

# A cosmopolitan girl

**Hari KUNZRU** ['kʊnzru:] was born in London in 1969, into a mixed English-Kashmiri family. His two novels, *The Impressionist* (2002) and *Transmission* were shortlisted for several awards and his essays and short stories have been published in well-known magazines. In 2003, Hari Kunzru was named one of the twenty "Best Young British Novelists" by *Granta* magazine.



1. New South Wales: state in Australia
2. grapple with: *essayer de comprendre*
3. capacity [kə'pæsɪti]: *ici, parts de réseau*
4. vernacular [və'nækjələ]: *du pays*
5. trivia ['trɪviə]: *bricoles*
6. splutter: *éructer*
7. *Beti* (Hindi): daughter
8. snap: *dire d'un ton brusque*
9. state-owned TV network

*The Mehtas, an Indian family, have two children, Arjun and Priti. Arjun, a computer programmer, has just told them that he has found a job in America.*

As it happened, Arjun was not the only one to have a new job. But did anyone care? Did anyone even notice? Finally, after her parents had phoned almost everyone they knew with her brother's news [...], [Priti] got to tell them.

"What do you mean you've never heard of DilliTel? They're only the most dynamic call centre in the city!"

She explained the New South Wales<sup>1</sup> connection, how she would be "in the hot seat", providing service and support to customers of one of Australia's biggest power companies. Her mother asked why she needed a job at all. Wouldn't she rather stay at home? Her father frowned over his spectacles, grappling ineptly with<sup>2</sup> the fundamentals of modern telecoms.

"What?" he asked. "You mean they call on the telephone here, all the way from Australia?"

"Exactly. These big companies find it cost-effective."

"Cost-effective? It must be like throwing money down the drain!"

"Daddy, they buy capacity<sup>3</sup>. The customers don't pay. They don't even know they are calling abroad. It's such a great job, Daddy. I'll receive training in Australian language and culture. We all have to be proficient in vernacular<sup>4</sup> slang and accent, and keep day-to-day items of trivia<sup>5</sup> at our fingertips."

"Trivia?"

"Sporting scores. Weather. The names of TV celebrities. It adds value by helping build customer trust and empathy. As operators, we even have to take on new Australian identities. A *nom de guerre*, the manager calls it. What do you think of Hayley?"

"Namda – what?" spluttered<sup>6</sup> Mr. Mehta. "Now look here, young lady, what all is wrong with your own good name?"

Her mother nodded in agreement. "*Beti*<sup>7</sup>, I don't like the sound of this at all. It doesn't seem decent. Why can't you tell these Australian fellows to call you Priti, or better still, Miss Mehta? That would be so much *nicer*."

Priti had been trying her best. The tears would not stay in any longer.

"I don't believe it. I do something good and you throw it in my face. I hate you! I hate all of you!"

"Don't talk to your father like that," snapped<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Mehta, but she was chastising her daughter's departing back.

Mr. Mehta looked towards God and the ceiling. "This is what comes of too many TV channels. MTV, lady fashion TV, this, that and what all TV. No daughter would have spoken to her father in such a way when we were having Doordarshan<sup>9</sup> only."

"She's turning into one of these cosmopolitan girls," said his wife. "I think we should find a boy for her sooner rather than later."

