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**A**FTER SCALING dizzy heights on the British pop charts, Hindi-hop and bhangra have headed across the Atlantic. And now this popular South Asian music is actually infiltrating the dance club scene in the United States of America.

Nightclubs playing this genre of music have begun to sprout across New York and New Jersey and many youngsters of Indian origin are taking to spinning remixes of Hindi tunes as well as bhangra as professional DJs.

The largest regular dance-club bhangra party in Manhattan is Bhangra Basement, held the first Thursday of every month at the popular S.O.B.'s — a world music club at Houston and Varick Streets.

In addition to the music being spun by DJ Rekha and DJ Joy for a diverse but South Asian-dominated crowd of hundreds, the club has a Mehndi painting booth for that Indian flavour.

The main reason that the music has not yet become a mainstream fascination, according to bhangra and Hindi-hop aficionados and producers, is that it is strictly "underground".

But they point out that Sony-produced bhangra legend, Bally Sagoo, and Talvin Singh, who is on the Quango label of Island Records, are exceptions. Chain stores carry their releases as their music is original, they say.

Gloria Rivera, the World Music buyer at Tower Records, says that when she plays Bally Sagoo in her store, people always ask about it.

"With World Music that's the only way to expose people. Regardless of their background, people generally like it once they hear it," she says. Because there are no radio stations fully devoted to international music, the ordinary person has little exposure, she adds.

Another factor in the way of bhangra becoming mainstream, DJs note, is that the lyrics are not English and therefore not appealing to an American audience. But that has not kept away audiences in Britain.

As DJ Gopal points out, "Bhangra is mainstream in England and is featured weekly on the radio and on television.

"Bally Sagoo's Indian remixes

## Spinning a golden orb of Asian hits

*After capturing Britain, bhangra and Hindi-hop are hitting the highs in the US of A. Ande Wanderer reports*



NOW CLUBBABLE IN THE USA: Daler Mehndi and Bally Sagoo

even topped the British mainstream top 40 charts. In America, the popularity of bhangra and Hindi hip hop has generally stayed among the Indian community."

A number of young DJs of Indian origin in New York state are getting attention outside the South Asian community. DJ Rekha and DJ Joy, who spin at the monthly party at S.O.B.'s, are the most notable.

DJ Rekha has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Daily News* and *Paper* magazine. The morning television programme, *Good Day New York*, recently filmed at one of her gigs and she has been in two documentaries. She tends to get more media attention than her partner, perhaps because it is more unusual for a

woman to be a DJ.

The Queens College Graduate does 70 to 80 gigs a year, in addition to freelance music, public relations consultation and an occasional day job. She says her main musical influence was originally American "old-school rap".

She started spinning bhangra four years ago along with her cousin, Nitin, who is now a DJ at CJ's in New Delhi.

"I think there is a global trend toward ethnic pop music," she says. "So in the same way that other ethnic music gets marginalised in the quagmire of world music, bhangra has found its niche. As for a mainstream fascination — that's just what it is. Fascination, or better yet, exotification."

DJ Jay Dabhi, or L'il Jay as the

21-year-old is known, is more influenced by the Hindi film songs his mother played around the house when he was growing up. When he developed an interest in American music such as hip-hop and house, a natural symbiosis of his multi-cultural musical tastes developed.

He took to the DJ tables at age 12 and got his first party gig through word of mouth three years later. When he started, he said, he was so little that he had to stand on a crate, which is how he acquired his pseudonym.

Though he appreciates bhangra, he says he doesn't mix it mainly because he has little contact with the traditional Punjabi folk music scene.

Dabhi says he appreciates the

commercialised bhangra music that is starting to come out of Bollywood because a wider audience can relate to it.

Li'l Jay is attending business school also at Queens College. He says his heart is not really into business school but, "I can't picture myself having kids and being a DJ".

Another DJ who spins Hindi-hop, Devin Chandrika, also from Queens, was born in Guyana. Though he has little contact with his Indian roots, like many young West Indians he has found a port of entry into the Indian community here through the new music.

Chandrika's father played Indian music when he was growing up and it got absorbed into his personal musical repertoire, though he has been more influenced by the island sounds of reggae, calypso and American house music.

Chandrika spins desi-flavoured music every other weekend in the summer, mostly for weddings.

Chandrika reads music, plays the violin and wants to record his own original music. He doesn't feel DJ-ing really takes much musical ability.

"How can you say you're a music producer if you don't play an instrument? You're just plagiarising."

Chandrika says if South Asian artistes in New York began producing fully original music, there is a market for it. MTV International, he points out, is an excellent avenue for broadcasting desi-dance music to a broad audience.

The 19 year-old DJ Gopal says: "I'm part of a new 'younger' generation of DJ's. I grew up listening to remixes of artistes such as Bally Sagoo, TS Soundz, and even DJ Jiten!" (A popular underground artiste from Toronto).

Gopal is from a close, musical family. "Even though my parents came to America and became part of a whole different society, they have always tried their best to instill strong traditional cultural ties in their children. As a result, I have an insatiable interest in my traditional Indian roots and culture, especially the music."

Gopal spins 12-15 hours a week and is a full time student at the Sophie Davis School of Bio-Medical Education. He also has a corporate-backed Hindi/Punjabi remix album coming out in September.—IANS