

## **South Asian Diaspora in Spain and its Representation in Spanish Cinema**

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**Abstract** Spain, traditionally a migrant-sending country, has received a great number of immigrants since the early 2000s. Migrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have formed a small but important South Asian diaspora in Spain that is often perceived as a homogenous group by the Spanish people. Although the number of migrants in this group is comparatively less than the African, Latin American or East European counterpart, their visibility is much higher in Spanish media (film, television and newspapers). This paper will first look at the trends and patterns of South Asian immigration into Spain. It will argue that South Asian immigrants are unique in their ability to turn their 'difference' into tools that help in their survival and integration. Then the paper will discuss the representation of the South Asian migrants in Spanish films. Through the analysis of three films the paper will argue that the interaction between the migrants and the autochthonous plays out in either a framework of multiculturalism or eurocentrism. The failure or success of the interaction and/or the possibility of integration depends on this: whether the Other is accepted with its differences (multiculturalism) or expected to adopt the culture of the host society (eurocentrism).

**Summary** 1 South Asian Diaspora in Spain (Facts and Figures). – 2 South Asians in Spain, Issues of Integration and Representation. – 3 South Asians Represented in Spanish Immigration Cinema. – 4 Conclusion.

**Keywords** Migration. Culture. Representation. South Asian Diaspora. Immigration Cinema.

Migration is a very important phenomenon in the world today. The world is becoming more and more interconnected and human mobility is on the rise. Migration flows around the world are constantly growing and impacting nations, citizenships, identities and borders. All growing economies depend upon migrant labour, domestic or international. Spain, a part of the European Union since 1985, is a relatively new migrant-receiving country. In fact Spain was a migrant-sending country for the longer part of its history. But Spain's location, at a distance of just 14 kilometres from Africa (through the Strait of Gibraltar), and its growing economy made it a gateway to Europe for migrants from all over the world from the 1980s. From around 2000 the population of immigrants saw a major growth which got halted after the 2008 global economic meltdown which had badly affected Spain's economy. As of now immigrants constitute about 10% of Spain's

population.<sup>1</sup> Out of this South Asians (i.e. immigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, excluding Sri Lanka as it is a negligible minority) constitute a very small number. However, any look at the immigrant *barrios* or neighbourhoods in Spain reveals that South Asians are a 'visible' group. By this I mean that South Asians can and do reveal and affirm their identity, through clothes, accessories, habits, colours and the kind of business they do, for example restaurants selling Indian food, stores selling Indian clothes, artefacts and jewellery etc. This is in sharp contrast to many other ethnic groups who are much bigger in number but have still not achieved a good level of integration and therefore remain 'invisible', that is hidden from the gaze of the host society. This can be said of the Maghrebi population who do not enjoy a great deal of acceptability as revealed in many research results.<sup>2</sup> This paper intends to look at the South Asian diaspora in Spain and its representation in Spanish cinema.

Before we look into the nature of South Asian immigration to Spain and its diaspora in Spain I would like to make a few clarifications for the term being used in this paper and the rationale behind choosing it. I am using a common term 'South Asians' to talk about the people who originate from the nations that are known as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh today. South Asia may also include other countries such as Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Nepal but I believe the way India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are linked to a shared past and common culture is not equally true for those other countries. Besides, these nations have not yet registered a significant presence as migrants in Spain. The rationale behind studying these three nationalities together emerge from my observation that while studying migration, diaspora, and transnationalism looking at communities only from national perspective can be deceptive. Especially when we look at a diasporic community and try to analyse their experience at a host society we need to acknowledge that the people of the host society may not be fully aware of the national histories of the immigrants. I will try to show how their interaction could be influenced by age-old perceptions, or events going back much beyond modern history, to a pre nation-state scenario. In Spain many such confusing or ambiguous terms circulate in current use. For example the Spanish word *indio* historically refers to the indigenous races of America or anything related to it. However it can also refer to any person from India, or anything belonging to or related to India.<sup>3</sup> Similarly

1 According to the release by INE (National Statistical Institute) of Spain.

2 According to the report *Evolución del racismo y la xenofobia en España* (Cea D'Ancona, Valles Martínez 009, 328 graphic 3.25), when asked which group of immigrants receive the least sympathy from a Spanish person, the maximum number of people mentioned "Morrocans, Moros, North Africans".

3 *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* [online]. 23a ed. Real Academia Española. URL <http://dle.rae.es/>.

the word *moro* can refer to anyone from the North African region bordering Spain, or a person who practices Islam, or the historical groups of Islamic people who ruled over Spain between 711 to 1492. Traditionally the term *hindú* is used for people living in India and any person who practice Hinduism. I therefore feel it will be more useful to look at patterns of the entire South Asian diaspora rather than observing just one nationality.

## 1 South Asian Diaspora in Spain (Facts and Figures)

The history of immigration from the Indian subcontinent is very long but is not very well known. Ana López-Sala's work in this area is ground breaking. According to her "The history of the Indian community in Spain is fascinating not only for its peculiarity within the general dynamics of immigration to the country, but also because it is one of the least known migration inflows, despite being one of the oldest" (Sala 2013, 1). The migration of South Asians to Spain happened in different phases. The earliest groups from the Indian subcontinent to settle in Spain were Sindh merchants who settled in the Canary Islands during the second half of the 19th century. These early migrants were attracted by the business opportunities available there as they were free ports. Many of the descendants of these early migrants have become naturalized as Spanish citizens and formed the cream of the business class in the Canaries. Sindh traders migrated in the 19th century when India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were part of the same territory known as British India, but at present the Sindh province is part of Pakistan. So the Sindh diaspora may be more appropriately termed as a South Asian diasporic community rather than Indian diaspora. The Sindh migrant community is a rare case as Spain started to receive a considerable inflow of migration only after the 1970s. By this time the migration from Sindh however halts whereas other waves of migration from South Asia arrive in the decades after the 1980s. In the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century a sudden growth has been recorded in the population of South Asian origin. A majority of these new South Asian migrants are semi-skilled or unskilled labourers who find employment in sectors which require hard labour such as agriculture and mining. According to the statistics released by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Statistical Institute) in June 2016 the total population of Spain is more than 46 million out of which about 4 million are foreigners (INE 2016). None of the South Asian countries figure in the top 15 countries sending migrants to Spain. The migration statistics of the community of Madrid show that 13.15% of Madrid's population is constituted by foreigners. The top 15 nationalities in Madrid also do not count any South Asian country. However interestingly both Bangladesh and Pakistan figure in the list of countries registering

maximum growth among immigrants between January and June 2015 in the Madrid area (Observatorio de Inmigración 2015). According to the study of Singh Garha, Galeano and Domingo Valls (2016), South Asians in Spain are estimated to be 131,230 in 2014. At present Pakistanis are the biggest group followed by Indians and then Bangladeshis although Indians arrived earlier. Although compared to the total population of foreigners in Spain the figure of South Asians is very low, a mere 1.99%. Compared to the total population of Spain it is only 2.08%. However what is interesting about the South Asian population in Spain is the dramatic increase it experienced between 2000 and 2013. The total population of South Asian people multiplied more than ten times to its number within the first decade of the 21st century (Singh Garha, Galeano, Domingo Valls 2016, 196). This can be attributed to the initiatives to regularize the immigrants in Spain undertaken by the then President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Further it can be noted that while the general trend of immigration seems to have slowed down in Spain, and in fact an emigration process has started, the South Asian community is continuing to grow in Spain:

All the studies of the South Asian diaspora have observed that the South Asian diaspora is dominated by young males who find work in labour intensive sectors. There exist also a migration of highly skilled workers (again male dominated) from India to Spain, a consequence of the internationalization of business and services. India is one of the most important countries in the area of highly skilled labour that the Spanish government is trying to attract through certain policies since 2009 (Gómez Ventura 2013).

Singh and Galeano Paredes' (2015) study on the spatial distribution, concentration and diversity of the South Asian community in Spain reveals that the South Asian diasporic community lives in certain specific locations in a densely concentrated manner. The areas chosen by the migrants for settlement are closely linked to the economic activities they are involved in. Therefore early settlement concentrated around the mining regions, later in regions with agricultural activities. The boom in the Spanish real estate industry attracted migrant workers to construction sector in the cities and suburban areas. The most recent settlements have been related to ethnic business (Singh, Galeano Paredes 2015, 22). These are mainly the immigrant neighbourhoods of Lavapiés in Madrid and el Raval in Barcelona. According to López Sala earlier the Indian community was concentrated in the Canary Islands. This trend has now changed and at present most of the Indian population are settled primarily in Catalonia and Valencia and secondarily in Andalusia and Madrid. South Asian diaspora is particularly successful in the area of ethnic business: restaurants offering Indian cuisine, grocery stores that offer products from South Asia, *locutorios* or public phone booths etc. Amongst the South Asian migrants people from Pakistan are engaged in the most diverse labour sectors. The diasporic community live close to each other which makes

their exposure to Spanish natives not very common except for commercial purposes. Many South Asians do not learn the Spanish language which makes interaction with natives difficult. Some of these observations are made by Sameer Rawal (2007), an Indian Hispanist who lives and works in Barcelona, Spain. He observes that the South Asian communities and the native Spanish communities may live next to each other but know little about each other except through stereotypes and imaginations which in turn are based on indirect and unreliable sources of information. I quote his own erudite words:

The mutually-delusive ideas are formed based on indirectly available, accessible translations of the culture, provided by sources who in theory have had direct communicative dialogue with India and vice versa. The misperceptions are reinforced because there is no actual – or psychological – space where things can be seen in their accurate dimensions, and where processes of direct dialogue can be initiated and sustained. (Rawal 2007, 399)

Between 2007, when the above lines were published, and the present a lot could have changed but more recent study by Singh and Galeano Paredes (2015, 5) also point out that the South Asian diaspora “has showed the prevalence of multicultural mosaic model” in which

the immigrant minorities participate in economic activities but remains socially invisible or encapsulated” (Peach 1997). Another important argument in the favour of this model is that SAP (South Asian Population) has maintained its separate identity and social setup (unlike the assimilation model in which minorities lose their identities and mix with native majority) in the “all new territories where they have settled. [...] We can say that the SAP is expanding in the form of homogeneous clusters which are economically integrated to Spanish economy but socially isolated from native society.

M.S. Aubia and J. Rodríguez Roca (2004) conducted a research on Pakistanis in Spain using a collective in Barcelona in 2002. This research shows that most of the Pakistanis live in close ties with friends and relatives from Pakistan in certain neighbourhoods of Barcelona out of which el Raval is the most important. The main business activities they are involved in are grocery stores, butchers, fruits shop, phone booths, mobile phone shops, all at 100 shops and barbers. The researchers observe that the commercial activities carried out by Pakistanis has produced a positive effect on the economy of the neighbourhood, something which was in decline since 1990s. The so called ‘crisis of the small business’ had led to shutting down of small shops in the neighbourhood who found stiff competition from the

big supermarkets. There is a predominance of family-owned and run shops among the immigrants that enable these shops to provide more flexible timings to their clients. Indians and Pakistanis have created a niche in the sale of fruit and vegetables by offering low prices and keeping their shops open for longer duration in the Alicante region of Spain.<sup>4</sup>

So far we have seen research that has showcased the demographic factors of South Asians in Spain, the number of immigrants, the history of their migration, their spatial distribution and settlement patterns, their occupation patterns and gender ratio etc. However no research has yet been conducted on the integration of South Asians in Spain and the factors influencing it such as media representation. It is in this area that I would like to make a contribution through this paper and further research.

## **2 South Asians in Spain, Issues of Integration and Representation**

Any study on migration has to dwell on the aspect of integration of the migrants in the host society. Integration is the process that enables the migrants to live and work in peace and with dignity in the host society. Despite the long tradition of human migration, integration remains a difficult arena. Migrants unfortunately remain outside the mainstream society in many situations.<sup>5</sup> At times they receive racist or xenophobic treatment from the natives and at times they are forgotten or ignored, rendered invisible by the natives. Various models of integration are often proposed and discussed. In the assimilation model integration is only possible when minorities assimilate in to the mainstream through a process that inevitably leads to the minorities' losing their cultural difference. On the other hand the multiculturalism model gives value to the preservation of cultural identity of the minority during the process of integration. It emanates from the belief that integration should not and need not take place at the cost of the loss of cultural identity or cultural difference of the minority groups in a society. Those who oppose multiculturalism claim that it encourages creation of ghettos of people who live together but do not co-exist, that is, they remain isolated from each other in spite of inhabiting the same space. In the context of migration to Europe in the 20th century it has been observed that a new kind of racism has emerged which is not based on the idea of superiority of certain races as traditional racism but a negative attitude towards cultural

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4 "Fruterías de indios y pakistaníes copan el mercado con bajos precios y amplios horarios" (Fruit shops by Indians and Pakistanis capture the market with low prices and longer serving hours) [online]. *Información.es*, 15 May 2012. URL <https://goo.gl/DC2GiI> (2016-10-19).

5 Things have started to change. Right now there is an Indian senator in Spain, who belongs to Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), a Catalan independentist party.

differences along with the fear that cultural differences threaten certain cultures (Rathzel 2002). Taguieff used the term 'differential racism' for this. Whereas multiculturalism as a political idea or model of integration constitutes accepting all cultures as being equal and diversity as a good thing for any culture both within and outside (Parekh 1999).

When we look at the research on South Asia mentioned in the previous part of this paper we can say that what distinguishes the South Asian diaspora in Spain is their ability to preserve the distinctive features of their culture and society and make use of it both for economic benefit and integration into the host society. The fact that many of them participate in ethnic business allows them to assert their identity to a certain extent. They form a small minority but one that is visible, with distinct features. I believe in Spain, South Asian immigrants have been able to turn their culture into a viable business as well as soft power to enjoy better integration while affirming their identity.

A major factor that influences the integration of a group into a society is how it is perceived which shapes and is shaped by how that group is represented in the media circulated in that society. In the paper mentioned earlier, Sameer Rawal (2007) points out that images about South Asia reach Spain through Spanish translations of media originally written in English and that a direct contact has been missing for several years. However it is also true that Spanish people may not know the history and culture of India in a profound manner but there is a huge amount of interest in things related to India. Cultural aspects perceived to be related to India like Bollywood dance and music, films, fashion, food, yoga, Hinduism etc. are immensely popular in Spain. According to Ángel Fernández (2015), who has studied the media portrayal of Indian community in Spain, culture is the topic which has received maximum attention followed by religion and then business. The study shows that media portrayal of Indians in Spain is generally positive. The focus while covering the Indian community is on cultural and religious aspects. It proves that cultural aspects such as "Indian cultural festivals, yoga, cuisine, marriage ceremonies, music, art and films (especially from Bollywood) are quite popular in the Spanish media" (Fernández 2015, 18). I would like to argue that migrants play a role in popularizing these aspects and at the same time benefit from this popularity. A very interesting example of this interest for anything Indian can be seen in BollyMadrid. It is a festival of Bollywood and Indian Culture that takes place in Lavapiés every year since the last 8 years. Bollywood films are screened, groups and individual artists perform Bollywood dance, there are stalls selling typical Indian food, costumes and jewellery. There are also presence of NGOs who work in India. What is surprising is that it is called Festival of Indian Culture but what is celebrated really is Bollywood, mainstream commercial Hindi cinema, its dance and music, which is a transnational cultural phenomenon with as many followers in Pakistan

and Bangladesh as in India. And many of the people involved in selling the supposedly Indian stuff are also Bangladeshis and Pakistani migrants. From the point of view of nationalism this may seem problematic at many levels. Does India or Bollywood subsume the ethnic identity of other South Asian people? Does this festival truly represent India or even a small part of its diversity or does it generate stereotypical images about India? Does it represent the culture of geo-political South Asia? Perhaps not. But through the lens of transnationalism we can say that the festival actually celebrates the culture of the South Asian diaspora in Spain. Those aspects of the diaspora that unites Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis and their culture that they know will appeal to the host society. The festival has grown each year and seen participation by a huge number of Spanish people. It is not directed towards an immigrant audience. The audience is Spanish. The performers are the people of South Asian diaspora in and beyond Spain.

### **3 South Asians Represented in Spanish Immigration Cinema**

The unprecedented levels of human migration towards Europe in the 20th century has produced new challenges to European societies in dealing with the ethnic and cultural diversity of its new inhabitants. Art, cinema, literature etc. have all responded to these social changes. According to Isolina Ballesteros (2009, 192) a new genre of cinema can be identified in Europe which she calls “Immigration Cinema”, that fictionalizes “a concrete social phenomenon – immigration and the unfortunate but unavoidable ramifica-



Figure 1. Logo of *BollyMadrid*



tions of racism and xenophobia – and a social group, immigrants and their marginal allies, the “undesirables” of society that constitute the ampler category of Otherness”. In my M.Phil. Dissertation<sup>6</sup> I have shown that in Spain too such a cinema has developed, which I have termed “Spanish immigration cinema”, a broad category of cinema which represents the social phenomenon of migration in its various facets. In this study I have shown that in Spain the majority of films dealing with migration try to focus on the human aspect of the migrants, of the desire to pursue the dream for a better life, and highlight the similarity in human experiences irrespective of nationality. These are the alternative representations of migrants compared to the sensationalist and negative images circulated by newspapers and television news channels. When we analyse the entire body of immigration cinema of Spain we do find representation of a variety of nationalities such as Africans, Latin Americans and Asians. In this paper I am focussing on the representation of South Asian migrants within Spanish immigration cinema. Two feature films and one made for TV have been made with leading characters/protagonists having a South Asian identity: *Tomándote* (2000) by Isabel Gardela, *El Próximo Oriente* (2006) by Fernando Colomo and *Masala* (2007) by Salvador Calvo. This is not a small number if we consider the small size of Spanish film industry and the actual percentage of South Asians among the immigrants in Spain. The first two films mentioned are feature films, both of them can be termed intercultural romance or intercultural romantic comedy. *Masala* is a social cause based film about a teacher of a school with several migrant children. There are several other films where South Asian characters can be seen for examples *Rastres de sàndal* (2014) and Indian characters in the biopic on Vicente Ferrer’s life (2014). These films however are not part of immigration cinema as per Ballesteros definition so they are not being discussed here.

In *Tomándote* a Catalan woman begins a romantic relationship with Jalil, an Indian Muslim florist who lives in Barcelona. In spite of the genuine attraction and affection the two have for each other, their relationship ultimately fails due to the several cultural differences between the two. The woman being a writer of romantic novels uses her experience with Jalil to develop a book that gains a lot of popularity because of the exotic element in it.

In *Próximo Oriente* a shy Madrilenian man is attracted to a Bangladeshi woman who actually has a relationship with his married brother. When the girl gets pregnant and faces difficulty in dealing with the situation the man proposes to enter into a ‘false marriage’ to avoid problems with the family. Through the process of this false marriage the Spanish man comes

6 *El Multiculturalismo en el cine español de inmigración (1990-2010)* [Multiculturalism in Spanish Immigration Cinema (1990-2010)]. Submitted at Centre for Spanish, Italian, and Latin American Studies, School of Languages, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

to know about the life and culture of this Bangladeshi family, Shakeel, his wife and their three daughters. The two end up falling in love with each other and live a happy life.

*Masala* is a story of the challenges of running a school in an immigrant neighbourhood where children are unruly, undisciplined and unmotivated to study. The film tries to explore the factors that go into creating a difficult adolescence for the children which can be attributed to the cultural and economic problems that are part of their immigrant lives. A motivated and dedicated music teacher tries to bring a change of attitude among the students through music and creativity. One among this group of students is an Indian girl who loves to sing Hindi film songs. Although her parents are against her desire to pursue music, by the end of the film she gathers the courage to pursue her passion. She also tries to escape the fate of getting married at a young age to a boy chosen by her parents.

The three movies are very different in the way they deal with the theme of migration in general and that of South Asian migrants in particular. *Tomándote* depicts a failed intercultural romance. It alludes to the difficulty in surpassing cultural differences. *Próximo Oriente* is a celebration of multicultural life in Lavapiés with all its colour, sound and sights. *Masala* is slightly stereotypical in its representation of an adolescent girl who is struggling with the cultural difference at home and outside.

I analyse these three films through the framework developed by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) in their seminal work *Unthinking Eurocentrism*. Shohat and Stam (1994, 2) posit that mainstream media in the West has been filled with Eurocentrism which “bifurcates the world into the “West and the Rest” and is the ideology that sees Europe as the unique source of meaning, as the world’s centre of gravity, as ontological reality to the rest of the world’s shadow”. Multiculturalism is an assault on Eurocentrism, which means seeing world history and contemporary social life from the perspective of the “radical equality of peoples in status, potential, and rights. Multiculturalism decolonizes representation not only in terms of cultural artefacts – literary canons, museum exhibit, film series – but also in terms of power relations between communities” (5).

Representation’s importance in identity formation and perception has been highlighted by Stuart Hall who has said that “Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (1990, 222). It is obvious that perception plays a big role in integration. How a community is viewed by another has a direct impact on the possibility of their co-existence. And media representation of a community leaves a major impact on the perception of that community by those who are new at knowing them. It is therefore interesting to observe how South Asians are represented in

Spanish cinema. We see that Spanish filmmakers have portrayed South Asian characters as belonging to a very different culture. We can observe in all the films that the culture of people from South Asia is seen as being very different from that of Spain, very conservative, somewhat patriarchal, governed by rules and morals etc. which at times cause clashes or differences with the autochthonous. But the way the differences are represented is different in each film. As multiculturalism seeks respect for different cultures, representing the cultural difference is not at all problematic. The key is to observe how those differences are portrayed. Has difference been represented as something negative, exceptional, surprising and intolerable or acceptable and normal?

The name of the film *Masala* is a Hindi word which can be loosely translated to 'a mix of spices'. In *Masala* we see only a small focus on the Indian girl named Priya who is very shy but loves to sing. It is a film with several characters from different communities with different problems. Priya's family runs a small store and is shown to be facing discrimination at the hand of the authorities in one scene. Priya is a very talented singer but is not encouraged by her parents to sing. As soon as her character is introduced in the film, Bollywood is mentioned.<sup>7</sup> In a conversation with the music teacher at school Priya describes how Bollywood film songs are and she explains that there is no kissing in them. She also describes how when it rains the clothes of female stars stick to their bodies making them more attractive for men. Her parents get upset upon knowing that she plans to sing for a show in front of an audience and they immediately arrange her marriage. She also says that she will be examined by a doctor to get a "virginity certificate" before getting married. As she has been a little intimate with a boy she is afraid that she will be caught although in reality she did not have sexual intercourse. All of these aspects are stereotypical ideas that the West has about a young Indian girl: a controlled life, repressed sexuality, a docile nature and a love for Bollywood. It is not a nuanced representation. The purpose of the film seems to be to showcase the problems of running a public school in an immigrant neighbourhood with limited funds. Music and creativity are suggested as the solution to social obstacles. So Priya is present in the film to represent the symptomatic problems of an Indian/South Asian girl. Sexual repression and lack of individual freedom may be real problems but then there is no need for the love for Bollywood to be given so much of space. But the film has an entire song in Bollywood style at the beginning. The climax of the film too features Priya singing a Hindi song and impressing the Spanish audience.

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7 Bollywood is the popular name for India's Hindi Film Industry. Regional languages in India such as Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, Bhojpuri, Punjabi and many more have their own film industries. The term Bollywood only refers to Hindi films which are mostly produced in the city of Mumbai which was earlier called Bombay.

The juxtaposition of oppositional features is the typical trait of stereotyping. Santaolalla (2002) in her analysis of the representation of racial and ethnic 'Otherness' used post-colonial theory: Edward Said's concept of 'orientalism' and Bhabha's reformulation of Said's concept of stereotype. These scholars emphasized the essentially ambivalent nature of stereotype which allows one to perceive the object of his or her anxieties as at once an 'other', thus incomprehensible in its strangeness and yet entirely knowable and visible.

We now move to the case of *Tomándote*. Here differences has been shown to be unsurpassable therefore coexistence fails. Jalil is a conservative Muslim who is shown to have several issues with Gabi's lifestyle. Gabi is shown to have been with Jalil only to extract experience that she could use for writing a book. In this film both the characters seem to be stereotypical representation of their respective identity without nuances. Since the film is shown through the point of view of Gabi, the audience is bound to identify with Gabi and find the thoughts and actions of Jalil and other minor characters (like Taj Mahal, a Pakistani delivery boy) at first amusing and intriguing but ultimately annoying. Daniela Flesler (2004) has seen this film as a failed intercultural romance, a kind of film that alludes to the impossibility of coexisting with the 'Other'. Another problem with this film is that although Jalil is Indian his identity in the film is limited to his being a Muslim. It is quite surprising that although Pakistanis are much higher in number particularly in Barcelona the film shows Jalil as Indian but then hardly touches upon any *Indianness*. The only Indian aspect in Jalil is his sexual performance which incorporates the art of *Kama Sutra*. This makes the representation in this film Eurocentric. Gabi's world is the norm and Jalil's views seem to be the exception that Gabi tries to understand but ultimately rejects. Jalil is the 'exotic Other', attractive and repulsive at the same time. Gabi is the European who wants to study and know about the 'Other' objectively, like Orientalists did, only to find reasons to reject it as inferior of it (Said 1978). Several scenes in the film shows Gabi's character making efforts to understand Jalil in particular and Islam in general going to the extent of attending lectures on Islam. But there eventual separation and the production of a book based on these experiences highlight but also reinforce stereotypes.

The above two films privilege the point of view of the Spanish/Western subject towards an Otherized 'object'. The film makes reject racism and xenophobia. There is a well-intentioned attempt to provide a better representation of the immigrants than what newspapers and television news channels provide. But the view still remains Eurocentric.

The last film to be analysed, on the other hand, seems a truly multicultural representation. It achieves this simply by not privileging the point of view of any one character irrespective of race or ethnicity. Thus point of view of no culture is privileged. First of all the genre is comedy which

provides a bigger range to the filmmaker. Multiculturalism seeks a multi-centered world. This film becomes multicentered by giving space to multiple characters and their little stories, apart from the main protagonist. Some of them are the band of Peruvian musicians who have no place to live, Abdul a Christian who converted to Islam influenced by Sufism, the Spanish lady who owns a butcher's shop and ultimately falls for Abdul. The true protagonist of the film is Madrid's immigrant *barrio* of Lavapiés: a multicultural neighbourhood.

This is the plot of the film: Cain is chubby, shy, does not have much luck with women and Abel, his brother, is handsome, married and has twin daughters. Their neighbours are a Bangladeshi family who has set up a restaurant, Shonar Bangla (which means Golden Bengal), which does not earn much. The father of this family is an orthodox Muslim. He does not serve alcohol at his restaurant. Conflict arises between him and Aisha, the eldest daughter, for her job in a bank and her liberal lifestyle. Abel gets Aisha pregnant but the family of Aisha believes that Cain is the father. Cain likes Aisha from the beginning and decides to help her by having a fake wedding with her. But to marry her, he needs to adopt Islam. So begins the process of approaching a completely different culture for Cain, the culture of a Bangladeshi Muslim family.

Here the filmmaker does not make the common mistake of conflating all identities into two homogenous categories: Muslim and Spanish. He does not forget that the traditions and customs of the family of Aisha does not depend only on their religion. Their nationality also influences these. So they are shown to speak Bengali and wear Sarees. Further the film highlights that the personality of each character differs and provides them an individuality. Aisha is more rebellious than her two sisters. Aisha's mother is more liberal than the father. The same goes with the Spanish characters who are very different people, and they respond very differently to the same situations. With the multiplicity of characters, all receiving equal importance, the film rejects a Eurocentric tendency of making generalizations and showcase a multicultural society. It also reflects that no attitude or thought is permanent and unchanging. With coexistence people's positions and attitude change. Bhikhu Parekh said that cultural diversity in a plane of equality offers a wide range of possibilities for human beings because no culture, no matter how rich, can cover all possibilities of human life. So "different cultures complement each other and correct, expand each other's horizon of thought and alert each other to new forms of human fulfilment" (Parekh 2006, 167). *Próximo Oriente* reflects this throughout the film. It projects intercultural encounters as enriching both sides. All characters undergo a change when they come in contact with people from other cultures in this film. On one hand the owner of the butcher's shop change by starting to sell *halal* meat and thereby gain new clients, on the other hand the Bangladeshi family also bend their rules and start

to serve alcohol. The restaurant of the Bangladeshi family goes through several changes, at first it is not at all popular, later it is called Taj Mahal, appropriating an Indian identity, but still it is not that popular, although it does a little better. Finally it becomes a music bar which is hugely popular only after Aisha and her sisters start to perform Bengali music there which attracts a new kind of crowd. We see then how culture that is different helps the immigrants in integrating and gaining acceptance.

It needs to be clarified that the film does not exoticize the music or the bodies of these South Asian women and the music used in the film is not Bollywood music unlike in *Masala*.<sup>8</sup> Music plays a very important role in this film and it also won a Goya nomination for the best original music in a film. A band of Peruvian musicians plays and sings a Native American song at the wedding of Aisha and Cain. The wedding takes place according to Islamic laws, but the red sari that Aisha wears is commonly worn by the Bride in Hindu weddings in India. The overall outcome is aesthetically appealing. Such *mise-en-scène* again celebrates cultural diversity. The film ends with the father of Aisha accepting Cain in spite of the initial lies that he had said to her and realizing that his family desires more liberty. Aisha too recognizes that she truly loves Cain. While in reality immigrants are the ones who struggle to gain acceptance in the host society, in this film at a personal level Cain, a native, is shown to be desiring acceptance by the immigrant family. In this way this film breaks the typical structure of initial rejection, eventual identification and then acceptance of the immigrant by the native of many films in Spanish Immigration Cinema.

This quality of this film lies in its genre. It is a comedy about inter-cultural encounters. In an atmosphere of rising Islamophobia and right-wing rhetoric against immigration a film like *Próximo Oriente* does more than just humanize immigrants. By making the audience laugh over the situations that Cain gets himself into while trying to learn to be a good Muslim from his father in law, the film brings a different culture closer to the audience. When something can be dealt with in a light hearted humorous manner it no longer seems to be a problem anymore. Unlike *Tomándote* this film does not question whether co-existence with immigrant from different cultures like Islam is possible. Co-existence and tolerance is a given premise, the film moves the audience towards mutual admiration.

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8 Ana Corbalán (2013) finds the representation of women in the film problematic. She points out the dance moves are exotic and sensuous, meant to seduce the Spanish audience. I would argue that their dance is a way of breaking away from the norms set by their father and thus more an act of assertion than that of submission to the gaze of the Spanish public.

## 4 Conclusion

We have seen in this paper first of all how the South Asian diaspora is growing in Spain and how they are a visible group who are able to affirm their distinct cultural identity. Further they are able to use their culture and convert into an advantage that helps them gain economic success and social acceptance. We have been able to see that in spite of the fact that a tendency to view South Asians through a stereotypical and narrow way does exist, there is also a great amount of interest for South Asians in Spain. Spanish people imagine Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis in a more or less similar vein which in turn may be attributed to the role Bollywood plays in the lives of all these communities both at home and in the diaspora. This can be seen from the films that have been analysed which do not make clear distinctions between Indians, Bangladeshi and Pakistanis. An aspect that has been left for further discussion in this paper is the role played by religion in the difference among the perception of South Asians for Spanish people. Out of the three films analysed, two of the main South Asian characters were Muslim, while one was Hindu. These films do not suggest that a non-Muslim person of South Asia would enjoy better integration compared to a Muslim one. However many scholars argue (see Flesler 2008) that there is an inherent anti-Islamic feeling in Spain due to the historical rule of Moors (*Moros* in Spanish) and also because of the participation of Moroccan (also known as *Moros*) in the Spanish Civil War. The films do reflect that any Muslim may be termed a *Moro* in Spain, whether they are from North Africa or India. In that case a Muslim Indian will be caught between these two opposite imaginations positive South Asian/Indian and negative Muslim/Moro". What a Spanish person would perceive such a person as is a question that remains open for further research.

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