

Shaping Diasporic Identity: The Impact of Indian Media on Indians in South Africa

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Abstract

Various researchers have discussed at length the story of Indians migrating to South Africa. There is quite a body of literature tracing the journey of Indians migrating to South Africa through different means. Through the different studies the question of 'identity' especially for Indians in South Africa, has been addressed time and again. South African Indian identity is the product of many different factors. Among the various factors that have led to the formation of this South Africa identity, perhaps the most significant is the media. Indians have been influenced with the Indian media, since the beginning of migration as indentured labour. This essay purports to analyze three types of Indian media that have been paramount in shaping Indian diasporic identity in South Africa: print media, especially newspapers; cinema, Bollywood; and social media, including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

Keywords: *Migration, Indians, South Africa, Media, Identity*

Introduction

The takeover of India by the East India Company is an example of how western forces tried to dominate any broken polity that existed before the modern notion of nation-state and during that period Indian populace went through extreme suffering. East India Company had only one goal in mind, which was to exploit the natural resources of the region and earn profit.

The collection of land revenue by the Company aided in financing the wars of the Company. Along with the new trading system, India stopped being an exporter of processed goods and started being an exporter of raw materials and, in turn, a consumer of manufactured goods. This severely damaged the economy of India, so much that the GDP hit rock bottom. The British were also in the process of expanding their empire, and were looking to produce cash crops that could be sold in the international market. The global market had a high demand for sugar and rubber. For this reason, the East India Company colonized parts of Africa such as South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana, as well as Gambia, due to their ability to cultivate such cash crops. What they lacked was a sufficient supply of inexpensive skilled and semi-skilled labor to work in the plantations.

Every time there was a call for labor, whether in agriculture or mining in the colonies, the appeal was for ‘coolies’. These would be either Indians or Chinese, and collectively termed the ‘Asiatics’ (Tinker, 1974). It has been argued by scholars such as Freud (1995) and Hu-Dehart (1993) that the British had a marked inclination towards sugar cultivation in South Africa as they had already experienced success with Indian and Chinese labour in other parts of the world such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Mauritius.

At some level, indenture systems served as an escape route from the relentless social and economic difficulties that plagued these Asian regions for over a century. One of these challenges was the “Indian population explosion.” Indian figures surged from an estimated 185 million in 1800 to 285 million by 1900 (Malharbe, 1991). Many members of the rural peasantry in these regions faced enduring poverty from economic depressions alongside internal civil wars and colonial exploitation. Unemployment and overcrowded conditions, coupled with the unrelenting droughts, famines, diseases, and floods, made these two nations susceptible to the call for “coolie indenture” (Northrup, 1995). Regarding the Indian indenture narrative, it has been argued that “poverty was the omnipresent backdrop against which the South African recruiting companies worked,” and that the interplay of poverty, rise in chronic ecological instability, and rebellion as Indian emigration drivers has been insufficiently explored. Northrup’s depiction relates very closely to the plight of the Indians from fifty years prior.

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Table 1

Indentured Indian immigrants by colony in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and Indian population by county, 1980

Colony	Period	Indian Immigrants	Indian Population (Est.) 1980
Mauritius	1834-1912	453,063	623,000
Natal (South Africa)	1860-1911	152,184	750,000
Reunion	1829-1924	118,100	125,000
East Africa (Kenya/Uganda)	1895-1901	39,771	79,000/430*
Seychelles	1899-1916	6,319	NA

* These figures are much lower than those prior to the expulsions of 1972. In 1970, the Indian population of Kenya was 1,82,000 while that of Uganda was 76,000.

Source: Clarke, Colin, Ceri Peach and Steven Vertovec (eds.) 1990. *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

South Africa is one such colony where Indians were brought mainly as indentured labour to work under these plantations. The transfer of Indians to South Africa in different phases led to a presence of a considerable Indian population in South Africa.

In South Africa, people of Indian origin constitute about 1.6 million, making up 3% of the total population. About 80% of the South African Indian population is concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal, which includes Durban. This is followed by 15% in the Gauteng region, which includes Johannesburg, and the remaining 5% in Cape Town. South Africa is one of the countries where Indians migrated to from the 18th century onwards, most of them as indentured workers. South African cities which have a significant population of Indians are quite familiar with Indian culture and Indian food. Indian restaurants are not a novelty in Durban, Johannesburg, or Cape Town. South African Indians have diverse associations aimed not only at self-mobilization but also at the social cohesion

of the community. Just like any other Indian diaspora, the concept of identity is of great significance to South African Indians. With the help of some different factors, the Indians in South Africa have managed to preserve this identity. This is where the media has been quite helpful.

This paper deals with Bollywood and social media alongside newspapers also as an important source of media which makes it equally important to consider the violence against Indians in South Africa through the years. Therefore, the second section seeks to analyze the impact newspapers in South Africa have had on the social, cultural, economic, and political identity of Indians in South Africa.

Print media played a significant role in shaping the identity of Indians in South Africa during the colonial period, particularly when the indentured labourers lived and worked under British rule, united by a shared opposition to the colonial regime. Indian cinema has been a continuous cultural presence throughout the Indian diaspora's journey in South Africa. Although its influence was disrupted during the Apartheid era, it re-emerged strongly in the post-Apartheid period, leaving a deep cultural impact. In contrast, social media is a much more recent force, gaining traction in the 21st century. This paper explores how social media, as a contemporary tool, is influencing and redefining the identity of South African Indians today.

Indian Migration to South Africa

The history of the Indians in South Africa is not only well-known but it has been recorded very well in the documents as well. Indians migrated under different waves, the first wave was called the 'Indentured Indians'. Most of the Indians who travelled to South Africa during the British rule travelled under a special contract of indenture labour to work in the plantations. When the Britishers found the prospects of growing commercial crops, at first, they encouraged the natives to work in sugar plantations. But being dissatisfied they tapped foreign sources for such labour. The British needed semi-skilled and skilled labour. India was found to be the best option as many Indians were already taken to colonies like Mauritius and had shown their talent.

The first ship named *Truro* reached the port of Durban on 16 November 1860 from Madras with the first batch of 340 indentured labour out of which 197 were men, 89 women and 54 children. Amongst the Indians the composition

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of Hindus was as follows: Brahmins (2%), Kshatriyas (9%), Vaishyas (21%) and Sudras (31%). The labourers started arriving one after the other, there was another batch that arrived on 26 November 1860 on a ship named Belvedere that came from Calcutta. In this batch there were around 61 Brahmins as well as 25 Kshatriyas. The labourers were brought under a contract which could be renewed after its expiry. There were large number of agents involved in the recruitment of labourers in and around the port of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay. In the year 1864, there were a total of 1000 labourers who came from Madras itself as can be seen in Table 2. The numbers of Indian indentured labourers kept increasing throughout the decade of 1860s, 70s and 80s, so much so that by the time indenture was abolished by the British government in 1911 after tremendous pressure from the Indian nationalists, the total number of migrants in South Africa was 152,184. Therefore, the Indian Diaspora forms a sizable portion of the population of South Africa. They have also played a very important role in the socio-economic as well as political structure of the country. While analysing this journey of the Indian Diaspora in South Africa, what interests the mind is the existence and the role of the Indian media in shaping the Indian Diaspora identity in South Africa.

Table 2

Ports of Embarkation of Indian Indentured Labourers

Year	Calcutta	Madras	Bombay/Karachi
No. (% of total during that period)			
1856-61	14,533 (66.5)	6479 (29.6)	860 (3.9)
1871-70	1,22,241 (67.5)	56,356 (31.1)	2479 (1.4)
1870-79	1,42,793 (78.4)	19,104 (10.5)	NA
1880-89	97,975 (76.0)	21,653 (16.8)	NA
1891-1900	106,700 (63.3)	28,550 (16.9)	33,343 (19.8)
1907-16	66,839 (62.3)	32,369 (30.2)	8016 (7.5)

Source: *Brij V. Lal, Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians.*

Indians also migrated in the second category as 'Passenger Indians'. These were those Indians who had no intention of permanent settlement. This category of people started coming as free immigrants in the year 1870 and formed at least 10

percent of the Indian migrant population. The first Indian trader who stayed in Natal in 1875 was Aboobakar Ahmod. Indian traders soon became very wealthy passengers and dominated the trade in the region. Their contribution was not only economic but also social. Many Indians funded religious events celebrating Indian festivals. Some of them contributed towards educational organisations as well. However, one could see the stark difference between Indian indentured labour and trader Indians. Indentured labourers were struggling with limited means at the mercy of their employer while passenger Indians were wealthy and did not have restrictions on them. They took several trips back to India in a year. While the Indentured Indians were mostly Hindus, the passenger Indians were largely Muslims who came from states like Gujarat and Bombay.

This paper seeks to discuss the role of media in shaping the identity of the Indian Diaspora in South Africa, and in order to do this the paper will highlight three major forms of media that have played an important role for the diasporic Indians- newspaper, Bollywood and social media.

The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them (Boyd, 1787, p. 49).

Print Media as a Tool for Empowering South African Indians

Media played a very important role in defining what the Indian community constitutes in the early years. With the help of print media, the South African Indian community was able to refine their South African 'Indian' identity. The paper would firstly, discuss the print media especially the Indian newspapers. The print media is also known as an important pillar of a democratic nation because of the power they have over the electorates. The mass media can easily influence the public opinion by mobilizing the masses by bringing them together to address common concerns, educating the electorates by providing them reliable information, creating awareness about issues like human rights, creating an environment of coherence between different groups and also by

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making the government accountable and transparent. The print media has proven to be an important tool that influences people's thoughts about ideas such as politics, religion, gender, race etc. The print media in South Africa has a long history in standing for the rights of the discriminated. Indian newspapers have been a powerful tool to mobilise the populations towards important ideas for the economy, society and polity of South Africa. The Green Pamphlet, *The Grievances of the British Indians in South Africa: An Appeal to the Indian Public* published in 1896 was the most important publication that brought into light the conditions and treatment of the Indians in South Africa. This document was also a very strong reply to some of the important newspapers in South Africa which referred to Indians in derogatory languages. As Gandhi (1896) mentions:

The man in the street hates him, curses him, spits on him and often pushes him off the foot path. The Press cannot find a sufficiently strong word in the best English dictionary to damn him with. The Press almost unanimously refuses to call the Indian by his proper name. He is 'Ramysamy'. He is 'Mr. Samy'. He is 'Mr. Coolie'. He is 'the black man'. And these offensive epithets have become so common that they are used even in the sacred precincts of the court. (p. 4)

Image 1

Indian Opinion, March 2, 1912.



FIFTY MEN GO TO GAOL

PASSIVE RESISTANCE BY INDENTURED INDIAN LABOURERS

ON Sunday, the 18th ultimo, a number of indentured Indians on Mr. Balcomb's estate at Kearsney, near Stanger, were asked to clean the barracks and the land about it.

One of the men refused to do such

plaint, but the men felt so indignant that they would not listen to such a proposal, and so went "in a body," which the law says they must not do.

It was also stated that there was a condition of the contract of service which states that the immigrant was

and engaged Mr. Dickinson to defend them.

The Magistrate, after hearing the complaints, cautioned Mr. Starr, and made an order that the wages of the Indians be paid at once and full rations given. He also ordered that

‘Indian Opinion’ is the newspaper that gained wide recognition and has always been referred to as the newspaper for Indians by Indians. But it doesn’t mean that there were no others who started this initiative before Gandhi. There was certainly the ‘Indian World’ in 1898 by P. S. Iyer and also the ‘Colonial Indian News’ in 1901. ‘Indian Views’ was another newspaper which was published from 3 July 1914 by M.I. Meer and mainly catered to the interests of the Indian Muslims. There were many renowned Muslim businessmen also gave donations to run the newspaper, since it catered to the Muslim population. There were the Indians who migrated as passenger Indians.

Many Indians tried to start their newspapers to gain the attention of the Indian community but did not succeed. One important Indian newspaper that could succeed for a long period of time was called ‘The Leader’ by Dhanee Bramdaw. Bramdaw saw to it that the price of ‘The Leader’ was lower than the previous newspapers, so that the average Indian could also afford to buy this newspaper. His aim was to reach to a larger Indian audience than the ‘Indian Opinion’ had been able to capture. What was different in this newspaper from the earlier ones was its non-alignment to any political group. In its first issue itself, ‘The Leader’ declared that,

it was an independent organ, owing no allegiance to any group or body but its columns will be open to all bodies which place the welfare of the Indian community in its entirety. This infact, will be the Leader’s criteria of judgement of all public affairs affecting Indians. (Prashanta, 1994, p. 51).

The writers knew very well that passive resistance movement and its development was important for Indians, so it covered the movement diligently. The Indian community resisted the Ghetto Act and it was resounding in the columns of ‘The Leader’ also like “Natal’s Determined Cry: No Indian Ghetto Bill” (Prashanta 1994, p. 53). Dhanee Bramdaw made sure that the news item which was important for Indians must be discussed on the editorial column. The phone lines were also open for the public to call and even express their discontent on any news piece. The newspapers brought out several political news but also didn’t leave out other things like cooking recipes, fashion, education etc. Therefore, one can say that ‘The Leader’ served an important purpose in shaping the identity of the Indian South Africans. The publishing of ‘The Leader’ is also important because it was published at a time when there

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was growing agitation by the Whites against the 'Indian Penetration'.

But the problem was none of these newspapers became successful in getting the attention of readers like 'Indian Opinion'. Indians were not drawn towards these papers and this brought down the sale to a large extent which made it difficult for them to survive. On the other 'Indian Opinion' was published in 1904 by Mahatma Gandhi and it became most successful in leading the political opinion amongst the Indian origin people of South Africa. This newspaper discussed all sorts of issues which were of concern to the Indians. It not only talked about racial discrimination but it also wrote about other issues being faced by Indians. Since, the time of arrival of Gandhi in South Africa the problem of racial discrimination was being discussed and talked about among the indentured labour population. Gandhi when himself faced racial discrimination on his arrival in South Africa, realized that the mobilization of Indians in this foreign land is a must. Gandhi understood that if Indians themselves do not stand up and fight for their rights, they would always be debarred of their rights. Therefore, starting a newspaper was the most logical step that Gandhi took to mobilise the large number of Indian populations which was also multi-lingual.

The various columns and articles published in newspapers like 'Indian Opinion' had been quite instrumental in shaping the identity of the Indian population in South Africa. In the first issue of 'Indian Opinion' Gandhi made himself clear to his readers that South African Indians would not be identified by their religious, regional or caste identities. Because of the simple reason that Indians in South Africa were divided among ethnic, caste, religious lines. He preferred not to refer to Indians as Tamils, Bengalis, Hindus etc. but always as British Indians (Pandey, 2018).

The formation of Natal Indian Congress was a very positive step towards bringing the Indians forward for negotiation. By this time the British also realized that Indians had their own demands and would not accept all the draconian passed the British government whether it was additional taxes or introduction of passes. Gandhi brought together the indentured labourers and made them understand the need of the British government for labourers in the sugarcane plantations. This he did to make Indians understand that the British will never put an end to indentureship, hence it has to be done from Indians. Gandhi demanded that, "We say with all earnestness, we can command: stop

the indentured immigration....It would furnish a practical demonstration as to whether the colony can or cannot dispense with such labour” (Gandhi. 11.06.1903).

Gandhi knew very well that the regional fragmentations that existed within the South African Indian community must be united and therefore, through his writing in ‘Indian Opinion’ he made clear that he wanted to carry forward the idea of Indianness. He united the Indians against the discriminatory practices of the British. Several attempts to negotiate with the colonisers were made in order to stand against racial discrimination in any form. The Indian community even started to expect humane and better living conditions from the British and not merely being treated as coolies, through the various columns of ‘Indian Opinion’. Indian newspapers came to be known commonly as mouthpiece of the Indians in South Africa in respect to the charges levelled against the members of their community. These articles, gave the Indians a place to express themselves and justify their acts even if they had been to defy the existing rules.

‘The Graphic’ was a magazine that started in 1950 that published content on entertainment all dabbled with politics. It helped to shape the Indian identity to a great extent. Soon, the magazine changed from a monthly magazine to a weekly tabloid which started providing competition to its predecessors like ‘The Leader’.

Bollywood and Belonging: The Influence of Indian Cinema on Diasporic Identity

The second form of media that this paper would talk about is the Bollywood or the Indian film industry. Bollywood has played an important role in the lives of the South African Indians. Indian movies have been very popular in South Africa and during the decades of 50s and 60s there were some cinema halls that were playing Indian films in Durban, South Africa for example, the 2400-seater Shah Jahan in Durban. The Indian population secretly watched the Indian movies which was illegal during Apartheid. But Bollywood being such an integral part of Indian households, continued to bring people together during Apartheid as well. There were also popular TV shows like Ramayana and Mahabharat that became household names for all Indians. But what is equally important is to look at how South African Indians have reacted to this Indianness displayed through films and music.

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An individual recognizes himself with his home or the host culture which forms his cultural identity. As Jung and , have defined cultural identity as a “socially and historically constructed outcome of locating the self in relations to interactions with others as well as to socially and culturally conditioned communicative structures within a given society” (2004, p. 147). Identifying with a particular culture also gives people a sense of belonging and security. It has been seen that any individual’s identity can be maintained through different social interactions with other people/groups/ associations as well as with media. The social interactions that individual has with his community, people, family have been known to play a very significant role in constructing and maintaining one’s identity, particularly the identities of the diasporic communities (Moorti, 2003). Hence, it becomes interesting to study the role of Bollywood in influencing the identity construction among the third, fourth and fifth generation Indians in South Africa.

Films are the most common artifacts of modern popular culture that generate and reflect diverse cultures and the traditional values of a society (Beard, 1994). People are becoming aware of different cultures from all over the world through various films. This is cultural exchange that is happening at a very fast pace. Preserving and maintaining their Indian identity was a continuous challenge in other countries for the Indian Diaspora in South Africa. They were able to connect with their Indian identity with the help of various technological advancements. It is not just the print media in the form of newspapers, journals that helped Indians in advancement of their identity but also the electronic media through films, television etc, that made it easier for the Indians to connect with their Indian identity through the comfort of their homes (Appadurai, 1990).

The electronic media which in this case is the Hindi cinema commonly known as Bollywood became extremely popular amongst the Indian Diaspora. Therefore, the role of Bollywood in Indian identity construction is very important to analyse. There are many reasons for the popularity of the Indian cinema among Indians as well as for the Indian Diaspora. The largest number of films are produced by the Indian film industry and it is not just Bollywood that produces Hindi cinema but also other industries in regional languages in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu. There are large number of diaspora that belongs to these regional states as well.

Thomas Blom Hansen 'In search of the Diasporic Self: Bollywood in South Africa' (2005) has written extensively on the role of Bollywood in the construction of diasporic Indian identity in South Africa. He says that the influence of Bollywood on the South Africans has for a long time been a type of mega-signifier of Indianness in South Africa. The only thing with his theory is that he sees all the South African Indians through the same eye. He doesn't see the class, religious and generational differences between them which many a times defines their actions and quest for identity.

Bollywood movies have gained popularity among the Indians abroad like never before. This fondness of Bollywood cinema began with films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), *Dil to Pagal Hai* (1997), *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003) which were highly successful movies in foreign countries. The Bollywood movies gained popularity in the international market with the changes brought about by contemporary producers like the shortening of the long three hours movies into a one and a half or two-hour short movie. Many producers also collaborated with international filmmakers and brought our movies like *Namesake*, *American Born Confused Desi (ABCD)* that catered mainly to Indian immigrant populations. With the advent of globalization, the popularity of Bollywood movies increased in the overseas market and movies especially for the Indian diaspora were being made. Bollywood became a continued source of entertainment for Indians abroad. Scholars like Dissanayake (2006) have also argued that Indian diasporic communities are not just interested in regular Bollywood movies but also in movies showcasing Indian culture, history and heritage. Bollywood movies have continuously remained an important source for Indian diaspora to remain in touch with their culture and heritage as is being practiced in India. The Indian movies have been able to influence the dressing, language and rituals of the average Indian abroad in a huge way. There is a certain fan culture which is spread through the Bollywood movies in India and also amongst the Diasporic community.

Mobilising Culture: The Role of Indian Diaspora Institutions in Identity Formation

Among Indian communities in South Africa, religion, language, and caste have played an important role in preserving their cultural identity. Over the years, many Indian organisations and associations have helped keep these traditions

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alive through their actions. For example, the Hindu Maha Sabha, founded in 1908, a very active organisation worked continuously to promote Hindu values, vegetarianism, and standardised religious practices for priests in South Africa.

There were also regional associations formed based on language and state identity as many amongst the diaspora belonged to non-hindi speaking states also. The South African Tamil Federation, set up in the early 1960s, focused on the protection of Tamil culture and language. Many Tamil families were worried about their children losing touch with the Tamil language due to the dominance of English. So, Tamil associations ran schools to teach Tamil and even started newspapers like *Viveka Banu* and *Senthamil Selvan*. The Natal Tamil Vedic Society also helped preserve Tamil culture and language and was very successful. The Tamils have been able to maintain their identity very well despite the Apartheid. Similarly, the Andhra Association of South Africa (AASA) which was formed in 2017 in Johannesburg to bring together Telugu-speaking people from Andhra Pradesh worked for their benefit. They have been organising cultural events, festivals, and community gatherings to keep Telugu traditions alive.

Majority of the Indians in South Africa live in KwaZulu-Natal region (around 800,000) and Gauteng (around 220,000). Among these Indians many belong to Gujarati families (about 40,000 Gujarati Hindus and 60,000–80,000 Gujarati Muslims) who belong to higher income groups. The Surat Hindu Association, formed in 1907, focused on Gujarati language education. There were also caste-based groups like the Pattani Soni Association (for goldsmiths), Mochi Mandar (shoemakers), Kumbhar Mandar (potters), and others. Eventually, in 1993, three of the main Gujarati groups came together to form the Gujarati Hindu Sanskruti Kendra, which continues to promote Gujarati culture in South Africa. The Gujaratis came together to strongly form one single Gujarati identity so that there is no bifurcation and there is no loss to their community. In short, cultural identity has always been deeply important for Indians in South Africa. Through various organisations, they have managed to hold on to their languages, customs, and traditions.

Among the younger generation Indians, those born and raised in South Africa with little direct connection to India, Bollywood has played a big part in shaping their idea of what it means to be Indian. From the 1950s to the 1970s,

Indian films were hugely popular. In Durban's Grey Street area, many cinemas screened Bollywood movies. One of the first Indian-owned theatres there was Rawat's Bio. Another, Shah Jahan cinema, had 2,400 seats and regularly sold out. Watching a Bollywood film was a major social event for which people came dressed in their best saris and kurtas to see stars like Dilip Kumar, Dev Anand, or Meena Kumari.

In 1955, the Rajab family opened the Shah Jahan cinema for screening of Hindi movies. At a time when there was no television, cinema was the biggest source of entertainment. But in the 1980s, the situation changed. Due to apartheid policies and India's boycott of South Africa, film imports were affected, and restrictions were placed on which movies could not be shown. Things began to change again in the 1990s after the end of apartheid. As restrictions lifted, Bollywood's popularity returned especially among younger South African Indians in the 21st century, who embraced Bollywood for its music, fashion, and glamour.

Even today, you can see Indian cultural influence in areas like Fordsburg in Johannesburg, where Indian food stalls sell dosas, samosas, and biryani. The Oriental Plaza shopping centre there has around 350 Indian-owned shops where people buy Bollywood music, clothes, and accessories. Many stores also sell replicas of outfits worn by Bollywood stars. In cities like Durban, jewellery stores import custom-made items from India. Wealthy Indian families, especially Gujaratis, often travel to India particularly Surat and Ahmedabad for wedding shopping. Bollywood continues to be a major cultural connection for third- and fourth-generation South African Indians, helping them stay connected to their roots and trends from India through movies, fashion, and music.

Netizens of Social Media

Another major form of media that has helped shape the identity of South African Indians is social media. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram have become powerful tools for people to connect, share, and celebrate their Indian roots. Many pages specifically focus on the South African Indian community and help younger generations stay connected to their culture.

One popular Instagram page is @thesouthafricandesi, which has over 11,000 followers. Since most young people today are on Instagram, this page has gained

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a lot of attention among South African Indians. It regularly shares content about Indian festivals, traditions, and cultural practices. Posts often highlight how deeply Indian traditions—like reciting prayers, fasting during Navratri, and following a vegetarian diet on religious days—are still part of many Hindu households.

The page is linked to a website that sells Indian items such as clothes, jewellery, mugs, and more. This small business was started by a young woman to support her family. The goal is not just to sell products, but to promote pride in Indian heritage among the South African Indian community.

Other pages like @gnsa_ (Gujarati Network South Africa) are also active and share a wide range of cultural and religious stories. For example, they post about the Nori Nem fast (the story of the mongoose and snake), the tale of Goddess Katyayani, Sheetalasthmi, Nag Panchami, and even stories from Indian mythology like Samudra Manthan. These pages also explain the history of Indian migration to South Africa, such as the journey of indentured labourers and passenger Indians.

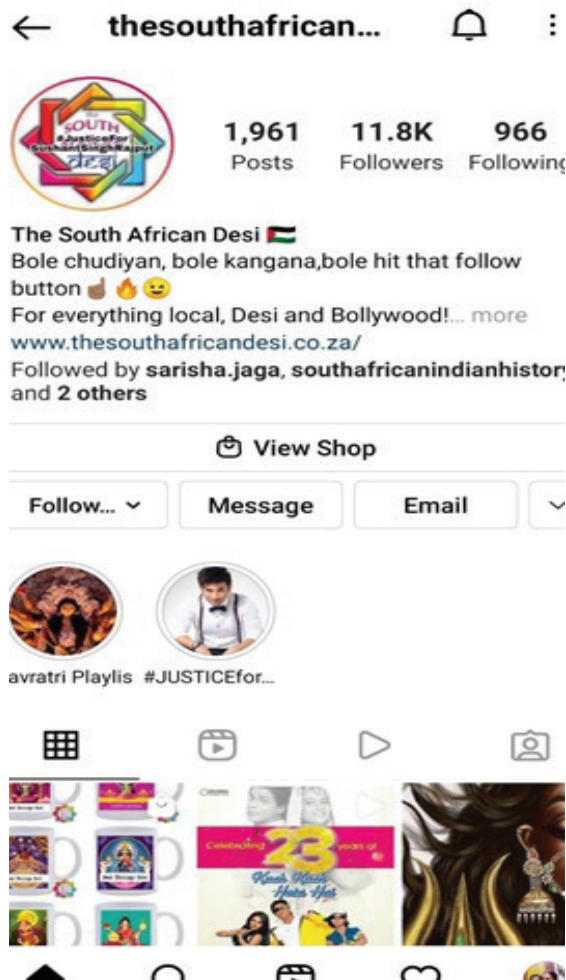
Alongside religion and history, these pages also celebrate Bollywood, which was discussed earlier, and local film productions. One example is the popular South African Indian movie “Kandasamy”, which tells the story of a love relationship between a boy and a girl from different family backgrounds—one traditional and the other more modern. The film, with its local humour and familiar family dynamics, resonated more with South African Indian audiences than typical Bollywood films because it reflected their own lives.

Another widely followed page, @saindians, has over 32,000 followers. This page mainly shares funny memes and jokes, many of which play on common Indian stereotypes in a light-hearted way. While it may be more focused on humour, it still plays a role in keeping cultural identity alive. Besides community pages, there are also many South African Indian influencers who use platforms like Instagram and YouTube to speak about their experiences. One of them is Sandhira Chetty, a Tamil Indian from Durban, who runs a YouTube channel with nearly 10,000 subscribers. Her videos often explore stereotypes about South African Indians—especially Tamil families—and discuss common traits, behaviours, and family dynamics. Her content is aimed mainly at the younger generations—third, fourth, and fifth—who’ve grown up hearing stories from

their parents and grandparents. She compares life in Indian households with those of white or African families, but always with a sense of humour and respect. Her videos strike a balance between being funny and thoughtful, never mocking anyone's identity while still making people laugh.

Image 2

The South African Desi Instagram Page @thesouthafricandesi



Conclusion

This paper explores how three types of media—newspapers, Bollywood films, and social media—have each played an important role in shaping the identity of the Indian diaspora in South Africa. Newspapers were the first form of media available to the community and played a vital role in uniting South African Indians, especially during times of racial discrimination. They helped bring together diverse groups within the Indian community, encouraging them to work toward shared goals and a collective voice.

Bollywood, on the other hand, became a powerful cultural force over the years. For many South African Indians, it's hard to imagine growing up without Bollywood movies, music, and stars. It has been more than just entertainment—it has helped maintain a sense of connection to Indian culture, especially for second, third, and fourth generations.

More recently, social media has become the most accessible and fastest-growing form of media. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have allowed young South African Indians to express their identity openly and creatively. These platforms not only connect people but also give space to celebrate, question, and reshape what it means to be Indian in a South African context. In conclusion, this paper argues that South African Indian identity is shaped by a mix of influences—no single factor or form of media can define it completely. By focusing on these three types of media, the paper highlights how each has contributed in its own way to keeping cultural identity alive and evolving across generations.

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