

# PROJECT 3.2%

**HOW DOES THE LACK  
OF SOUTH ASIAN  
REPRESENTATION IN  
THE MEDIA AFFECT THE  
DIASPORA?**



**WORD COUNT: 7027**  
**CCW: BA GRAPHIC DESIGN**  
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# INTRODUCTION

*\*Please note all sentences in Italics are personal accounts or connections*

I always wanted to look like Cinderella as a child. To resemble her beauty as much as my friends did. As a teenager I wanted to look like Kylie Jenner, cliché I know but very on-trend for the time. Where I am today, I want to know why I always wished to resemble a white woman growing up. My upbringing was one that was nomadic making me a third culture kid separated from home and my roots. Making me a part of the Diaspora. There was a point in my life where racial discrimination was a daily occurrence that had me feel the need to hide my South Asian roots and deny my identity to save myself from the bullying and harassment. I noticed as well that I was more often than not the only person of colour in the room and it took years for me to feel comfortable in my skin and proud of my ancestry but still to this day I cannot face those who made me endure that struggle. It was especially hard to be proud of my South Asian identity in countries abroad when everything everyone knew of South Asians were racial stereotypes they had picked up from the media's portrayal of us. Those stereotypes being, 'Stinking like Curry', 'Oily and dirty', 'Unpopular', 'Living in the slums' and the list goes on. *My personal opinion is these stereotypes are very unoriginal, I have a dark sense of humour but these are very dry ideals to place on South Asians, something a bit spicier would be better to humour myself.*

During that time in my life, I was quite oblivious to the fact that those remarks made towards me were racist. It was only until I moved to India that I began to connect the dots and work towards embracing my culture and ancestry without feeling ashamed or scared to look and be a bit more Desi.



Figure 1, Green, S., 2008. Family Photo.

Coming back to the UK, I've had the opportunity to become friends with South Asians who had a similar upbringing to me. Being the one brown person in a crowd of white. Being faced with obstacles that broke down our ability to feel comfortable in our skin. Being a target for racial slurs. Group conversations on the topic of being South Asian away from 'our country of origin', questions like, 'Why aren't there any accurate representations of South Asians in media?' or 'Why is the perception of our culture so skewed?' are often heard along with many others. It made me begin to question how different life would be for the South Asian diaspora if we had seen more of ourselves in the media growing up. The one thing that has the largest influence over people in the 21st century.

*Written, televised, or spoken communication that reaches a large audience is referred to as mass media. Television, radio, advertising, movies, the Internet, newspapers, magazines, and so on are all examples of this. In today's culture, the mass media is a powerful force. This is referred to by sociologists as a mediated culture, in which the media both reflects and produces the culture. Individuals and communities are continuously pummeled with messages from a variety of sources, including television, billboards, and publications, to mention a few.<sup>1</sup> Not only do these communications promote products, but they also encourage moods, attitudes, and a sense of what is and isn't significant. With this idea that mass media produces cultures, we could assume that based on how the media perceives South Asians, it has created a redesigned and selective representation of South Asian culture through stereotypes and cultural appropriation. This can be seen through white celebrities endorsing certain parts of our culture whilst not facing any of the repercussions of being a person of colour, such as Iggy Azalea in her music video for 'Bounce' or Beyonce in Coldplay's music video 'Hymn For The Weekend'. It can also be derived that the media has portrayed people of colour or of ethnic backgrounds to be of less significance than the white population today.*



Figure 2, Azalea, I., 2013. Iggy Azalea - Bounce.

<sup>1</sup>Free Essay., 2018. The Role of Media in Society. [online] PhDessay.com. Available at: <<https://phdessay.com/role-of-media-in-society/>> [Accessed 4 October 2021]

Not only is South Asian culture replicated to fit a White narrative when suited but is also often underreported in times of crisis in western media. An example of this would be the ongoing struggle in Kashmir or the Indian Farmers Protest of 2020/21. World renowned Indian author Arundhati Roy talks of the struggles faced in India over the course of the pandemic in her most recent book, *Azadi*. In this quote she illustrates the climate of India in present time, "In India today, a shadow world is creeping up on us in broad daylight. It is becoming more and more difficult to communicate the scale of the crisis even to ourselves - its size and changing shape, its depth and diversity. An accurate description runs the risk of sounding like hyperbole. And so, for the sake of credibility and good manners, we groom the creature that has sunk its teeth into us - we comb out its hair and wipe its dripping jaw to make it more personable in polite company. India isn't by any means the worst, or most dangerous, place in the world, at least not yet, but perhaps the divergence between what it could have been and what it has become makes it the most tragic."<sup>2</sup> From this quote we are able to grasp the situation citizens of India are faced with however unless looking into South Asian news channels, the severity of the crisis is not reported elsewhere. Whereas if we were to look at anything else mainstream media reports on when it comes to crises, it is much more publicised. Like Donald Trump catching the Corona Virus... This indicates to South Asians worldwide that whatever struggles our community is facing, we face alone with little support outside our country of origin's border.

It is for these reasons that I want to look into the specifics of what the effect of lack of representation for South Asians in the media has on the diaspora as it connects both to myself personally as well as the large community I find myself a part of. When deciding how to go about deducting this investigation we can categorise the factors into four sections; The importance of representation, the power of the media, the perception of South Asian culture and colonisation. As there is little to no research on this topic I will be heavily relying on first hand sources and looking into the work created by others to elevate South Asian Representation to support my arguments and conclusions.

<sup>2</sup> Roy, A., 2020. *Azadi*. Penguin Books, p.152.

# THE DESIGN OF REPRESENTATION

I think the best place to start is to ask myself what representation is to me. My personal definition of representation is to feel heard, seen, appreciated and acknowledged by not only those who can identify with me through similarities but also by those who cannot. To not look so harshly at what I cannot change and to not categorise myself as just another brown person with no interest in knowing the specifics. I say this because I often find that people just assume I am Indian. I am not. I am Mauritian. There is a difference. And I know that most South Asians face the same problem. But to those that do not care, we are all the same. We are brown, we are Indian and in worst cases, we are 'Paki's' or terrorists.

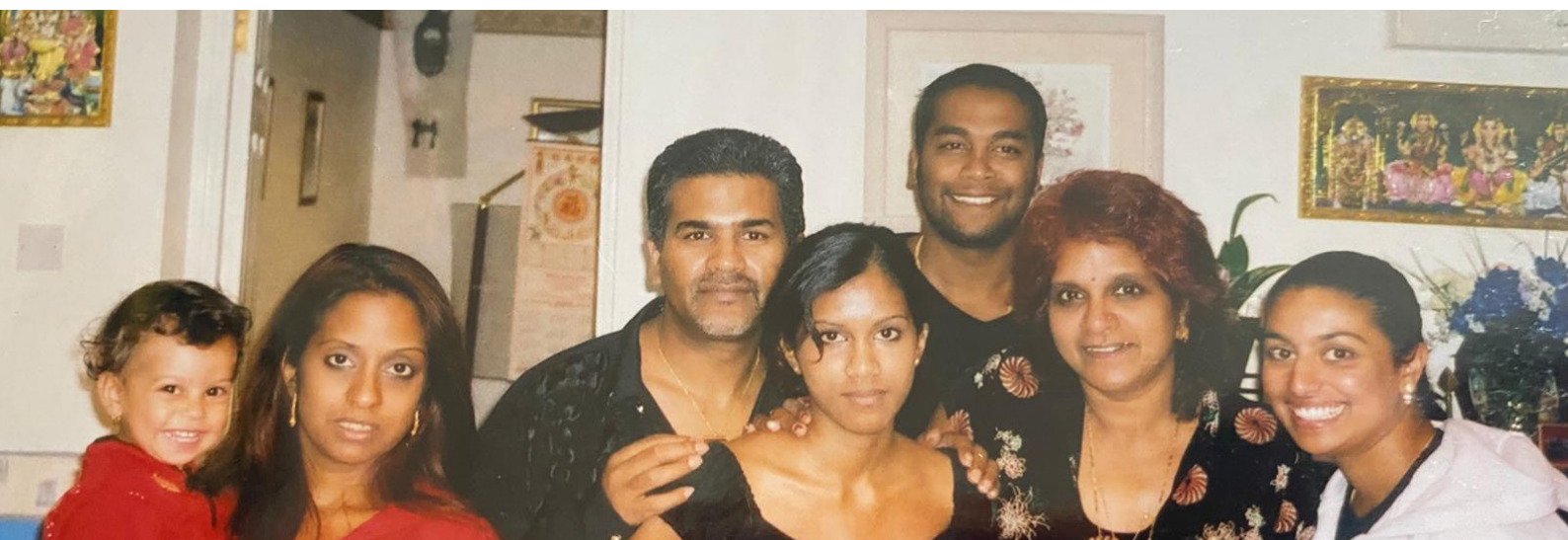


Figure 3, Green, S., 2002. Family Photo.

*It always boils down to stereotypes as being the root of a thought in regards to representation for me. The unjust amount of stereotypes there are seems to pile on as I write, with cruel memories flooding in. I know my definition does not align perfectly with Cambridge Dictionaries definition however as a person of colour this feels more fitting to what I have faced being underrepresented the entirety of my existence. I sit with my thoughts sometimes and ponder what would be different for me if I had seen more of myself in the things I was surrounded by. If I had seen a TV show on Disney Channel with a South Asian Heroine lead character, if I had seen my culture celebrated or acknowledged just as much as the Royal Families affairs in the newspaper or had dolls that looked like me rather than my white friends who I oh so dearly wanted to look like. Perhaps I wouldn't have been scared to pursue different goals in life, maybe I might not fear the white people that stare me down as I walk into a temple wearing a Lehenga Choli in Archway, London or feel the need to hide my middle name that sounds the slightest bit more ethnic than my first or last name. These are the sort of things people who have been appreciated and shown love do not fear. And do not forget that when we talk of representation in general, it is not only ethnicity. It is sexuality, gender, nationality, age, body types, disabilities and more.*



Figure 4, San, J., 2022. Vogue Australia.

The importance of representation stems deeper than just seeing yourself within someone else, it is also to have a role model, someone to look up to and be inspired by. In 2020 Netflix released its first-ever Tamil female lead TV show, 'Never Have I Ever', following the coming of age story of an Indian American teenage girl. This show within the South Asian community was a hit! The South Asian community's feedback featured many comments on how relatable their experiences were to the main characters and how good it felt to be represented minus the negative connotations that follow South Asian onscreen characters usually. The accurate representation acknowledged the South Asian Diaspora's privileges and struggles allowing viewers to feel

seen and heard. I could even go as far as to say helping the South Asian diaspora feel more connected to their culture. Yet not only is it important to be represented in fictional media but also in reality. To give an instance, in August 2021 Vogue Australia featured their first-ever Bangladeshi woman, Sophia Chowdhury, in their magazine. When I heard about this, there was almost a moment of personal victory in her accomplishment as she represented all South Asian women through her feature. *Flipping through magazines at a young age, again, I never saw a brown girl and to hear that in 2021 Vogue Australia had finally changed that was bittersweet in the sense that something like this was so long overdue but a sigh of relief that it had happened at last.* As a result of underrepresentation, the potential to establish harmful views and negative perceptions may occur. Media has a huge influence on children as they develop their beliefs and behaviours, as well as teenagers as they search for identity and their place in society. Therefore these small representational victories we achieve as the South Asian community helps us to individually feel more motivated to fight against stereotypes as we gain more physical evidence that it is not impossible to be more than the labels we are given and prove those stereotypes false. Representation encourages acceptance. Acceptance leads to safe spaces for people to grow and discover themselves freely. Those who do not have that will find it harder to truly connect to their identity and story. Slowly but surely we can see an increase in South Asian representation in the media but we are still not quite where we should be.

So how is it that the lack of representation of South Asians affects the diaspora more than those living in South Asian countries? It simply comes down to the influence of surroundings. When growing up a part of the diaspora, it is harder to feel connected

to your roots. We rely heavily on Cultural Socialisation. This involves parents teaching their children about their ethnic heritage and race helping to foster a strong sense of identity and belonging culturally.<sup>3</sup> Parents do this by showing the positive aspects of their ancestry, cultural customs and traditions. *Keeping home alive away from home I like to call it. 'Home away from home'... that's funny to me. It's almost a self-acknowledgement that I know my culture isn't always wanted here in the UK.* Most families will celebrate cultural holidays, discuss relevant topics, and encourage their children to speak their native language. This is all in an effort to not only create a bond to their culture but to also prepare them for bias of discrimination or egalitarianism. Growing up within South Asia, you have the benefit of being surrounded by your culture with people who understand it and share the same traditions, holidays and social acknowledgements but growing up a part of the diaspora it is harder to connect to your authentic culture as you are surrounded and exposed to a diverse amount of cultures and traditions. You don't get to hear the music you would hear on the radio in your native country playing on Capital FM, you don't see celebrities on BBC that look like you as often as you would in your native country and even looking up at the large billboards displaying ads... the odds of seeing someone look like you in comparison to your native country are extremely low. Representation in the media therefore further helps us to connect to our culture and be more comfortable in who we are. *To not feel like an alien on a different planet.*

Through accurate and nondiscriminatory portrayals of South Asians in the media, outcomes such as less racial bigotry towards the community and better self-esteem would result. Improved representation for all communities would also share these results as this topic does not just cover the lack of South Asian representation. Representation generates realistic and impactful role models along with sources of inspiration. Many people appear to underestimate the importance of having a role model to look up to and relate to however many success stories start with a role model for inspiration such as Lupita Nyong'o who believes having black role models was why she felt she could become a successful actress. Representation challenges the status quo, bringing ideas to fruition and because minorities are rarely given the focus, representation in the media helps to shatter these formulaic approaches. It provides a platform for more people's voices to be heard. The risk of echo chambers online and how damaging they are to establishing constructive, stimulating dialogue is a topic that is frequently brought up. Offline, the same notion applies. When the same voices are heard over and over, the conversation never moves forward and society is never challenged. Giving minorities a voice allows everyone's world to be opened up and their opinions to be challenged in a positive, productive way. Media enables the dismantling of prejudices and misconceptions, as well as more accurate portrayals. Giving people who are affected by the media's false portrayal of minorities a voice and a platform to speak is the only way to properly tackle these challenges. By doing so, we can battle negative preconceptions and beliefs that, if unaddressed, will continue to do significant harm.

<sup>3</sup> Aldoney, D., Kuhns, C. and Cabrera, N., 2018. [online] Research Gate. Available at: <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324755904\\_Cultural\\_Socialization](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324755904_Cultural_Socialization)> [Accessed 9 October 2021].

# THE POWER OF MEDIA



Figure 5, Cavallari, M., 2015.

The media is essential in the 21st century. It is everywhere we look. On our phones, laptops and TVs, outside on the streets posing as ads on buses or billboards, even on the tube in London where you will find newspapers on every second seat with big, bold headlines to grab your attention as you try so desperately not to make awkward eye contact with the people around you. On average a person will consume 9 and a half hours of media in a day. That's 54.7% of your year spent consuming digital media alone.<sup>4</sup> Media remains a tool of communication, a source of information and entertainment as well as a service to the economical and political systems. It can also be a means of education or positive influence through allowing individuals to become more informed about current events on a national and worldwide level or inspiring us to choose healthier lifestyles. But where there are positives, there will be negatives. Media can also be a form of manipulation on public opinion through biased narration or create a strong negative influence over viewers as they fall into the trap of believing everything they see or read. This in itself shapes how we think, the opinions we form and even how we act.

White people's impressions of people of colour can be negatively influenced by popular media. Nonverbal racial prejudices in facial expressions and body language, as depicted on popular TV series, are proven to influence white viewers' racial biases, according to one study. Furthermore, a lack of interaction between racial groups can lead to a stronger reliance on media stereotypes when forming opinions about people from other races. When people haven't had any direct interactions with particular racial groups, studies demonstrate that individuals replace prejudices they

<sup>4</sup> Fisher, B., 2019. UK Time Spent with Media 2019. [online] Insider Intelligence. Available at: <<https://www.emarketer.com/content/uk-time-spent-with-media-2019>> [Accessed 11 October 2021].



see on TV for reality.<sup>5</sup> As an example, the stereotype that all brown-skinned Muslims are terrorists portrayed in media can influence or add to peoples belief that this is true and normalise Islamaphobia. The erasure and negative depictions of people of colour can have a severe impact on how people of colour see themselves, in addition to escalating racial tensions. Lengthy television viewing is linked to lower self-esteem in all girls and coloured boys, as well as an increase in self-esteem in white boys. These disparities are linked to media racial and gender biases, which frequently portray white people as protagonists while eliminating or subordinating other races as villains, sidekicks, or sexual objects largely impacted young viewers opinions on what role they will play in society and the goals they have for themselves.

Although media has the power to subconsciously manipulate society, there is one form of media that challenges narratives portrayed to us, social media. Social media consists of versatile platforms that allow for powerful modern influence. This influence often is used as a tool of activism by many users in socio-political movements around the world as well as to confront biases. One well-known example of this would be the 'Black Lives Matter' Movement, a racial discrimination and police violence activist movement. Conversations on America's criminal justice system's role in racial inequality against the black community has gained fresh international attention in recent years. Following George Zimmerman's conviction in the fatal shooting of black teen Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2013, three black community activists, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors-Brignac, and Opal Tometi, launched an activist movement on social media under the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter.<sup>6</sup> Following the 2014 deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner in New York City, the Black Lives Matter movement evolved into a powerful social force. BLM has evolved its fight beyond racist police violence to include "an ideological and political intervention" aiming to eliminate systematic racial inequity against black people. By raising public awareness, particularly among academics, about issues of gun violence and black lives, BLM not only helps to present detailed data and information about the issue but also to push the public to develop a deeper understanding of the issue, which encourages black people to fight against the unjust situation in some way. This particular movement reflects the positive impacts of social media as a form of media in today's world. It allows for any ordinary person to have a platform and use their freedom of speech to share personal experiences and give their input to different topics allowing for more progressional conversations, a space for reflection or to question information the media has fed us.

When we look at the lack of South Asian representation as a social cause to act upon, many activists have used social media to raise awareness of the situation at hand. One activist that has strived to create more opportunities for the representation of South Asians is Anita Chhiba, founder of the Instagram platform '@DietParatha'. Launched in 2017, Diet Paratha is a platform celebrating South Asian and Middle Eastern

<sup>5</sup> Yuen, N., 2016. Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism. Rutgers University Press, p.8.

<sup>6</sup> En.wikipedia.org. n.d. Black Lives Matter - Wikipedia. [online] Available at: <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_Lives\\_Matter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Lives_Matter)> [Accessed 11 October 2021].

creatives worldwide providing a space to appreciate all MESA cultures. Chhiba collates, curates, and celebrates artists, designers, models, musicians, and creative communities from across the South Asian diaspora, with the belief that telling the story yourself is the best way to empower people and control the narrative.<sup>7</sup> Chhiba's inspiration stemmed from the obvious lack of a South Asian perspective in western media stating, "I started Diet Paratha because I needed it myself...The platform broke free from a host of stereotypes and it made people feel empowered and inspired to create. Specifically, in Western countries, where the majority of the population is white, our identities are reduced to traditional clothing, the food we eat, and other tired tropes." The platform is specific to creatives as establishing yourself in the creative field is difficult due to multiple reasons such as the arts not being seen as an acceptable career path in South Asian cultures or lack of opportunity for people of colour. Although to some posting creatives work on a large platform might not be a traditional form of activism against lack of representation, Chhiba has helped many South Asians receive opportunities to represent the community within the creative field. "My understanding of representation doesn't stop at the visual," she notes in an interview with Grazia India, "Whenever I execute a project or host an event, I make sure there are South Asian teams on board, and we're paying as many of them as we can. From the caterers, the models, photographers and videographers, to the door staff, it is important to me that we go beyond the surface and provide opportunities to this previously underrepresented yet supremely talented community."<sup>8</sup> Through creating a space for representation, she has inspired many others to create platforms to corroborate the lack of representation as a social cause for change. Myself included. And with so many new and upcoming platforms striving to increase South Asian representation, we can see an impact being made through awareness being raised and noticed by few mainstream media sources such as Vogue UK, Dazed Magazine or even Netflix. This notable change thus has created more openings for nondiscriminatory South Asian representation in media.

As the media plays a vital role in 21st Century society, we must acknowledge the influence it has in how we regard people, the toll it takes on us negatively and how it can be used to make positive changes if done correctly. It plays a significant part in the stigmas faced against minorities especially in white-dominated communities. Thus whether an effective change is made soon or not, it will contribute towards if the treatment of South Asians in society is improved or worsened. So not only does lack of South Asian representation disable the diaspora to feel connected to their culture proudly but also creates more tolerance towards racist stereotyping, inequality, islamophobia, colourism and more.

<sup>7</sup> Rosen, M., 2021. Vote for Diet Paratha on the #Dazed100. [online] Dazed. Available at: <<https://www.dazeddigital.com/projects/article/53119/1/diet-paratha-instagram-biography-dazed-100-2021-profile>> [Accessed 16 December 2021].

<sup>8</sup> Afthab, Z., 2021. For The Culture: Diet Paratha Celebrates A New South Asian Narrative. [online] grazia.co.in. Available at: <<https://www.grazia.co.in/people/for-the-culture-diet-paratha-celebrates-a-new-south-asian-narrative-8673-2.html>> [Accessed 22 December 2021].

## 3.2%

Often when I say I am Mauritian, the follow-up question is usually, “Where is that? Is it in India?...I’ve never heard of it.”. Every time I try to think of a quick, sassy response on the spot but end up being so blindsided by the ignorance of the question. As I said before I am not even Indian, I am Mauritian! And the more this question is asked to me, the more I want to know why if a white person said they were from Europe the response would be, “Wow, where? France, Italy, England, Switzerland, Germany...?” which is so different to the response I and so many other people of colour get. It’s the ignorance in thinking India is South Asia or Africa is one large country. Almost as if anything that concerns the culture of people of colour isn’t important enough to learn about. I remember when I was in Year 12 studying history whilst living in India, I began to learn about colonisation in-depth for the first time. Or so I thought... I was learning about it from the perspective of those being colonised by the British but quickly realised that in all my Primary and Secondary education in the UK, I had been taught about colonisation but from the perspective of the coloniser. I remember learning about the French’s great victories but how no one was more victorious than the British. It dawned on me that in small ways the mindset of colonialism still lives on very prominently within such modern countries. It lives on through the education system, the health system, immigration, politics and of course the media. This realisation forced me to ask myself how is it that our education systems failed me and so many others to have all perspectives of history? To learn of the freedom movements so many colonised countries had to get their freedom back for example? To find in our immediate surroundings? It all stems down to the trickling effects of postcolonialism and the lack of cultural awareness in today’s society. This leads to the question then how does that affect the South Asian diaspora in regards to media representation though? This is what I will be exploring within this section.

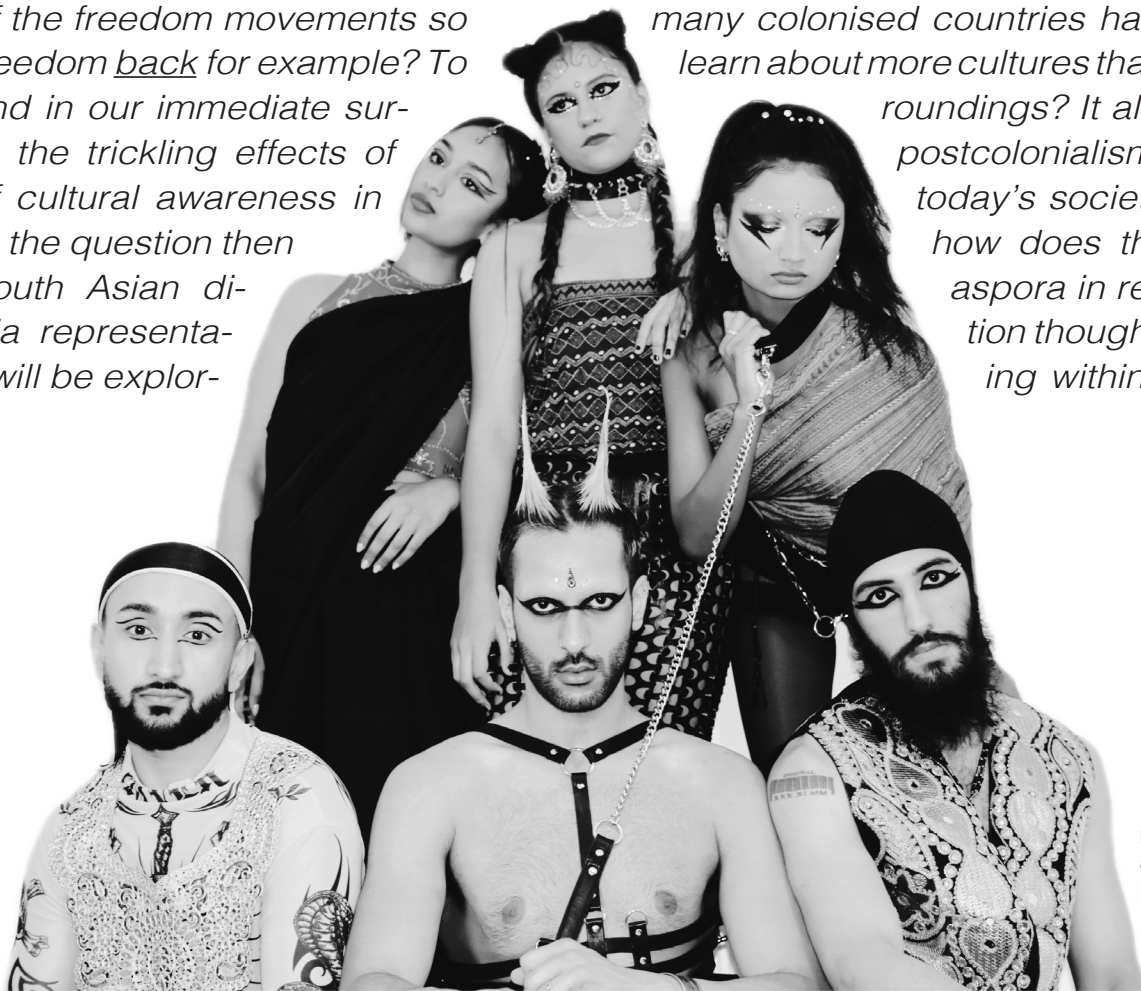


Figure 6, Zabir, A., 2021. We are here, we are bold, we are present.

South Asian representation when found is many a time met with racial stereotypes such as Orientalism, Romanticism along with Scientific racism.<sup>9</sup> These stereotypes are applied in an unrealistically ideal way contributing to the mistreatment of South Asians. When investigating the lack of South Asian representation in the media, we should consider the effect of these stereotypes, their links to racism and connections to colonialism.

To begin with, let us first determine what South Asia is. South Asia consists of eight countries. These countries being Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, each with their own unique culture. When combining the total population of each country it is evident that South Asians are one of the largest minority groups in the world. The UK itself has a population of 35.9%<sup>10</sup> British South Asians with only 3.2% of South Asians appearing on-screen productions in the UK.<sup>11</sup> This makes us the least represented minority in Global and British media according to a diversity report from 2018. When we are represented, the roles of on-screen South Asians are limited to belittled characters. Characters that are either inferior to the white cast presented in the same show or portrayed as uncultured immigrants with absurd accents. Where it concerns the accents given to characters in media, South Asian accents are made to be perceived as a lower class or uneducated emphasising the idea that Asian accents are undesirable in comparison to European accents which are perceived as classy and attractive. An example of this would be the notorious UK TV Show 'Citizen Khan'. It portrays the notion that immigrants in western countries are inferior to the white population and thus creates room for this narrative to play out in reality. For accents to be made fun out of or enable certain opportunities where their voice feels 'unprofessional' to employers. *I know from personal experience that even though I have a British accent, the colour of my skin was enough for people to imitate me as if I was Apu from the Simpsons. I know many people where the main racist problem they face is the imitation of their accent by white people and how that, in turn, made them fear to even open their mouth to say something.* In an article written by Oona King for The Independent, she raised the question, "Why must Asian actors mainly choose between playing the corner-shop owners or terrorists?"<sup>12</sup> and this struck me deeply as it shows the narrow lane a South Asian Actor or Actress can go down. *Now it's not to say that all South Asians given the opportunity to appear on screen are misrepresented. There are some amazing shows and movies making us South Asians proud however it's less likely to see this accurate representation in comparison to what already exists. The stereotype of South Asians only having jobs in corner shops plays into society allowing the young diaspora to believe that is what they are destined for, don't strive for more than that - the racist attachment to this comes into play when we see the white cast in media generally having successful careers whilst the immigrant is struggling to pay for rent. It plays into*

<sup>9</sup> Infogalactic.com. n.d. Stereotypes of South Asians - Infogalactic: the planetary knowledge core. [online] Available at: <[https://infogalactic.com/info/Stereotypes\\_of\\_South\\_Asians](https://infogalactic.com/info/Stereotypes_of_South_Asians)> [Accessed 9 October 2021].

<sup>10</sup> Ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk. 2018. Regional ethnic diversity. [online] Available at: <<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest>> [Accessed 13 October 2021].

<sup>11</sup> Cumberbatch, D., Bailey, A., Lyne, V. and Gauntlett, S., 2018. On-Screen Diversity Monitoring: BBC ONE and BBC TWO. Cumberbatch Research Group, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> King, O., 2015. Cumberbatch is right - too many black & Asian actors are typecast. [online] The Independent. Available at: <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/benedict-cumberbatch-is-right-too-many-black-and-asian-actors-are-typecast-10021802.html>> [Accessed 5 November 2021].

*white supremacy and how society sees the role of a South Asian. Always less than. With each stereotype we see portrayed in the media, we must acknowledge the racism that it came from and the racism it enables. It's a form of control over the true narrative of ethnic minorities creating false personas to what our culture is like, to enforce the idea that the west is far superior to the east. These stereotypes stem from a long history of systematic racism and the treatment of South Asians post colonisation as well as pre.*

In the world today there is a false narrative of meritocratic postcolonial power where we believe that the west has produced positive innovations within the political and scientific fields amongst other things such as diversity, for example, leading us to believe there is ongoing positive progress being made in society. However, we are manipulated by propaganda which overlooks the fact that the west is profoundly built from white supremacy, the exploitation of labour and resources such as land from underdeveloped countries. If we were to try and reverse these effects, it would cause a collapse of western society affecting everyone residing in the countries that stand to benefit from all of this. Thus if those who are from these exploited countries wanted to escape this system put in place by colonialism, they would have to immigrate to the west for a better way of life. This then creates the diaspora, a group of people who spread from one original country to other countries, or the act of spreading in this way.<sup>13</sup> The ethnic minorities within the UK's diaspora fall victim to an ongoing debate on the appeal of an increase of ethnic minorities in media to the western masses. To simplify this, one side of the debate essentially says that if you want to be an actor or actress go back to your 'real country' and act there whilst the other side is begging for blind auditions so that race does not affect your chances. Those opposing for an increase of ethnic minorities in the media, encouraging the diaspora to return to their country of origin are oblivious to the fact that it is the postcolonial world and white supremacy that has forced them or their families to leave their 'country of origin' in the first place. It is because of this that there is a large South Asian diaspora community in the UK for instance. Within Bollywood, there are a handful of British born South Asian actors and actresses who have found success in their careers through leaving the UK to find acting opportunities. However, this is a result of them being turned away as their skin colour was not what producers pictured for a role. Which begs the question why can't a British person be seen as just that, a British person? Regardless of skin colour? Why is it easier to get racist and exaggerated stereotypical roles as an ethnic minority?

It is these racist monologues that are not often discussed which discourage the South Asian diaspora from pursuing careers in media consequently. It highlights the racism we have to fear and the hardship of being successful as an ethnic minority in the west. The lack of representation as a result of ethnic minorities not getting roles due to this, portrays to the diaspora that we are in a game rigged for us to lose. A game where to succeed we should accept what limited options we have available to us. The stereotypes, the exaggerated South Asian accent or the corner shop owner. With the media having the power to both stimulate social change or sustain prejudice, it is up to us as society to demand a change and an increase of representation not just for South Asians but for all ethnic minorities.

<sup>13</sup> Dictionary.cambridge.org. n.d. Diaspora. [online] Available at: <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/diaspora>> [Accessed 9 October 2021].

**WHERE ARE YOU  
REALLY FROM?**

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**"SO WHERE ARE YOU FROM?"**



**"I'M FROM KENT, WHAT  
ABOUT YOU?"**

**"NO, I MEAN WHERE  
ARE YOU REALLY  
FROM?"**

**"SORRY, I'M FROM  
A\*\*\*\*\* IN KENT."**



*I'm sure this conversation sounds familiar to everyone reading this. Whether you're the one being antagonised by these questions or the one asking the ridiculously arrogant question. We've all been there. I always hate when white people ask me where I am from because I know where the conversation is going. It's like a broken record and I know the lyrics to this track by heart. It's the implication of you're not really from my country so...where are you from? I mean your skin is not white so you're not really British. I always debate whether I just cut to the chase of what they want to hear or try to make them deliberately slip up to reveal their subconscious racism. I don't blame them for asking this question though. It's what they've been taught. It's taught to them from their parents, grandparents, friends, media, politicians, celebrities, the list goes on. I think more awareness needs to be made on this type of conversation and how it implements the idea that if you're from a minority background, you're automatically less than. It reminds me of a book I once read titled 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' by Mohsin Hamid. It's the story of a Pakistani man trying to feel like he belongs in America through disregarding his roots and adopting an all American personality. In the end, it didn't work out for him because of the increase in racism towards Asians and Muslims in America following the 9/11 attacks but the key thing I picked up from this book was the need for 'the other' in society. The idea that the label, 'the other' brings balance to a white-dominated country. If you're from the west but don't look white, you are the other in society. To be put in this box the second you are brought into this world feels claustrophobic. There isn't enough space for me to be more than that. The colour of my skin will forever determine that I am not British, I am the other. The other kind of British, the other kind of race, the other kind of human. Less. Than. It made it hard for me to look up to the South Asians I did see in the media as they were always portrayed in this way. There were probably 2 South Asians that I often saw in the media representing the multitude of cultures within South Asia that I was a fan of but oftentimes when it came to them having to be the voice of South Asia's opinion, honestly, sometimes I didn't agree with what they had to say. But that's not their fault. It's not that they said something wrong or bad, it was just their opinion. I didn't like that for one of the largest ethnic minority groups in the world, there were only less than a handful of us in the media sharing our opinions. It was almost as if because they were lucky enough to have such a spotlight it was good enough for the South Asian community to have at least them to represent us but how is that fair? How could one expect one person to hold the opinion of millions of South Asians and the rest of us are expected to be happy with that? My dream would be to see a large, diverse amount of South Asians in the media. Those who are a part of the diaspora, those from countries within South Asia and those who immigrated from South Asia. Maybe then people will see me as British, maybe then people will understand the numerous cultures South Asia has to offer, or maybe ethnic minorities, in general, will have no narrative to be compared to and be seen for who they are as a person.*

“They try to resist change. Power comes from becoming change.”<sup>14</sup> This quote from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* can be seen as the author trying to teach society that through changing our mindset and fundamentals, we can become a society of peace. It is almost a plea for change in how we think and view the world. To learn from our mistakes and to improve. The role of ‘the other’ in society stems from the long acknowledged notion that to be seen as a foreigner to a land is to be seen as ‘the other’. I would define the role of ‘the other’ in media as a category for those with an ethnic background. In modern media, it can be disguised as diversity but its true purpose is to show the hierarchy of race power. Particularly in favour to the white race. This hierarchy is made clear in media through ‘the other’ being given a less fortunate hand in life, almost engraving in our head that to have an ethnic background is a curse. When the role of ‘the other’ is given to South Asians, it is often met with poverty, terrorism, unfortunate mishaps or the struggling immigrant. These storylines usually fall into the white saviour narrative. For the South Asian community, these tropes reiterate how little society thinks of us and this alone can make one feel isolated when in the presence of white people as somewhere in your head there is a little voice saying ‘less than’. This severely affects one’s confidence and how they determine their self-worth. Particularly for the diaspora, when growing up seeing someone like you portrayed as such, to then be asked ‘where are you *really* from?’ can start a complicated battle within yourself to feel as though you belong in the country where you were born. Your only hope in this situation is to look up to the few South Asians in media representing our community for enlightenment and acknowledgement. But then again, with only so little South Asian celebrities in mainstream media, it may be hard to find someone who you can relate to.

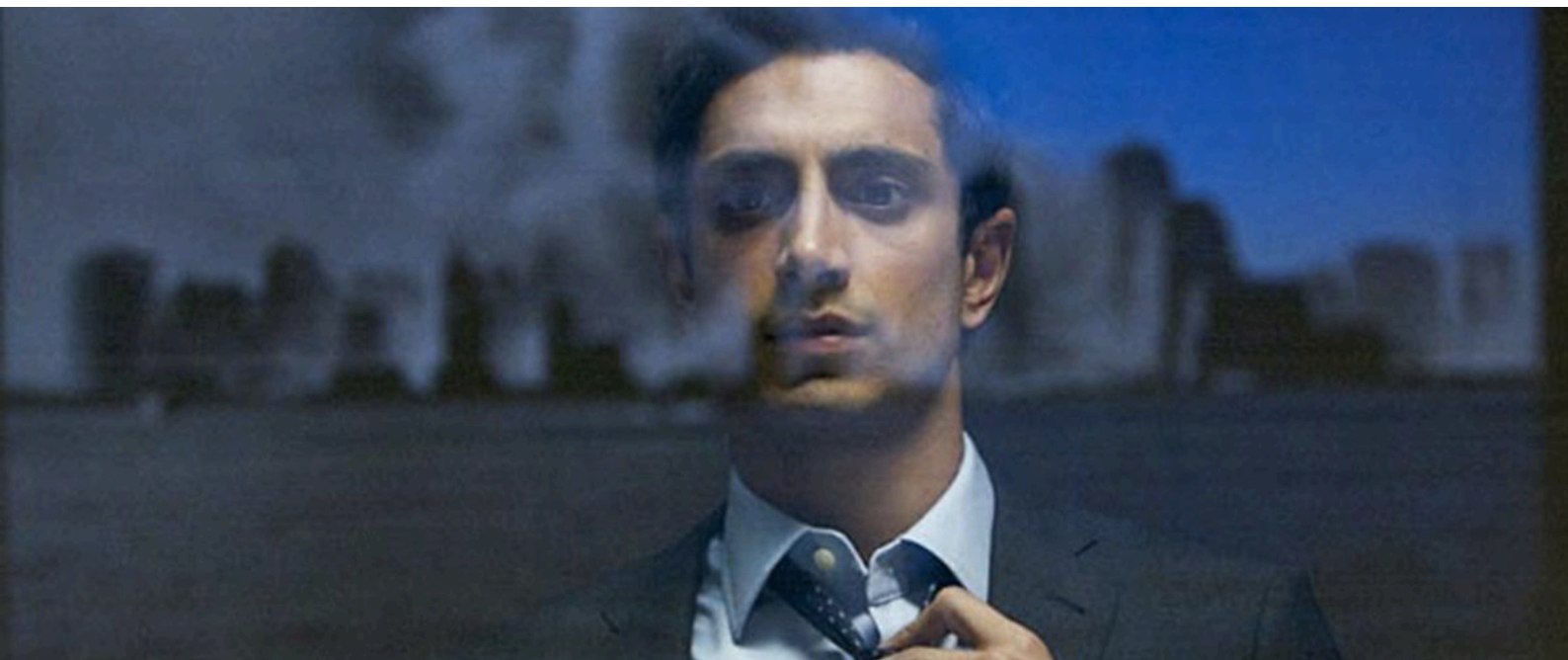


Figure 7, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012) Directed by Mira Nair. [Feature film]. IFC Films.

<sup>14</sup>Hamid, M., 2007. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Elsternwick, Vic.: Insight Publications, p.61.



It is often found that ethnic minorities have a small selection of celebrities in mainstream media with the platform to share personal experiences, opinions as well as inform. These celebrities who then find themselves apart of this small selection, are automatically given the weight of representing an entire communities belief, even if they do not realise it. Generally we see that it is expected that one ethnic celebrity's comments stands for what everyone has to say and so when a South Asian celebrity, for example, talks on how they feel about politics, it is assumed that the rest of us share the same belief. *I speak of this through personal experiences as multiple times I have had conversations where my opinion was automatically assumed and when corrected, was followed by questioning such as 'if this person said it then why don't I agree? I know this can be seen as a normal conversation however it is the tone of conversation that is so belittling to what I feel to be true and what they feel to be true so not to be politically incorrect. This ordeal is hardly talked about and so I feel it an important point to make.* When situations such as this, it makes you wonder, does this person have any true interest in this topic or are they trying to make sure they are 'with the times' so not to make any mistakes in the presence of an ethnic minority. With more representation for ethnic minorities and more platforms for us to share our opinion, we are forced to 'shift from the seemingly commercial myopic lens through which our narrative is usually shaped'<sup>15</sup> and provide more cultural awareness towards South Asians.

<sup>15</sup> Ayubi, N., 2021. Riz Ahmed: Hollywood's portrayal of Muslims 'stereotypical, toxic, two-dimensional'. [online] Middle East Eye. Available at: <<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/riz-ahmed-Muslims-Hollywood-dehumanising>> [Accessed 10 January 2022].

# THE AFFECT

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The South Asian community have been victim to racial stereotypes and unjust prejudices in media for as long as we have been portrayed in mass media. These racial stereotypes and profiling found within films, tv shows, books and so on are a result of pre and post colonialism, imperialism in modern day, systematic racism and profiling. Consequently, the diaspora have stood to endure the most struggle from this resulting in a lack of confidence in identity, the normalisation of racism, and an absence of role models. The lack of South Asian representation in the media stands to be an evergrowing movement with the diaspora being it's biggest participate and supporter. With thousands of shared experiences and beliefs, we can conclude the affect of the lack of representation for South Asians in the media has a large impact on the diaspora. It affects us in ways we may not see and in ways we wish we did not see. It affects us from a young age and stays with us as we get older. It affects this generation, the ones before us and will continue to affect future generations if change is not made. Representation stands to be an opportunity to be heard and seen for more than the racial bigotry and small box of expectations portrayed to us in the media. It is the representation in media which we have now that severely influences the diasporas self-esteem and how others portray us leading to the normalisation of racism towards South Asians as well as giving power to white supremacy. With the medias large sphere of influence, we should encourage cultural awareness when representing South Asians and allow for all ethnic minorities to have more role models to look up to. Ones who are the hero and not the shop keeper, ones who remind you of home and not remind you that tomorrow you'll be compared to Apu from The Simpsons. With only 3.2% of South Asians in media and 54.7% of our years spent consuming media, the increase of South Asian representation could cease the stereotypes that lead to bullying, improve inequality and create less tolerance of racism and islamophobia.

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## FIGURES

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Cover Image: Green, S., 2021. Brown is beautiful. [Photography]

Figure 1: Green, S., 2008. Family Photo. [Photography]

Figure 2: Azalea, I., 2013. Iggy Azalea - Bounce (Official Music Video). [online] Youtube.com. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cI1A405jBqg>> [Accessed 4 November 2021].

Figure 3: Green, S., 2002. Family Photo. [Photography]

Figure 4: San, J., 2022. 4 new-age content creators on how they use their influence towards a better tomorrow. [online] Vogue India. Available at: <<https://www.vogue.in/magazine-story/4-new-age-content-creators-on-how-they-use-their-influence-towards-a-better-tomorrow/>> [Accessed 21 December 2021].

Figure 5: Cavallari, M., 2015. So smartphones suck our faces (and our soul). [Photography] Corriere della Sera. Available at: <[https://www.corriere.it/foto-gallery/tecnologia/cyber-cultura/15\\_novembre\\_13/cosi-smartphone-risucchiano-nostri-volti-nostra-anima-09d3b964-8a02-11e5-8bb5-95de089d6e71.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/foto-gallery/tecnologia/cyber-cultura/15_novembre_13/cosi-smartphone-risucchiano-nostri-volti-nostra-anima-09d3b964-8a02-11e5-8bb5-95de089d6e71.shtml)> [Accessed 14 December 2021].

Figure 6: Figure 6, Zahir, A., 2021. We are here, we are bold, we are present. [Photography]

Figure 7: The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2012) Directed by Mira Nair. [Feature film]. IFC Films.