

Indians on TV: Challenging Hollywood's characterization of South Asian (American) men and lack of diversity through comedy

Comedy as social commentary



Master of None: Season 1, Episode 4: Indians on TV (2015)

[The episode] begins with a montage of young Dev watching portrayals of Indians in movies and shows, starting with the scene with the Indian character in the movie *Short Circuit 2* that was actually played by white actor Fisher Stevens...The episode soon moves to Dev's own issues as an aspiring actor in New York: he and his friend and fellow actor Ravi are both auditioning for "Unnamed Cab Driver" on a crime procedural, and Dev gets told outright by the casting director he won't be getting a callback because he won't do an accent. "Ben Kingsley did an accent for Gandhi," is the justification the casting director offers Dev. (Mehta 2015)

1988



Fisher Stevens, *Short Circuit's* fake Indian. Digital image. The A.V. Club. November 10, 2015. Accessed February 3, 2016. <http://www.avclub.com/article/read-aziz-ansari-talks-fisher-stevens-short-circui-228211>.

2012



PopChips. "Browned Off: Ashton Was Accused of Racism after Donning Makeup to Play a 'Bollywood Producer' in a Crisps Commercial." Digital image. Dailymail. May 3, 2012. Accessed February 3, 2016. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2138671/Ashton-Kutchers-racist-commercial-pulled-backlash-horrified-viewers.html>.

Research Questions and Topics

Questions:

- How are South Asian/-American men characterized in Hollywood?
- How is Hollywood's lack of diversity and characterization of South Asian (American) men being approached/addressed?
- How does comedy make sensitive topics, such as race, approachable?
- How does comedy inspire social discourse?
- What is the relevance of comedy, diversity, and the role of South Asian/-American men in Hollywood?

Topics:

- Hollywood's lack of diversity
- Brown face, brown voice
- The relationship between comedy and social commentary

Methodology

Qualitative research

- Drawing a comparison between and analysis of "Indians on TV" *Master of None* Episode and *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle* (2004)
- Outlining the connection between comedy and social discourse
- *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film* will be used as a primary source.



"John Cho as Harold Lee and Kal Penn as Kumar Patel in "Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle" (2004)." Digital image. Wordpress. December 9, 2011. Accessed February 25, 2016. <https://scottbaio.wordpress.com/2011/12/>.

Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle (2004)

Because the film is a stoner comedy, it is not readily recognizable as an Asian American story. However, within the genre of stoner comedy, these films create a narrative that normalizes Asian Americans and South Asian Americans as a central part of American culture and in the process redefines the boundaries of American regional, cultural, and national identities. (Davé 2013, S.17)

Sources

Davé, Shilpa. *Indian Accents: Brown Voice and Racial Performance in American Television and Film*. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2013.

Mehta, Maitri. "Aziz Ansari's 'Master Of None' Episode 'Indians On TV' Gets Representation Painfully Right." *Bustle*. November 17, 2015. Accessed February 25, 2016. <http://www.bustle.com/articles/122532-aziz-ansaris-master-of-none-episode-indians-on-tv-gets-representation-painfully-right>.

Shohat, Ella, and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge, 1994.