

# South Asian Music And The Politics Of Belonging In Britain

South Asian music has a rich history in Britain, and it continues to play a vital role in the cultural landscape of the country. From traditional folk music to modern fusion, South Asian music has evolved and adapted, reflecting the experiences of generations of immigrants and their descendants. In this article, we will explore the politics of belonging in Britain through the lens of South Asian music, examining how it has been used to assert identity, challenge stereotypes, and navigate issues of migration and assimilation.

## The Roots of South Asian Music in Britain

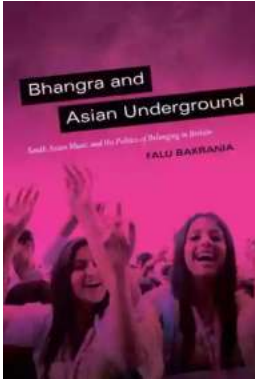
The arrival of South Asian immigrants in Britain can be traced back to the mid-19th century when sailors and traders from the Indian subcontinent settled in port cities like Liverpool and London. These early settlers brought with them their music and dance traditions, providing the foundation for the thriving South Asian music scene in Britain today.

One of the earliest forms of South Asian music to gain popularity in Britain was Indian classical music. Hindustani and Carnatic classical music traditions were taught and performed in small communities, providing a sense of cultural continuity for immigrants far away from their homeland. These classical music concerts and recitals not only served as cultural gatherings but also showcased the artistic talents of South Asian musicians to a wider British audience.

## **Bhangra and Asian Underground: South Asian Music and the Politics of Belonging in Britain**

by Jacqueline Mroz (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.2 out of 5



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Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
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## Challenging Stereotypes Through Fusion

In the 1960s and 1970s, a new generation of South Asian musicians emerged in Britain who sought to challenge stereotypes and create a unique musical identity for themselves. This led to the rise of fusion music, blending traditional South Asian music with Western genres such as jazz, rock, and reggae.

The fusion movement not only allowed South Asian musicians to experiment and express their creativity but also served as a means of asserting their British identity. By incorporating elements of both their South Asian heritage and the British musical landscape, these musicians were able to navigate the complexities of belonging and challenge the notion of a single cultural identity.

## From Bhangra to Bollywood

In the 1980s and 1990s, South Asian music in Britain witnessed another significant evolution with the rise of Bhangra music. Originating from the Punjab region of India and Pakistan, Bhangra fused traditional folk music with modern Western beats, creating an infectious sound that became a symbol of South Asian cultural pride.

Bhangra music quickly gained popularity in the British music scene, transcending cultural boundaries and attracting a diverse audience. It became the soundtrack of British South Asian diaspora, often performed at weddings, parties, and festivals. The success of Bhangra paved the way for the inclusion of South Asian music in mainstream British culture.

Another major influence on the South Asian music scene in Britain was the rise of Bollywood films. Bollywood music, with its catchy melodies and vibrant choreography, captivated audiences not only in South Asia but also among British South Asians. The popularity of Bollywood music led to the emergence of British-Asian artists who created their own unique blend of South Asian and Western pop music.

## **South Asian Music and Migration**

South Asian music in Britain has always been deeply intertwined with the experiences of migration. For many immigrants, music served as a powerful tool to cope with the challenges of settling in a new country and to maintain a sense of connection with their roots.

As the South Asian diaspora in Britain grew, so did the diversity of music genres and styles. From traditional qawwali and ghazals to contemporary hip-hop and R&B, South Asian musicians in Britain continue to explore and innovate, creating new fusion genres that reflect their unique experiences of migration and belonging.

## **A Platform for Political Expression**

South Asian music in Britain has also been used as a platform for political expression. Artists have used their music to address issues of racism,

discrimination, and social inequality, giving a voice to marginalized communities and raising awareness about important social and political issues.

One example is the Asian Dub Foundation, a British music group known for their politically charged lyrics and fusion of diverse musical styles. They have been at the forefront of the fight against racism and have used their music as a tool for activism and education.

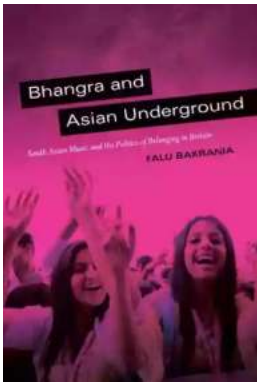
## **The Future of South Asian Music in Britain**

The future of South Asian music in Britain is promising. As the South Asian diaspora continues to grow and evolve, the music scene will continue to thrive. New generations of British South Asian musicians will undoubtedly create their own unique blend of traditional and contemporary sounds, reflecting their experiences of navigating multiple identities and belonging.

South Asian music will also play a crucial role in shaping the broader British music scene, as artists from diverse backgrounds collaborate and fuse different genres. The dynamic and ever-evolving nature of South Asian music will ensure its continued relevance and contribution to the cultural fabric of Britain.

South Asian music in Britain has a rich history filled with cultural significance, personal expression, and social activism. Through its evolution and adaptation, it has provided a powerful means of asserting identity, challenging stereotypes, and navigating the complexities of migration and belonging.

As South Asian music continues to flourish in Britain, it will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in shaping the cultural landscape of the country and promoting a more inclusive and diverse society.



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Asian Underground music—a fusion of South Asian genres with western breakbeats created for the dance club scene by DJs and musicians of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi descent—went mainstream in the U.K. in the late 1990s. Its success was unprecedented: British bhangra, a blend of Punjabi folk music with hip-hop musical elements, was enormously popular among South Asian communities but had yet to become mainstream. For many, the widespread attention to Asian Underground music signaled the emergence of a supposedly new, tolerant, and multicultural Britain that could finally accept South Asians. Interweaving ethnography and theory, Falu Bakrania examines the social life of British Asian musical culture to reveal a more complex and contradictory story of South Asian belonging in Britain. Analyzing the production of bhangra and Asian Underground music by male artists and its consumption by female club-goers, Bakrania shows that gender, sexuality, and class intersected in ways that profoundly shaped how young people interpreted “British” and “Asian” identity and negotiated, sometimes violently, contests about ethnic authenticity, sexual morality, individual expression, and political empowerment.



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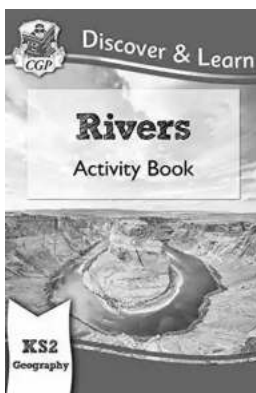
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