

SAME DIFFERENCE

The near-simultaneous release of these two photographic projects is a coincidence that invites comment—and some comparison. *The Americans* by Gauri Gill (Nature Morte/Bose Pacia) and *The Anglo-Indians* by Dileep Prakash (Photoink) are both substantial works of community portraiture clearly born of several years of labour, travel and emotional com-

mitment. There are surface similarities between them, from the titles, to their physical heft, and horizontal format. And there is a more elliptical propinquity between their subjects, each seemingly defined by the tensions of assimilation, colour, and the push and pull of East and West. Familiarity and difference.

And, yes, despite the similarities these are also very different photographers. Prakash's pictures

are warmly coloured, gently staged portraits, often framed by domestic tableaux of faintly colonial remains and bric-a-brac. These photographs have an uncomplicated if geographically extensive approach to defining this community.

Gill's 'Americans', by contrast, are problematised right from the title. The nod to Robert Frank is explicit but also a foregrounding of the paradoxes of Identity. Or maybe 'The Indian-Americans' just didn't sound that good. At any rate, Gill's photographs are keenly observed, opportunistic snapshots, revealing a cool intimacy, very different and more discursive than Prakash's affectionate formality.

There is finally a common melancholy to both these projects.

Prakash's pictures, for all their tender dignity, have an unmistakably elegiac quality. Gill's are drenched in their own, distinct sadness. It's not the lament for a vanishing tribe without a future but the unhappiness of people with a vanishing past. There are moments of happiness and delight in both books, and many gorgeous photographs, but they do seem defined by stories of loss. It's an impulse I can understand but I'm not sure I agree with.

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