



Last Updated: Tuesday, 12 July, 2005, 09:18 GMT 10:18 UK

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Big Apple feels the South Asian impact

By Kiran Bharthapudi in New York

It is six o'clock in the evening on a typical Wednesday in New York City and Floyd Cardoz's kitchen near 25th street and Madison Ave in getting busy.

Crab cake with South Indian upma polenta, avocado salad and north Indian tamarind chutney is being made as an appetiser in one corner.

Freshly made Elysian Fields lamb with braised long squash, silk squash and garam masala sauce is being cooked as a main course at the other.

Cardoz began his career peeling 100kg bags of onions at the Taj Mahal Intercontinental Hotel in Mumbai (Bombay).

Now he is the executive chef of the upmarket restaurant, Tabla, near downtown Manhattan. He is accredited for influencing the appetite of affluent New Yorkers and Hollywood celebrities.

Name-droppers

He says his blend of Indian flavours and mainstream American cuisine is "user friendly" and adaptable to the New York palate.

Cardoz, however, is not the only South Asian making an impact on New York. The city has become a paradise for sub-continental name-droppers.

These personalities, who inextricably intertwine South Asian threads into the New York fabric, are also among Newsweek's most influential South Asians in America.



Floyd Cardoz - creating 'user friendly' recipes for New Yorkers

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Big names aside, the South Asian presence is also evident

in more generic New York lifestyles, like the city's transport.

About 38% of the nearly 100,000 yellow cab drivers in New York are South Asian immigrants (14% from Bangladesh, 14% from Pakistan and 10% from India), according to figures provided by Schaller Consulting, a group which specialises in researching US public transportation.

"After driving on the roads of Dhaka, New York is no big deal. We get [passengers] there quickly, we know the shortcuts," says Abdul, who has worked as a cabbie for the last nine years.

The other enterprise which have been seized upon by South Asians is news stand ownership. The stands can be found at every street corner and subway station.

"The men and women behind the counters at the thousands of city news stands and magazine stores are overwhelmingly South Asian immigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh," says journalist Adam Phillips.

Pervez, a Pakistani newsstand owner in mid-town Manhattan explains the South Asian dominance: "We work 14 hours day in a closet size wooden box, seven days a week.

"We are hardworking folks, and we do a job that most other groups would not prefer. That's why we are everywhere."



A bhangra dance class for New Yorkers

The South Asian factor is more noticeable in all sorts of other jobs - doctors, lawyers, accountants, travel agents, beauticians, grocers and even stand-up comedians.

"At the most external level I think it's because we've infiltrated the city at every socio-economic level, from fruit vendor to taxi driver, from busboy to investment banker," says Abha Dawesar, the New York based author of the much acclaimed debut novel, *Miniplanner*.

Movie culture

"At a deeper level there are a myriad South Asian groups in the arts and other professions that are active in the city that results in our long term visibility," she says.

Ms Dawesar herself has been listed as "one of the 25 people who will make their mark in 2005" by New York's weekly magazine *Time Out*.

If pop and movie culture is a measure of success and high public profile, South Asians do not score too badly on that front either.

Just three blocks away from Time Square, the Bollywood films *Paheli* and *Parineeta* are running alongside such Hollywood blockbusters as *Batman*.



A 'myriad' South Asian groups are active in the city

South Asian songs play in downtown bars alongside Britney Spears and *Candy Shop*.

A few months earlier, the musical *Bombay Dreams* drew full houses in Broadway.

In New York, South Asian people and their culture have not been sidelined by the mainstream, at some levels they have become the mainstream.