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Kavyta Kay

New Indian Nuttals

Comedy and Cultural Critique in Millennial India

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Kavyta Kay
Institute of Commonwealth Studies
London, UK

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Cover illustration: Pattern adapted from an Indian cotton print produced in the 19th century

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*I've often said that the seventh paramita [perfection] should be a sense
of humour.*

—Tenzin Palmo

*For my parents, whose warrior spirit will always be a source of love and
inspiration.*

For my siblings, to whom I am always thankful for what they say and do.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has been percolating in my mind since 2015 when, after my PhD, I went down a rabbit hole of YouTube videos on one of the rare days that I was bored. It started when I saw the title of AIB’s “India reacts to ban of pornography”; my curiosity was piqued and suddenly I found I had blown out one full day binge watching TVF’s *The Making Of* series and most of what appeared on the right-hand side of my laptop screen. After familiarising myself with the YouTubers and some of their channels, I felt there was something really exciting and dynamic happening, especially because I had never come across this type of content from India before and which was created to a high-quality standard. And also one that in some ways I could relate to, particularly as growing up watching a lot of 1990s Bollywood films, I rarely related to any of the female representations or storylines. It made me question, even back then, what messages they were putting out through sketchy plots of harassment evolving into romance, or the wanton women from the West positioned opposite the upstanding, moral Indian woman from the homeland. If pop culture creates perception, then was that their perception of me, someone born and raised in Britain, and of my British Asian counterparts?

I further found that there was a huge gap in scholarly literature on this new addition to South Asian popular culture, which remains dominated by studies on Bollywood, television, or music. Hence, my foray into attempting to understand what this new form of humour, or internet comedy, tells us about millennial India. Writing this book also gave me an opportunity to dig back into my Indian roots, especially when for the

most part I have felt alienated from representations of women in Bollywood and Indian television for a long time now.

First and foremost, I owe the greatest, lifelong debt to my parents for their patience, love, and doing all the heavy lifting. Till date, I do not know how they did it. They have been the link between my life in Britain and my Mauritian and Indian heritage. Thank you to my siblings extraordinaire, Kiran and Davyna, for their moral support and their own unique brand of humour and healthy distractions! I thank Abbas Kumar for his steadfast support. At Palgrave Pivot, I am grateful to my commissioning editor Lina Aboujieb for supporting this project as part of the Comedy Studies Series, to Felicity Plester for originally championing it, and to Ellie Freedman for her editorial assistance.

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I appreciated the opportunity to engage in stimulating conversations with Vatsal Raichura, CEO of My Media Cafe, and to Aditi Mittal for allowing me to interview her.

Last but not least, I would also like to express my sincere thanks to my respondents. It was an arduous task trying to get a group together, and I am incredibly grateful to the group, who came through in the end, for their time and enthusiasm for the project. I owe the idea for this book in no small part to the users, content creators, and comedians who post their

genius content online, and who I affectionately describe as the new Indian nuttahs (a riff on a classic drum & bass track by Shy FX and which was the soundtrack of my uni days).

All the limitations in this book are mine. All the strengths belong to my family, friends, and to the Indians trying to make a difference.

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