

Shalini Shankar. *Desi Land: Teen Culture, Class and Success in Silicon Valley*, Duke University Press, 2008. 264 pp., \$22.95 paper.

Shalini Shankar begins her book by locating her own positionality of growing up in a predominantly white, middle-class high school in suburban New York versus the study's main focus of South Asian youth in Silicon Valley's mostly ethnic neighborhoods. Shankar was encouraged by her Indian, immigrant family to socialize with other South Asians, similar to the youth she studies; however, she clearly notes the stark differences in the researcher and subject divisions. Shankar employs an unusual anthropological approach to study Desi youth in the Silicon Valley by historically contextualizing the economic success of the South Asian community while presenting the sometimes destructive behavior of the youth. These behaviors include drug use, gossip, inter-youth and inter-generational tensions. This study was completed during the 1999-2001, at the height of the "dot.com" boom. Shankar seems to develop a genuine bond with the youth and organizes the data and research in a methodological, organized, and analytical way. The scholarly contribution she makes to South Asian American Studies and Women's Studies is concrete and evidenced by

various points that follow. She also provides a significant insight into inter-generation bonding, although her discussion of slang language within the Desi youth culture remains somewhat reductive.

Shankar's analysis of a historic time period in the Silicon Valley is relevant and groundbreaking for the Desi community in the tradition of Sunaina Maira's *Desis in the House* and Vijay Prashad's *Karma of Brown Folks*. Similar to Maira's groundbreaking scholarship about Desi youth and club culture, Shankar successfully addresses societal pressures, the technology industry, class division, gender, familial roles, linguistic codes, and inter-community tensions. More specifically, her analysis emphasizes four main areas: 1) linguistic styles as subversive; 2) self-segregation in high schools; 3) notions of familial shame and gossip as tools of control; and 4) the "grey sector" as upward mobility. In the Indian community, these may seem areas of common knowledge; however, in the world of academia, Shankar is unique in analyzing the positionality of South Asian American youth culture in the Silicon Valley by interrogating the racialization of South Asian Americans as well as the gender and class boundaries they challenge in the American public schools. She successfully contextualizes the model minority experience of Asian Americans by explaining how East Asian and South Asian groups were chosen to participate in "Multicultural Day" over what was viewed by administrators as the more militant groups such as Black Student Union and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). This hierarchal racialization by administrators in the public school system is one example of how South Asian Americans are viewed by the mainstream in Silicon Valley as the model minority. At the same time, Shankar debunks this myth by interviewing South Asian American drug users and youth that regularly lie to their parents in order to pursue sexual and social relationships. Although Shankar's research is on the forefront in this area, there are themes that could use

clarification and further interrogation.

Shankar describes the process by which South Asian families consume Bollywood films and then analyzes this consumption as a form of bonding within the immigrant families. However, the so-called bonding that takes place with her subjects needs to be scrutinized and analyzed at a more specific level. While the bonding and nostalgia that takes place over Bollywood may be occurring, the types of connections that take place between the families need to be further investigated. For example, are heteronormative, patriarchal structures and agendas being encouraged for South Asian youth through the viewing of Bollywood cinema? Shankar leaves us with a superficial understanding of what types of bonding occur in the lives of South Asian American families. In addition, her use of slang language becomes repetitive and does not investigate the relationship between the South Asian American, African American and Latino communities. One Latino administrator she interviews mentions that he commonly mistook the South Asian youth for Latinos until they spoke, but inter-ethnic relationships and the importance of hip hop as empowerment are never discussed in Shankar's study. This potential for understanding the inter-racial relationships could be expanded upon to include tensions and collaborations.

Shakar's book is an important contribution to the understanding of race, class, gender, immigration, ethnicity and socio-economic status of the South Asian immigrant community. The multiple analyses that Shankar undertakes expand the current youth scholarship and challenge existing notions of the model minority myth as it is applied to South Asians in the United States. Furthermore, her scholarship offers an important dimension to the fields of Asian American Studies, Women's Studies, and Anthropology.

Gitanjali Singh
California State University, Long Beach