diasporic, national and local flows; it has similarly not been ‘rooted’ to any specific region, religion or language.

The Asian electronic music scene is uniquely placed as it involves elite, well-travelled, highly educated Delhiites, who have had extensive contacts with the diaspora.⁶ The scene’s use of technology is a key area that will be used to understand these rich communicative interactions. As the scene in Delhi was born and has grown through close collaboration between Indians and the diaspora, it is also an excellent vehicle for further exploring the bilateral communicative flows between the diaspora and ‘homeland’. The article concludes by showing how individuals in the Asian electronic music scene have appropriated a diasporic musical form, but ascribed new meanings in the shadow of the cultural globalization ushered in by Indian economic liberalization. Specifically, British Asian musics have ‘offered alternative imaginings of *home* and *belonging*’ to Asians (ibid.: 318, emphasis original). For Delhiwallahs,⁷ perhaps the music has been a means to alternatively imagine a commodified, postcolonial *home* and *belonging* (ibid.: 318, emphasis original)—a developing Delhi that is somehow identified with heavy electronic breaks and nostalgic Hindustani vocals. It is in some ways the third leg of the music’s journey in that the original flows that spawned the music were between the British diaspora and ‘homeland’; the second leg took Asian electronic across the diaspora and now it has traversed back ‘home’. This article will explore this fascinating triangular movement as a product of complex, technologically mediated, creative communicative flows.

‘DELHI SWINGS’⁸

Delhi has been a centre of cultural, political and economic activity in Asia. From the Delhi Sultanate to the transfer of Imperial India’s capital to the city in 1931, it has also been an important urban metropolis internationally. With Indian independence in 1947, it quickly became home to countless embassies and consulates, bringing an influx of highly educated diplomats from all corners of the globe. Delhi, especially south Delhi (where these diplomatic enclaves are concentrated), began to play host to many cultural events through the patronage of these foreign governments as well as the newborn Indian state. After India’s economic liberalization programmes were launched in 1991–92, many diasporic companies also quickly opened offices in the capital upon the urging of the Indian government. The influential, Indian government-backed Bharat Nirman NRI Conference in 1991 proclaimed on the cover of its conference proceedings: ‘Call of Motherland ... Come Home’ and ‘Be Proud of Your Country and Participate in Its Progress’ (Bhandari 1991). Diasporic companies answered the call, entering the market, eyeing the increasingly deep pockets of Delhi’s middle and elite classes, as well as the valuable labour pool of its large population of skilled professionals. The staggering inflows of capital and the new economic opportunities brought by economic liberalization have, broadly speaking, benefited the middle and upper classes of Delhi.⁹ The affluence of many south Delhi neighbourhoods—especially Vasant Vihar, Greater Kailash, Defence Colony, Hauz Khas and parts of Vasant Kunj—became overtly visible as designer boutiques, the newest German luxury cars and *haute cuisine* restaurants appeared almost overnight. Concurrently, neighbourhoods in congested Old Delhi and parts of New Delhi remain overpopulated and are more likely to feature substandard housing than cafés serving up frothy cappuccinos.

In contrast to those economically less well off, affluent Delhiites who participate in the Asian electronic music scene are socially and economically mobile. They can and do frequently travel for holidays and to visit family in the diaspora, have international credit cards, buy imported consumer goods, have broadband Internet access, and have attended English-speaking private schools. The economic and social mobility of these Delhi elites led Jain (2001) to term them ‘nouveau-maharajas’. Because of this high level of mobility, these individuals have had greater than average physical and virtual contact with the diaspora.

THE ‘HOMELAND’ STRIKES BACK

The birth of Asian electronic music in the UK has many parallels to that of ‘Black Atlantic’ musics (Gilroy 1993). Specifically, Asian electronic was also a product of (post)colonial

crossings and movement—a ‘Brown Atlantic’ spanning the UK, North America, Trinidad and Guyana, for example. British brown Atlantic musicians, whose forebears came to British ports from Calcutta, Dhaka, Bombay, Karachi, Delhi and Jalandhar, made physical and imagined crossings back to the ‘homeland’ through their aural texts. Diasporic musics, as Gilroy (1993) argues in the case of the black diaspora, have been a product of ‘displacement’, ‘relocation’ and the struggle for self-identity within a racist political culture. Diverse diasporic musics ranging from techno-banda music within the Mexican diaspora in Los Angeles (Simonett 2001) to blues and later hip-hop in America (Rose 1994) are examples. Asian electronic music mimics similar political dynamics in that British Asians continue to be subjected to racist practices in Britain. Some Asian electronic music was part of a movement to articulate these voices, ultimately aimed at rupturing racist stereotypes in order to introduce positive Asian images.

Interestingly, the musics of the Brown and Black Atlantic are also similar in that they have both involved a ‘return’ to ‘homeland’. In the case of black diasporic musics, twentieth-century musicians who were descendants of African slaves took their music back to the ‘source’. Ewens (1991: 38–39) argues that Bob Marley ‘led the penetration of reggae music into Africa’ through performances in Zimbabwe and Benin. Jimmy Cliff followed in the 1980s through extensive collaborations with Cameroonian and Zairean musicians. Jazz masters such as Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie also paid homage to Ghana and North Africa respectively (ibid.: 31–32), and the recently deceased soul singer Wilson Pickett headlined the influential Soul to Soul Festival in Ghana in 1974 (ibid.: 34). The Ivorian Alpha Blondy studied at Columbia University in the 1970s, sang *Mandinka* language lyrics with a New York reggae band, Manyaka. He returned to Africa and, as Ewens (ibid.: 78) points out, became Africa’s first reggae star. Alpha Blondy is particularly interesting for three main reasons. First, he ‘pulled’ reggae from New York, rather than having it pushed by a diasporic African—an act of African agency. Second, by studying at an elite American university, he brought a non-poor image of Africans to New York—a subversive image to a 1970s racist America. Last, Blondy became involved in Rastafarian culture in New York, which he brought ‘back’ to Africa through his reggae. Blondy represents a bilateral communicative negotiation with the African diaspora in North America—as an equal and not as an object of philanthropy.

In the mid to late twentieth century, African musicians, as Ewens (ibid.) says, became inspired by the black diaspora to reappropriate musics that had originated from Africa but had been transformed by the diasporic experience. An interesting, non-Western example is the case of Swahili rumba. Musically, rumba can be traced to slaves from West and Central Africa who were taken to Cuba in the nineteenth century (Stewart 2000: 20). Many variations later, it ‘returned’ to the Congo region (now Zaire and the Democratic Republic of Congo) in the 1940s and 1950s (Coelho 2003: 56), and became known as African rumba and later *soukous*.

(Steward 1999: 159). Rumba also spread across to different regions of Africa such as Senegal somewhat accidentally. Black rumba musicians from Cuba came ashore from cruise ships and inspired local Senegalese musicians, who later set up rumba orchestras in Dakar and St Louis (Ewens 1991: 69). Interestingly, the most prominent African rumba, the Congo-lesé variant, underwent a significant linguistic change when it arrived on African shores. Though some rumba tracks were being made in copied phonetic Spanish, musicians increasingly produced rumba in Lingala (Stewart 2000: 77), a pidgin vernacular of Congolese languages. This marked the start of a new rumba/soukous in African languages, which has continued to the present, with rumba sung in Swahili in Kenya.¹⁰

I have included this extended discussion of black diasporic musics and their ‘returns to African soil’¹¹ for two main reasons. First, it shows that the musical engagements between diaspora and ‘homeland’ are usually products of long, often colonially mediated, histories. It is all too easy to forget the importance of the colonial in Asian diasporic musics (slavery makes this almost impossible in black diasporic musics). The origins of exporting subcontinental sounds and then (re)importing them back is hardly a contemporary phenomenon. Rather, its modern origins begin with the first subcontinental gramophone recordings at the turn of the twentieth century under the British Raj. From 1899 onwards the Gramophone Company recorded artists such as Sila Bai, Hari Moti and Miss Sughila in British India (especially Calcutta) (Kinnear 1994). The master copies were sent to Europe to be pressed and were exported back to India (as well as other destinations) (ibid.). The diaspora was not involved at this point, but these colonial gramophone origins set the stage for mechanically reproduced London-subcontinent aural exchanges. Sitar and tabla music in the 1960s, Bollywood soundtracks from the late 1960s, Bollywood remixes from the 1980s, *bhangra* from the 1980s and 1990s, and Asian electronic from the late 1980s and 1990s all involved bilateral exchanges between the diaspora (many times via the UK) and the subcontinent.

Second, the black diasporic musics (re)appropriated by Africa were a ‘living legacy’ (Gilroy 1993), which reflected dislocations, histories and movements that crossed from Africa to the diaspora and back to Africa. African rumba and soukous were not new musics per se; rather, they were evolutions of a music that was to some extent concurrently diasporic and African. Just like the Swahili rumba of the Golden Sounds Band and the rumba of Lokua Kanza (whose rumba spans Swahili, Lingala, English and French) is postcolonial African and diasporic,¹² Asian electronic music is similarly post-colonial South Asian and diasporic. It is not simply a case of diasporic music being consumed back in the ‘homeland’. This is a case in point in Delhi where Asian electronic music has been influenced by Delhi and Goan psy-trance¹³ as well as local Delhi ‘traditional’ musicians. Like the linguistic Africanization of rumba, the ‘Indianization’ of Asian electronic has come about through a real engagement by Indian Asian electronic musicians.

In the case of Asian electronic music's return to the subcontinent, the Bob Marleys and Wilson Picketts were Talvin Singh, Nitin Sawhney, Badmarsh and Shri, Nasha, Shiva Sound-systems and State of Bengal. Several of these musicians, like some musicians in the black diaspora, used the music as an expressive text to articulate politicized identity struggles borne from their experiences as diasporic Asians. Additionally, the music, through the musicians' imaginary and real interactions with 'homeland', expressed their diverse aural conceptualizations of the subcontinent. Critically, it also articulated the marginalization of British Asians and sought, like hip-hop in America (Rose 1994), to evoke internal and external dialogues on progressive political moves and a general increase in diasporic agency.¹⁴

The arrival/return of Asian electronic music to India has itself been a product of complex movements, dislocations and appropriations involving not only the diaspora's eagerness to communicate with the subcontinent, but vice versa. Like rumba, this return to 'homeland' can be seen as the third major movements of the music. From its birth in the UK, the second movement of Asian electronic music saw it fan across the diaspora (much like the spread of dub and reggae in the black diaspora), sparking the growth of scenes in New York, San Francisco, Toronto, Melbourne, Singapore and many other South Asian centres. The musics being produced at these individual sites were then circulated across the international scene, leading to new interpretations, collaborative performances and unique communicative networks across the South Asian diaspora.

It was at this point that this diasporic music made its way back to the 'homeland'. It came as an ambiguous aural corpus that had been exoticized by the West, but had still managed to generate progressive identity discourses and new solidarities in the Asian diaspora, whether intentionally or unintentionally. When Talvin Singh brought Asian electronic music to Bombay, it was unknown whether this political 'baggage' from the diaspora could be 'understood', re-appropriated or, at worst, tolerated as its audience in India was not a marginalized one, but rather a privileged one. The music took off and the creative communicative exchanges between the diaspora and subcontinent came alive. Mumbaikers¹⁵ such as the Bhavishyawani Future Soundz collective quickly appropriated the music, swapping themes of British Asian marginalization for the emergence of a post-liberalization India. The rough breaks merged with sitars and ragas provided sonic disjunctures ripe for the ascription of new semiotic significations.

The impact of Asian electronic music to the subcontinent should not be underestimated. As rumba and reggae energized African music scenes, Asian electronic music has done the same for Mumbai and later Delhi. Similarly, as rumba and reggae brought the black diaspora in contact with Africa, Asian electronic music has brought specific subsections of the Asian diaspora in contact with their ancestral 'homeland'. Interestingly, Indian musicians and consumers have read the music within discourses between tradition and modernity. The success of Asian electronic music in India can, to some extent, be attributed to its association as a modern,

post-liberalization music. Specifically, elite Indians are reappropriating the music and ascribing new meanings of a triumphal post-liberalization state, where the ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ are, albeit problematically, negotiating a new postcolonial, post-socialist Delhi. This should not be taken as an argument that liberalization has been successful; rather, the music is being positioned as emblematic of this new ‘internationally successful’ India.

As these nouveau-maharajahs have felt increasingly empowered, they have been more confident in their exchanges with the diaspora. Just as Indians have been shaped by physical contact with diasporic Asians, the converse has also occurred. London’s Asian electronic music scene has performed regularly in India. Prominent British Asian electronic music producers such as Talvin Singh, DJ Badmarsh, the State of Bengal, DJ Zakhm, Karsh Kale and Dhamaal of the scene in the US have all performed at venues that are associated with the Delhi scene.¹⁶ Besides performative contact, these musicians recorded sarangi and sitar sessions by Indian masters to use in their work in London.¹⁷ Additionally, armed with their MiniDisc recorders, they travelled around the subcontinent, grabbing samples of sounds from the roadside to luxury hotels. Over the last five years musicians in Delhi have been travelling to the diaspora—performing as well as attending events. Several individuals in the Delhi scene that I spoke with, including both DJs and attendees, mentioned specifically that their trips to London always included performances at or visits to Asian electronic music events such as those put on by Nasha or Shiva Soundsystems. The MIDival PunditZ have performed overseas, dating as far back as 1999.¹⁸ The dialogical exchanges born from such contacts are not so much based on a disequilibrium (as in the India of the 1980s where ‘West was best’). Rather, the regular performances by Indian musicians in the diaspora have led to real collaboration.

These performative exchanges are not just important in terms of their effects on the music being produced in Delhi and internationally, but have also led to record and distribution deals. In the case of the MIDival PunditZ, a performance in London launched their career. Tapan of the MIDival PunditZ observes that they first went to London in 1999 when they were invited by Talvin Singh to do an Asian electronic music DJ set at an Anokha night at Fabric in London (personal interview). It was here that they met the key British Asians involved in the London scene as well as Ajay Naidu and Karsh Kale of the scene in New York. Tapan describes the event as an ‘eye opener’ (personal interview). When Naidu and Kale went back to New York, MIDival PunditZ kept in touch with them. Gradually, the MIDival PunditZ networked with the scene in New York and found themselves signed to the San Francisco-based label, Six Degrees:

Karsh went back to the US. He got himself a deal with Six Degrees and then he was kind of instrumental in getting our music across to the management at Six Degrees and they liked the music. So you know, if you look at it in hindsight ... yeah, the Anokha night kind of started it for us. (Personal interview with Tapan Raj)

These Indo-American capital links, forged through the performative geographical halfway point of London are not trivial. They have literally launched the career of Indian Asian electronic groups, like the MIDival PunditZ, providing the backing and infrastructure to tour and have albums distributed internationally. The Fabric night also opened the door for exchanges with the New York City and San Francisco Asian electronic music scenes in addition to the London one—an expanded Brown Atlantic.

The MIDival PunditZ's record deal with an American label exemplifies the fact that the transnational capital involved in the financing of Indian Asian electronic music is embedded within a complex dialogical nexus in which the diaspora and 'homeland' meet. Tapan and Gaurav both commented to me that the Indian sources of finance are near impossible to come by. Recording deals and performative exchanges are usually mediated by diasporic or foreign capital. For example, in December 2004 Smirnoff, the international vodka distiller, financed an Asian electronic music event in Delhi, *The Smirnoff Experience*. It featured DJ Badmarsh (a well-known British Indian Asian electronic music DJ and producer) and the MIDival PunditZ. Though born from Smirnoff's corporate agenda, the performative exchanges between diasporic DJ Badmarsh and the Delhi-based MIDival PunditZ were a positive by-product. As the diaspora and *desi*¹⁹ danced together, conversations sparked through musical breaks and interruptions such as when DJ Badmarsh segued into anti-racist British Asian electronic tracks. The communicative exchanges occurring within the dance hall were both intra-performer and intra-audience. These dialogical moments open channels between the diaspora and 'homeland', where stories, experiences and possibilities could be shared.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE DIASPORA

This dialogical common ground has not always existed. In pre-liberalization Delhi, Indian youth cultures were not always readily accessible to the diaspora. Rock and metal-dominated Indian cities through the 1990s kept burgeoning Anglo-American electronic musics at bay. Diasporic visitors without an interest or at least a tolerance of rock and metal had difficulty participating in Delhi's elite youth music cultures. However, the musical gulf has now been bridged by Star TV, MTV, Zee TV, Channel V and others as Delhi's youth listen to the same musics as the diaspora. Culturally, satellite television has also facilitated both the diaspora and 'homeland' a celluloid glimpse of the 'other'. Satellite television, the Internet and cheap DVDs are some of the technological means by which celluloid imagery of cosmopolitan lifestyles are channelled and sold to well off Delhiites. Second, there is a prevailing view that India is now at parity with

the West (as discussed previously). Despite the fact that some policy makers in the British diaspora conceive of India subordinately as ‘the back office of the UK’ (Patel 2004: 41), the nouveau-maharajas of Delhi are not bothered, believing that India has entered a new era.²⁰

‘Community’ within the Asian electronic music scene is highly mediated by technology. From e-flyer advertising to obtaining the music through MP3 downloads, new media technologies have been critical. E-mail lists such as those for the state-of-the-art mega club *Elevate* and the MIDival PunditZ include details of club gigs, small events and invite-only private parties. Usually, e-flyers are sent by email as attachments (see Figure 1).

These active lists were cited by diasporic respondents as the primary way they found out about the scene’s events. Websites, such as Delhi’s wannabuzz.com, have thousands of users

Figure 1

E-flyer from a Cyber Mehfil Event Held at *Elevate*, NOIDA, on 5 November 2004



who discuss gigs, flirt and exchange music. Wannabuzz.com has specific forums and listings for Asian electronic music. As of late 2005, wannabuzz.com had close to 8,000 members, including many from the diaspora (personal interview with a manager of the website). In the guestbook for Elevate, phone numbers, instant messaging IDs and e-mail addresses are regularly exchanged, occasionally leading to actual physical meetings at the club. At any given time, the guestbook also contained posts from diasporic Asians who were interested in the scene or visiting Delhi and would like to meet participants.²¹ The MIDIval PunditZ's well-trafficked guestbook is used for local, national and international Asian electronic music participants to discuss the MIDIval PunditZ, as Tapan recounted to me, Serendipitiously as well as Asian electronic music in general. Two respondents, Arun and Shiv, who I had met through this guestbook, had themselves met through this list. They exchanged e-mails and digital pictures and became friends, meeting at Asian electronic music events as well as sharing music and videos. Arun also became 'friends' with various diasporic Asian electronic musicians in the UK and US via these guestbooks and through e-mail.

Digital distribution has specifically increased the diaspora's reach into the subcontinent. The MIDIval PunditZ serendipitously came across Talvin Singh when they were watching MTV India in Gaurav's lounge. The fact that the digital beams from a distant INSAT satellite and not a physical introduction or even a physical CD was the means by which this diasporic music reached Delhi is a case in point.

Unsurprisingly, satellite television, online music distribution and inexpensive CDs have displaced the 'cassette culture' described by Manuel (1993) for Delhi's middle and elite classes. The specific distribution of Asian electronic music to end-listeners in India is now mainly through technologies such as MP3 downloads and computer-based CD copying. These forms of digital distribution have enabled the diaspora and 'homeland' to share music seamlessly. Indeed, even DJs turn to online methods to procure Asian electronic music tracks. One DJ observed that if he had to procure legitimate copies of new CDs, he would not be able to play new Asian electronic music due to costs and inaccessibility. Rather, he uses peer-to-peer Internet software to download all of his music illegally—mostly from diasporic friends.²² He observes that im-ported CDs cost around Rs 500 or 600 (about US\$ 10–12) and some rare CDs sell for Rs 2,600 (US\$ 50 or thereabouts). Some of the more dedicated participants in the scene ask diasporic relatives to bring them CDs when they visit. The rest download.

Most production of Asian electronic music in Delhi is also mediated by new technologies. Indian DJs in clubs frequently mix downloaded MP3s on their laptops with CD turntables. Vinyl, due to its high cost, is almost non-existent. Indian Asian electronic musicians upload tracks to their diasporic collaborators. The MIDIval PunditZ even uploaded a completed album

to their American mastering house rather than post it. The Internet is generally also used to download software and plug-ins for sequencing, sampling and other production. The MIDIval PunditZ, for example, use computer-based hardware and software—much of which was recommended to them by British and American diasporic musicians—as well as the Internet for most aspects of their production. The same can be said of the Ahmedabad-based Bandish Projekt who were mentored in using specific software and audio plug-ins by British Asian electronic musicians such as the Nasha crew and Equal-I.

In these examples, technology has enabled transnational collaboration, knowledge sharing and remastering. The Internet has superseded physical travel to studios as the preferred means of collaborating. Of course, these processes of digital music production are not exclusive to India, but are concomitant parts of the technological globalization of music production in general (Connell and Gibson 2003: 251–69). What is crucial is that these technologically-mediated forms of production have enabled Indian musicians to be easily exposed to diasporic musics and music-making styles. Concurrently, Delhi-based electronic music producers are placing their music, which reflects urban north Indian identities, into Internet-based distribution such as iTunes, making their music accessible to diasporic and world audiences.

Technology has allowed the Indians involved in the scene to produce and procure music that reflects their deep connections with the diaspora. Though they are giving the music new significations (as opposed to the sets of significations generated by the music in London or New York for example), the music is a simulacrum of some exchanges between the diaspora and ‘homeland’. Grossly simplified, physical/geographical locality has seemingly become less important as the global diffusion of homogenizing cultural flows permeates emerging economies such as India. However, the ‘registering’ of Indian Asian electronic musicians into the Internet has increased their push for asserting ‘deep particularities’ (Robertson 1995: 74). In the case of the MIDIval PunditZ, they had been consuming international electronic musics such as the Chemical Brothers, Orbital and Prodigy since the 1990s. Even before they were exposed to any Asian electronic music, they were making their own version, which they termed ‘Indian electronic’ music (personal interview). For Gaurav of the MIDIval PunditZ, their music, which is now circulating in the ‘global circuit’ (Greene 2005: 8), is a reflection of their globalized cosmopolitan identities. From his perspective, ‘Indian electronic [music] really happens’ when the ‘Western’ rhythms and scales used in electronic music are substituted and merged with ‘Indian scales, Indian stuff, and Indian *ragas*’ (personal interview). In Gaurav’s words, Indian electronic music is a ‘representation’ of ‘where we are from and the way we have grown up’ as ‘Indian boys’ and ‘Delhi boys,’ ‘from a generation which is very very electronic and very clubby, very new-age’ (personal interview).

Gaurav's invocation of the 'particular' of India and Delhi alongside within the context of an 'electronic' generation is significant. It is similar to Slobin's (2000) invocation of a 'heritage music' in reference to klezmer or what Ewens (1991: 8), in the African context, calls 'transitional—bridging the gap between 'traditional' and 'modern'. The actual production of the music, which involves the merging of Indian scales with electronic music, is an expression of Gaurav's identity as a member of a generation of elite, post-liberalization, 'clubby' young Delhiites. Specifically, from his perspective, their music-making is a quasi-biographical cartography, reflective of their unique identities, and not a facsimile of diasporic Asian musics. And when the music is consumed or remixed, new significations and identities are triggered. This has been the case in America where the MIDival PunditZ recently toured. Diasporic Asians read the music and performance as 'authentic' because the MIDival PunditZ are Indian rather than diasporic Indian.²³ The modalities by which authenticity is being renegotiated in the diaspora after contact with the subcontinent's 'newly hip' musics is fascinating. When the 'homeland' strikes back, new communicative exchanges occur within the diaspora, placing the subcontinent in a position of perceived power—a marked turn.

REMIXED IDENTITIES

Asian electronic music encapsulates many axes of these individuals' lives—travel, childhood memories of 1980s Bollywood hits, an affluent consumerist lifestyle of cocktails and the latest clothes, and a feeling that they are 'empowered', 'with-it', modern Indians. This postcolonial 'empowerment', whether it occurs in 'homeland' or diaspora, is represented by economic success, international recognition and feelings of legitimacy. This is hardly a phenomenon exclusively associated with Asian electronic music; rather, other musics 'returning' to their 'homeland' such as reggae and rumba have developed similarly (Ewens 1991). However, it is couched within a tension between the neo-colonial and postcolonial in the sense that these purported 'successes' are noticeable largely due to the fact that both the diasporic and subcontinental cultural forms were, for very different reasons, less visible historically in comparison to white 'Western' cultural forms.²⁴ Therefore, the music, as interpreted by the live DJs in Delhi, embodies a move to be positively recognized locally, nationally and internationally. Through (neo/post) colonial lenses, pre- and post-liberalization India, and the intersections between diaspora and 'homeland', the music articulates a moment in time when India is considered full of promise for its elite. The DJs fluidly interweave lounge music, samples from

Hindustani music, tracks common on satellite television channels such as France's F, and, of course, uncut and remixed international Asian electronic music. The diaspora's quest for mapping their fluid identities—'traditional', 'modern', Asian, Western, queer, racially subjugated—are reflected in diasporic Asian electronic music. Delhiwallahs have identified with the difference discussed in these texts and were recurrently negotiating them through the lenses of cosmopolitan yet 'traditional' and vice versa. The electronic breaks signified the former and the sitar, tablas and vocals the latter.

These findings are contra Saldanha's (2002) work on music and identity amongst youths in Bangalore, India. Saldanha (*ibid.*: 344–45) argues that in Bangalore elite youths created a binary, mutually exclusive distinction between a 'local India' that was 'stuck in the past' and 'annoys them', and a 'global India' that is cosmopolitan and exciting. He argues that elite youths in Bangalore identify with the latter, cutting themselves off from connections with the former. He argues that if these youths, termed 'global youths', identify with Western popular music, they then *disidentify* with Indian musical forms:

For instance, if global youth identify with/through Western pop music, they *disidentify* with Indian musical forms. Indian classical music, regional folk musics, devotional singing, school brass bands and Hindi film music are found to be archaic, annoying or insipid.

Saldanha (*ibid.*: 345) then concludes that, presumably for this reason, Asian electronic music (referred to by him as 'Asian drum 'n bass') 'hardly receive[s] any attention in India'. First, Asian electronic music has received significant attention in India, especially in Mumbai with the Bhavishyavani Future Soundz collective performing formally from 2000 (*Indian Express* 2000), and in Delhi with the MIDival Punditz from 1997.²⁵ Second, Saldanha's analysis is oversimplified in that, for him, the complex processes of identity formation amongst elite youths in India can be neatly pigeonholed into a distinction between a backwards 'local India' and a progressive 'global India'. Rather, some elite 'global youths' in Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad view their identities as products of an India which has become globalized, but an India which is still—in Saldanha's words—'local'. These individuals do not 'disidentify' with Indian musical forms. They do not consider the 'local India' to be a pejorative. For this reason Asian electronic music, a music that fuses influences from the 'local' and the 'global', has been popular with some elite youths in Indian cities, especially in Mumbai and Delhi. Indeed, even in Bangalore, the city of Saldanha's research and a historical bastion of Indian rock music, Asian electronic music has made inroads through nights such as DJ Kashyap's *autopilot*

(Gupta 2005, Iyengar 2005, Pillai 2004) or through Asian electronic DJ sets after rock gigs.²⁶ For some of the participants in Delhi, Asian electronic music has represented an affirmation of ‘local’ and ‘global’ aspects of their ‘cosmopolitan’ Indian identities. For example, Vikram, a 30-year-old Indian journalist for the BBC, New Delhi, argues along these lines:

A lot of my friends like the whole idea of the [electronic music] beats with the sitar and the tabla. It’s kind of an India which is saying that we are important... it’s the idea that we have arrived, this is the global music. It’s not just us listening ... it’s the whole world listening, and it’s got the sitar, the tabla—*our instruments*. (Personal interview)

These discourses are shockingly similar to the ones regarding authenticity and British Asian musics. For example, *bhangra* and the *dhol* are similarly positioned as owned by Asians. Again, this idea that the music as a text can mediate common discourses of authenticity that both diaspora and ‘homeland’ engage in is a powerful point of intersection between the diaspora and subcontinent, and needs to be explored further. The literature tends to look at movement between ‘homeland’ and diaspora, rather than the converse or the simultaneity of flows. This deficiency sidelines important changes in communicative flows between the subcontinent and the diaspora, which this article touches on, though there is much more to explore.

For Vikram and his friends, Asian electronic music embodies a postcolonial historical point of pride for India as the music represents, in his opinion, an affirmation that ‘the world’ is recognizing the importance of India, as evidenced by international consumption of electronic music with sitars and tabla (‘our instruments’). Vikram is implicitly making a distinction between Western consumption of Indian exotica (a negative) and consumption of Indian cultural products as respectable, ‘equal’ cultural products (a positive). When I asked him to clarify his comments, he immediately positioned his views within post-liberalization India:

post independence ... we were clinging to what we had because we thought that for 200 years the British have subjugated us, they have pushed us down, our culture, everything... and suddenly the 90s was the time when we got IT [information technologies] and we got global players now—we have moved on from that phase to a different phase. Okay we’re equal players now and we don’t have to cling to anything that is ours and we just take in what’s coming and I think that’s what happened with the MIDival Punditz. They’ve got Indian roots, but they’ve just showed the world they’re at a level playing field with any other DJs and bands in the world. The 90s have been very special for Indians I would say.

Asian electronic music embodies a feeling of empowerment, attributed by Vikram to Indian economic liberalization. The music, for respondents such as him, is an exemplar of an Indian cultural product that is being consumed/produced on a 'level playing field' rather than at a market disadvantage. This feeling that 'the world' is consuming Asian electronic music as a culturally equal product, rather than a cultural product from a backward country, seems to be fostering the simultaneous affirmation of 'Indian roots' (Saldanha's 'local India') along with a cosmopolitan India (Saldanha's 'global India'), triggering a sense of 'pride' amongst many participants in the scene. Another respondent, Arun, comments, 'I felt really proud that West [*sic*] is using our culture and they're making tracks from our culture.' Gowri, a journalist for *Elle India*, adds: 'I think there's also a bit of pride in feeling that your country's sounds are being interpreted by so many people around the world. It makes me a bit proud.'

Specifically, these respondents feel that the music, in its incorporation of electronic beats with instruments and samples traditionally associated with the subcontinent, induces some level of perceived 'pride' (most likely nationalism) towards an India that, like China, is now considered successful in terms of its ongoing development. Sundeep, a 26-year-old Asian electronic music DJ and project manager for an IT company in Delhi, feels that Asian electronic music has changed his relationship to his homeland: 'I think just being associated with Asian electronic music, I personally have felt closer to my homeland.'

For Sundeep, Asian electronic music provides him with two channels of identification—one in regards to being Indian and the other is with electronic music: '(a) being an Indian, I relate to Asian instruments in the music, and (b) being so hooked on to electronica music, I can relate to all of that as well.'

Though Sundeep makes a division here, the two are not mutually exclusive. However, this does not diminish the fact that, for Sundeep, the music provides two points of identification—as mentioned earlier. His involvement with the Asian electronic music scene has changed his identity (via these two channels of identification) into one which is 'closer to [his] homeland'. This almost primordial response is, of course, complex in itself as it involves a feeling of India achieving success in its post-liberalization development efforts. Second, his 'closer' connection is built upon his own identity as an elite Delhiite in the sense that his identity is 'routed' through local/national cultural, political and economic flows, as well as transnational ones. Third, he has become 'closer' to his 'homeland' via the diasporic medium of Asian electronic music.

The crucial question is why a diasporic text has been appropriated to fulfil this task. It seems a more complex means than using music produced in Delhi. Slobin's (2000) analysis of klezmer music presents a compelling theory. He argues that klezmer music, originally associated with

Eastern Ashkenazic Jews, was wiped out in Jewish European cities during World War II. Post-War, ‘authentic klezmer’ was most likely to be found in Jewish diasporic communities such as Melbourne and New York rather than in Krakow. What is fascinating with klezmer was how diasporic intervention actually brought it to old world Jewish cities such as St Petersburg that had never had histories of klezmer. Slobin (2000: 86) argues that the ability of klezmer—a mixture of Yiddish vocals with clarinet, violins, bluegrass and jazz influences—has had a power of ‘reaffiliation’ in that the St Petersburg Jews were ‘connecting with some past notion of Jewishness ... where secularized, assimilated Jews are turning to their roots’. This notion of a return to ‘roots’ has been critical to the success of Asian electronic music in Delhi. Young hip Delhiites like Sundeep and Vikram feel that liberalization has qualitatively changed their relationship with traditional, *desi* India. Like klezmer in St Petersburg, Asian electronic music in Delhi has had a constructed ‘reaffiliation’ affect. Interestingly, it is the American Jewish diaspora that popularized klezmer in St Petersburg through events such as Klezfest. Asian electronic music in Delhi is presently heavily linked to the American diaspora, musically and monetarily. Slobin (ibid.) argues that klezmer’s popularity in St Petersburg perhaps marks ‘the convergence of lifestyles across the transatlantic space as the deep divisions of the twentieth century recede in memory’. With the new-found economic successes of Delhi’s elite, perhaps a similar transatlantic convergence of lifestyles is occurring. Jain (2001) argues that this is the case in Delhi. She observes that in the 1980s visitors used to even bring imported luxury toilet paper with them to Delhi. Now, she remarks, everything from foie gras to tahini to techno clubs is at the disposal of Delhi’s elites. Asian electronic music is seen by its participants as emblematic of this convergence.

CONCLUSION

What link do I have anyway to the world’s largest democracy that is ever worth more than a 49-cent-per minute calling card?

That is why

I sit here turning the pages of my *India Abroad*. (Kumar 1999–2000)

Kumar’s poetry succinctly captures the feelings of displacement felt by many in the Asian diaspora. In this poem the connection to ‘homeland’ becomes a copy of the diasporic American newspaper, *India Abroad*. This article has explored how Asian electronic music has marked a turn from this disconnection. Interactions between the Asian diaspora and the subcontinent

via the scene's creative aural engagements have replaced the severance marked by Kumar's poem. The diaspora and 'homeland' have 'reconnected' sonically through Asian electronic music.

From klezmer to Swahili rumba music, communicative musical flows between diaspora and 'homeland' have been critical to postcolonial 'reaffiliations' with a lost precolonial identity. In the case of Asian electronic music in Delhi, the Asian diaspora has been involved in the formation and maintenance of the scene there. The increased availability of new media technologies after the Indian economic liberalization programmes of the early 1990s were instrumental in forming the intense contacts between the diaspora and the subcontinent. Asian electronic music has not only had the ability for the diaspora to connect with the subcontinent, but for the converse as well. Delhi musicians were able to creatively express the current/convergent position of the city's 'nouveau-maharajas'. This article has argued that this push for 'reaffiliation' via the diaspora is a postcolonial process. Specifically, Delhi's elite feel that economic liberalization has been party to significant disjunctures in the city's cultural landscape. Asian electronic music is being read by these individuals as a 'transition' (Ewens 1991) text as Delhi tries to integrate its 'traditional' with liberalization's 'modern'. The music's mixture of cutting bass with sitars, tablas, sarangis and Hindustani vocals is viewed as an aural archetype of this negotiation.

The music's incorporation of (Western) electronic beats such as those found in drum and bass with subcontinentally inspired forms (sitar, ragas and Hindustani vocals for example) has inculcated a feeling of 'pride' amongst many participants in the scene. Many respondents felt that the global rise of Asian electronic music heralded a global appreciation of Indian cultural products as 'equal' rather than as exotica from a 'backward' country. Though respondents argued that Delhi's production and consumption of Asian electronic music reflects India's and the city's successes in economic development, their responses also indicate the development of nationalist sentiments.

Ultimately, this research has found that these interactions between diaspora and 'homeland' have been bilateral in terms of flows and causality. Like klezmer music for St Petersburg's Jews, Delhiwallahs in the scene have felt that Asian electronic music has brought them closer to their 'homeland'. This vanguard of Delhi's educated, elite nouveau-maharajahs are positioning postcolonial urban India as empowered. With the export of Delhi's Asian electronic music worldwide, new perceptions of India are filling the ears of not only the Indian diaspora, but of the numerous fans of Asian electronic music worldwide. This is the next iteration of the communicative exchanges this essay has explored.

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NOTES

1. Vivekanandan (2000) argues that this decision was not wholly unproblematic, arguing that Indian liberalization stemmed from a 'flawed, greed-based' vision of development 'imposed' by the IMF, World Bank and WTO.
2. See Gamre (1991) for an example of direct lobbying for dual citizenship.
3. In this paper 'Asian' and 'South Asian' is used interchangeably.
4. Talvin Singh's album *OK* includes female vocals from Okinawa, the Bandish Projekt compose and sample in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Last, the 'race riots' in Burnley, Bradford, and Oldham have been important to some Asian electronic musicians in the UK.
5. These 'roots' are theoretically reified, but in practice pose very real implications for the identities of producers and consumers.
6. A group vastly different from the city's demographic norm.
7. Residents of Delhi.
8. Taken from the vocal sample, 'Bombay's a Grid, Delhi Swings', by Ajay Naidu on the track 'Bhangra Fever' from the *MIDIval PunditZ* album, *MIDIval PunditZ*.
9. At the expense of New Delhi's poor, who, many commentators such as Vivekanandan (2000) argue, are worse off.
10. The Golden Sounds Band are perhaps the most famous contemporary Swahili rumba outfit, though they are no longer together.
11. This phrase is borrowed from Steward (1999), who uses it as chapter heading.
12. Kanza himself now lives in Paris, a further reflection of the concurrency of diaspora and 'homeland'.
13. Psy-trance originates from the Goa rave/trance scene. It is an international scene, rife with backpackers, Israelis out of military service and young urban Indians. All are there to rave with the aid of cheap acid. See Saldhana (2002, 2005), as well as Noy and Cohen (2005) for more on this scene.
14. This has been done explicitly by some artists such as Badmarsh and Shri, and more subtly by Sitarfunk. The latter shy away from 'preachy' music, believing that their presence as Asian DJs breaks Asian stereotypes at a 'subconscious' level, increasing the real agency of Asians (Saha 2006).
15. Residents of Mumbai/Bombay.
16. These British Asian electronic music producers were all instrumental in the formation of the Asian Underground scene in London in the mid to late 1990s. The Indian-American producers were similarly instrumental in the formation of Asian electronic music scenes in New York City (Zakhm and Kale) and in San Francisco (Dhamaal).
17. The Nasha crew did this with Ustad Sultan Khan Saab in 2005 in Jaipur, India.
18. Their first international gigs included Fabric in London in 1999 and Paisley in New York City in 2001.
19. Interestingly, the usage of *desi* in the subcontinent and diaspora is itself a product of engagement between both groups. In India, the term is used to refer to a villager, whereas in the diaspora, it is used as synonymously with Asian 'homeboy'. The diasporic use of *desi* is now being reappropriated within *bhangra* remix and Asian electronic music scenes in Delhi.
20. Similar changes have occurred between the Chinese diaspora and mainland China in that pre-liberalization late twentieth-century China gave preferential treatment to the diaspora and even their relatives (Thunø 2001). Now the Chinese elite are perhaps on parity or even wealthier than the diaspora.

21. For example, one entry dated 18 April 2006 in the Elevate guestbook reads: ‘Amrita: I’m a new girl in Delhi from London. Any guy wanna show up with me at Elevate?’
22. Identity anonymous as some downloading was done through illegal sources.
23. References to ‘authentic’ were found on the MIDival PunditZ’s guestbook as well as on several websites that reviewed their album, *MIDival PunditZ*.
24. For a discussion on visibility and ‘Asian Kool’ in Britain, see Huq (1996).
25. From 2000 onwards, the MIDival PunditZ received significant attention, including a three-page article in the widely read national magazine *India Today* (11 November 2002 issue). For more on Bhavishyavani, see Lahiri (2003).
26. For example, DJ Kashyap, DJ Sunil, DJ Gladwin, DJ Sachin and DJ Sash mixed an ‘Asian Underground’ set after a rock gig at Krishna Farms, Whitefield, in Bangalore in November 2004.

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