Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation

Summative Analysis

Fall 2014
Smithsonian Institution
Office of Policy and Analysis
Introduction

In February 2014, the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center (APAC) opened *Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation* on the second floor of the National Museum of Natural History. Never before had such a comprehensive story been told in a U.S. museum of Indian immigrant and Indian American contributions – and struggles along the way – to the cultural, political, and professional fabric of the nation. In spring 2014, APAC asked the Smithsonian Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to do a summative analysis of the exhibition. APAC and the study team decided on a three-pronged approach of studying visitor response to the exhibition via interviews and a survey and print media response via text analysis. (APAC separately studied the response to *Beyond Bollywood* in the social media.)

Below is a short summary comparing key takeaways from study questions across the three studies. The three separate studies then follow.

Summary of Three Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N (number in analysis)</th>
<th>Quantitative Survey</th>
<th>Qualitative Interviews</th>
<th>Print Media Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A total of 373 eligible visitors were intercepted, of whom 299 completed the survey (a cooperation rate of 80%).</td>
<td>42 interviews; 21 with individuals and 21 with groups. Total of 75 visitors. 17 interviews included those who self-identified as Indian or Indian descent.</td>
<td>40 articles; 28 domestic and 12 international publications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Who came to the exhibition?**

*Beyond Bollywood* was successful in drawing in more visitors who identified their cultural heritage as Indian (29%) than usual for NMNH. The overall percentage of Asian Americans and visitors from Asian countries at *Beyond Bollywood* (31%) was four times as high as the 2009 Museum-wide survey (8%).

More women than men visited *Beyond Bollywood* (62% vs. 38%).

Overall, the audience at *Beyond Bollywood* was slightly younger than the Museum as a whole, with more visitors under 32 years old and fewer from Generation X.

One in ten visitors came to the Museum specifically to see *Beyond Bollywood* (11%). Among *exhibition-specific visitors*, seven in ten indicated their cultural heritage was Indian (71%). *Exhibition-specific visitors* from the US were:

- Three times as likely to self-identify as Asian (75% vs. 28% of general visitors from the US) and less likely to self-identify as White (15% vs. 57%).
- Three times as likely to say their cultural heritage was Indian (74% vs. 22%).
- Twice as likely to indicate that they or their parents were born outside the US. (85% vs. 43%).
How did visitors hear about the exhibition?

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<th>Quantitative Survey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three out of four exhibition visitors said they had stumbled upon it (77%). One in ten found out by Word of mouth (9%), and fewer from the Smithsonian website (7%), Mainstream (American) press (2%), Indian/Indian American press (2%), Facebook (2%), or Twitter (0%).</td>
<td>Quite a few visitors commented that they were surprised to find the exhibition in the Natural History museum.</td>
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<td>“It’s something I didn’t expect to find, and I honestly didn’t know too much about Indian American culture. It’s cool to mix things up. One moment I’m walking through the bones and whatnot, mummies. Next thing you know, I’m checking out Indian American culture.”</td>
<td>By far, the biggest complaint the study team heard was that Beyond Bollywood was difficult to find.</td>
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How did visitors rate their overall experience in the exhibition?

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<tr>
<th>Quantitative Survey</th>
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<tr>
<td>The overall experience rating for the exhibition (18% Superior, 43% Excellent, 38% Less than Excellent) was close to the Smithsonian exhibition average (20% Superior, 48% Excellent, 33% Less than Excellent). Visitors who personally related to the content of the exhibition as well as those who felt they enriched their understanding enjoyed their experience more.</td>
<td>Visitors’ initial reaction to Beyond Bollywood was overwhelmingly positive, starting off with such words and phrases as “liked it a lot,” “loved it,” “really enjoyable,” and “fantastic.” The most common adjective was “interesting.” Other commonly heard expressions were “new to me,” “didn’t realize,” and “I was surprised.”</td>
</tr>
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Are the ratings and experiences of visitors who took guided tours different from those of other visitors?

<table>
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<th>Quantitative Survey</th>
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<tr>
<td>Less than one in twenty used a visitor guide (5%) or took a guided tour (1%).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## What kinds of experiences did visitors find especially satisfying?

### Quantitative Survey

Half of the visitors to *Beyond Bollywood* selected *Enriching my understanding* as especially satisfying (54%). Four other experiences were selected by at least one in five visitors: *Connecting with the emotional experiences of others* (26%), *Spending time with children/friends/family* (22%), *Reflecting on the meaning of what I saw* (22%), and *Being moved by beauty* (22%).

The exhibition’s aim for non-Indian Americans to learn about Indian Americans appeared to be met as non-Indian Americans found *Enriching my understanding* to be especially satisfying.

### Qualitative Interviews

Visitors frequently referred to the variety of people and “different pieces of life” in the exhibition, for example, “the groundbreakers” and “people who were denied their rights.”

Visitors of non-Indian descent were more likely to recite facts and statistics that they hadn’t known before.

Many visitors talked about historical moments and events that surprised them.

Visitors expressed surprise – and in the case of many of Indian descent, delight – at the extent of Indian American influence on contemporary American life.

## What did visitors find most striking? What parts of the exhibition stood out?

### Qualitative Interviews

When visitors were asked, “what stood out”, the most-mentioned areas/objects were the religion wall, the dining table display, and the Naeem Khan dress.

“This wall with the quotes, with all the different religious faiths behind their names, is really interesting because if you don’t know a lot about India, everyone just assumes it’s all Hindi. I have a neighbor who’s Sikh, but I’m not sure that I necessarily recognized that there were Muslims living in India, and obviously they’re living here too ...”

“We walked around the dining table and I was just telling [my wife] look, your spice box is sitting right there. So it was very close to home, as authentic as you can get. Everything resonated with us.”

Other frequently mentioned areas were the art by emerging Indian-American artists, the motel display, the Spelling Bee, the shoes, and the trunk in the Migration Section.

A number of interviewees said they were moved by the turban of Balbir Singh Sodhi and parts of the exhibition that dealt with discrimination.

### Print Media Analysis

Well over half of the articles commented on history, i.e., first arrived in 1790, helped build the nation’s railroads and farms.

Almost all of the publications covered at least one or more of three types of contributions—cultural, political and professional. Most cited the same examples of struggle/political contributions: difficulties in attaining U.S. citizenship in the first half of the 20th century; participation in workers’ and civil rights issues; hate crimes performed by “dot busters” in the late 1980s; and the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi in the aftermath of 9-11.

The most extensive reviews of cultural contributions were of food (the table), religion/spirituality, and fashion. By far the most-mentioned cultural artifact was the dress designed by Naeem Khan for Michelle Obama. Described variously as compelling, striking, moving, and sobering, one of the most commented upon objects in the show was the royal blue Sikh turban worn by Balbir Singh Sodhi, the first South Asian person murdered in retaliation for September 11, 2001.
What was the impact of exhibit design, i.e., utilization of specific exhibit features/elements such as vibrant colors?

<table>
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<th>Print Media Analysis</th>
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</table>
| Among exhibition features, Design/layout and Thematic organization (both at 59% combined Excellent and Superior) rated higher than Content of texts (49%), Selection of art (46%), and Selection of objects (42%). | Beyond Bollywood's "look and feel" was often visitors' top-of-the-mind impression. "The mood is very relaxed, colorful and enjoyable, and that’s what Indians are all about."
“Bright colors trying to get the vibrancy of the culture.”
“Well, I really love the sound of Indian music ... I still just like hearing the sounds of the tabla especially. Walking in hearing that old style of Indian music was really nice.” | Articles noted that colors were inspired by the Bollywood aesthetic, using descriptors such as bold mango, deep magenta, saffron, bright plum, and vibrant jewel tones. Articles equally described the two iconic Hindi film melodies playing on a loop at the entry and the listening station with ten tracks from Indian musicians who have influenced American music. |

Did visitors notice the art by young, emerging Indian American artists who are taking on questions of identity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Interviews</th>
<th>Print Media Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Visitors frequently mentioned the art featured in the exhibition. “But that was brilliant ... the dot, because you hear that your whole life. What tribe was your family from? Oh really? I’m Navajo. And you have to explain. And I’ve done that my whole entire life, so that was just really cool that somebody did that.” | Reviewers gravitated to the original artworks of emerging Indian American artists and praised how they posed questions about race and identity. “Meanwhile, in the “Arts and Activism” section, it’s reinvigorating to see how pioneering Indian American artists use their mediums to explore and challenge issues of identity.” (Aerogram)
“... favorite parts of the exhibit, a series of photos by Annu Palakunnathu Matthew are featured ... I’m sure Annu’s narrative is familiar to anyone who [has] ever been questioned ‘But where are you really from,’ so this photo series resonated with me on multiple levels.” (Brazen Behenji)
“... favorite find? There’s a piece of art — it’s a painting called Dots. It’s by a Brooklyn-based artist named Anujan Ezhikode. He created it in response to a number of racially motivated acts of violence and hate crimes that happened in New Jersey in the 1980s. (Huffington Post)
“Hip-hop activists, DJs and musicians fire the new generation of “desi,” a term of ethnic solidarity among South Asian Americans” (IIP Digital). |
Did the exhibition highlight the contributions of Indian immigrants and Indian-Americans in shaping US history? Did it honor and respect both the struggles and achievements? Did it show that Indian-Americans have been in the U.S. for centuries?

**Quantitative Survey**
The most often selected theme—marked by more than two in five visitors—was *Cultural contributions* (45%). Next, with fewer than two in five, was *Personal stories of migration* (36%). Three other themes were selected by about one in four visitors: *History of early immigrants in America* (28%), *Religion, spirituality* (26%), and *Discrimination* (23%). The least selected themes were *Indian American professions* (19%) and *Activism and social justice* (14%).

**Qualitative Interviews**
People of non-Indian heritage generally said they “knew a lot” coming into the exhibition; however, many were surprised to learn about Indian Americans’ long history in the U.S. and breadth of influence.

“It wasn’t just here are spices, here is pop culture. It’s also the harder history.”

“When I came in ’98, there was already an established Indian community, so it wasn’t a big deal for me. But I can’t imagine people in the ’60s and ’70s. I can’t imagine what they have gone through, all the struggles. We are basically standing tall on their shoulders.”

“I didn’t realize how much my people influenced or became part of the American fabric.” (Indian immigrant who has lived in Columbus, Ohio for 30 years)

**Print Media Analysis**
“From workers who built some of America’s first railways in the West to the creator of Hotmail, a new exhibition here showcases the contributions …” (Deccan Herald)

“... the juxtaposition between the serious and weighty (e.g., recognition of a difficult history with harsh immigration and citizenship laws) and the light and humorous (e.g., Besting the Bee)” (Brazen Behenji)

“... surprised to learn that Indian Americans started arriving in the US in the late 1800s. They worked in lumber mills and on railroads.” (Live Mint)
Did the exhibition raise questions in the minds of visitors about: Who is American and who is a foreigner? Whose stories should be told as part of American history?

**Qualitative Interviews**

The exhibition made visitors think about who is American and who is a foreigner.

Interviewer: “What was one theme that stood out for you?”

Woman: “The inclusion in society.”

Man: “The struggle and then ultimately the value added of Indian Americans was a common thread throughout.”

Several interviewees made a point of saying that they do not differentiate between Indian American and simply American, while others made a point of celebrating cultural difference.

**Print Media Analysis**

“I wanted to know if my mom views herself as Indian, Indian American, or American. “Indian American,” she says unequivocally. ‘Because I came from India and I am in America and I still have a lot of Indian ways and I love America.’ ... I [the author] think of myself as an American of Indian origin because I was born here, my ideas are shaped largely by this country since I went through the education system here and yet at the same time, I don’t think of myself as “American Period.” (American Bazaar)

Did Indian immigrants see their experience reflected and their stories told?

**Quantitative Survey**

Indian Americans seemed to engage with the exhibition as a way to connect to and share their past, with a high proportion saying the theme *History of early immigrants in America* made the strongest impression.

The exhibition also evoked an emotional response to stories of shared experiences for visitors who came to NMNH specifically to see *Beyond Bollywood*.

Compared to other visitors, *Exhibition-specific visitors* were three times more likely to claim Indian cultural heritage; were significantly more impressed with *Personal stories of migration*; and more often chose the satisfying experience *Connecting with the emotional experiences of others.*

**Qualitative Interviews**

Indians, Indian Americans, and those of Indian descent living in other countries said the exhibition had a personal connection for them: It was a “pleasant surprise” and they “related to everything.” Certain elements such as the migration section, Hindi music, and dining table served as emotional triggers for personal connection and memory. Other Asians and Asian Americans also felt a strong personal connection.

“I came here 18 years ago, and I have been through many of the struggles these folks have been through.”

**Print Media Analysis**

“The vivid images and stories include Indian labor in the building of US railroads and in farms and lumber mills in the 19th century, to the well-known journey of Swami Vivekananda to America later in the century. There are lesser-known milestones such as the Indian debut in Hollywood through the child actor Sabu Dastagir in the 1930s, pre-dating the entry of a raft of Indian-Americans into the entertainment industry.” (Times of India)
## Did children of immigrants experience pride in their roots and a sense of belonging?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US visitors whose cultural heritage was Indian were more likely to select the theme <em>History of early immigrants in America</em> (44% vs. 21%).</td>
<td>“I still tear up when I listen to that old Hindi music, and I try to tell [my children] that this is my favorite music. And when we entered and [my son] said, “Mom, this is your favorite music!” I thought it was so cool.” “My dad came over here in the ’50s. His family was Sindhi, but they ended up in Mumbai because they left when the partition happened. And so he met my mom and married her in New York. So this is very personal to me.” Interviewer: “So you said you have children. Is part of the enjoyment seeing them learn about the Indian culture?” Visitor: “Yes. I don’t think they know much about their culture, so this is exciting to them.”</td>
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## Did the exhibition serve to combat stereotypes?

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<th>Qualitative Interviews</th>
<th>Print Media Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US visitors whose cultural heritage was not South Asian were more likely to select <em>Enriching my understanding</em> (59% vs. 38%).</td>
<td>Visitors said the exhibition was effective in addressing and dispelling stereotypes. “I was expecting the stereotypical thing, but it diminished my stereotypical belief of the community, and it was nice and educational! It was eye-opening.”</td>
<td>“This recurring theme of exploring and transcending stereotypes of Indian Americans is echoed in every part of the exhibition and in its very name.” (Aerogram) “[The Indian American] community is vast, diverse, deeply-rooted and nuanced, and this is the story that needs to be told.” (USINPAC) “… The exhibition goes far beyond old tropes about diversity as much as it transcends pop culture stereotypes, and offers a fresh perspective to a museum world that often still thinks in terms of race, class and gender ‘silos.’” (SI Magazine)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation

Qualitative Analysis of Interviews with Visitors

October 2014
Smithsonian Institution
Office of Policy and Analysis
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Did you emigrate from India?

I did. 18 years ago. It’s our story on these walls. I’m amazed.

Introduction

As Part 2 of the three-part summative analysis of Beyond Bollywood, the Asian Pacific American Center (APAC) asked the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to conduct a qualitative study to elicit visitors’ opinions and feelings about the exhibition. The purpose was to provide a window into visitors’ thoughts and impressions about the exhibition in the broadest terms, rather than the precise data on pre-defined issues that the quantitative survey could provide. With a qualitative approach, visitors are able to express their thoughts in their own words, thus providing nuanced and more in-depth insights into how some visitors saw Beyond Bollywood.

To this end, the OP&A study team conducted and analyzed 42 interviews with individuals and groups, comprising a total of 75 visitors (see Table 1). To the extent possible OP&A used an open-ended interview approach – as opposed to a structured interview – with the interviewer asking very few predetermined questions, usually starting off the conversation with, “So, what did you think?” Interviewers listened intently, and probed further when a visitor said something more general, unclear, or attention grabbing by asking, “please elaborate” or “what did you mean by that?” This interview method encourages visitors to talk about what is most important to them (e.g., if lighting is important to the visitor, she will mention it organically). Fewer leading questions also minimize social bias, i.e., the tendency of visitors to give the interviewer polite or superficial responses based on what they think the Museum wants to hear. Depending on how the conversations flowed, OP&A did query visitors more directly about a range of experiences and opinions of interest, for example: what they liked most or disliked, what sections or objects stood out for them, whether they learned anything new, what they related to personally, what they found missing or would change, and what messages they took away.

Half of the interviews (21) were with individuals, and the rest were with groups of two or more people. Individuals and groups included somewhat more females (44) than males (31). The interviewers guessed at age ranges, so it is roughly estimated that more than one-third were young adults (20s and 30s), less than one-third were middle age adults (40s and 50s), there was a small number of older adults, and slightly less than one-fourth were teens and youth who were visiting with adults.

The interviews included 17 with individuals or groups who self-identified as Indian or of Indian descent. Three of the 17 were with international visitors of Indian descent. The other 25 interviews included one with an international visitor (not of Indian descent) and six with individuals or groups who identified as being non-Indian Asian Americans.
The individuals who were intercepted for interviews were not representative of who was at *Beyond Bollywood* during summer, 2014; as such, inferences about the views of the overall population of exhibition visitors cannot be drawn from this study.

In addition to the visitor interviews, the study team asked five college students, interning at OP&A in summer 2014, to walk through *Beyond Bollywood* and record their observations. Afterwards the OP&A study team held a discussion with them, asking them to evaluate how well the exhibition met the five exhibition goals articulated by the curator in press interviews. The observations and discussion are included as Appendix A.

### Table 1: Visitor Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th># Visitors</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>State/Country</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/13/2014</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M/F/F/F</td>
<td>70s/youth</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>family trip - grandparents with granddaughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/13/2014</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>F/M/M</td>
<td>30s/youth</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>mom with two young boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/13/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F/F</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>two young women visiting from Baltimore, one half-Indian, one from UK; just graduated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/13/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>HI</td>
<td>woman is half Indian, her dad came from India in 1950s; in DC for business and came specifically to see the exhibit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/13/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F/F</td>
<td>20s/50s</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>mother and daughter (who practices Bikram yoga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/14/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>man in DC for Asian American non-profit coalition convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/15/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M/F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>couple self-identified as Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/18/2014</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>F/F/M</td>
<td>teens</td>
<td>WI</td>
<td>3 kids on 8th grade trip. One girl from India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/19/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F/M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>couple from India working in US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/19/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>DC</td>
<td>local woman who stumbled upon it; prefers hard science in the Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/19/2014</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>F/F/F/M</td>
<td>40s/teens</td>
<td>TX</td>
<td>family with 2 teen girls; love Indian culture, dance, yoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/1/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F/F</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>two women from Baltimore, came with a Boy Scout troop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/1/2014</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>F/M/F/M</td>
<td>40s/teen/ youth</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Indian American family from Boston with teen daughter and younger son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/1/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>woman from India; has lived 17 years in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/8/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>young Asian American man - parents born in Philippines; PhD student in DC for internship at Global Change Research Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/8/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>woman was born in India but grew up in MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/8/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>woman was born in India; came to US for arranged marriage 16 years ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/11/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F/F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>TX</td>
<td>two women road-tripping from San Antonio to Boston with stop in DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/11/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F/M</td>
<td>20s/teen</td>
<td>DC</td>
<td>siblings; she just graduated from Museum Studies program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td># Visitors</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>State/Country</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F/F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>two women from Las Vegas in DC for a conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>AL</td>
<td>young man In DC for National Youth Science Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2014</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M/M/F/F</td>
<td>40s/youth</td>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>family of Indian descent from Qatar here to visit relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>DC</td>
<td>man originally from China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2014</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>M/M</td>
<td>30s, 7</td>
<td>WA/MD</td>
<td>cousins from Seattle and Baltimore, half Indian via the diaspora (their moms are South American), one with daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>man here to visit relatives; wife is of Indian descent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>woman of Indian descent (wife of man just interviewed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M/F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>TX</td>
<td>couple; liked inclusion of Indian Jews; she is a doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>young man loves the music, had been to India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>out of state</td>
<td>woman interested in food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/16/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M/M</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>two men of Indian descent visiting from London; father emigrated from India to UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>woman in DC for a medical convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>woman in DC for a Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>OH</td>
<td>Indian immigrant has lived in Columbus, OH 30 years; his non-Indian wife knew about the exhibit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F/M</td>
<td>40s/youth</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>mother and son; live near Silicon Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>woman from Australia, here to visit her child who lives in MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Japanese American woman; in DC for Asian and Pacific Islanders Historic Preservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>young Asian American (not IA) man; girlfriend was fellow at APAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/17/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Indian immigrant came to US 18 years ago; visiting Museum with small son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/17/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M/F</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>man is Indian; wife is Mexican American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/17/2014</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>M/M/F</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>group all of Indian descent; one man was born in a British colony in Uganda, spent 35 years in the UK, in US since 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/17/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>man was in India 2 years ago; intrigued by culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/17/2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>F/F</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>two women, one is on committee for Filipino American National Museum in Stockton, CA and teaches Asian American Studies at San Francisco State; other is chair of Asian American Pacific Historical Preservation</td>
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Analysis of Visitor Interviews

So, What Did You Think …?

As the word cloud of responses to this opening question shows (see Figure 1), visitors’ initial reaction to Beyond Bollywood was overwhelmingly positive, starting off with such words and phrases as “liked it a lot,” “loved it,” “really enjoyable,” and “fantastic.” The most common adjective was “interesting” – people commonly referenced statistics or facts that they learned or something in the exhibition that they hadn’t known before, using such expressions as “new to me,” “didn’t realize,” and “I was surprised.” Visitors frequently referred to the variety of people and “different pieces of life” in the exhibition, for example, “the groundbreakers” and “people who were denied their rights.” Some visitors immediately related to a personal shared experience such as leaving shoes at the door. A number of visitors’ first impressions had to do with the design of the exhibition, saying “the aesthetics are beautiful,” “I like the music,” and “I love the bright colors.” Visitors of Indian descent often gave a nod of approval to the exhibition’s “accuracy,” saying it “is a good representation of who we are” and “captures Indian life very nicely.”

What Stood Out

When visitors were asked about their favorite part of the exhibition or what stood out for them, the most-mentioned areas/objects were the religion wall, the dining table display, and the Naeem Khan dress.

People were fascinated with the religion wall that had quotations from young people. Several visitors commented on common threads that they discerned or personal connections:

*I liked seeing how close the ideals were for each one of those religions because they all talked about the same things: community, family. It was nice to see that.*

* * * * *

*Woman 2: I think for younger adults to feel like, “these are my peers.” It’s on the wall.*

*Woman 1: Or for some, ‘I live near there. Chicago? There are Christian Indians in Chicago? There’s a Jewish Indian in Edison, New Jersey?’* * * *

*This wall with the quotes, with all the different religious faiths behind their names, is really interesting because if you don’t know a lot about India, everyone just assumes it’s all Hindi. I have a neighbor who’s Sikh, but I’m not sure that I necessarily recognize that there were Muslims living in India, and obviously they’re living here too. So there are like a broad spectrum of religions across that country, so they’re not that different from us as Americans.*
Figure 1: Wordle™ of responses to question, So what did you think?
The religion wall was a learning experience for others, such as one teenager in town for a National Youth Science Camp:

... it’s just like each quote is about a different religion. I might as well say I’m ignorant. I don’t know too much about various religions, so it’s just like each quote categorizes each religion in one statement. I think this is really awesome. It’s cool to learn different things.

The dining table display of Indian foods, spices, dinnerware, and food-related cultural touchpoints was very popular with all manner of visitors, young and old, of Indian descent and not. A mother visiting with her two young sons explained:

But what I love most, emotionally, was the table. Especially being a mom, having to cook for the family. And then that brought me back to my college days and my friends. They opened my eyes to Indian culture in a way that no book ever could. Now I have a thing for Indian food.

An Indian American family visiting from Boston had this to say:

Father: ... we walked around the dining table and I was just telling [my wife] look, your spice box is sitting right there. So it was very close to home, as authentic as you can get. Everything resonated with us.

Mother: And that spice box from Williams Sonoma – that was quite a surprise for me – you used to get it from India, you don’t get those boxes here. Now you get it at Williams Sonoma – wow, that’s very close! It’s the same thing! Just little added features.

Father: Innovation or tradition, so it has half lids so you can level off the spoons.

Mother: But Indian cooking is not about spoons or teaspoons, it is about experience; you just do it. You don’t think about it, you just look at it, you smell it. It’s not like baking where you measure everything, no. You have to have the things, and you just add things as you think you are going there.

Teen daughter: Food is really huge for us; it’s by taste and smell that we go ahead and cook.

And a girl of Indian descent visiting with her family from Qatar had a particular reason:

Interviewer: Did you kids like any particular part?

Mother: The dining table, you liked the most?

Daughter: Yeah.

Interviewer: What did you like about it?
Daughter: Jalebi [Indian dessert] was there.

The **dress designed by Naeem Khan** for Michelle Obama was similarly a huge hit. A typical comment was, “and the dress… I walked over and wow, that’s gorgeous, and then I see who made it.”

Other frequently mentioned areas that stood out for visitors were the art featured in the exhibition, the motel display (and Arch Motel photography project), the Spelling Bee display, the shoe display, and the trunk and family photos in the migration section.

Visitors were intrigued by the **artwork**. One woman said, “The colors, the woman wearing the gas mask, the spray paint. I’m not even exactly sure what that’s about. It makes me want to ask questions …” In particular, they pointed out Annu Palakunnathu Matthew’s work juxtaposing Indian Americans/American Indians titled “Where are you really from?” The artwork’s statement about identity resonated with many of the interviewees of Indian descent, such as one young woman who said,

> **But that was brilliant ... the dot, because you hear that your whole life. What tribe was your family from? Oh really? I’m Navajo. And you have to explain. And I’ve done that my whole entire life, so that was just really cool that somebody did that. Very good side by side.**

Others not of Indian descent were also drawn to Matthew’s work, for example, a mom visiting with her two boys:

> **Oh! I like the part where it showed that people get confused about Indians and Native Americans, and how Indians have to explain that I’m an Indian from India. That was really interesting. And then they have the side by side! There are some really clear similarities in facial features that I never even thought about before. That was really cool. To have them sitting in similar positions, and then showing the dot in the middle of the forehead and then two on the cheek, that was great.**

Visitors found the **motel display** interesting and illustrative – “It just shows about hard work and getting somewhere. That you can start fresh and follow the American dream.” One woman of Indian descent from Hawaii said:

> **And I liked the motel project. It was very interesting.**

**Interviewer:** What interested you in that?

> **Well, I like the visuals of it, and you don’t realize how many people are doing that, and they’re raising their families like that. That’s just fascinating when you didn’t grow up in an environment like that. I think it’s great that someone took the time to document that. I really like photography, and I like seeing how people capture the world.**
The Spelling Bee display was a big attraction for the children with interviewees. Two visitors who highlighted the interactive were a young woman from Baltimore at the museum with a Scout troop and a mom with her two young boys:

The best thing that I found was the spelling bee because I try to watch it every year, and I thought it was neat that an Indian girl had won that year. I didn’t know that; that was pretty awesome and that you have the trophy there. That’s really cool.

The Bee thing is awesome, my kids just keep gravitating towards that ... my son was in a spelling bee competition, and that’s something that we went through as a family. So when I see the kids up there, I go through what it takes to prepare your kid, how nerve-wracking it is, even small scale, and that was like big scale.

All kinds of people noticed and personally related to the shoe display, including:

A young Japanese American woman:

I really appreciated and enjoyed this part of it (the shoes). I’m Japanese American, and that’s always something that has been a source of discomfort when people come over and they don’t take off their shoes.

An eighteen-year-old man from Alabama:

I immediately noticed the shoes. And my friend wanted to try them on, and I’m like, no, we probably shouldn’t do that.

A man of Chinese descent:

And the shoes when you walk in, how Asian people take off their shoes. We do that at home too.

Two women from California:

Woman 2: I was like, am I supposed to take mine off?

Woman 1: I was like, oh no, these are artifacts.

The entrance area of the Migration section with the trunk, family photographs, and Bollywood music particularly resonated with people of Indian descent, such as one woman who was born in India who said, “I loved that picture at the Golden Gate Bridge. I love the photo of the mother and the two kids.” Other comments on this area included:

A man of Indian descent who prodded his daughter:

Did you like the old pictures we looked at? The old steamer trunk? When they travelled with all of the belongings they had.
A woman whose father emigrated from India in the 1950s:

When you first walk in, and you see the old photographs of all the kinds of ways that Indian people are here, but people don’t even realize that someone is Indian. And that’s how my life has been. People don’t know what I am. They can’t tell what I am. I get asked all the time. Everyone thinks I look more like my stepdad because he’s Italian and Puerto Rican. So it’s kind of funny.

A mother who came to the US for an arranged marriage, and her son:

When we first entered, the first thing he mentioned was that he had listened to the music that was played. That’s great because that was one of my favorite movies, and I still tear up when I listen to that old Hindi music, and I try to tell them that this is my favorite music. And when we entered and he said, “Mom, this is your favorite music!” I thought it was so cool.

A number of interviewees said they were moved by the turban of Balbir Singh Sodhi and commented more generally on the parts of the exhibition that dealt with discrimination. As one man married to an Indian woman said, “…all these different people and all the things they’ve done to assimilate, and all the crap about not being able to get citizenship – that is unbelievable to me.” Other comments included:

After 9/11 I was very sad to hear a Sikh man had been shot just because he had a beard and wore a turban.

*     *     *

This particular wall over here, the 9/11 and afterwards – that’s fairly poignant.

Interviewer: Is that new information for you?

No, obviously I live in the west, so I was aware of the one gentlemen’s murder. It’s just tremendously saddening as Americans that that even happened.

*     *     *

In the 9/11 area … I was a student collaborator in the Guantanamo Public Memory Project. So it’s always neat to see something that is controversial or straight up not shying away from a difficult topic.

Interviewer: So you appreciate what the curator did in terms of bringing things in that are controversial?

It wasn’t just here are spices, here is pop culture. It’s also the harder history.
Several people mentioned the “tribute to Miss America.” One young man from California in town for an Asian American non-profit coalition appreciated the exhibition’s currency and attention to activism:

> Like I said, the current event, the Miss America debacle with the racism and xenophobia. That’s something new. For me, another side is the youth, meaning the young adult movement at the other end, where they’re moving, there’s activism too within the community. They want representation. I like that.

Other mostly young visitors referred to the display of Hip Hop artists. One rising 8th grade girl of Indian descent had this to say:

> It was showing how it is getting more Westernized, how hip hop activism, like they didn’t have that before, and now when I listen to songs from India, they are a lot like American songs. They are changing, and it is showing famous Hip Hop people.

Other parts of the exhibition that visitors said stood out included yoga; the historical piece in general; the Olympic medal; and the cab driver video. This last was of particular interest to a woman visiting from Australia:

> I was intrigued to see that bit about cab drivers, because of where I’m from in Australia, in the past 5-10 years there has been a lot of immigration from India. Most of our taxi drivers now in the city where I live will be Indian. Mostly Indian, maybe a few Pakistanis, but it was interesting to see that little bit. I enjoyed that.

**Exhibition Design**

*Beyond Bollywood*’s “look and feel” was often visitors’ top-of-the-mind impression, and they were very complimentary of the exhibition design. As one person said, “the mood is very relaxed, colorful and enjoyable, and that’s what Indians are all about.” Specifically, they commented on the flow, use of space, labels, interactives, colors, and music.

In terms of flow, comments included that *Beyond Bollywood* was “organized, grouped in a logical way.” One man said, “I really like the way it’s broken up by different experiences, the historical pop culture, the contemporary.” A woman from California noted, “It flows really well. I think we went in the order it was supposed to go, chronological and thematic, and it was kind of mixed.” However, some indicated that it was hard to know if there was a right way to go, or during the interview realized that they had missed a room.

> Man: Well I think the reason we missed that room, you come in so far around; we may have missed it. We would’ve looped back around there and gone out the door. Maybe have an arrow or something.
A number of visitors commented on the **use of space**, with some saying it was a “wonderful use of space” and others saying, in general, that “there were a lot of small things for a big space.” Two women with a professional interest in the exhibition who were in town for an Asian American related conference thought the use of space was “just right”:

**Woman 2:** And then we were taking pictures of even the citations of where the collections were taken from. I’m impressed because I can only imagine the amount of research and time to curate the exhibit, and then you have to edit it so much.

**Woman 1:** It feels really well edited.

**Woman 2:** Like one piece is like three books. Yet it’s just enough for this space and this audience.

**Woman 2:** At one point I said, this makes me want to read more books. This is something I want to look into more. It’s like a little commercial for something much bigger. It’s easy to consume really quickly.

**Woman 1:** ….but you could also go very slowly through it and digest and meditate. We just don’t have much time, and plus this is not really a new history to us…you can move through it quickly. I think for people for whom this is very new, I think it’s a really good introduction.

On the “wanting more” side was a mother visiting with her son from Silicon Valley, CA:

**I think of India as being this overwhelming place of sights and smells and textures, and there is a lot more space here to digest everything. It’s an interesting India removed from India. I feel like I’d like more.**

**Interviewer:** More how?

**More music or to see more of the Indian Americans in Silicon Valley. Who are they? What are they making? The films … It seemed like there were a lot of things spaced out on the wall and things to read, and it just seems like there would be so many ways to interact with something either on the screen or with sounds or media clips. I think of India or Indians if they are here being so media savvy with film, music, games, smells….**

Visitors of all ages commended on how clearly the **label information** was presented. Two rising 8th graders had this to say:

**Girl:** I thought it was really nice because they showed the information really well. I kind of knew what was going on, but it was pretty good.

**Interviewer:** When you said they showed everything well, what did you mean?
Boy: It was explained well. There are some places where you read it and kind of say, “what?” But this was explained well, and it was interesting.

Two women, one in academia in California and the other a Japanese American woman, said in separate interviews:

> There are so many times where [information] is presented in an awkward disjointed way, and people get upset because they feel like they don’t understand a lot of it, but here it is easy to consume, and it just made sense to me.

> I like it a lot. I think it does a pretty good job of meeting at a more general space in terms of the knowledge of what people are coming in with. I feel that the language is easy and meets people where they are.

The exhibition’s use of **interactive elements** was commented upon favorably; most often mentioned were the table, yoga section, Spelling Bee, motel, and mirror with dance poses.

> I also like some of the more artistic aspects of the curation, the mirrors, the interactive parts of it.

Interviewer: Like what?

> Like this yoga section. The Spelling Bee. It’s inviting to get people to come up and perform with it. I feel it’s a good way of bringing history to the present and allowing people to explore for themselves.

> Boy: I like some of the interactive things, like they had the table out there, and they had the mirror and the poses. I thought that was really cool.

Visitors loved the **wall colors** – “bright colors trying to get the vibrancy of the culture.” As one person said, “The colors really attract people and say ‘come check it out.’”

The use of **music** was also appreciated, both the overhead Bollywood music playing on a loop at the entrance and the listening station on the other end.

> Well, I really love the sound of Indian music … I still just like hearing the sounds of the tablas, especially walking in hearing that old style of Indian music was really nice.

> The music was great. We listened to one of them because they had Norah Jones…They [young boys] loved the listening station. They really liked that a lot.
What Visitors Learned

Almost all visitors when queried said they learned something – a typical response was that of a young woman visiting with a Scout Troop from Baltimore: “There was a lot that I didn’t know about the Indian heritage. Looking at the different points in history, it was very enlightening.” Examples of learning fell into three broad categories: facts and statistics, surprise at certain historical events, and a new realization about the extent of Indian American influence in America.

Visitors of non-Indian descent were more likely to recite facts and statistics that they hadn’t known before:

*I learned some surprising things. 95% of farmers in California are Sikhs.*

*I didn’t realize that 1% of the population is Indian American.*

*I love the factoids. One in ten. I love those – I didn’t know them. Spelling Bee factoid.*

*I didn’t know that 50% of hotels were owned by Indians.*

Many visitors talked about historical moments and events that surprised them. Things that came up multiple times were the early arrival of Indians to the US, patterns of migration, inter-ethnic mixing, struggle for citizenship, Indian laborers on the transcontinental railroad, and the Bellingham riots.

*The first wave of Indians came in 1800. I never would’ve dreamed that.*

*I read about the guy’s story where he had to go through the entire process of Supreme Court to say just because I am a different religion doesn’t mean I can’t get immigration. I had no idea. For me, religion was never asked when I came, nobody cared about it. This wall was very enlightening to me.*

*We refer to ourselves as Asians, but it’s interesting to know that earlier they were named as non-white Hindus and then Asians and then South Asians. So that was interesting to know.*

*Didn’t know there was a riot not too far from his house [in Seattle] in 1907. A lot of history.*
Oh, and that tidbit about how cheap labor was sought after in the early 20th century, but they didn’t want immigrants to settle here. As a result then, a lot of people dated inter-ethnically. That was really interesting, and I never thought about that before. I loved seeing the pictures of the guy who was the Sikh, and he’s got his kids around him, and that’s an Indian Mexican family. And we’re from California, so that’s a high population of Indians.

Likewise, visitors expressed surprise – and in the case of many of Indian descent, delight – at the extent of Indian American influence on contemporary American life. As one Indian immigrant who has lived in Columbus, Ohio for the last 30 years stated, “I didn’t realize how much my people influenced or became part of the American fabric.” Another Indian immigrant who came to the US 18 years ago said to his small son, “You’re so lucky to have your own house, your own room. We saw the person who developed the first chip, the astronaut. I learned a lot.” Comments by visitors not of Indian descent tended to center on professional contributions:

Also I didn’t realize – I’ve stayed at a lot of Indian-run hotels. It is so amazing to realize that that was something that gave them an ability to assimilate and to make money and enjoy a life in America.

I was quite interested in the careers that American Indians have, being more than just doctors and engineers but also involved in sports and the media.

I didn’t know the Sixth Sense was produced by an Indian American guy.

I didn’t know that it was an Indian designer who had designed Michelle’s gown.

I also didn’t realize there were so many Indian Americans that were athletes that made it so big. You’ve never heard of any of them.

**Personal Connection**

The OP&A team asked visitors if the exhibition had a personal connection for them and, naturally, Indians, Indian Americans, and those of Indian descent living in other countries said it certainly did. They said it was a “pleasant surprise” and that they “related to everything.” One 14-year-old girl from India said, “Yeah. I like how they show these pictures [on mirror outside] because I do these dances. I can relate to everything. All the words that people don’t understand, I know what they mean, so it was really nice.” An Indian man explained, “I came here 18 years ago, and I have been through many of the struggles these folks have been through.”
As noted above, certain elements such as the migration section, Hindi music, and dining tables served as emotional triggers for personal connection and memory. From these jumping-off points came a number of interesting stories:

An Indian man who has lived in Columbus, OH for 30 years:

*Just to see how well they’ve done overall from the time they got here and all kinds of nasty jobs they’ve had. I’ve started with that too. I shoveled all kinds of nasty chicken manure in college. It’s like, ok, whatever you do to get through... I started in a small town in Virginia near Harrisonburg where I went to school, and we’ve been in Columbus, Ohio for almost thirty years.*

Interviewer: Wow! So essentially you are saying that you didn’t necessarily know a lot about the Indian community or how well they’ve done.

*Well, I married an American person, and it took me out of the Indian community. Most of the Indian community is in the New York, New Jersey, Boston area, and I was in the Midwest. The company I worked for, when I started, I was the only Indian working in the US, even though we had factories in India. Now when I go to work, probably 10% of our staff are now Indian.*

An Indian woman in the US for 16 years:

*I never thought I would be here. It’s just that my marriage was arranged, and he had a job here, so by default I had to follow him... I was trying to read a few of the sentiments written by the women. Why are you here? Why did you bring me here? Everyone has their own experience and how they try to make sense of it, you know? When I came in ’98, there was already an established Indian community, so it wasn’t a big deal for me. But I can’t imagine people in the ’60s and ’70s. I can’t imagine what they have gone through, all the struggles. We are basically standing tall on their shoulders. We have the advantage of the language. It’s easy to make roots, when you go out shopping, etc. But it must have been hard for them.*

A [half] Indian American woman living in Hawaii:

*My dad came over here in the ‘50s. His family was Sindhi, but they ended up in Mumbai, because they left when the partition happened. And so he met my mom and married her in New York. So this is very personal to me. And my mom’s Irish English descent. She’s from Ohio originally.*

A British man of Indian heritage:

*The story of Indian doctors coming to America relates to my father. My father did immigrate to Britain. Same thing where he wasn’t allowed to go into top jobs in*
medicine. In fact, he did the same thing as that doctor did. He added tabasco to everything.

Not surprisingly, other Asians and Asian Americans visiting Beyond Bollywood also felt a strong personal connection to the exhibition. A Japanese American woman explained,

I’m interested in the APA experience in general. I am curious about the duality of the culture, like most minorities in America...

Interviewer: What do you mean by this?

The experience of being connected to two very different cultures; there is a lot of clashing but also sometimes meshing – different cultural odds. So I guess I’m always interested in hearing about other ethnic experiences because to me America is such a unique place in that sense. A very common American experience is multicultural and multiethnic and dealing with that.

A young PhD student from Washington state whose parents were born in the Philippines said,

Indian Americans are very entrepreneurial and hardworking, like my parents who came to this country to give their children a better life. I can understand why a lot of these people chose to do the profession they did just to give their kids the opportunity to have a different life and leave the hotel and go off to do what they’re going to do. I could relate to some of the stories here.

A woman on the committee for the Filipino American National Museum in Stockton, CA admired Beyond Bollywood and wants to use the exhibition as a model for:

... how do you bring together hundreds of years of history, and you know, an incredible number of languages and people? Filipinos have the same issues of speakers of different dialects, people from a huge...well, India is a much bigger country, but you know, 7,000 islands, people speaking all these different languages, different religions, right? How they’re [Beyond Bollywood] able to do that and be complex and broad and easy to consume yet feeling very intimate and very complex at the same time.

Finally, visitors with presumably no Indian or Asian heritage were also able to find things in the exhibition that related to their personal lives. Often the connections had to do with having Indian friends and enjoying Indian food, but there was a wide range of examples:

We’re Jewish so including the Indian Jews meant a lot to me.

* * *

Well, I’m a doctor so all the medical stuff really applied with me.
I’m a software engineer – so I think, oh yes, so many people that I’ve worked with, and the fact struck me that 15% of entrepreneurs are Indian.

I watch a lot of Bollywood. I love Bollywood. So I walked in and heard the music and was immediately like [hums]. And I eat a lot of Indian food. I mean we have a fairly large population in Las Vegas, so it felt comfortable.

The Sixth Sense was always my favorite movie growing up, and I love M. Night Shyamalan – he is one of my favorite producers ever. He did one of my favorite cartoon series of the movie Avatar. I keep looking for his name wherever I go, and it was interesting to see that that was his first movie production. I didn’t know that.

... the different folks that are in the entertainment [section], like the basketball player and the tennis player. I’m a tennis player, well, recreational. That was new to me. I didn’t know that they’d been active in those various sports.

Insight into Indian American Culture

People of non-Indian heritage generally said they “knew a lot” coming into the exhibition. However, as noted above, many were surprised to learn about Indian Americans’ long history in this country and breadth of influence. Two teenagers, a girl visiting with her family from Texas and a boy in the museum with his older sister, had similar thoughts:

I had no idea that Indian Americans had been here that long. It was an insight into Indian American culture here.

I was surprised at the wall with all the inventions that Indian Americans have contributed that the normal American person doesn’t know about.

One 18-year-old from Alabama said this was the first time he had ever learned about Indian Americans:

I also wasn’t quite sure what Bollywood was. I thought it was the Indian version of Hollywood. I was a little confused at first...

Interviewer: Does the title make sense now?
Now that I think about it, yes. I guess the title Beyond Bollywood is talking about how Indian Americans in America are mostly known for Bollywood, and there’s a lot more to Indian Americans than just Bollywood. It makes sense now that I actually think about it.

A young Asian (not Indian) American man commented on how unique it was to see the Indian culture represented separately from a larger ethnic lumping:

I like it a lot, man. It was different, the cultural aspects of Indian American culture ... they often get bunched into East Asian culture and pop culture, but to see their own was eye opening.

Different interviewees – a young woman from Nevada traveling with a friend and another young woman from Baltimore – expressed the idea that exposure to not only Indian American culture but many different cultures can lead to greater understanding and tolerance:

Because this is about Indian Americans, and they bring so much vibrancy to the country and into our society as a whole, it’s really, really nice to see something like this. Like these children over here playing [in the yoga section], so hopefully this will make some kind of impact that kind of knocks down some of those barriers that are sometimes present between different cultures. I think anything that leads to acceptance and understanding is excellent.

* * *

…there is not a lot of recognition for other nationalities in many of our history museums. Looking at this, maybe we should take a step back and look farther ... More people have contributed to our history than what we acknowledge in our textbooks. I believe exhibits like this, as with the Korean one and the Kenyan one outside [Folklife Festival]... more cultural ideas should be brought out so people can be more open-minded.

People of Indian descent also said that they appreciated the Smithsonian providing exposure to Indian American culture and contributions, and saw the exhibition as teaching or reinforcing the cultural knowledge of their children. For example, this from an Indian couple working in the U.S., and a woman who came to this country 16 years ago in an arranged marriage:

Woman: We found it very good because everything is in one space – it includes people, culture, religion, something associated with yoga, a little bit of music and painting. That is what amazed us.

Man: That India doesn’t represent just Bollywood but beyond that.

Woman: It is not just about costumes and food. It is more than that.

* * *
It’s so nice to see in the heart of Washington, DC this exhibit. You don’t even know there’s so much contribution. We need to know and to get exposed to all this stuff. Of course, with the internet and all you can type in and learn all this stuff, but when you see it like this, it’s engrained in your memory, and it’s part of the whole experience. That’s what people from our culture and others learn about. The cuisine...my son said, “Mom, you’re right. You’re supposed to take your shoes off when you come into the house.”

Interviewer: So you said you have children. Is part of the enjoyment seeing them learn about the Indian culture?

Yes. I don’t think they know much about their culture, so this is exciting to them.

Knocking Down Stereotypes

Visitors said the exhibition was effective in addressing and dispelling stereotypes, for example, a woman in town for an Asian American conference and two young women visiting from Nevada:

Interviewer: What were you expecting?

I was expecting the stereotypical thing, but it diminished my stereotypical belief of the community, and it was nice and educational! It was eye-opening.

* * *

Woman 1: I think exhibits like this are important because it makes us stop and think and really re-examine who we are and who we want to be as a people.

Woman 2: And our collective stereotypes. And I think that’s true with any culture. There will always be a collective stereotype. There can be things that... you know, major celebrations or major catastrophes that can change that stereotype for good or bad.

Interviewer: How do you think this exhibition was with dealing with those stereotypes?

Female 1: I think it knocks down some of those.

Female 2: Yeah, yeah. And I think the name of the exhibition says that, too, and it captures that, you know, this is the intent. This is the focus and this is the direction it wants the exhibit to go.

One interview offered the perspective of two British citizens of Indian descent:

Interviewer: What do you think this exhibition is saying about Indian Americans?

There are a lot of stereotypes and unfortunately we do fall into those. We are high achievers, though, as a society, hard workers, and I think it reflects that well.
Interviewer: Do you think it did a good job dealing with stereotypes?

_It did. It exposed it. It shows that we actually can do all sorts of professions, but we’re still stuck in those main types of professions, but as the generations go further down… I’m not going to do medicine because we have one in the family._

**Questions of Identity**

The exhibition made visitors think about who is American and who is a foreigner. For example, a woman from Washington state in town for an Asian American nonprofit convention commented:

Interviewer: Were there any messages that came across to you?

Well, I’m kind of part of these efforts, right? Trying to get across that there are Indian Americans all over the country – that they have been here for a long time and have faced discrimination. That there are some niches they have, but they are also part of the mainstream. I like how it’s showcasing different individuals. So culture, but also this part of – they are American but they are Indian as well.

A young couple visiting from Texas:

Interviewer: What was one theme that stood out for you that you thought was really well done?

Woman: The inclusion in society.

Man: The struggle and then ultimately the value added of Indian Americans was a common thread throughout.

A local woman visiting the museum on her lunch break:

Interviewer: Did any theme or message come across?

_The words they are putting right there: Indian Americans shaping the nation. The impact… I think they said, “what is an American?” And so if you are bringing your ideas from another country… it is such a hodgepodge here. I don’t even know sometimes if there is an American view given the fact that someone who has come from India, or a Spanish speaker from Mexico, general immigrants, we are all here. And so this sense that no one has a right to say, “this is mine.” We are all sharing. We are all mixing together and trying to live together. And we have very different ideas sometimes. I don’t know if that is what they intended to say._

Several interviewees made a point of saying that they do not differentiate between Indian American and simply American, for example, a woman in town for a medical convention and a young woman visiting from Nevada:
Other than that, people I know who are Indian Americans, I don’t draw too much distinction, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Sure. Did it give you any insight into their lives?

Not really. Just because a lot of the Indians I know have been in America for a very long time …

* * *

Interviewer: What do you think of Indian Americans’ identity after having gone through this exhibition?

I have so many Indians where I live that I’ve never thought of them as not American.

Interviewer: Right.

So it’s not necessarily that I segregated them in my mind. But I don’t think I realized what kind of history they had here.

In speaking about identity, other visitors acknowledged and celebrated difference, as this young woman from Nevada:

It is very charismatic in terms of its aesthetics. It’s very identifiable.

Interviewer: And did you like that?

I do! We were just talking about that. There was a woman in the store the other day, and she had on some traditional clothing, and it was absolutely beautiful. And I thought, “You know what? That’s just so cool!” You can walk out of your house like that. To little girls, that’s dress up, but for some women that’s how they dress every day. It’s almost very glamorous. And she was just a beautiful lady; what she had on was gorgeous.

What’s Missing?

Several interviewees felt that, in general, the exhibition needed “more artifacts,” more interactivities, and more sensory stimulation to fill the large space. As one mother with two small boys said, “I like all the little facts, which is neat, but it would be nice to see some more items.” Another visitor said, “hearing these voices here would be really cool.” Other interviewees who wanted more in general included:

A woman in DC for a medical convention:

I’m a very visual person. Things seem to be small for this space. The pictures could be a lot bigger. I think some things could be larger and kind of grab you and bring you in. I’m
interested in the motel thing. That could be more experiential and intense. So just I guess bigger and bolder a little bit.

A woman with her husband and two daughters:

And maybe ... just be able to smell the spices... They use so many... cardamom and cinnamon... all these intense flavors that are so different than what we are used to. It is powerful when you go into an Indian restaurant or a shop, especially the motels, you can get a little bit of the incense smell.

People from India or with Indian heritage, in particular, noticed the absence of things having to do with areas of India, politics, and family life.

A man of Indian descent and his Mexican American wife:

Woman: I think it could’ve gone a little more into depth.

Man: Around the corner from this post where you have the big wall, I’m surprised there isn’t more on the current ascendency of Indian politicians. We have two governors, the new congressman...I didn’t see anything on that.

Man: ...there’s nothing [on] the practice of religion at a family level. I was thinking about something like the temples we keep in our home, but also the community temples. Unless I missed that, I didn’t see anything on that. That’s a really big part.

Woman: Also for Latinos.

An Indian American who emigrated 18 years ago:

Maybe the Indian festivals. India has a lot of festivals. In India every week we have a festival of a different religion. As school-aged kids we had 20 national holidays. The beauty was that every culture was a national holiday, it was a celebration. Diwali, Holi, The festival of colors. The festival of light and sweets... Festivals are celebrated in America by American Indians, so that’s something I feel is missing.

An Indian American family from Boston:

Father: One thing I didn’t see here – there is a lot of history between the Indian Freedom Struggle and the support that America gave to them ... coming to Japan and visiting the other countries for the freedom of India. I didn’t think that was anywhere in here.

Teen daughter: something about the difference between the many different states, because having so many different friends of mine who are from different states, and their family is structured different from my family. The four regions of India – north, south,
east, and west – are plenty diverse in foods, in clothing, in culture, in festivals, languages...

Mother: this is more... I could see the northern part of India. This exhibit does not show anything of the southern part of India. I could see Mumbai, Punjab, Delhi, but I could not see the southern part, which is very different.

An Indian woman who came to the US 16 years ago:

My daughter was saying, “why isn’t there anything about Gandhi?” When I told her that they were not part of the immigrants, that they were part of the freedom movement...but if there was one little corner maybe explaining the freedom struggle. That’s something I would like to see.

Often visitors responded that they wanted more of something that was a personal interest of theirs:

I know it sounds really silly but as soon as I saw the pictures of yoga, I became obsessed with that, and I wanted more of that.

* * *

I would have just loved to have seen more of the textiles.

* * *

Textiles. But I’m a costume designer.

* * *

Maybe a listening station for the hip hop?

* * *

I’m sure there was some stuff about Bhangra; I saw a couple of things, but that seems to be a big cultural thing these days, so maybe more of that.

* * *

The Dot busters – that they were stopped. But how?... I wanted to know how did the community come together, how did they stop it, who were the allies, what were their strategies. And it just stopped there. Then again, because we’re Asian American study scholars, we know there is a story there, but they just didn’t have time to tell it.
Location

Quite a few visitors commented that they were surprised to find the exhibition in the Natural History museum:

As I was walking out the door, I thought to myself, natural history, and I guess I think natural history is more the geology and the rocks. But I realized there was a Korean exhibit just before it, so clearly it is not just my idea of the physical sciences, it is anthropological.

* * *

I liked it. It’s something I didn’t expect to find, and I honestly didn’t know too much about Indian American culture. It’s cool to mix things up. One moment I’m walking through the bones and whatnot, mummies. Next thing you know, I’m checking out Indian American culture.

* * *

I was surprised to find cultural material in the Natural History science museum. I didn’t realize they would have exhibits like this back here.

* * *

It’s very nice. It’s a little different than other exhibitions, and it’s very creative. It’s kind of surprising to see cultural-related stuff in the Museum of Natural History.

* * *

I do think this exhibit was interesting because this is the Natural History Museum. To me, I thought this would be in the American History Museum or some other museum with more culture, but then I thought about it, and there aren’t really any with more culture. I mean, they’re building the African American Museum. There isn’t one for Asian Americans that I know of here in DC ... It’s not something I would have expected, but I thought it was a nice surprise.

By far, the biggest complaint the study team heard was that Beyond Bollywood was difficult to find:

Yes, the leaflet, Beyond Bollywood just came, and I saw it, and I thought it looked a bit different, BUT I did find it difficult to find. I had to go back to the main lobby and the woman said “go to the main entrance on Constitution Avenue, get in the lift, and when you get to the second floor, you are right there.” I came to the gems before, and I didn’t see any signage to it.
I was also frustrated by how difficult it was to find it. I asked someone downstairs and followed her route only to find a technician who walked around the rotunda with me and we found it eventually.

The only thing I can say is that I think this should have more signs and more attention to it. I didn’t know it was here. None of the other girls that came in here with me knew it was here. I don’t think most folks know it’s here.
Appendix A: *Beyond Bollywood* review by OP&A interns

**Intern Observations**

*Summer 2014 intern from the UK studying at the University of Edinburgh*

- I thought that the exhibition was somewhat difficult to find, and I didn’t notice much information for how to get there. For instance, I did a complete loop of the second floor but didn’t see any obvious directions for how to get to the *Beyond Bollywood* room… Perhaps this would not be such a problem for visitors who found the exhibit online (there are directions on the web page: “*Beyond Bollywood* is located on the 2nd floor of NMNH, right off the elevator by the Constitution Avenue entrance”), but it seems to me that had I just been visiting the museum with no planned agenda, I might not have known that the exhibition was on, or where it was. Some signs could have been useful, even by the floor maps (which display where the “Special Exhibitions” are) to let you know what those exhibitions actually are.

- Regarding the name, I had interpreted the title ‘*Beyond Bollywood*’ slightly differently than the curator: I expected it to be focused on the effects and production of Bollywood films, and was pleased to find that it was a broader inspection of the impacts that Indian Americans have had on the country.

- I very much enjoyed the overall aesthetic of the exhibition – it was bright, fun and attractive, and I thought that the sections were organized distinctly & clearly. One good example is the way that the quotes regarding religions were blown up on a wall – they were eye-catching and interesting, and it was an imaginative way of presenting the information. My only problem with the presentation of the exhibition was that occasionally I felt some areas looked to be on the sparse side, with just a touch too much blank wall showing (see below).

- The highlights of the exhibition for me were the artworks displayed by Indian American artists which responded to their place within the culture here. For example, the parallels drawn between
American Indians and Indian Americans, and the before and after US photo comparisons (by Annu Palakunnathu Matthew) were fascinating, as were the photo portraits of Desi ‘undesirables’, which were contemporary and easily relatable at least for someone of my age.

- I thought that the room with mirrors and yoga poses, the table laid out explaining about Indian food, and the kiosk which showed you as the owner of a motel were all enjoyable and interactive parts of the exhibition. I saw children having fun with these parts especially.

- I would be interested to know how open the exhibition is to additions, given there was a sign noting that one could send in their own Indian American family photos, and suggest other famous Indian Americans not mentioned by the museum.

*Summer 2014 intern of Pakistani descent studying at the University of Calgary*

To put my thoughts into perspective, it may be relevant to know that this is the first Smithsonian exhibit I have seen and, being of South Asian descent, I am familiar with the language and culture to a certain extent.

While I was mainly drawn to the content, I do have some words on presentation of the exhibit. I really liked how even before you enter, you encounter the shoe stand. It gave me pause, made me wonder if I should be taking my shoes off (there was a mixture of western and traditional Indian shoes lined up on the stand). For people unfamiliar with the Indian culture, I think it is a great primer to the rest of the exhibit. Upon entering, I noticed a very inviting environment. I liked the open space; it made me want to spend a fair amount of time at each part of the exhibit, whereas often times the cluttered feel of museum exhibits can be a bit overwhelming. There were a few things I questioned, however. For example, the Indian culture is very bright and colourful but I saw very little of that. The colours, while welcoming, were a bit sedate. As well, I was confused by the mirrors on the walls as I went along, and baffled by the mirrors in the yoga portion of the exhibit. They seemed out of place. Although I can see the purpose of the mirrors for yoga, it just did not seem to fit with the feel of the rest of the exhibit. As well, while I enjoyed the open space, at some parts I felt there was too much emptiness. This was especially apparent at the Indian American dinner table. It did not seem to convey any of the richness of American Indian dinners as I have experienced them.

Some things I did enjoy, however, were the photos of American Indian families. They were one of the first things I saw upon entering. I also thought it was great that Indians coming to the exhibit could send in their personal photos, and add to the content of the exhibit in a few places. Another thing I loved was
the Indian motel. First, because this was the first time I had heard of such a thing, and second, because, for lack of a better word, it was displayed in a cool way. It stood out among the rest of the exhibit and had an almost interactive feel to it. I actually noticed some children pick up the motel room keys and try and find a room (they realized there were no rooms soon enough, although that would have been a great addition). Other things I enjoyed: pieces on the struggle for acceptance, the jukebox, 9/11 for American Indians, and the wall of accomplished American Indians.

Finally, I have a few random notes of interest:

- Some Hindi words were used along the way without any explanation (koil, khadi, gay-neck). The one word that was explained (desi), I appreciated.
- There is a wall dedicated to freedom of religion, which I found interesting in the context of India's current Hindu fundamentalism happenings. And also, it felt a bit disconnected from the "American Indian" theme.
- The column with LGBT movements among Indians was also interesting in the context of current Indian climate around that area.

**Intern from Korea studying at Keimyung Adams College**

Overall, the exhibition was much better than what I expected. For some reasons, I couldn’t really think of Indian Americans when I thought of the United States. Rather, Chinese, Hispanic, African Americans, and Caucasian are almost the first groups of people that came into my mind. So it was quite surprising that Indian Americans were actually a huge part of the US society.

In addition, when I first heard of ‘Beyond Bollywood’, the first thing that struck me was the Bollywood movies. ‘Three Idiots’ is the only Bollywood movie that I’ve seen and it was kind of spectrum that I could think of when I heard the exhibition. However, it was indeed *Beyond Bollywood* and I really enjoyed the entire exhibition.

Throughout the whole time when I was looking around the exhibition, I connected the exhibition with my personal experiences. I had really close friends who were from India when I was in Kentucky. They are originally Tibetans but their family moved to India, so they introduced themselves as they were from India. Thus, while looking at the exhibition, I thought of them. There were also section introducing Indian food and I felt I was really connected to it thinking of my experiences at Indian restaurants. To be honest, I wasn’t really impressed by Indian food at that time, but when I saw that Indian table, I felt I wanted to try Indian food again.

Another big part of my thought was related to Korean Americans. Looking at the difficulties that Indian Americans had to experience and the process that they had to made to settle down here, I thought about Korean Americans who probably also had to went through similar processes. I thought that it would be nice to have this kind of exhibition for Korean Americans as well.

There were some interesting points that I wanted to point out in terms of contents and the way they were set.
• I really liked ‘Did you know?’ panels. They were short but contained really interesting facts. For example, the word ‘Bollywood’ comes from ‘Bombay’ plus ‘Hollywood’.
• I liked the video called ‘Scenes from Punjabi Cab’. It was much better than the words and I was able to see how Indian cab drivers lived and thought.
• I liked the section where all notable Indians who made accomplishments in their fields were introduced. I was able to see how many Indian Americans had been affecting the US society in many areas.
• Yoga section was another interesting part of the exhibition. The yoga room with mirrors was good as well. Yoga is very popular these days, but I never thought that it was actually from India.

9/11 and its aftermath that has affected Indian Americans were interesting. Once in my class, I studied about terrorism in general and at that time it was focusing on political and economic aspects of it. By looking at how it actually has affected the daily lives of Indian Americans, however, I was able to think about another aspect of terrorism in a sense of daily lives.

**Summer 2014 intern studying at California University of Pennsylvania**

• Pretty bare at entrance
• Good for people type – generally because of how many pictures of people there were and that there were pictures of just regular families
• Why a mirror? – there was a mirror on a wall and I was confused as to what its purpose is
• Pretty bare exhibition
• Denzel! – my boyfriend and I collect Denzel Washington movies. I thought that the post they had that included him was an example of something more “current” that could bring in peoples’ attention to the exhibition
• Good illustration of percentages – when they had percentages, they showed the proportion using a pie chart
• Illustrates emotional pain well
• I like the photos that compare Indians
• No apparent path to follow
• I like that the text isn't in huge chunks
• Accompanying pictures give some context to text
• Spelling bee stage is mildly interactive
• Good to have physical things to touch, like motel keys.
• The motel desk setup is pretty cool
• Pictures like goddess of visas appealing to object types
• Same sign in two places makes it so the experience isn't dependent on where you enter
• The unsuitability thing is cool – the pictures of “unsuitable” Indian Americans
• Isn't so specific, touches on a plethora of topics
• I’ve decided that the spaciness is nice because it's not cluttered and allows you to productively focus your attention
• Kind of has something for everyone
• Has history and present day in one
• Another set of signs duplicated
Intern from Korea studying at Sejong University

Overall, I was engaged in it which exceeded my expectation. To be detailed….

Contents

- I could become to have a quite explicit perspective about Indian Americans’ history, not to mention not only persisting downtrodden time, which was what I knew, but also interesting facts I wasn’t aware like entrepreneurs of free market system in California.
- I enjoyed looking over how big and diverse its population in America, the areas where they’ve stood out and the industries their workforce’s held the largest category. A couple of things were surprising. E.g., Spelling Bee

Exhibition Designs

- Color: The color of wall, floor, and frames of works are aesthetically beautiful, suitable for each small theme.
- Materials: An array of materials is used for this exhibition. Wood for Hip Hop and Acryl for gender diversity are impressive.
- The flow: Two doors function as entrance and exit at the same time, give same amount of qualified experience. Also, it would be evenly great no matter which theme visitors pick for the first or the last. Everything’s naturally connected.
- Appropriate quotes from ordinary people and celebrities lead deep understanding and emotional engagement.
- Circular graph easily comes into sight because of its shape and color. It’s very intuitive.

The minor issues

- Finding the exhibition: It’s hard to say that many visitors who has limited time and doesn’t have knowledge about this exhibition in advance can actually visit here. I checked the information desk right after entering the museum, but hopefully wanted to see a panel sign or a poster.
- Playing the music: There were two Indian music players, one of them I was using didn’t work.
- Yoga station: It may have more description and interactive.

Discussion: Were exhibition goals met? (exceeded … met … not sure/maybe … no)

The exhibition shows that the impact of the Indian American community goes beyond that community. It highlights the contributions of Indian immigrants and Indian Americans in shaping US history.

- Met: This happens with the achievement wall and idea that IA professions / areas of achievement are ubiquitous, i.e., medical etc. and the big photo of the IA Congressman. Showed that IA is a tapestry.
• No: Exhibit shows that impact goes beyond the community but not exactly shaping US history. It had a part but did not affect it all. The Wall showed contributions and some interesting Indian Americans. It did show that IA is more than a single group, i.e., the LGBT movement was a stronger message. Showed struggle more than contributions.
• Not sure: It was very broad so didn’t see direct impact; exception was Silicon Valley

The exhibition raises questions in the minds of visitors about: Who is American and who is a foreigner? Whose stories should be told as part of American history?

• Met: I connected the exhibition to Korean Americans – both Indian Americans and Korean Americans have had similar experiences. Settling down, they had to go through hard times. Even though they have been here for a long time they are still considered as foreigners for some reason. All those thoughts came to me – I connected my personal experiences in explaining this goal. The exhibition definitely raised the question about being an American and being a foreigner.
• Met: the first time I thought that was looking at the history and being surprised at how early IA’s were here and what their contributions were, similar to the Chinese. There was also the modern IA woman and how their values have been shaped by living here and how they’ve grown. It is not the same conservative and regressive Indian values anymore. I would have loved to see more of that.
• Thought the motel was the best part – loved that part.
• The exhibit reminded me that we have to be ever vigilant because discrimination exists and it is strong.
• We both identified the art portraits of Desi undesirables as particularly good for this goal because it does force the question of what is the difference between Indian and American culture. For me it only succeeded in a limited way because as a goal it is difficult because you have this antimony – you want to show how Indian culture is distinct and how Indian American culture is a real individual thing, but at the same time you want to be able to show how blurred the line is between what it is to be Indian and what it is to be American.
• For me (non IA, white) that question is vague and abstract – I guess certain things kind of got at that, but walking through I wasn’t thinking, what does it mean to be a foreigner. If they were trying to get at that, they could have had a phrase somewhere pushing you to think about that abstract idea (instead of having things that represent that).
• With giving the history, then the stereotypes of the cabdriver and hotel owner, I thought they did push you in that direction without being too explicit.
• I thought it was fascinating how IA’s had tried to be classified as Americans and the crazy ways that people were being classified, i.e., non-white Hindu.

The exhibition evokes an emotional response: Indian immigrants see their experience reflected and their stories told and children of immigrants experience pride in their roots and a sense of belonging.

• It was hard for us to judge this from our perspectives (both white) because we haven’t had those experiences, but we talked about things in the exhibit that might have had those effects. The cab driver and the motel are stereotypes but they are still common, so would lend to Indian Americans seeing their own experiences. For children, the spelling bee, and hipper things like the Hip Hop and sports stars – things that kids might be more prone to value. Also, just illustrating the early
history and the iconic people that struggled for equal rights – I can’t ever remember hearing about that in history class, so if a 12-year-old come in and they have never heard this, they would be like WOW, this is really cool – I think it does instill a sense of pride.

- For older immigrants to have seen that suitcase – you are only allowed one suitcase…I think that would evoke an emotional response. And seeing the shoes and the table setting. People in the tour group said, “Oh, we had those same dishes.”

- [from Korea] If children (of immigrants) saw their parents were struggling while they were growing up, they probably feel pride or connection. But if they are too Americanized, it may be a bit difficult for them. Even though they are rooted in Indian American, their mind is just American. In that case it may be hard to feel pride – it depends on their personal experiences.

- Maybe: As a foreigner (Korean) and a visitor it was very surprising—I saw a lot of good facts about Indian Americans. I felt in terms of work, cab drivers and motel owners [are focused on] rather than doctors and engineers because of the huge numbers and the interactives. I felt like doctors or engineers or sports stars should be more [highlighted] in terms of [engendering] pride. When I see the word ‘belonging’, some historical fact was really good but I couldn’t see a real connection between Indian American history and American history. The last thing I saw was 9/11, a very sad story that a man was killed with no reason.

- Maybe: As an immigrant [Pakistani], the first part describing Indian immigrant stories was well done, the idea of struggle and making your way as a cab driver, or motel owner while still retaining your Indian identity. The second part (of the goal) about children’s experiences I didn’t get at all. The whole exhibit, even the child friendly parts, weren’t directed at Indian children. I don’t think any child would get pride from thinking about their parents or grandparents struggle. Because that struggle isn’t over – those cab drivers are still there having struggles with benefits and working hours. If I heard that about my parents I would be sad, not proud. You don’t get that sense of pride until after you are reflecting on your life and how you got there, which children don’t really do. As for roots and sense of belonging, it would have been great to have stories of successful Indians, not just famous people, something that a child could relate to. Introduce a doctor rather than saying ‘there are so many of these.’

- The first part on immigrants seeing their own experiences reflected in the stories – I saw the emotional response in that. That was done very successfully because it was even emotional for me to read about the hardships of becoming an American citizen, the religious intolerance, and tragedies around 9/11. And then to go into the next room where they have all the achievements – that was quite a nice emotional trajectory. You see what has been overcome. I did not get a sense that had I been a child, I would have felt proud of my own roots because it seemed more focused on the effects of Indian American culture that on the roots and rich traditions of India, and origins and sources of where they came from.

- Children can be from 5 to 17 – a preteen or adult might have more of an affect. Also what kind of family that child is coming from. Some children do not come from a background of struggle – they come with very well off parents to go to school. I don’t know if they would get any of that.

The exhibition serves to combat stereotypes – non-Indians learn about Indian Americans and recognize them as neighbors, classmates, colleagues.

- I think it accomplished that.
• As I was going through I heard people saying, “Oh, I didn’t know that, that’s really interesting.” It definitely introduced new information that people weren’t familiar with.
• I didn’t get the sense that it was really actively trying to combat stereotypes – if anything I got the impression it was trying to carve out and display the niche that Indian American can occupy. It did not steer clear of the stereotypical occupations, like the guy from the Simpsons. I’m actually glad it didn’t try to steer clear of those things because those things are part of the Indian American culture; you can’t just pretend there isn’t a stereotype.
• I think they did try to combat [stereotypes] but did not go into enough depth to actually succeed. They had portions where you don’t have your typical Indian stereotype, but you get a name and maybe what they are and not much beyond that. Whereas you have a video of the cab driver going through his day. Something like that would have been nice on the other end too.
• The undesirable photos and Sikh basketball player combat stereotypes.
• They tried, like 9/11, people automatically think they are terrorists. At least conveying those thoughts to the visitors raises the issue. But they did not go deep enough.
• They did not have the breadth either – I don’t think they showed the variety of kinds of Indian Americans there are. They touched on that (e.g., doctors) but did not go into any depth.
• By kind of going into detail and explaining why this is such a common profession, it was in a way combating stereotypes. With the taxi driver and motel owner – it was something that was attainable, that they could come here and do and be successful at; something related to what they had been doing and brought with them.
• Some stuff like the spelling bee is so stereotypical. I laughed when I saw that.
• I actually think they handled these stereotypes well; the Silicon valley stuff was done in a way that was respectful but not hiding away from the stereotype.
• Maybe “combatting” is the wrong word. Yes. Illuminate?
• The part about recognizing Indian Americans as neighbors etc. everywhere– it didn’t do that; seems a bit heavy handed.
• Going into depth about the stereotypes was better than trying to stay clear. Understanding the stereotype more meant it was not just a common association, but was explained.
A Study of Visitors to

Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation

September 2014
Smithsonian Institution
Office of Policy and Analysis
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Background

The purpose of this study was threefold. First, to understand who was coming to the exhibition (demographic and visit characteristics and how visitors heard about *Beyond Bollywood*). Second, to uncover what visitors did in the gallery and which experiences stood out. Finally, to assess visitor satisfaction with the exhibition.

Observations

*Beyond Bollywood* was successful in drawing in more visitors who identified their cultural heritage as Indian (29%) than usual. Direct comparisons of this figure with other exhibitions at NMNH are not possible as the question of Indian/South Asian heritage has not been previously asked. However, comparing the overall percentage of Asian Americans and visitors from Asian countries at *Beyond Bollywood* (31%) with the 2009 Museum-wide survey (8%), it is clear that the exhibition attracted its core audience.

Indian Americans seemed to engage with the exhibition as a way to connect to and share their past, with a high proportion saying the theme *History of early immigrants in America* made the strongest impression. The exhibition also evoked an emotional response to stories of shared experiences for visitors who came to NMNH specifically to see *Beyond Bollywood*. Compared to other visitors, *Exhibition-specific visitors* were three times more likely to claim Indian cultural heritage; were significantly more impressed with *Personal stories of migration*; and more often chose the satisfying experience *Connecting with the emotional experiences of others*.

The exhibition’s aim for non-Indian Americans to learn about Indian Americans appeared to be met as non-Indian Americans found *Enriching my understanding* to be especially satisfying.

The overall experience rating for the exhibition (18% *Superior*, 43% *Excellent*, 38% *Less than Excellent*) was close to the Smithsonian exhibition average (20% *Superior*, 48% *Excellent*, 33% *Less than Excellent*). Visitors who personally related to the content of the exhibition as well as those who felt they enriched their understanding enjoyed their experience more.

Methodology

Between July 8 and 18, 2014, interns from the Asian Pacific American Center (APAC) administered questionnaires to visitors exiting either door of the *Beyond Bollywood* exhibition on the second floor of the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). Eligible visitors were age 18 or older, non-Smithsonian employees/volunteers, visiting the Museum voluntarily (i.e., not with an organized group), and able to read English. A total of 373 eligible visitors were intercepted, of whom 299 completed the survey (a very good cooperation rate of 80%; for the NMNH Summer 2013 and 2014 Museum surveys on Exit, the response rates were both 56%). The questionnaire is included in Appendix A and frequencies of responses in Appendix B.
Findings

Residence, Race, and Cultural Heritage

Beyond Bollywood attracted a higher proportion of Asian American visitors and visitors from Asian countries than recently studied NMNH exhibitions. (See figures 1 and 2.)

Three quarters of visitors to the Beyond Bollywood exhibition were from the United States (77%). The majority of US visitors self-identified as White (57% of US visitors, or 44% of all exhibition visitors) and one in three as Asian (30% of US visitors, or 23% of all exhibition visitors).\(^1\)

The percentage of US visitors that identified as Asian was higher than on other surveys with this question that OP&A conducted at NMNH.

The next closest was the 17% at the Genome exhibition, where OP&A conducted a survey while Bollywood was open.\(^2\) The percentage was at 7% or less for the Museum-wide surveys in summer 2009 (7% of US visitors, or 6% of all museum visitors) and winter 2010 (5% of US visitors), and for the Smithsonian all-museum survey in 2004 (7% of US visitors). The All-Museum survey had 7% of US visitors for the Smithsonian as a whole.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) The 70% of US visitors who did not identify as Asian comprised 54% of all exhibition visitors.

\(^2\) Race was asked in the August 2014 Genome survey, but not in the survey the previous summer.

\(^3\) The highest percentage of Asian American visitors in the 2004 All Museum Survey was at the Freer—14%.
About one quarter of visitors to Beyond Bollywood were international (23% visiting from another country), and one in three international visitors to Beyond Bollywood was from an Asian country (35% of international visitors, or 8% of all exhibition visitors)\(^4\).

Compared to the results from the Summer 2014 NMNH Museum survey, the ratio of Asian visitors to Beyond Bollywood was significantly higher than to the Museum overall. In the case of the latter, slightly less than one in five museum visitors were international (17%), and of those, about one in eight were from an Asian country (12%, or 2 percent of all visitors).

Overall, three in ten visitors identified their cultural heritage as Indian (29%), and a very small percentage selected elsewhere in South Asia (1%). Among US visitors, one in four identified as Indian (26%).\(^5\) Notably, one in four international visitors came from India (25%), or six percent of all visitors. For the Museum as a whole, less than 1 percent of all visitors were from India.

More than two in five US respondents indicated that they or their parents were born outside of the US (43%).

Visitor Characteristics

Three in five visitors were on their first visit to the National Museum of Natural History (59%), and one in fourteen was from the local DC metro region (7%). Both figures were similar to visitation to NMNH during the summer of 2014 (58% and 10%, respectively, in the NMNH Summer 2014 Museum Entrance/Exit survey). Local visitors were twice as likely to be making a return visit (79% vs. 38% of those from other areas).

One in ten visitors came to the Museum specifically to see Beyond Bollywood (11%). Among exhibition-specific visitors, seven in ten indicated their cultural heritage was Indian (71%).

Exhibition-specific visitors from the US were

- Three times as likely to self-identify as Asian (75% vs. 28% of general visitors from the US) and less likely to self-identify as White (15% vs. 57%)
- Three times as likely to say their cultural heritage was Indian (74% vs. 22%)
- Twice as likely to indicate that they or their parents were born outside the US. (85% vs. 43%)

When asked how they had found out about Beyond Bollywood, three out of four exhibition visitors said they had stumbled upon it (77%). One in ten found out by Word of mouth

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\(^4\) The 65% of international visitors from countries outside of Asia comprised 15% of all exhibition visitors.

\(^5\) By comparison, the 27% of US visitors who identified as South Asian was more than twice as high as reported by the visitors to two South Asian art exhibitions at the Sackler—Worlds Within Worlds: Imperial Paintings from India and Iran (12%) and Yoga: The Art of Transformation (8%).
(9%), and fewer from the Smithsonian website (7%), Mainstream (American) press (2%), Indian/Indian American press (2%), Facebook (2%), or Twitter (0%).

In contrast to those who came specifically to see the exhibit, US visitors who stumbled upon *Beyond Bollywood* were:

- Twice as likely to self-identify as White (59% vs. 29% of others) and less likely to self-identify as Asian (26% vs. 56%)
- Less likely to say their cultural heritage was Indian (21% vs. 79%)

**Demographics**

More women than men visited *Beyond Bollywood* (62% vs. 38%)—in comparison, visitation at the museum during the same timeframe was evenly split between women and men (52% vs. 48%).

Half of respondents were visiting the exhibition in a group comprised only of one or more other adults (50%); one in five with only one or more youth under 18 (21%); one in five with both one or more other adults and one or more youth (19%); and one in ten was visiting alone (10%) (Figure 3). Twice as many visit groups to the Museum included both one or more other adults and youth (41%).

![Figure 3: Visit Group Composition at Beyond Bollywood](image)

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6 Data collection was conducted in early July, and may not reflect the number of *exhibition specific* visitors or how visitors found out about the exhibition at the time of the exhibition opening.

7 A handful of visitors wrote in a response—two found out from the Museum map and one from the fundraising campaign for the exhibition.
The average age of visitors was 35 and the median 33.\textsuperscript{8} The generations with the largest visitation were Generation X (33-49 year olds, 37%) and Generation Y (19-32 year olds, 32%). One in six visitors was older (Baby Boomers, 15%), and one in six was younger (Digital Natives, 14%) (Figure 4). Overall, the audience at Beyond Bollywood was slightly younger than the Museum as a whole, with more visitors under 32 years old and fewer from Generation X.

\textsuperscript{8} In the summer 2014 survey, the Museum-wide average and median ages were 39; by generation: Digital Natives (7%), Generation Y (28%), Generation X (45%), Baby Boomers and older (19%).
Overall Experience Rating

Visitors exiting *Beyond Bollywood* were asked to rate their overall experience in the exhibition using a five-point scale that OP&A has applied across the Smithsonian: *Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent*, and *Superior*. OP&A has found that, in general, Smithsonian visitors who enjoyed their experience tend to select *Excellent*, while those who felt they had an experience beyond their expectations mark *Superior*. Visitors who were critical of an exhibition to some extent select *Good*, and rarely *Fair* or *Poor*.

The numbers for *Beyond Bollywood* were similar to the Smithsonian average. Just under one in five visitors rated their overall experience as *Superior* (18%), slightly more than two in five rated it *Excellent* (43%), and slightly fewer than two in five rated it *less than Excellent* (36% *Good* and 2% *Fair*) (Figure 5).

The percentage of visitors rating their overall experience in *Beyond Bollywood* as...

- *Less than Excellent* was similar to that for the *National Fossil Hall* (Spring 2014); *Geology, Gems & Minerals* (Fall 2006); and *Bright Beneath* (Fall 2011)
- *Superior* was not significantly different than any of the recent exhibitions at NMNH studied by OP&A

![Figure 5: Comparison of Ratings of Recent Exhibitions at NMNH](image-url)
**Exhibition Aspect Ratings**

Visitors were asked to rate five aspects of the exhibition on the same five-point scale as the overall rating—with an additional option of *No opinion*. The proportion of *Superior* ratings across each of the five aspects was similar, ranging between 12% and 19%.

For the combined *Excellent* and *Superior* numbers, Design/layout and Thematic organization (both at 59%) rated higher than Content of texts (49%), Selection of art (46%), and Selection of objects (42%) (Figure 6).

As would be expected, each of the aspect ratings was associated with the overall experience ratings—where visitors rated an aspect higher, they were more likely to rate their overall experience higher.

![Figure 6: Ratings of Exhibition Aspects in Beyond Bollywood](image)

**Missing Elements**

The questionnaire included an opportunity for visitors to express their opinions about what was missing from the exhibition, or additional elements that they would have liked to see. One in four visitors chose to respond.

A common response was that nothing was missing. Other visitors expressed an interest in more content within the exhibition—more objects generally; specific types of objects, such as artworks, jewelry, or costumes; and more hand-on activities. Some comments suggested more exhibitions about India in the Museum or at the Smithsonian.

Some visitors highlighted topics for which they would have liked more in-depth treatment: music and dance; celebrities; religion or spirituality; food; movies; discussions and stories about Indians/life in India; individual life stories of Indian Americans; history of India; and the economy/industries of India.
Exhibition Themes and Satisfying Experiences

Two questions on the survey asked visitors to identify which of seven exhibition themes made the strongest impression on them and which of six experiences they found especially satisfying in the exhibition; they could mark as many as applied. They could also write in a theme that was not offered or, for the experiences question, indicate that none applied.

The most often selected theme—marked by more than two in five visitors—was Cultural contributions (45%) (Figure 7). Next, with fewer than two in five, was Personal stories of migration (36%). Three other themes were selected by about one in four visitors: History of early immigrants in America (28%), Religion, spirituality (26%), and Discrimination (23%). The least selected themes were Indian American professions (19%) and Activism and social justice (14%).

Figure 7: Exhibition Themes in Beyond Bollywood That Made the Strongest Impression

For the experiences, half of the visitors to Beyond Bollywood selected Enriching my understanding as especially satisfying (54%) (Figure 8). Four other experiences were selected by at least one in five visitors: Connecting with the emotional experiences of others (26%), Spending time with children/friends/family (22%), Reflecting on the meaning of what I saw (22%), and Being moved by beauty (22%). One in eight visitors identified Discovering by doing things (13%) as especially satisfying, and one in twelve marked None of these (8%).
**Interplay of Themes and Experiences**

*Being moved by beauty* was selected twice as often by visitors who selected:

- *Religion, spirituality* (40% vs. 19% of others)
- *Cultural contributions* (32% vs. 18%)

*Enriching my understanding* was selected more often by those who chose

- History of early immigrants in America (70% vs. 44%)

*Connecting with the emotional experiences of others* was selected more than twice as often by visitors who chose the following themes:

- Personal stories of migration (40% vs. 16%)
- Discrimination (42% vs. 20%)
- Activism and social justice (57% vs. 20%)

*Reflecting on the meaning of what I saw* was selected more often by visitors who marked:

- Activism and social justice (51% vs. 20%)
- Personal stories of migration (36% vs. 17%)
- Cultural contributions (32% vs. 18%)
Themes, Experiences, and Visitor Characteristics

US visitors whose cultural heritage was Indian were more likely to select the theme *History of early immigrants in America* (44% vs. 21%). On the other hand, US visitors whose cultural heritage was not South Asian were more likely to select *Enriching my understanding* (59% vs. 38%).

Exhibition-specific visitors were

- Almost twice as likely to indicate that *Personal stories of migration* made the strongest impression (63% vs. 34%)
- Almost three times more likely to mark *Connecting with the emotional experiences of others* (58% vs. 21%)

Themes, Experiences, and Overall Experience Ratings

Those who indicated that *Personal stories of migration* made the strongest impression were less likely to give a Poor, Fair, or Good rating (24% vs. 50%). Those who marked *Enriching my understanding* were more than twice as likely to give a Superior rating (25% vs. 10%), and those who did not mark this experience were more likely to rate the exhibition Poor, Fair, or Good (48% vs. 32%).

Visitor Activities

Visitors were asked whether they did any of six activities in the exhibition. Just over four in ten visitors took a photo (42%), and one in ten shared a photo (10%). Fewer than one in ten used an interactive (e.g., Spelling Bee, yoga) (7%) or used social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) (7%). Less than one in twenty used a visitor guide9 (5%) or took a guided tour (1%). Just under half of visitors engaged in none of the six activities (47%).

Notably, those who took photos more often rated the Thematic organization of the exhibition Superior (23% vs. 11%). Also, visitors who identified themselves as white were more likely to report that they did none of the six activities (59% vs. 41% of others).

Personally Relate

Visitors were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement “I can personally relate to what I saw in this exhibition.” The scale was 1 to 10, with 1 being Completely disagree and 10 being Completely agree. About four in ten visitors marked their agreement as 6 or 7 mid-range (39%); three in ten agreed to a lesser extent or not at all (1-5, 31%) and three in ten agreed to a great extent or completely (8-10, 30%) (Figure 9).

---

9 Visitor guides were only available at the information desk, not in the exhibition.
Agreement with the statement was associated with overall experience ratings. Visitors whose agreement was 5 or lower were more likely to rate their overall experience as *less than Excellent* (53% vs. 33% among those whose agreement was 6 or higher).

Visitors were more likely to indicate that their agreement was 5 or lower if:

- They stumbled upon *Beyond Bollywood* (37% vs. 18% of others)
- They did none of the six activities (42% vs. 24%)

Visitors were more likely to mark their agreement at 8 or higher if:

- They were *exhibition-specific* (57% vs. 30% of others)
- Their cultural heritage was Indian (58% vs 22)
### Appendix B: Frequencies of Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is this your first visit to this Museum, the National Museum of Natural History?</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please rate your overall experience at this <em>Beyond Bollywood</em> exhibition today.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you come to the Museum today specifically to see the <em>Beyond Bollywood</em> exhibition?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you find out about this exhibition, <em>Beyond Bollywood</em>? [Mark one or more]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stumbled upon it</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream (American) Press</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian/Indian American Press</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithsonian website</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of the following experiences were especially satisfying for you in <em>Beyond Bollywood</em>? [Mark one or more]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being moved by beauty</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering by doing things</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriching my understanding</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with the emotional experiences of others</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on the meaning of what I saw</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending time with children/friends/family</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which theme(s) of the exhibition made the strongest impression on you? [Mark one or more]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal stories of migration</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of early immigrants in America</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion, spirituality</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural contributions</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian American professions</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activism and social justice</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please rate your experience with the following aspects of <em>Beyond Bollywood</em>: Content of texts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of texts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design/layout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of objects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thematic organization
No opinion 3%
Poor 0%
Fair 6%
Good 32%
Excellent 41%
Superior 18%

To what extent do you agree with this statement?
I can personally relate to what I saw in this exhibition
Completely disagree 3%
2 2%
3 8%
4 6%
5 12%
6 19%
7 20%
8 11%
9 7%
Completely Agree 12%

On your visit to this exhibition, did you...
[Mark one or more]
Take a guided tour 1%
Use an interactive (e.g., Spelling Bee, yoga) 7%
Take a photo 42%
Share a photo 10%
Use social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) 7%
Use a visitor guide 5%
None of these 47%

*Are you male or female?  
Male 38%
Female 62%

*What is your age?
Average 35 yr
Median 33 yr

Age by generation
Silent (Born 1925-1945) 0%
Leading Boom (Born 1946-1955) 4%
Trailing Boom (Born 1956-1964) 11%
Generation X (Born 1965-1981) 37%
Generation Y (Born 1982-1995) 32%
Digital Natives (Born after 1995) 14%

Age by 10 year increment
18-29 37%
30-39 24%
40-49 23%
50-59 12%
60+ 4%

*Do you live in the United States or another country?  
United States 77%
Another country 23%

Washington DC Metro
Non-local 93%
Local 7%

Mall Radius
5 mile radius 3%
10 mile radius 3%
20 mile radius 3%
40 mile radius 6%
100 mile radius 6%
250 mile radius 7%
Other U.S. 50%
International 23%

US Region (AAM)
Metro Washington 7%
Southeast 16%
Mid Atlantic 16%
Midwest 11%
New England 4%
Mountain Plains 7%
West 9%
Country other than U.S. 23%
Unspecified U.S. 8%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Alaskan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian (Chinese, Indian,</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Was your cultural heritage South Asian (i.e., Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepali)?</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Among all respondents]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Indian</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, elsewhere in South Asia</td>
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<td>[US only]</td>
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<td>Yes, Indian</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<td>Yes, elsewhere in South Asia</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<th>Were you or your parents born outside of the US?</th>
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<td>[Among all respondents]</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>[US only]</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>57%</td>
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Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation

A Print/Online Media Analysis

September 2014
Smithsonian Institution
Office of Policy and Analysis
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Introduction

As the third leg of the three-part summative analysis of the Beyond Bollywood exhibition, the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) study team analyzed 40 press reviews of the exhibition (see Table 1). The purpose of the media analysis was to examine the frequency and degree of emphasis placed on certain content/themes, design elements, and objects in the exhibition and to see overall how the reviews were “framed,” i.e., what aspect(s) of the exhibition were particularly highlighted.

The 40 articles in the analysis (Table 1) included the press release prepared by the Smithsonian Office of Communications for media distribution. Five articles were interviews with the curator Masum Momaya in a question and answer format, although many, if not most, of the reviews included quotes that were pulled from interviews with the curator and/or Konrad Ng, Director of the Asian Pacific American Center (APAC), or the SI press kit.

For analysis purposes, the study team further classified the articles according to their place of publication, with 28 domestic publications and 12 international publications. Sixteen of the 28 U.S. publications were India-focused and ranged from mainstream publications (The Wall Street Journal India Real Time) to blogs (My Dosti; Brazen Behenji). Four of the domestic publications were Smithsonian, one was State Department, and the remaining seven were mainstream print or online news sources. Of the 12 international publications, nine were Indian news sources and three were from Canada, France, and the UK.

Articles ranged in length, focus, and comprehensiveness from those that singled out one aspect of Beyond Bollywood – e.g., a Smithsonian Magazine article on the Arch Motel Project and a New York Times reporter who wrote only about the Spelling Bee display – to an exhaustive review by a doctoral candidate in rhetoric at UC Berkeley, writing for The Caravan, who critically examined the exhibition’s handling of such complicated topics as identity and distinctions between what is Indian vs. American Indian-influenced.

Framing

The curator was interested in how the articles were framed, i.e., what aspects of the exhibition were particularly emphasized. As the article titles suggest, and as was borne out in the article texts, six overarching “frames” emerged (Table 1 entries have color text corresponding to the framing below):
1. Contributions/achievements

2. Range/diversity of the Indian American experience; identity

3. Stereotype busting

4. History focus

5. Breakthrough/first-of-its-kind exhibition

6. Eclectic

Table 1. Media Articles Included in the *Beyond Bollywood* Analysis (earliest to most recent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Domestic or International focus</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Article Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Asian Hospitality</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Maxwell, Judy</td>
<td>11/15/2013</td>
<td>Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans’ <em>contribution</em> to US history told in upcoming Smithsonian project...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The South Asian Times</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>1/13/2014</td>
<td><em>Groundbreaking</em> exhibition on Indian Americans to debut in Feb</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 SI Press kit</td>
<td>US-SI</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>1/15/2014</td>
<td>Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 USINPAC blog</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Ojha, Ajay K.</td>
<td>1/29/2014</td>
<td>“Beyond Bollywood” is an Education on Indian American Achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The Aerogram</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Das, Kavita</td>
<td>1/30/2014</td>
<td>Curating the Indian American <em>Experience</em> for the Smithsonian: Q&amp;A on ‘Beyond Bollywood’ with Masum Momaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 The Washington Post</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Parker, Lonnae</td>
<td>1/31/2014</td>
<td>Spring Preview Museums: 'Beyond Bollywood' <em>Passage to America</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage newsletter</td>
<td>US-SI</td>
<td>Mayer, James</td>
<td>2/18/2014</td>
<td>Beyond Bollywood: <em>Immigration, Culture</em>, and the Indian American <em>Experience</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication</td>
<td>Domestic or International focus</td>
<td>Author</td>
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<td>8 India Abroad</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Haniffa; Aziz; Mehta; Parag V.; Chaudhuri; Toby; Raghavan; Gautam</td>
<td>2/21/2014</td>
<td><strong>Your History</strong>, At the Smithsonian: How we helped preserve a bit of your history; We finally got our own little corner of America’s attic; An extraordinary moment; ‘We are a lot more than popular stereotypes suggest’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Live Mint &amp; The Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Rao, Shamanth</td>
<td>2/22/2014</td>
<td>**Masum Momaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 The New Indian Express</td>
<td>Intl-Indian focus</td>
<td>Karthikeyan; Divya</td>
<td>2/22/2014</td>
<td><strong>Passage to America</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 The American Bazaar</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Chitnis; Deepak</td>
<td>2/25/2014</td>
<td><strong>From Spelling Bee champs to Punjabi cab drivers, Shyamalan to Islam, dotbuster violence to shoes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Associated Press</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Zongker; Bret</td>
<td>2/25/2014</td>
<td><strong>Smithsonian eyes influences of Indian-Americans</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 BollySpice</td>
<td>Intl-Indian focus</td>
<td>Yount; Stacey</td>
<td>2/26/2014</td>
<td><strong>Incredible &quot;Beyond Bollywood&quot; Exhibition to Open at Smithsonian February 27th</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Deccan Herald</td>
<td>Intl-Indian focus</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>2/26/2014</td>
<td><strong>Celebrating 200 years of immigration from India</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Examiner.com</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Dubrow; Marsha</td>
<td>2/26/2014</td>
<td><strong>Indian American stereotype busting 'Beyond Bollywood' exhibit now at Smithsonian</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 The Times of India</td>
<td>Intl-Indian focus</td>
<td>Rajghatta; Chidanand</td>
<td>2/26/2014</td>
<td><strong>Beyond Bollywood: Indian-Americans get a call up from Smithsonian</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 The Aerogram</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Das; Kavita</td>
<td>2/27/2014</td>
<td><strong>Smithsonian’s ‘Beyond Bollywood’ Opens, Putting the Spotlight on Indians in America</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 India West</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>staff</td>
<td>2/27/2014</td>
<td>‘Beyond Bollywood’ Exhibit on Indian Americans Opens at Smithsonian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Smithsonian Magazine</td>
<td>US-SI focus</td>
<td>Gan; Vicky</td>
<td>2/27/2014</td>
<td><strong>How Motel Ownership Offers Indian-Americans a Gateway to the American Dream</strong></td>
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<td>Publication</td>
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<td>Author</td>
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<td>India Today</td>
<td>Intl-Indian</td>
<td>Melwani, Lavina</td>
<td>3/7/2014</td>
<td>Discovery of America: A new exhibition in Washington shows how Indians have been part of US history since 1790</td>
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<td>Hindustan Times</td>
<td>Intl-Indian</td>
<td>Ghosh, Paramita</td>
<td>3/9/2014</td>
<td>Smithsonian brings to life the Indian-American love story</td>
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<td>The American Bazaar</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Das, Kavita</td>
<td>3/10/2014</td>
<td>Dr. Das and I go to Washington: An intergenerational conversation on Smithsonian's 'Beyond Bollywood'</td>
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<td>brazenbehenji</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Behenji, Brazen</td>
<td>3/11/2014</td>
<td>Beyond Bollywood: Indian Americans Shape the Nation. Part One</td>
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<td>Vogue India</td>
<td>Intl-Indian</td>
<td>Virani, Aarti</td>
<td>3/11/2014</td>
<td>An exhibit fights Indian stereotypes in America</td>
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<td>BBC News</td>
<td>Intl-UK</td>
<td>Basu, Diksha</td>
<td>3/12/2014</td>
<td>Exploring how Indian Americans helped shape US</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian Fortune</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>de Peralta, Aurora</td>
<td>3/14/2014</td>
<td>Smithsonian “Beyond Bollywood” Exhibit Debunks Stereotypes about Indian Americans</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Indian Express</td>
<td>Intl-Indian</td>
<td>Pundir, Pallavi</td>
<td>3/17/2014</td>
<td>Inscrutable Indians</td>
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<tr>
<td>Huffington Post</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>Rao, Mallika</td>
<td>3/18/2014</td>
<td>Finally, Indian-Americans Get The Exposure They Deserve</td>
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<td>Asian American Press</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Kunjummen-Paulose, Rachel</td>
<td>4/5/2014</td>
<td>Smithsonian's “Beyond Bollywood” breaks new ground for Indian Americans</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Dosti</td>
<td>US-India focus</td>
<td>Goindi, Geeta</td>
<td>4/12/2014</td>
<td>Smithsonian Exhibition Tells the Indian-American Story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While some articles fall squarely within a particular frame, others dwell evenly on two or more themes – categorizing is always somewhat subjective, and the distinctions were often fine.

About one-fifth of the articles focused primarily on the exhibition's depiction of the contributions and achievements of Indian Americans. This frame was seen primarily in international-Indian and US Indian-focus publications, with lead-off sentences such as:

*From workers who built some of America’s first railways in the West to the creator of Hotmail, a new exhibition here showcases the contributions ...* (Deccan Herald)

*Indian American contributions to American culture are at the forefront ...* (Asian Fortune)

Another one-fifth of the articles highlighted the diversity and range of the Indian-American (IA) experience and Indian Americans’ sense of identity. This category had no predominant publication type. A quote of the curator that “Indian Americans are as diverse as America itself” is seen frequently in this frame. Articles often cited lists demonstrating the range of the IA experience:

*From Spelling Bee champs to Punjabi cab drivers, Shyamalan to Islam, dotbuster violence to shoes* (The American Bazaar)
... the juxtaposition between the serious and weighty (e.g., recognition of a difficult history with harsh immigration and citizenship laws) and the light and humorous (e.g., “Besting the Bee”). (Brazen Behenji)

Indian Americans are very diverse in terms of how they identify themselves, not just religiously, but ethnically, linguistically, with different occupations, social classes, and different periods in the history of immigration. (IIP Digital)

Closely related to the above frame were a handful of articles that also focused on the range and diversity of the IA experience, but that honed in on the fact that the exhibition served to explode IA stereotypes. Articles in the stereotype-busting frame also fell across publications types. Distinguishing text included:

... compels the multicreedal American viewers at Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC, to look beyond stereotypes of an Indian ... images of these popular figures form just a small cluster, overshadowed by over 300 images, historical artefacts, art and installations that go beyond those stereotypes. (Indian Express)

Art illustrating these stereotypes includes posters of one of the best-known Indian Americans – Apu, owner of the Kwik-E-Mart in “The Simpsons” – and Rudolf Valentino as “The Young Rajah” in brown-face! One of the most effective of all the stereotype-busting artworks is a three-photo series “UnSuitable Girls” – “Most Reluctant Housekeeper,” “Least Dutiful Wife,” and “Most Apprehensive Fiancée” – by Anjali Bhargava and Swati Khurana. Specific items are also very powerful in dispelling stereotypes and racial profiling that have sparked violence. (Examiner)

... The exhibition goes far beyond old tropes about diversity as much as it transcends pop culture stereotypes, and offers a fresh perspective to a museum world that often still thinks in terms of race, class and gender “silos.” (SI Magazine)

Another handful of articles – notably international Indian and US India-focus publications – particularly emphasized the historical aspects of the IA experience. Typical texts (often picking up quotes of the curator) in the history-focus frame are:

“... strong sentiments that we are ‘outsiders’,” says Momaya. “The history of us here shows how false this is. It dates back to 1790, just 14 years after the nation was founded. (India Today)

... not only documenting the history of Indians in America but also imprinting this history onto the collective conscience of this country.” (BollySpice)

... surprised to learn that Indian Americans started arriving in the US in the late 1800s. They worked in lumber mills and on railroads. (Live Mint)

While almost all of the articles used descriptors such as “landmark,” “first-of-its kind,” “breakthrough,” “groundbreaking,” and “long overdue,” a couple of articles focused primarily on that aspect of the show. Oft-quoted was Masum Momaya’s statement that “until recently, the country’s largest museum network held not a single item representative of the ethnic subgroup in its collection.” These articles tended to highlight the years-long
crowd-sourcing effort that produced family photographs, shoes, and other objects for the exhibition:

[The Indian American] history in the United States going back two centuries has been a spottily-recorded mystery, although the first ones arrived on these shores in the 1790s, just over a decade after America’s independence. On Tuesday, the storied Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC plugged this gap significantly. (Times of India)

Calls [were] put out around the country for people to share everything they have, from documents to photographs to historical objects to works of art, to everyday objects like shoes. There was nothing that represented our history here in the United States – Indian history. (Huffington Post)

A few articles in the last eclectic frame focused on one narrow aspect of the exhibition. A New York Times review of multiple DC spring shows chose to depict only the Spelling Bee display and report that “you can listen as a 14-year-old girl, Nupur Lala, spells knotty words at the 1999 Scripps National Spelling Bee.” An article in India Currents zeroed in on the painting, “The Goddess of Visas,” which made a provocative statement about visa woes. And a Smithsonian Magazine article dealt solely with Indian American hotel ownership and the Arch Motel Project.

Design elements

The study team looked to see which design elements were brought up in the media reviews. Most often-mentioned were the exhibition’s use of music and color. As for music, articles equally described the two iconic Hindi film melodies playing on a loop at the entry and the listening station with ten tracks from Indian musicians who have influenced American music. Some provided greater context to the music and even quoted lyrics:

...the music of Bollywood movies from the 1960s and 1970s, representing how many Indians – moving as the United States liberalized its immigration laws – brought with them records which they presumed they would not find. (Agence France)

“Trauma upon trauma. A decade of fear. How will I, and we heal?” asks Sonny Singh, educator, activist and musician from the funk-bhangra band Red Baraat. (My Dosti)

Articles noted that colors were inspired by the Bollywood aesthetic, using descriptors such as bold mango, deep magenta, saffron, bright plum, and vibrant jewel tones. One article went on to say that the curator “matched paint swatches to the colors she spied in spice shops and in her own closet, settling on mustards, plums and rose.” (Washington Post)

Design elements less frequently singled out were the exhibition’s attention to detail, immersive experiences, and use of multimedia to tell stories.

... small details of the exhibition are no less impressive. For example, a typical Indian American dining table is laid out partially with steel thalis and partially with Corelle
plate ware, both staples of Indian American households. And thalis do double duty on the walls, framing key statistics on Indian Americans. (Aerogram)

[One] experience[s], in small ways, the life of an Indian immigrant. At one point, a visitor stands in the footsteps of an Indian motel owner, looking out on a lobby with all-American images such as a crucifix and a sign. Meanwhile a table out of customers’ views is cluttered with images of Hindu deities and VHS videotapes of Indian movies. (Agence France)

Told through captivating images, music, visual art, and first-person narratives. (Deccan Herald)

Content / thematic elements

History

Well over half of the articles commented on the exhibition’s depiction of the history of Indian Americans in the U.S. Most referenced material in the Migration and Early Immigration sections – i.e., first arrived in 1790, helped build the nation’s railroads and farms; fight for citizenship. Several articles picked up facts from interviews with the curator, i.e., “Early waves of immigrants often settled in California, Oregon and Washington and worked on farms … There are some Indian families on the West Coast today that are fifth- and sixth-generation farmers.”

Several – notably those fitting in the history-focus frame – included historical touch points found in other parts of the exhibition or gave a more detailed description of historical events:

... most dramatic wave of Indian American immigration began in the 1960s, after President John F. Kennedy initiated and President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. The statute, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, dismantled years of discriminatory immigration quotas against Asians, Jews, and Mediterranean Europeans. (Asian American Press)

The vivid images and stories include Indian labor in the building of US railroads and in farms and lumber mills in the 19th century, to the well-known journey of Swami Vivekananda to America later in the century. There are lesser-known milestones such as the Indian debut in Hollywood through the child actor Sabu Dastagir in the 1930s, pre-dating the entry of a raft of Indian-Americans into the entertainment industry. (Times of India)

Some opined on why the telling of this history is important:

Telling history and showing the experiences of these particular communities will give further context to the questions that are being debated politically and in public policy. So, it’s really important for all Americans to know this history. It’s also important for children who are growing up in this country to know that their history and legacy here spans multiple generations. (My Dosti)
Contributions

Picking up on the curator’s statement in several interviews that the focus of the exhibition was the “cultural, political and professional contributions that Indian immigrants and Indian Americans have made to shaping US history,” almost all of the publications covered at least one or more of three types of contributions.

**Struggle/Political contributions**

Most of the articles cited the same examples of struggle/political contributions: difficulties in attaining U.S. citizenship in the first half of the 20th century; participation in workers’ and civil rights issues; hate crimes performed by “dot busters” in the late 1980s; and the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi in the aftermath of 9-11.

Described variously as compelling, striking, moving, and sobering, one of the most commented upon objects in the show was the royal blue Sikh turban worn by Balbir Singh Sodhi, the first South Asian person murdered in retaliation for September 11, 2001.

*The turbans that observant Sikhs wear have been mistakenly equated with terrorist attire, a misconception this exhibition strives to correct.* (IIP Digital)

A number of articles highlighted the blown-up photo and campaign materials of the first Indian American Congressman Dalip Singh Saund:

*The Indian-American political rise is captured in a striking photograph of Congressman Dalip Singh Saund ... with President Kennedy and Vice-President Lyndon Johnson, although the community's political awareness is reflected from the very beginning with the arrival [of] refugees on board the ship Komagatamaru and the subsequent founding of the Ghadar Party.* (Times of India)

The art by emerging Indian American artists was cited often for its social commentary on discrimination and provocative questions of identity and “who is American”:

*Meanwhile, in the “Arts and Activism” section, it’s reinvigorating to see how pioneering Indian American artists use their mediums to explore and challenge issues of identity.* (Aerogram)

*... favorite find? There’s a piece of art — it’s a painting called Dots. It’s by a Brooklyn-based artist named Anujan Ezhikode. He created it in response to a number of racially motivated acts of violence and hate crimes that happened in New Jersey in the 1980s.* (Huffington Post)

*... favorite parts of the exhibit, a series of photos by Annu Palakunnathu Matthew are featured ... I’m sure Annu’s narrative is familiar to anyone who [has] ever been questioned “But where are you really from,” so this photo series resonated with me on multiple levels.* (Brazen Behenji)

*“The Goddess of Visas” is far more interesting than the descriptions offered ... The reds, blues, and whites of the painting invoke the American dream to which the text panel*
refers, but only by revealing its nightmarish cognates. The goddess’ hands are clawed. The clouds above are stormy. Embedded in this painting’s somber elaboration of visa dreams denied is artist Ruee Gawarikar’s own experience of moving to the United States from Pune in 2004 as a dependent spouse on an H-4 visa. The only thing potentially worse than a visa denied, the painting seems to say, is a visa granted. (India Currents)

Several articles commended the exhibition for its unflinching approach:

It does not shy away from discrimination against South Asians. It features a video interview of a Sikh taxi driver who shared his occasional fears of customers. [It] highlights South Asian activism on behalf of gay, lesbian and transgender Americans. (Agence France).

The violent reception “Hindoos” received and the ways in which it sparked civic activism, are rarely discussed outside ethnic studies courses. (Washington Post)

This theme seemed to resonate with many of the authors, for example, this reporting of the struggle/political theme by a writer for India Abroad:

What unites all Indian Americans is that in all of their families, there are stories of perseverance … stories that start with relatives who left behind everything they knew to seek the promise of a new land. Many faced hardship or ridicule and racism. Many were treated as second-class citizens – as people who didn’t belong. But they didn’t give up. They didn’t make excuses… They kept building up America.

Professional contributions

Roughly half of the articles addressed professional contributions in some detail, and the approach varied. Many, in particular international Indian and domestic India-focused publications, chose to highlight the more stellar achievements:

U.S. Representative Dalip Singh Saund, the first person of Asian descent to be elected to the US Congress, in 1956; Zubin Mehta, the first person of Indian origin to become principal conductor of a major U.S. orchestra and Dr. Har Gobind Khorana, the first Indian American Nobel Prize winner; Mohini Bhardwaj, the first Indian American woman to win an Olympic medal, is shown along with her actual 2004 Olympic Silver Medal for gymnastics. Then there is Mindy Kaling (Vera Chokalingam), the first Indian American to star in and produce her own shows “The Mindy Project” and “The Office.” (News East West)

Among the famous and the not-so-famous, whose time in America has been marked out include Dhan Gopal Mukherji (the first Indian-American who won the Newbery Medal, a literary prize for a work of children’s fiction), Gay Neck: the Story of a Pigeon (1927), Congressman Dalip Singh Saund standing in a photograph with two American presidents, gymnast Mohini Bharadwaj, a silver medallist in the 2004 Olympics; Naeem Khan, who designed Michelle Obama’s dress for the 2013 Oscars, Madhur Jaffrey, who
introduced the American public to Indian food, and sitar maestro Ravi Shankar. (Hindustan Times)

Early recorded Indian contributions to science and technology include the effort of Yellapragada Subba Rao and Nobel laureate Hargobind Khorana to the more recent achievements of technology pioneer Vinod Dham that is now part of the Indian-American folklore in Silicon Valley. (Times of India)

The wall of “Groundbreakers” – more so than any other section of the exhibition – was viewed critically by some articles:

... a highly self-congratulatory section devoted to spelling bee winners and a wall of fame featuring such high-profile Indian Americans as actress Mindy Kaling and former NFL player Brandon Chillar feels like a low point, seeming not to tell a broader story of South Asian immigrants so much as to point out brown faces doing surprising things. (Washington Post)

At first view, Beyond Bollywood seems complicit not only in rehashing well-known tropes, but also in bowing to the cult of celebrity. (Caravan)

Relatedly, a number of writers were impelled to point out who they felt were missing:

Indeed, some of the most recognized American desis are missing altogether: Anita and Kiran Desai, Fareed Zakaria, Vinod Khosla, Deepak Chopra, Bobby Jindal, Nikki Haley, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and others. (Caravan)

India-born writer Salman Rushdie, who made America his home in 2000 and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, however, stands out in his exclusion... (Hindustan Times)

... there are no mentions or examples of the many Indian Americans who are becoming increasingly visible in US politics, journalism, academia, or business. (BBC)

... like the dancer, Kamala Natarajan. She should have been there. She made her life here. L. Subramaniam (Indian American violinist) should have been there. (American Bazaar)

Two of the most often-discussed elements in the Professional contributions section were the motel installation/Arch Motel Project and the Sikh cab driver video. Notably, the Asian Hospitality article consisted almost entirely of an interview with Masum Momaya about the creation of the hotel lobby display, the story of 20th century Indian American hotel life, and artist Chiraag Bhakta’s Arch Motel photo project.

... meticulously recreated motel entrance (honoring the surge of Gujarati entrepreneurs who entered the hospitality industry in the 1950s.) The detailed installation, which draws inspiration from a series of photographs taken by artists Chiraag Bhakta and Mark Hewko, is an “inverted take” take on the lobby, showcasing an hotelier’s point-of-view. (Wall Street Journal)
Sikh cab driver in San Francisco (strangely, its screen is part of an art installation resembling a cab with New York plates) also conveys an aching loneliness. (Washington Post)

Other articles picked up on the stereotype-busting theme in writing about professional contributions, often using the curator’s statement that in looking at fields in which Indian Americans are concentrated professionally, “we went for the most stereotypical ones with the idea of dismantling the stereotypes.”

This recurring theme of exploring and transcending stereotypes of Indian Americans is echoed in every part of the exhibition and in its very name. (Aerogram)

Taxi drivers, Internet innovators, restaurateurs, doctors, scientists, actors, winners of spelling bees and the Miss America contest all have a place in the exhibition. (IIP Digital)

Most stories about Indian contributions to the US feature men—so Beyond Bollywood features many female protagonists, be they leaders in politics and business, astronauts, athletes, activists or artists. (India Abroad)

At least one publication questioned the rationale of this section of the exhibition:

In the section on Professions, four have been showcased – Physicians, Engineering and Science, Motel and Hotel Owners and Taxi-drivers – to show Indians’ role in the American economy. But is that all Indians do in America? It’s also unclear what are the common grounds between the four to be grouped so, unless it is about the life of any immigrant working in any profession – and who is to say that their stories should not be told? (Hindustan Times)

Cultural contributions

Commentary on cultural contributions was often limited to clarifying that they included food, fashion, film, music, dance, and entertainment. The most extensive reviews of cultural contributions were of food (the table), religion/spirituality, and fashion (the Naeem Khan gown.) One article in particular was captivated with the cultural implications of the table display:

In its most attentive moments, though, Beyond Bollywood rises to Bhakta’s challenge. The food installation, for example, features vintage Corelle CorningWare plates (“lightweight, versatile, stackable, unbreakable, microwavable,” my mother recalled), a familiar object for many Indian immigrant families. In the Washington Post, the reporter Lavanya Ramanathan criticized this particular brand of ethnic representation through product placement. “Corelle doesn’t belong here,” she wrote, “mere feet from dinosaurs and great beasts whose existence is mind-boggling.” But the exhibit could have used more artefacts with the socio-historical specificity of the Corelle plates. For example, as Bhakta noted in our conversation, in Indian American homes, fennel seeds are more likely to be stored in reused Ragu pasta sauce jars than in the stainless steel containers on display in the exhibition. Indian American
immigrants “recycle,” he said, they try “to adapt.” That, Bhakta said, “is what America is.” (Caravan)

As noted above, the section on religion and spirituality garnered a fair amount of attention in the press:

The community’s spiritual input into American consciousness is seen in another photo showing Swami Satchidananda addressing the Woodstock music festival in 1969, where Pandit Ravi Shankar also played. (Times of India)

Swami Vivekananda and guests at Green Acre School in Eliot, Maine in 1894. This school, a meeting place for the study of world religions, was one stop on a tour in which Vivekananda introduced the West to Hinduism and yoga. (India Today)

Among the highlights is an awe-inspiring Prayer room, of the Lotus Upper Shrine at the Yogaville Ashram in Buckingham, VA. About Yoga, the exhibition conveys “Everyone’s doing it.” It is “maybe India’s most popular contribution to American culture.” (My Dosti)

On another wall, however, are quotations about religious life in the United States from a collection of non-celebrities, almost all of them aged under thirty … Evidencing an unusual and refreshing curatorial principle of selection, these young Zoroastrians, Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Jains are allotted more of the exhibit’s coveted real estate than many well-known producers of Indian American diaspora culture. (Caravan)

By far the most-mentioned cultural artifact was the dress designed by Naeem Khan for Michelle Obama. While most declared the gold strapless gown a highlight, The Washington Post and The Examiner described it in great length:

Designer Naeem Khan is represented by the sequin-embroidered gown he created for First Lady Michelle Obama in 2012. Khan said he combines “the complicated Indian over-the-top Bollywood traditions with the clean lines I learned from Halston” while apprenticing with him. Khan, whose family has made garments for Indian royalty since the Mughal Empire (16th century-mid-19th century) designs for American “royalty” including Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, and Eva Longoria, among many others. (Examiner)

Other objects meriting notice were Mohini Bhardwaj’s 2004 Olympic Silver Medal, the 1985 Spelling Bee trophy, and Brandon Chollar’s football helmet:

Says football player, Brandon Chillar: “I like showing Indians it can be done. Showing that Indians can do this too, I’m doing this in my field, you can do it in your field. It’s an inspiration. Let the world know that it’s not just all education and engineering. We have some Big Dudes too.” (My Dosti)

A critique of the selection of cultural contributions was that it erred on the side of the more commonplace and less ethnic:

The exhibition foregrounds people and phenomena that are assumed to resonate with non-Indian Americans: football players, Weight Watchers and yoga, rather than the
Namaste America TV network or Shasta Foods, whose idli and dosa batter has fed an entire generation of Indian Americans. (Caravan)

Larger images, maybe a mock-up of a Little India market or large-scale murals of local Holi, Navratri and Diwali celebrations would have conveyed to the mainstream the sheer energy of Indian culture which these immigrants strive to keep alive. (India Today)

One of the most obvious imprints of Indian Americans on the American landscape is through Indian enclaves, like Jackson Heights and Flushing in New York City or Edison in New Jersey but also smaller enclaves. (American Bazaar)

Diversity

An overarching theme encompassing the three types of contributions is the idea of diversity. That together, the “artifacts, art, objects, and images that exemplify the contributions that Indian immigrants and Indian Americans have made to the U.S. tell a larger story” (Momaya). This theme was articulated by several publications:

Indian Americans represent very diverse communities with roots from many places, speak various languages and represent many different cultures cemented together in an Indian American mosaic. (India Abroad)

... community is vast, diverse, deeply-rooted and nuanced, and this is the story that needs to be told. (USINPAC)

Identity

Another theme permeating the show and playing off diversity was that of identity and “who is American.” As curator Momaya explains, “People who identify themselves as ‘Indian-American’ may have ancestral roots in the Indian subcontinent, but the way they embody and experience their ‘Indianness’ and ‘Americanness’ varies tremendously.” Several articles picked up the quote of APAC director Konrad Ng that “The vibrant life, culture and history of immigrants from India and Indian Americans is the story of America.”

As noted in the political contributions section above, reviewers gravitated to the original artworks of emerging Indian American artists and praised how they posed questions about race and identity. Music is also a medium of identity, as one author noted, “Hip-hop activists, DJs and musicians fire the new generation of “desi,” a term of ethnic solidarity among South Asian Americans” (IIP Digital). The history section, as well, was intended, according to the curator, to “shed new light on contemporary debates about patriotism and who is American.”

One American-born author, visiting with her India-born mother, parsed out feelings of identity this way:

I wanted to know if my mom views herself as Indian, Indian American, or American. “Indian American,” she says unequivocally. “Because I came from India and I am in America and I still have a lot of Indian ways and I love America. So, it’s fifty-fifty ... I
The author writing for *Caravan* referenced a quote of physician-author Abraham Verghese to illustrate the challenge of simultaneously living in two worlds:

*Verghese’s words capture the familiar dual imperative of immigrant life: on the one hand, fitting in, with a tie knot of appropriate girth; on the other, maintaining one’s tastes, through the strategic application of chilli-approximating Tabasco.*

This author also commented at length on the difficulty that *Beyond Bollywood* faced in “separating uniquely Indian American themes from representations of India in the United States” and, in general, the “slippage between ‘India’ and ‘Indian’ in America:

*By placing the still of [Rudolph] Valentino [from the 1922 silent film The Young Rajah] alongside promotional materials for the director Mira Nair’s Mississippi Masala (1991), and by decorating the yoga pavilion with America’s favourite pinup [Marilyn Monroe in sexed-up yoga poses for a 1946 fitness ad], the exhibit attempts to effect a connection between India’s influences on American popular culture and Indian American contributions to the political and cultural spheres. This is not in and of itself surprising, as the line between Indian culture and its diasporic derivates can often be thin.* (Caravan)

Using the example of Yoga,

*The exhibit succeeds in describing the transmutation of a spiritual practice into a “big business” in the United States, but it fails to plumb the larger implications of the fact that yoga is “India’s most popular contribution to American culture,” and not necessarily an Indian American contribution.* (Caravan)

**Images selected for the articles**

Not surprisingly, many of the images that showed up most frequently in the 39 articles were those provided in the SI press kit (Table 2). The only incongruity was that, although one of the most discussed topics was the display of the turban worn by Balbir Singh Sodhi, no publication chose to publish that image from the press kit. Three of the highest occurring images – the Naeem Khan dress, dining table display, and Arch Motel project photos – were not included in the press kit.
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