

Reading List for

Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation

Nonfiction

The World Next Door: South Asian American Literature and the Idea of America

Rajini Srikanth, Sucheng Chan (ed), David Palumbo-Liu (ed)

2005

Drawing on the cosmopolitan sensibility of scholars like Anthony Appiah, Vinay Dharwadker, Martha Nussbaum, Bruce Robbins, and Amartya Sen, this book argues that to read the body of South Asian American literature justly, one must engage with the urgencies of places as diverse as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Burma, Pakistan, and Trinidad. Poets, novelists, and playwrights like Indran Amirthanayagam, Meena Alexander, Amitav Ghosh, Michael Ondaatje, Shani Mootoo, Amitava Kumar, Tahira Naqvi, and Sharbari Ahmed exhort North American residents to envision connectedness with inhabitants of other lands.

Karma of Brown Folk

Vijay Prashad

2001

"How does it feel to be a problem?" asked W. E. B. Du Bois of black Americans in his classic *The Souls of Black Folk*. A hundred years later, Vijay Prashad asks South Asians "How does it feel to be a solution?" In this kaleidoscopic critique, Prashad looks into the complexities faced by the members of a "model minority"-one, he claims, that is consistently deployed as "a weapon in the war against black America."

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOwjiA2nSFo>

Bengali Harlem and the Lost History of South Asian America

Vivek Bald

2013

Vivek Bald's meticulous reconstruction reveals a lost history of South Asian sojourning and life-making in the United States. At a time when Asian immigrants were vilified and criminalized, Bengali Muslims quietly became part of some of America's most iconic neighborhoods of color, from Tremé in New Orleans to Detroit's Black Bottom, from West Baltimore to Harlem.

Preview of *Bengali Harlem* documentary: <http://bengaliharlem.com/?p=24>

A Part, Yet Apart: South Asian Americans in Asian America

Lavina Dhingra Shankar, Rajini Srinanth

1998

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.

India in the West: South Asians in America

Ronald T. Takaki

1995

This overview of the Asian Indian experience in the United States describes how, when, & why South Asians came to this country & the problems they have confronted.

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhjUrYqwPvs>

Whistling in the Dark (21 Queer Interviews)

Raj Rao

2009

Whistling in the Dark: Twenty One Queer Interviews features gay narratives from India and other countries through 20 interviews with homosexual/bi-sexual men and one woman.

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLDpV5jfag0>

Fasting for Ramadan

Kazim Ali

2011

Fasting for Ramadan is a chronicle of daily meditations, during two cycles of the 30-day rite of daytime abstinence required by Ramadan for purgation and prayer. Estranged in certain ways from his family's cultural traditions when he was younger, Ali has in recent years re-embraced the Ramadan ritual, and brings an extraordinary delicacy of reflection, a powerfully inquiring mind, and the linguistic precision and ardor of a superb poet.

Fiction

Living in America: Poetry and Fiction by South Asian American Writers

Roshni Rustomji-Kerns

1995

Perceptions and realities of life in North America are interwoven with memories of South Asia in this unique anthology. Most of the short stories and poems deal explicitly with South Asian American experiences, but from all emerge the evocative themes of love, loss, exile, nostalgia, loneliness, and renewal.

Miss New India

Bharati Mukherjee

2011

Anjali Bose's prospects don't look great. Born into a traditional lower-middle-class family, she lives in a backwater town with only an arranged marriage on the horizon. But her ambition, charm, and fluency in language do not go unnoticed by her charismatic and influential expat teacher, Peter Champion. And champion her he does, both to powerful people who can help her along the way and to Anjali herself, stirring in her a desire to take charge of her own destiny.

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4y56BERx2E0>

NPR Review: <http://www.npr.org/2011/05/27/136723353/review-miss-new-india>

Karma and Other Stories

Rishi Reddi

2007

In this sparkling collection, award-winning writer Rishi Reddi weaves a multigenerational tapestry of interconnected lives, depicting members of an Indian American community struggling to balance the demands of tradition with the allure of Western life.

Interview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afF_NldqpY8

Blog talk radio interview with Rishi Reddi: <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/book-club-girl/2009/01/26/rishi-reddi-interviewed-about-her-book-karma-and-other-stories>

The Namesake

Jhumpa Lahiri

2004

In *The Namesake*, Lahiri enriches the themes that made her collection an international bestseller: the immigrant experience, the clash of cultures, the conflicts of assimilation, and, most poignantly, the tangled ties between generations. Here again Lahiri displays her deft touch for the perfect detail -- the fleeting moment, the turn of phrase -- that opens whole worlds of emotion.

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCORnF2Y74w>

Interpreter of Maladies

Jhumpa Lahiri

1999

Navigating between the Indian traditions they've inherited and the baffling new world, the characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's elegant, touching stories seek love beyond the barriers of culture and generations. In "A Temporary Matter," published in *The New Yorker*, a young Indian-American couple faces the heartbreak of a stillborn birth while their Boston neighborhood copes with a nightly blackout. In the title story, an interpreter guides an American family through the India of their ancestors and hears an astonishing confession. Lahiri writes with deft cultural insight reminiscent of Anita Desai and a nuanced depth that recalls Mavis Gallant. She is an important and powerful new voice.

Unaccustomed Earth

Jhumpa Lahiri

2008

These eight stories by beloved and bestselling author Jhumpa Lahiri take us from Cambridge and Seattle to India and Thailand, as they explore the secrets at the heart of family life. Here they enter the worlds of sisters and brothers, fathers and mothers, daughters and sons, friends and lovers. Rich with the signature gifts that have established Jhumpa Lahiri as one of our most essential writers, *Unaccustomed Earth* exquisitely renders the most intricate workings of the heart and mind.

Oleander Girl

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

2014

In this novel, a young woman from a distinguished and orthodox Bengali heritage falls in love with a man from a nouveau-riche business family in Kolkata, a city buffeted by the clash between the old and new ways of life. Set in 2002, in the fraught world of post 9/11 America and in an India torn apart by the Godhra Riots, *Oleander Girl* is an examination of the consequences of intolerance and the cost of desire.

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENpDSmd0BnQ>

The Perfect Man

Naeem Murr

2007

Identity, friendship, and a long-hidden crime lie at the heart of Naeem Murr's captivating novel about five friends growing up in a small 1950s Missouri river town. A contender for the Man Booker Prize, this exhilarating story beautifully evokes the extreme joys, as well as the dark and shameful desires, of childhood.

Interview: <http://midwestgothic.com/2014/11/interview-naeem-murr/>

Blue Boy

Rakesh Satyal

2009

Surrounded by examples of upstanding Indian Americans-in his own home, in his temple, at the weekly parties given by his parents' friends, Kiran nevertheless finds it impossible to get the knack of normalcy. And then one fateful day, a revelation: perhaps his desires aren't too earthly, but too divine.

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDNvtWDryMk>

Cowboys and East Indians

Nina McConigley

2014

Set in Wyoming and India, the short-story collection *Cowboys and East Indians* explores the immigrant experience and the collisions of cultures in the American West as seen through the eyes of outsiders. From motel owners to rig workers, cross-dressers to exchange students, this book examines the rural immigrant experience -- and how identity is shaped by place.

Nina McConigley reading: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_hYmfF-Hg

The Inheritance of Loss

Kiran Desai

2006

In a crumbling, isolated house at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas lives an embittered judge who wants only to retire in peace, when his orphaned granddaughter, Sai, arrives on his doorstep. The judge's cook watches over her distractedly, for his thoughts are often on his son, Biju, who is hopscotching from one gritty New York restaurant to another. Kiran Desai's brilliant novel, published to huge acclaim, is a story of joy and despair. Her characters face numerous choices that majestically illuminate the consequences of colonialism as it collides with the modern world.

Interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvK3X7U5d54>

Essays

The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience

Meena Alexander

Many of the poems and essays in this rich, provocative collection deal with classic immigrant themes of identity, language and dislocation. Alexander starts with intimate concerns-coming to grips with life in a female body, struggling to find an emotional home-but also speaks passionately on broader political themes.

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4AMQpRbceQ>

Children's Books

Mama's Saris

Pooja Makhijani

2007

When a young girl eyes her mother's suitcase full of gorgeous silk, cotton and embroidered saris, she decides that she, too, should wear one, even though she is too young for such clothing. When the mother finally realizes how important it is for her little girl to feel like a big girl on her seventh birthday, she dresses up her daughter in the folds of a blue sari.

Interview: <http://cynthialeitichsmith.blogspot.com/2007/10/author-interview-pooja-makhijani-on.html>

Young Adult

The Not-So-Star-Spangled Life of Sunita Sen

Mitali Perkins

2005

In this engaging story about cultural discovery, thirteen-year-old Sunita finds herself resenting her Indian heritage when her grandparents come for a visit from India to California. She's embarrassed by the differences she feels between herself and her friends, but she's in for some surprises as she gets to know her grandparents -- and herself!

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7OGwqfxs2E>

Lovetorn

Kavita Daswani

2012

Shalini is new to L.A. Not new like from New York City new—or even Kansas new. New like from India new. And in the U.S., she has it all wrong: the way she dresses, the way she talks, the way she wears her hair. And then there is the ring, which makes her way different from everyone else—because Shalini has been engaged since she was three to Vikram, back in India.

Preview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTsu1ZMx-00>

Tina's Mouth: An Existential Comic Diary

Keshni Kashyap

2012

Tina M., sophomore, is a wry observer of the cliques and mores of Yarborough Academy, and of the foibles of her Southern California intellectual Indian family. She's on a first-name basis with Jean-Paul Sartre, the result of an English honors class assignment to keep an “existential diary.”

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7r2UaEj7lGk&list=PLqNzTfSZpUYGeOXFNMPDtkzFc8ArxS0st>

Shine, Coconut Moon

Neesha Meminger

2010

Sixteen-year-old Samar—aka Sam—is an Indian American teenager whose mom has kept her away from her old-fashioned family. It's never bothered Sam, who is busy with school, friends, and a demanding boyfriend. But things change after 9/11.

Interview: http://mountkiscoolibrary.podomatic.com/entry/2010-03-01T15_36_23-08_00

Autobiography

All for Love

Ved Mehta

2001

Ved Mehta joined the staff of The New Yorker in the 1960s, blind since the age of four and already on his way to a career as a writer. In a series of four relationships he demanded that his lovers, like him, pretend he could see.

Author Interview: <http://www.ndtv.com/video/player/just-books/ved-mehta-on-his-books/112440>

Poetry

Indivisible: An Anthology of Contemporary South Asian American Poetry

Neelanjana Banerjee (Editor), Summi Kaipa (Editor), Pireeni Sundaralingam (Editor)

2010

The first anthology of its kind, *Indivisible* brings together forty-nine American poets who trace their roots to Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8faRwFvqLHU>

Migritude

Shailja Patel

2010

Poetry. Cross-Genre. Literary Nonfiction. Memoir. South Asian Studies. African Studies. The U.S. debut of internationally acclaimed poet and performance artist Shailja Patel, *MIGRITUDE* is a tour-de-force hybrid text that confounds categories and conventions.

Interview: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXuFwCt8wul>

City of Rivers

Zubair Ahmed

2012

The poems in *City of Rivers*—the first full-length collection from 23-year-old wunderkind Zubair Ahmed—are clear and cool as a glass of water. Grounded in his childhood in Bangladesh, Ahmed's spare, evocative poems cast a knowing eye on the wider world, telling us what it's like to be displaced and replaced, relocated and dislocated. His poems are suffused with a graceful, mysterious pathos—and also with joy, humor, and longing—with the full range of human emotions. *City of Rivers* is a remarkable and precocious debut.

*We used to play soccer in the monsoon rains.
Through my windows, I can see acres of fields,
Lying in the ruins of the wind.*

Dhaka Dust

Dilruba Ahmed

2011

Ranging across Europe and America to the streets of Bangladesh, the sharp-edged poems in *Dhaka Dust* are culled from a rich mélange of languages, people, and poetic attitudes. Through lyric and narrative poems, Dilruba Ahmed's keen observations on birth, motherhood, and death offer a unique way into the beckoning world. Voices of villagers resonate alongside those of global travelers, each searching for an elusive homeland in small towns and cities alike. Vendors hawk their wares at a bazaar in Dhaka. Gyms in Ohio double as mosques for uprooted immigrants. In Ahmed's skillful hands, these disparate subjects adroitly capture the textures of life in this new century.

Can't occupy the same space at the same time
unless, of course, you land in Dhaka
—from "Dhaka Dust"

The Veiled Suite: Collected Poems

Agha Shahid Ali

2009

Agha Shahid Ali died in 2001, mourned by myriad lovers of poetry and devoted students. This volume, his shining legacy, moves from playful early poems to themes of mourning and loss, culminating in the ghazals of *Call Me Ishmael Tonight*. The title poem appears in print for the first time.

from "The Veiled Suite"

*I wait for him to look straight into my eyes
This is our only chance for magnificence.
If he, carefully, upon this hour of ice,
will let us almost completely crystallize,
tell me, who but I could chill his dreaming night.
Where he turns, what will not appear but my eyes?
Wherever he looks, the sky is only eyes.
Whatever news he has, it is of the sea.*

Interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFPMmcUhJLo>

Lucky Fish

Aimee Nezhukumatathil

2011

Lucky Fish travels along a lush current—a confluence of leaping vocabulary and startling formal variety, with upwelling gratitude at its source: for love, motherhood, "new hope," and the fluid and rich possibilities of words themselves. With an exuberant appetite for "my morning song, my scurry-step, my dew," anchored in complicated human situations, this astounding young poet's third collection of poems is her strongest yet.

3 Sections

Vijay Seshadri

2013

Vijay Seshadri's new poetry is assured and expert, his line as canny as ever. In an array of poetic forms from the rhyming lyric to the philosophical meditation to the prose essay, *3 Sections* confronts perplexing divisions of contemporary life—a wayward history, an indeterminate future, and a present condition of wanting to outthink time. This is an extraordinary book, witty and vivacious, by one of America's best poets.