



A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America (Asian American History & Cultu)

Lavina Shankar

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As people from the cultures of the Indian subcontinent increasingly participate in the complex and often heated debates about race and ethnicity in the United States, they confront questions about naming and claiming an identity that designates their group in this country. To be sure, claiming any single identity omits, perhaps threatens to obliterate, the significant political, historical, economic, and religious differences between their countries of origin. However, the term "South Asian" is growing in acceptance among people in this country who trace their heritage to India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Maldives because it acknowledges common interests while it allows for difference. This construction process parallels the gradual acceptance of the term "Asian American" by people primarily of East and Southeast Asian ancestry who found abundant reason to claim a shared identity in dealing with officialdom and an apparently intractable racism in this country. In time, "Asian American" has become a designation of collective pride for a wide range of people.

In academic institutions and society generally, there are vexed questions about the term's inclusiveness and the dominance of established groups over more recent ones. "A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America" concerns itself with the extent to which South Asian Americans are and ought to be included within Asian America as that term is applied to academic programs and admission policies; grassroots community organizing and politics more broadly; and, critical analyses of cultural products. Taken together these essays form a spirited dialogue on the dilemmas of identity politics, coalition building, and diasporics. Author note: Lavina Dhingra Shankar is Assistant Professor of English at Bates College, Maine. Rajini Srikanth is Adjunct Professor of American Studies at Tufts University, Massachusetts.

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