The Politics and Poetics of Indian Digital Diasporas

From Desi to Brown

Edited by Yasmin Jiwani, Arjun Tremblay and Mohita Bhatia

Chapter 1

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Introduction

This collection of essays emerges from a highly successful symposium 'From Desi to Brown and Beyond' that we organised in Montreal, Canada in 2022. The contributors to the symposium highlighted the complex and nuanced digital experiences of South Asian Indian diasporas. The chapters focus on how South Asian groups digitally navigate this complex racial terrain and contest, reinforce, or refract their categorisation as model minorities on the one hand (Saran, 2016; Shankar, 2008), and as inassimilable aliens on the other (Dasgupta, 2006; Jiwani, 2006). The chapters included here chart the range of performances that intersperse the symbolic distance between these 'Desi' and 'Brown.' In so doing, they gesture to what lies 'Beyond.'

This volume also brings together an international network of scholars, both established and emerging, to explore South Asian diasporic communities in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the U.K. The essays herein show how digital spaces sometimes create unprecedented opportunities for diasporic communities to mobilise (multi)cultures, sexuality, race, and queerness within South Asian diasporic communities and to move beyond 'Desi' and 'Brown' as homogenising identifiers. However, the essays also show that digital spaces can be and have been used to reassert internal hegemonies far from homelands.

This collection serves an additional objective, which is to balance a comparative cross-national discussion and contribute to the ongoing development of a 'postcolonial digital pedagogy' (Risam, 2019). In so doing, our aim is to attentively heed the important warning articulated by Risam and Gairola (2019, p. 146): 'As publics look primarily to digital sources for information, scholars have a responsibility, as people equipped with both humanities knowledge and digital skills, to challenge the reproduction of an exclusionary print record in digital form.' Hence, this collection advances methodological eclecticism and centres South Asians' voices, narratives, scholars, and scholarship in the study of the digital milieu. This is particularly important in the current conjuncture, when the COVID-19 pandemic has sharpened the bite of anti-South Asian and anti-Asian racism and when populist movements continue to mobilise under the banner of ethno-nationalisms and univocality (Mallapragada, 2022).

Further, the essays herein also evaluate key arguments on digital spaces/ divides, such as the claims that digital technology is revolutionary in facilitating expressions of identity and politics of diasporic communities (Georgiou, 2013) and that digitalisation of culture and the pervasive use of technologies have transformed interpretations of 'home' and 'belonging' and that they have assumed fluid, non-territorial meanings (Gairola, 2016; Marino, 2015). This anthology is also situated within the ever-changing discourse on the democratic potential of digital media and explores whether the so-called 'third level digital divide' (Ragnedda & Gladkova, 2020), concerning digital platforms' capacity to enhance/diminish self-perception and self-esteem, is being redressed by and within South Asian diasporic communities.

In brief, Australia, Canada, the United States, and the U.K. have been revealed to be what they are – privileged crucibles to white-populated centres shaped by British imperialism – and it is critical to see how diasporic communities are using digital spaces contending with this unvarnished image articulating the richness of their stories in *the* 21st-century mode of communication. Amidst the ongoing discussion on the politics of diversity in contemporary democratic societies, a commonly held assumption was that democracies were only likely to survive and thrive if their constitutive people were largely culturally, linguistically, and religiously homogenous (Lijphart, 1968). This assumption was upended during the latter half of the 20th century and scholars have argued since then (see Taylor & Gutmann, 1994; Kymlicka, 1996; Modood, 2013) that the public recognition of diversity is fundamental to the function and persistence of liberal democracies.

One of the paradoxes of this literature is that while it embraces a view that a democracy is effectively a 'community of communities' (Runnymede Trust & Parekh, 2000), it rarely, if ever, addresses the heterogeneity of immigrant communities, tending instead to treat them instead as highly uniform social units. The discourse of policymakers, for both opponents of immigration and even those considered amongst the most progressive voices regarding immigration and integration, tends to embrace this view of minority communities. In turn, minority-centred policy frameworks hardly ever address intra-community diversity, differences, and exclusions. A central issue that this volume addresses is whether digital platforms reveal a diversity that is obviated in theoretical and policy discussions and, more generally, within the context of majority-minority relations in immigrant-receiving countries where South Asian diasporic communities reside.

Advances in digital technology and social media connectivity have led to revisiting the traditional notion of diaspora and the emergence of snazzy terms such as 'digital diasporas,' 'net diasporas,' or 'smart diasporas.' Although the idea of the digital diaspora has not superseded or trivialised traditional conceptualisations, the wide usage of social media by the various diasporic groups makes it necessary to analyse the quotidian and political lives of these groups in digital and virtual contexts. Here, the digital mediascape's affordances of virtual realities that are closely connected to and intertwined with the politics

of the real world, make it feasible to imagine communities that are bound by networks of connectivity, anchored in the infrastructure of digital communication platforms (Karim, 2007).

An examination of the digitalisation of South Asian diasporic identities is not merely a technological fad but rather points towards a necessary scholarly engagement given the contemporary conjuncture and these diasporic communities' growing social media presence and their intense socio-political engagement with various social media platforms in ways never seen before (Brinkerhoff, 2009). Digitalisation has blurred the boundaries between public and private, thus becoming an embedded and inevitable part of people's everyday lives. As argued by Victoria Bernal (2010), it has become 'the quintessential diasporic medium' as it provides an accessible and unique space for diasporic communities to articulate their identities, construct meanings, develop subjectivities, and negotiate their sense of belonging in complex and interesting ways. Blending the global-local binaries has enabled the diaspora to connect with the ideas of 'home' and identity in hybrid and cosmopolitan ways – to fashion an idea of home, culture, and belonging that is less connected with 'place' and more with ideas, discourse, and politics. An overlap between digital online and offline lives has destabilised and reconstructed the ideas of 'home' or 'nation' – as entities that have become fluid, non-permanent, and elusive. The blending of 'digital' and 'real' worlds has created new meanings of home that go beyond the physical space and lie at the intersections of nostalgia, emotions, politics, culture, and belongings.

A growing and constant presence of South Asian diasporic groups on different digital platforms is illustrative of the ways in which these groups have creatively used the virtual realms to shape, transform, and create their ideas of self-anew, and to talk 'back to the hegemonic Western(ised) selves' in the words of Radhika Gajjala (2004). Although there exists prodigious scholarship separately focusing on the two areas of digital media and South Asian diaspora, not much work has been done to connect digital media with South Asian diasporic expressions of their identities, apart from some leading figures in the area (e.g., Gajjala, Hegde, Mallapragada, Mishra, and others). There is also a paucity of comparative cross-national scholarship as well as a dearth of academic involvement focusing specifically on South Asian digital diasporas in Canada despite the country having one of the largest South Asian populations – one that has a significant presence on different social media platforms.

The digital milieu then provides a unique backdrop to examine how group identities are developed, nurtured, and/or contested, particularly when considering diasporas. On the one hand, it is quite feasible to view digital spaces as hubs for diasporic communities to re-connect with the imaginary of the homeland or to create a new sense of homeland or make tangible a hyphenated existence that speaks to a cosmopolitan hybridity (Mallapragada, 2006). On the other hand, for diasporic communities, the digital milieu also offers unprecedented opportunities to contest monolithic identities, considering both their unique position at the intersection of cultures and identities and their underlying 'outsider' status as immigrant minorities (see Gajjala, 2004b).

Questioning the administrative, census-based categorisation of the 'South Asian' as an unchanging monolith (Carsignol, 2014; Ashutosh, 2014; Brah, 1996), this book explores the plural and polyphonic digital experiences coming from the South Asian peripheries and within South Asian communities. An understanding of how these marginalities are performed, represented, or excluded from the digital spaces can enable conceptualising the experiences of identity and oppression, both within and outside the diasporic communities. It also initiates a meaningful dialogue on what constitutes South Asian diasporic identity (Shukla, 2001; Rai & Reeves, 2008; Sahoo & Sheffer, 2014; Mishra, 2017), the ways in which the process of 'desecularisation' (Bhatia, 2020) and conflicts over devolution and centralisation (Bhatia, 2017) are replicated in digital spaces, and the degree to which the global right-wing backlash against diversity (Farokhi, 2020, 2021; Tremblay, 2019) has penetrated South Asian digital diasporas.

If the digital milieu is a place where any categorical label of South Asian is contested, this raises several questions, most notably: Do South Asian diasporic communities engage the digital milieu in similar or diverse ways? Are the categories 'Desi' and 'Brown' contested (or reinforced) across diasporic communities? Where does the realm of 'Beyond' lie in such a binary? How do the processes of identification, disidentification, and hybridisation span these categories of 'Desi,' 'Brown,' and 'Beyond'? While the category 'Brown' has often been used to collapse and encapsulate non-black and non-white racialised communities (Al-Solaylee, 2016; Prashad, 2000; Badruddoja, 2006; Harpalani, 2015; Modi, 2016), the totalising label of 'Desi' embraces all immigrants from the Indian subcontinent. What, if any, are the new and emerging digital diasporic identities? As Hall (1990, p. 222) suggests, it would be wiser to think 'of identity as a "production" which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.'

The digital engagement of the South Asian diaspora is then a critically important space to explore their digital performances as ever-emerging, fluid and heterogeneous socio-political constructions, fraught with tensions and ambivalence. Although these communities constitute one of the fastest-growing diasporas, scholars (Udupa, 2019; Gajjala, 2019; Davé, 2013; Mallapragada, 2014; Hegde, 2011; Bhardwaj, 2020) have repeatedly pointed out that there is scant scholarly literature available to analyse intersectional experiences and digital negotiations in relation to race, caste, ethnic and sexual identities. Exploring various diasporic digital performances and embodiments, as well as their use of visuals, narratives, texts, music, and enactments, the essays herein lay open the differentiated, layered, and fluid ideas of South Asian senses of belongings. More importantly, these digital embodiments foreground racial, ethnic, religious, gender, queer, national differences, and exclusions, both within and outside the community. The variegated performances of identity, exclusion, and resistance offer pointers towards ideas of 'selves' that are differentiated yet connected at certain points and moments.

Dialogue concerning 'who is excluded' is also extremely relevant to acknowledge while being cognizant that the digital medium is not a power-neutral space (Gajjala, 2013; Dasgupta, 2014; Pearce et al., 2020). Furthermore, the growing use of digital media by these communities during the COVID-19 pandemic reflects the power of digital culture. Never has digital technology been used so effectively – to strengthen links with their homelands as they mourn the loss of lives of their loved ones, document growing incidents of racism, and perform resistance.

Digital Encounters – Personal Reflections

Our shared collective interest and lived experience as individuals who are either 'brown' or who may visibly fit the census categories either of 'South Asian' or' mixed-race' (i.e., South Asian and white), is what motivated us to engage in this project. Despite sharing certain commonalities with 'brown' or 'South Asian' identity frameworks, each of us has a different lived experience, rootedness, and familiarity with all things Indian or South Asian more broadly. One of us was born in Uganda, East Africa, three generations after the ancestral migration, another was born in the United States and raised in Canada, and another was born in India. Standpoint is critical to any feminist analysis. Thus, we begin with this background to illustrate the different standpoints that we occupy in the continuum of the hyphen – situating us at different points between a rather fictitious 'authentic Indian,' to those who have immigrated from the Indian homeland – as in Desi, to those characterised as 'brown' – an all-encompassing phenotypic attribute that is neither white nor black, but an in-between. The 'Beyond' category consists of those of us who are brown and have a South Asian connection, yet do not fit into any of the above-mentioned stereotypical 'Desi' categorisations! This volume is, thus, an attempt to explore the dispersed and differentiated nature of South Asian-ness while disrupting the canonical and homogenising ideas of the South Asian diaspora. It examines South Asianness as a multifocal practice or process rather than a fixed category or label.

LatinX feminist theorist Cherrie Moraga (1981, p. 23), reminds us, 'A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives-our skin colour, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings-all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience.' It is this attempt to make sense of our contradictions – our embrace of things Indian and our rejection, also of things typified as Indian, our situatedness in the Canadian landscape, that underpins our lived experience as diasporic agents. However, unlike the generations that preceded us or those whose realities overlap with ours, we are cognizant of how our experience of the diaspora is influenced by the contemporary features of modernity and neo-modernity at that. The hypermobility and fluidity of the goods, media, travel, extractive labour, and corporeal selves have created conditions not only of a consumer cosmopolitanism, but also of ethnoscapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes,

mediascapes, and financescapes (Appadurai, 1996) that have fostered and nur-tured a range of imagined communities, politically progressive on the one hand, and politically conservative on the other. Between these two ends is a range of other moral suasions and perspectives. This is evident not only in this collection but also among us as the co-editors of this anthology. We hail from different disciplinary – Communication Studies, Political Science, Sociology – and socio-cultural-linguistic backgrounds. By way of a more grounded introduction to the topic of this volume, we take this opportunity to share our personal political encounters with the realm of Indian digital diasporas.

Yasmin Jiwani

Intersectionality as a framework of analysis demands that we take into consid-eration the intersecting influences of age, gender, religion, class, race, sexuality, and social location. In reminiscing on my encounters with many of the digital Indian diasporas, I am reminded of how age is a significant factor. Growing up with analogue media, the digital turn did not hit me until much later in life when I was a graduate student exploring the influence of Bollywood cinema on immi-grant South Asian youth. That's when email and listservs were prominent vehi-cles of communication, laying the groundwork for imagined communities. Radhika Gajjala's insightful work on listservs is an entry point marking that digital turn. However, the listservs that I subscribed to were not focused on Indian cultural commodities, but rather on political struggles. At the time, it was the Zapatista movement and its use of alternative media to disseminate its man-ifesto and publicise the struggles of indigenous peoples against the Mexican state (see Downing, 2018). Clemencia Rodríguez (2001) describes this as citi-zen media.

Fast forward to the introduction of DVDs in the global mediascape and their impact on my South Asian immigrant youth interviewees. As Amita Handa (2003) and Faiza Hirji (2010) have shown, the influence of Bollywood on the diasporic South Asian youth cannot be underestimated. Indeed, in a context of violent racism and exclusionary policies, Bollywood became the new point of reference, generating a shared imagined community. Pushed by the racist rejection of the dominant Canadian society, the uptake of an ascribed South Asian identity was something that third-generation diasporic Indians like me had no choice but to accept. Colourism, as the literature dealing with the South Asian diaspora shows, is pervasive within Indian communities' writ large. Being darker than my counterparts firmly fixed me as a South Asian 'Indian' both within and outside my community. For those of us who were lighter skinned, the ability to pass off as something other than Indian afforded its own set of privileges. I recall friends and family who claimed to be Iranian or Italian, rather than being categorised as South Asian, a stigmatised label in Canada at the time.

The first digital turn then ushered in a heightened exposure of digital media to connect with India and all things Indian. Indian fashion and cuisine were part

of the digital fare for digitally literate nomads. With the second digital turn, this has expanded to include a more politicised fare that was contingent on finding a sense of belonging and contesting racially based exclusions. The second digital turn, I would argue, has more broadly embraced the dictum that the 'political is personal,' in contrast to the first digital turn where the prevailing ethos was the feminist adage that the 'personal is political.' This is reflective of the personalised political action frames that individuals mobilise in their use of digital technologies to promote social causes and movements (Bennett, 2012). Here, as Krishnan, in this volume, identifies as identification based on 'skinfolk' – as Brown – became more prominent within the Canadian setting. This contrasts with the U.K. setting, where Black as an umbrella identification of all people of colour was more salient (see Yoganathan's chapter in this volume). I do not want to suggest that these turns are mutually exclusive in their orientations, but rather to emphasise how the second turn, with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies, augmented a politicised personal.

Within the feminist circles I travelled in, this took the form of listservs but also, more generally, to digitally archiving submerged histories. A sustained effort to digitally document the histories of South Asian immigrant groups in Canada and the United States was the most obvious manifestation of this. At Simon Fraser University, the history of the tragedy of the Komagatu Maru[1] has been digitised by the South Asian Canadian Digital Archive, and in the United States, a similar effort has been made by the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA).

However, while these digital archives focus on the histories of South Asian communities in Canada and the United States, they remain separate from the digitisation of specific cultural initiatives. Here, I want to turn to Rungh magazine as an example of this turn. As a contributor to Rungh magazine, which at the time of its inception in 1992 was originally titled the South Asian Quarterly of Culture, Comment and Criticism, I was motivated by the magazine's inclusive ethos – embracing all South Asians and contesting the racism that South Asian communities were encountering. As the editors of Rungh recall: 'Rungh was about documenting and creating "documents"; it was about dialogues, activism and creating a forum for discussion; finally, Rungh was about defining and challenging definitions. East-Indian. Paki. Indo-Canadian. Curryeater. These were the terms used to describe us South Asians' (Jiwani & Bernard-Brind'Amour, 2023, p. 246). The digitisation of Rungh has been a more recent effort as part of preserving the cultural memory of activist work that took place in Vancouver during the 1990s. However, Rungh itself has also transformed from a specifically South-Asian Canadian magazine into one that is more broadly catered to Indigenous, Black, and people of colour (IBPOC). While this is not entirely due to a digital turn, there is no doubt that the magazine's evolution has been influenced by access to and use of digital media, enabling it to reach a broader audience and provide more inclusive coverage.

The move from the personal is political to the political is personal is also evident in the social movements that have emerged on various social platform

sites, as for example, X (formerly Twitter). It is apparent that one of the affordances of digital media is that they lend themselves so well to generating a sedimented, collective memory of the layered histories of exclusion and violence (see Shruti Devgan's chapter in this volume). In tracing the digital activism that emerged after the Quebec Mosque shooting, which resulted in the murders of six Muslim men and twenty others who were severely injured, this layering was evident with the call and recall of previous instances of such violence such that a submerged history was reinvoked repeatedly (Jiwani & Al-Rawi, 2020). Similarly, the killing of the Afzaal-Salman family in London, Ontario, demonstrated how digital media was mobilised to express grief, solidarity, and collective mourning (Jiwani, 2022a), much as in the case of the victims of the Christchurch Mosque shooting in New Zealand. Hence, aside from the most immediately impacted, such networks of mourning also include what Harju describes as the communities of 'weak ties' (Harju, 2015; see also Döveling et al., 2018) and are constitutive of what Papacharissi (2016) describes as networked publics. That aside, the visual aspect of digital media enhances the shared universe of meaning through the circulation of memes and other digital artefacts (Jiwani, 2022b). Notwithstanding this potential of digital media, as Farokhi's chapter in this volume demonstrates, these affective networks can also generate extremist echo chambers that undermine the more progressive possibilities of different social media platforms (Jiwani, 2021).

In exploring these and other subaltern contestations of hegemonic power, we are going beyond the categories of Desi and Brown to a 'Beyond.' Indeed, this call for a transnational solidarity that transcends group-based identities is clearly apparent in the chants expressed at protest marches taking place globally against the ongoing genocide of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, a chant that asserts that 'we are all Palestinians.' The chant expresses a concretisation of a shared humanity that takes as its point of departure a recognition of the specificity and particularity of the Palestinian experience of oppression (see also Thakur's and Verma's respective chapters in this volume). Hence, we are Desi, Brown and Beyond, diasporic Indians who are also Brown and Beyond the classifications imposed on us!

Mohita Bhatia

This project resonates with my personal location and experiences as a South Asian Indian who is based in Canada. As a sociologist in academia, I have always analysed identity as performative, dialogic, and non-cohesive. This idea is not just limited to theory but is embodied in my real-life practices. In different contexts, I have variously performed my 'Indian,' 'South Asian,' 'Brown,' 'diasporic,' or cosmopolitan hybrid identity. Before Canada, I had lived and worked in several contexts outside my country of origin – Cambridge in the U.K., Lausanne in Switzerland, and California in the United States. I enacted and performed Britishness, without being overtly aware of my identity practices. When in Lausanne, I found it challenging yet enjoyed the French culturalscapes.

In California, I was considered a member of the Indian/South Asian diaspora in a broader state context, yet I performed a non-diasporic local identity in my locality in Santa Clara inhabited mainly by 'Desis' most of whom – unlike me – were 'techies' (working in the I.T. sector). I remember talking to a friend and mentioning, 'Sometimes I forget I am living in the United States. Santa Clara feels like living in India.' When I visit 'home' in India every few years, I rejoice in my 'Indian' identity, fulfil my desire to be at home in Jammu, where I hail from, and lose myself in the comforts of cultural familiarity while also simultaneously feeling intrigued about how this socio-political landscape has changed much beyond my imagination. I often feel that this is 'home,' yet not the home I left but one that changes every time I visit – politically, aesthetically as well as culturally. The categories Brown, Desi, or South Asian become trifling in these moments – empty words that carry no meaning. But when I return to Canada, these interchanging but sometimes contesting categories become lived realities, differently experienced in various moments. Deriving a sense of belonging from my university and the scenic city of Halifax, Canada also becomes 'home,' yet a space where I am still trying to find my roots. Who am I? Where is home? Is home a place or a feeling or a political identity? Where do I belong? Am I an Indian more than a South Asian, or is it the other way around? How do I comprehend and derive meaning from this always 'incomplete' hybrid sense of 'self'? Like many other members of the diaspora, I have no definite answers since multiple mobilities make identity an elusive and ever-becoming category – never complete or comprehensible. This intangibility of diasporic identity offers a sense of liberation as well as loss – as one belongs everywhere and nowhere. It is an ambiguous space yet overtly political that lies at the intersections of gender, caste, colour, class, and nationality. As a sociologist, I am intrigued by the ongoing and ever-innovative political and social constructions of what it means to be a diasporic South Asian. I understand these constructions from a symbolic interactionist and interpretive perspective – where meanings are collectively shared as well as contested as a result of a dialogue both within and outside the diasporic community.

A predominance of digital media and its effortless blurring into our real worlds has further sharpened these ambiguities, bringing into light many contested ways of being and belonging to the overlapping South Asian, Brown, Desi, and Beyond categories. In the digital world, the idea of 'home' or 'India' or 'South Asian' is differently constructed – it is fictionalised, romanticised, politicised, and hybridised. I place myself as part of this digital diasporic space that enables me to analyse interesting digital imaginations and constructions. What is this digital South Asian diasporic space? Is it a space that has been claimed by the voices from the peripheries (Dalit, queer, or feminist voices) and locates diasporic conversations in the structures of power and exclusions, both within and outside the diasporic community? Is it a realm for South Asian comedians that disrupt the cliched White, Western tags and labels assigned to the diasporic bodies and their experiences? Or does this digital space offer a unifying and expansive platform to the conservative, ultra-nationalist, and

casteist nationalist imaginations and discourse? Or is it a perplexing space that connects spirituality or 'yoga' to the ideas of Brown and Desi, thus both resisting and reinforcing the Orientalist conceptions of 'South Asia'? I locate myself as a researcher, consumer, and participant in this fractured and intriguing digital space. Based in Canada, my digital presence co-exists with my real lived experiences as a South Asian Indian woman. My two selves – digital and offline – blend into one another and shape my diasporic identity as liminal, political, and emotive. This liminality is further complicated when my disciplinary location as a sociologist liberates me from an ethnocentric grounding and enables an expansive sense of connection with global struggles, anti-racist movements, and politics of the marginalised.

It is this personal experience as a South Asian located in Canada, as well as the experience of other editors of the volume, that underlies the inspiration for this anthology. We feel that our personal experience is shared by many other South Asians similarly located in Canada. This anthology not only aims at capturing this experience but also unravelling the heterogeneities, contradictions, and political struggles that the diasporic community undergoes. The anthology, as one would notice, blends diasporic and political imaginary of the editors with those of the contributors who explore the continually contested meanings of 'South Asianness.' True to our varied experiences, this volume speaks to the members of the diaspora who differently fit into yet often escape the standardised tags of 'South Asian,' 'Brown,' or 'Desi.' It foregrounds not only the theoretical conversations but also the emotive and enacted diasporic practices.

Arjun Tremblay

In adding the category of 'Beyond' to the typology of 'Desi' and 'Brown,' one of our objectives as editors of this volume was to open room for discussion on representations and self-representations of South Asian identities that may be simultaneously embedded and dis-embedded from the diasporic community. To be more precise, the 'Beyond' identity is one that tends to resonate with people who have been racialised either by the receiving society or by the diasporic community itself and who may have little to any connection to (and who may have never even visited) their parents' and grandparents' homeland. This identity also applies to those of us whose mixed cultural, ethnic, and racial background situates us in the liminal space between majority and minority (diasporic) communities and whose full membership in either of these communities is often brought into question (either through self-reflection or by members of the majority or diasporic community themselves).

Although a 'Beyond' identity stands out from the more widely embraced or widely imposed identities of 'Desi' and 'Brown,' it might yet prove to the more encompassing of all three identity categories. As time progresses, so too does the distance increase between descendants of the first members of diasporic communities and their ancestors' 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2016).

And, mixed cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds are becoming a permanent feature of the immigrant-receiving societies that are home to large diasporic communities. For example, recent census data in Canada – home to one of the largest South Asian diasporic communities – reveals that close to 36–40% of all Canadians identify themselves as multi-ethnic (see Bascaramurty, 2018; Norris, 2022).

If the 'Beyond' identity category continues to increase in importance it is also likely to challenge certain long-held assumptions about the recognition of diversity and processes of integration in immigrant-receiving societies. More specifically, the 'Beyond' identity category can bring to light the limitations of the term immigrant and of the underlying assumptions of liberal multiculturalism, a model of integration long assumed as the ideal way to reconcile individual rights with group-differentiated rights in deeply diverse societies. For one, by showing that a member of the polity can simultaneously belong to the majority and a minority, the 'Beyond' identity category shows that 'immigrant' can be an unnuanced and problematic concept which may, in the end, be more useful for othering segments of the population rather than for accurately describing them. Following from this, the 'Beyond' identity category also complexifies liberal multiculturalism's (see Kymlicka, 1996) oversimplified conception of deeply diverse societies as being composed of a majority nation and a (possible) combination of three minorities: territorially concentrated minority nations, Indigenous peoples, and polyethnic minorities (i.e., minority groups borne out of immigration). In brief, the 'Beyond' category suggests that in deeply diverse societies, there is neither a homogenous majority nation nor are there coherent and cohesive polyethnic minorities. The 'Beyond' identity category also strikes at the heart of all models of integration (e.g., multiculturalism, assimilation, civic integration, interculturalism), each of which assumes that it is possible (either by recognising or by eliminating difference) to ensure full membership in the society and to a crystalise a sense of national belonging. The 'Beyond' category exposes the deficiencies of integrationist models that have received full-throated support from a range of actors by showing that, no matter what, some of us are likely to remain perpetual outsiders.

As we shall see, some of the chapters in this book provide us with thicker descriptions of what it means to be 'Beyond' in the third decade of the 21st century and, more specifically, how 'Beyond' identities are portrayed and contested in the digital sphere. Our hope is that these chapters will also bring to light the transgressive potential of this identity category and how it may also help us to review and, potentially, reconceptualise our notions of diversity and belonging.

Chapter Overview

We begin with Shruti Devgan's chapter on 'Digital Crevices: Sikh Diasporic and Digital Memories of the 1984 Violence,' which delves into the digital deconstruction and reconstruction of narratives of 1984 – a year marked by

the Indian Army's attack on Darbar Sahib (the Golden Temple), the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, and the subsequent massacre of Sikhs in north and central India. More specifically, Devgan examines how six websites run and operated by diasporic Sikhs exploit 'digital crevices' and, in so doing, contribute to the development of a digital counter-narrative about 1984.

In 'South Asian Digital Diaspora and New Wave of Subalternity,' Arvind Kumar Thakur introduces readers to Dalit-Bahujan and anti-caste collective digital activism in the South Asian diaspora and the concomitant development of a digital 'Subaltern Public Sphere.' Thakur's chapter shows how subaltern mobilisation internationalises caste by bringing it into the digital arena and, in so doing, troubles the monolithic image of the South Asian diaspora and its representation/self-representation as a 'model minority.' The chapter also discusses the developing intersections between diasporic Dalit-Bahujan and anti-caste collective activism and African American mobilisation.

With the rising tide of Islamophobia on a global scale, Zeinab Farokhi's chapter on 'New Methods for Analysing Digital Islamophobia: Approaches, Challenges, and Opportunities,' introduces the foundations for a new methodological approach to the study of digital Islamophobia on the Twitter/X platform. This new methodological approach is composed of four interrelated frameworks (i.e., digital governmentality, affective alignment, a gendered lens, and affective manipulation). Farokhi argues that, taken together, these four interrelated frameworks can help us to overcome some of the challenges associated with studying digital Islamophobia and may also help anti-Islamophobia actors to combat online hate more effectively.

Prakash Krishnan's chapter on 'Digital Disidentifications: A Case Study of South Asian Instagram Community Archives,' is based on a digital ethnography of how South Asian Instagram community archives represent the identities of South Asians and South Asian diasporic communities. Krishnan argues that these community archives present evidence both of 'disidentification' and of the construction of South Asian as 'a personalised and nonspecific cultural and regional identity.' In brief, the chapter points to the potential for 'South Asian' to be a mutable and inclusive digital identity.

In 'Brown Rang: Popular Perception of "Brown" as a Marker for South Asian Identity,' Tarishi Verma explores feminist Instagram accounts that identify themselves as 'Brown.' She examines how Brown has become an umbrella term for capturing the diversity of South Asian women in the global diaspora. However, while liberating as an identifier, Verma problematises how the term 'Brown' negates the history of colourism in India and how its lure as an identifier emanates from South Asian women living in the West. 'Brown,' she argues, conceals a certain kind of privilege.

Focusing on diasporic soundscapes, Nimalan Yoganathan's chapter '"There's no singular Brown voice": Sounding out a multiplicity of South Asian diasporic identities through the music of Sarathy Korwar,' takes a deep dive into London-based percussionist Sarathy Korwar's album More Arriving. Yoganathan argues

that Korwar's collaboration with Aklesh Sutar (aka MC Mawali) is representative of a 'political Brown aurality' that draws a link between diaspora and homeland and that challenges hegemonic representations of Brownness. The chapter then concludes with an extensive examination of Korwar's contributions to the development of online counterpublics.

Faiza Hirji's chapter on '"Anything to Build a Better Future": South Asian Celebrities for a New Era,' examines the online activity and profiles (on Twitter/X and Instagram) of three celebrities in the diaspora: Lilly Singh, Riz Ahmed, and Maitreyi Ramakrishnan. Hirji's chapter delves into the pressures and social, political, and cultural constraints that these diasporic celebrities face in developing their own self-representations. The chapter also shows that all three celebrities have developed a fluid and hybrid identity and serve as role models for diasporic youth. Hirji concludes by discussing the identity/work that these celebrities must do as people of colour in White-Hollywood.

Continuing this theme, Radha Sarma Hegde and Noopur Raval's chapter 'Digital dreaming and diasporic tech icons: reading Sundar Pichai's corporate ascent as an aspirational template,' explores another dimension of the diaspora by focusing on a 'digital rockstar': Sundar Pichai, the chief executive of Alphabet and Google. The chapter discusses Pichai's meteoric rise and celebrity status with the main aim of addressing how the arc of Pichai's ascent is narrativised in the United States. The chapter concludes by highlighting the narrative of merit in the American and Indian I.T. sectors and how Pichai's self-representation may occlude a more complex and challenging reality.

The volume concludes with a brief postscript highlighting the unifying threads running through the different chapters. Digital platforms clearly afford diasporic communities the tools to assert, resist, reinvent, and reimagine ideas and identities. However, the way in which diasporic groups use these platforms is contingent on their location, the issues they face in their contextual surroundings, as well as the accessibility and availability of these technologies. As the following chapters demonstrate, the politics and performances of Indian digital diasporas is a constantly evolving and creative process roaming the continuum from Desi to Brown and Beyond.

Note

1 The Komagatu Maru was a ship that was denied docking in Vancouver's harbour in 1914. It was forced to sail back to India after a protracted siege where its passengers were prohibited from landing onshore. Upon return, the remaining passengers were killed by the Indian authorities. See https://sacda.ca/exhibits/km/index.php (accessed 2024-04-24).

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