

Portrayals of Indians in the Diaspora by the Media: Biased, Muted, Marginalised or Made Invisible?

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What do content analyses of the media show about Indians in the Diaspora, especially in countries such as Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname where they constitute the largest ethnic group?

How much are Indian culture and artistes featured in the entertainment sections of the newspapers? Are Indian children seeing themselves mirrored equitably in the media? Do the advertisements in these multi-ethnic societies reflect diversity, equity and inclusion? Are Indian men muted, erased and made invisible? As with ethnic minorities in the media in Canada, are Indians in the Diaspora made to feel alien, devalued and as second-class citizens in their own nations? Does the media promote and grant legitimacy to certain cultural art forms at the expense of others? Answers to these questions are critical in building a peaceful, harmonious, just, inclusive and progressive multicultural society.

The following are EXCERPTS of a ZOOM public meeting (10/ 9/2022) on the topic “Portrayals of Indians in the Diaspora by the Media: Biased, Muted, Marginalised or Made Invisible?”

[See unedited recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QB0esWSec-c&t=3860s>]. The Pan-Caribbean public meeting was chaired by Shakira Mohammed and moderated by Shalima Mohammed, both from Trinidad. The programme was hosted by the Indo-Caribbean Cultural Centre (ICC) and the Ameena Gafoor Institute (AGI). The speakers were Professor Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, a journalist, broadcaster, author and lecturer; Rajan Nazran, chief explorer for Global Indian Series; Dr Kumar Mahabir, anthropologist, university lecturer and Executive Director of the ICC ZOOM programme; and Dr Vishnu Bisram, political opinion pollster and international journalist.



PROF YASMIN ALIBHAI-BROWN of the UK said, “You were treated very badly in the newsrooms; you weren't paid the same as white journalists; you never had a contract; you always felt you were made to feel grateful. I remember once being paid so little that I asked the editor why I was being paid so little money, and she said: ‘You should be grateful for writing for the *Guardian*.’ The brutal racism is now built not so much on the colour of our skin but on a nationalist ownership of these islands. It's a very edgy relationship between people of colour and Indian origin, the nation and the media. It's hard to accept that journalism has the right to be critical of everybody if it is criticism with evidence and is justified. I don't think just because we are discriminated against, we should never be criticised.”



RAJAN NAZRAN of the UK said, “Trinidad culture is that everybody has to fit in and it's defined by the steel pan, calypso, limbo and Carnival which is [promoted by the media as] national culture, but Phagwa or Diwali is not. True journalism is the conversations that people don't want to have. The reality is the media, and news especially, is PR.... South Asian journalists may have diversity of skin colour, but not diversity of thought, which is what the news needs to be. Journalists should say what are the key issues because they intimately acknowledge the fragility of these stories to local people.”



DR KUMAR MAHABIR of Trinidad said, “I did the first empirical study on Indian men in the media. My presentation statistically examined the frequency of Indian men in advertisements in two daily ‘national’ newspapers in Trinidad and Tobago. The methodology used in this study was

content analysis that coded the frequency of images of men of all ethnicities in 116 colour advertisements in 60 editions of the *Newsday* and *Guardian* over a 30-day duration. The findings revealed that Indian men were marginalised/underrepresented in advertisements in comparison to African men (11: 61) in the print media in a country in which Indian men outnumber African men (236, 823 or 36% and 228, 068 or 34% respectively). This study is framed within the Agenda Setting Theory. The agenda of these advertisers is to create a perception that Indian males are unimportant, marginalised, inferior and invisible.”



DR VISHNU BISRAM of the US said, “Historically, Guyana’s media was controlled by the white colonial establishment. Guyana became independent and the government acquired control of the media. I examined how Indians are portrayed and whether there is fair coverage of Indians relative to other ethnic groups. The media is small in proportion to the population and profit. Positive articles honouring Indians are very rare and far. Those that cast Indians in a negative light, are significantly higher than the positives. I suggest that we need to have more ethnic publications that focus on the community as we do on social media through the Indo-Caribbean forum. We should encourage more Indians to join the profession so that they could give us greater publication space as well as positive coverage in the media.”

– Reporting by **Trishana Jeenath**

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