The Brown Stripe In Pride:
Exploring South Asian Queer Liberation Through Graphic Design

by

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Submitted to Ian Baitz
GCM 490: Thesis

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Bachelor of Technology in Graphic Communications Management
Ryerson University

December 7th, 2020

Research question: How has graphic design, or, visual communication, been used as a tool for queer liberation in South Asian communities?

Acknowledgements

I must begin by acknowledging the key individuals from Ryerson University that contributed to my success in writing this thesis over the past few months. Firstly, I would like to extend my gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Layal Shuman, who opened my eyes up to the area of critical design studies in the early stages of my undergrad. Your suggestion to pursue a visual analysis was especially helpful and crucial for my study.

I would also like to acknowledge my good friend and colleague Jessica Machado, who made me realize the depth of the visuals that I gathered when I was feeling very uncertain about the direction of my analysis. Thank you for spending hours talking through my ideas with me, and bringing light to every discussion we had.

A sincere thank you goes out to my professor Dr. Craig Jennex from the Department of English, who I was able to turn to as an expert on gender and sex in culture, and who provided me with several of the ideas and visuals for this thesis. Without you, this thesis truly would not have been possible.

I must also thank Chris Ambedkar, who supported me very early on in the writing process. I came to him with broad ideas for my topic and left with specific intersections of race and sexuality to focus upon, which truly shifted the entire direction of my paper.

As well, I thank professor Ian Baitz for the time that he spent preparing course material, as well as being so understanding of our circumstances and seeing us as more than just students. Thank you, Ian.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and friends, who supported me throughout the process from listening to my initial ideas, pushing me to write, and keeping me company on very long calls of silent writing. I thank you all deeply for your kindness.

Abstract

Graphic design has held a significant role in creating feelings of pride and liberation for the LGBTQ+ community throughout history. This has been facilitated through the development of symbols such as the pride flag, the pink triangle, AIDS prevention campaigns, and more. However, throughout gay liberation movements, there has historically been a lack and exclusion of queer South Asian voices and experiences, especially within the Western world. This paper aims to explore the use of graphic design and visual communication by queer South Asians to uncover how these pieces facilitate liberation for themselves and their communities. In this study, a visual analysis was conducted on five key pieces of graphic design, which looked at the way in which colour, typography, hierarchy, emphasis, content, and medium worked together to communicate the messaging of queer South Asian individuals. An analysis of the results uncovered that South Asian individuals have used graphic design for queer liberation in various forms, including to foster safe meeting spaces in cities using national colours of South Asian countries to draw community members in, to promote queer South Asian art festivals through newspaper design, and to protest homophobic and transphobic laws in South Asian countries on social media. The overall conclusion revealed that each piece of design held an underlying political purpose of creating safety and inclusion for the often marginalized group, and was more than a display of graphic art for beauty and aesthetic purposes. It also revealed that there is much work to be done in ensuring the representation and inclusion of South Asian individuals in queer conversations and communities, as well as acknowledging their contributions to movements of liberation.

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Glossary

Diaspora: Diaspora is defined by Merriam Webster Dictionary as "the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland" ("Diaspora," n.d.). In this thesis, the diaspora refers to South Asian people that have immigrated to North America from their countries of origin or were born in North America but come from a deep rooted ancestral background elsewhere.

Liberation: The term liberation can hold multiple meanings, yet the one most significant to this thesis refers to the feeling of being liberated, as defined by Merriam Webster Dictionary as "freed from or opposed to traditional social and sexual attitudes or roles" ("Liberated," n.d.). Facilitating this is Merriam Webster's alternate definition of liberation as a movement that "seek[s] equal rights and status for a group" ("Liberation," n.d.).

Queer: Queer is a term that is often used to refer to sexual identity, particularly those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, and so forth ("Queer," n.d.). Though the term queer has come to have multiple meanings, for the purposes of this thesis it is used as an umbrella term for the LGBTQ+ community.

South Asian: An ethnic group consisting of those that come from the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives, Nepal, and Pakistan ("South Asia," n.d.).

Design Terminology

Colour: The way in which the eye interprets light reflects the appearance of colour, which can then be referred to by its hue (colour such as red, orange, etc), lightness (brightness of the reflectance from light to dark), or saturation, known as the purity or vibrance of the hue ("The Visible Spectrum," n.d.).

Emphasis: A principle of design which refers to the part of the visual that attracts the viewer's attention ("Getty Education," 2011). Typically designers create emphasis through the use of varying levels of contrast, size, or colour.

Hierarchy: Organizes elements by importance, often done through the use of varying layout and colour (Siang, n.d.)

Typography: Typography is defined by Britannica as "the design, or selection, of letter forms to be organized into words and sentences to be disposed in blocks of type as printing upon a page" ("Typography," n.d.). For the purpose of this thesis, typography also refers to the use of letter forms for digital design usages.

Introduction

The graphic communications industry exists to disseminate knowledge and ideas across the world in ways that are powerful enough to influence people's ways of thinking and being. It has given a platform and a means of communication to many groups across the world, over the course of time. One group in particular that has made use of visual communication in their campaigning and fight for justice is the LGBTQ+ community, also referred to in this thesis as the queer community.

Gay liberation, or, the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement in the Western world is a movement that began in the late 1960s at an LGBTQ+ bar in New York City, known as The Stonewall Inn ("Stonewall," n.d.). On June 28, 1969, police raided the establishment after a recurring pattern of harassment against LGBTQ+ people, to which the community fought back and rioted against, ultimately leading to six days worth of demonstrations and gatherings in protest ("Stonewall," n.d.). The Stonewall riots are referred to as the catalyst for the gay liberation movement, as they spearheaded the concept of organizing together through a shared identity to fight for sexual freedom and liberation ("Stonewall," n.d.).

After the riots, groups across the country and continent began to form to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights ("Stonewall," n.d.). Among these groups developed pieces of visual communication and graphic art that were used to represent the community and their pride. It was during this time that prolific LGBTQ+ symbols such as the lambda and rainbow flag were created (Campbell, 2019). The creation of these groups, however, still presented a division between people of colour and white members of the LGBTQ+ community. In books on the history of queer graphic design, there is minimal voice given to people of colour, and notably less to the South Asian queer community. This thesis aims to gather and analyze the work of queer South Asians during the time of liberation from the late 1990s to the 21st century. Through a visual analysis of these design pieces, the unique ways in which South Asians used graphic design for organizing and their own personal liberation will be uncovered and explored in detail.

Literature Review

Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to uncover the existing literature on visual communication, queer identity, and South Asian ethnicity. In order to understand queer liberation as it operates in South Asian communities, it is necessary to examine the position that it has, and currently occupies in society. As a South Asian woman who has observed queerness as a historically white dominated space, developed in part by the lack of acceptance of homosexuality in communities of colour but also by a Western suppression of racialized voices, one must consider how South Asian queer liberation came to be and created a voice for itself in this space despite exclusion. This review ultimately analyzes the way in which this form of liberation, which includes open personal and political expressions of sexuality, exerts itself through mediums of visual communication, revealing gaps in the literature among work created by South Asians for queer visibility.

Queerness as a White Dominated Space

In spaces occupied by minorities, there are often several intersections of race, gender, sex and other that compose the identities of these individuals and their lived experiences. These aspects of their identities inform their lives in ways that those with white privilege are inherently unable to experience or understand from a racial standpoint. In a society rooted in colonialism, the power and privilege that whiteness holds pervades into all aspects of life, and in an already marginalized group, it prevails still in queer spaces. This is explained in Khadijah Kanji's paper, "The Gays Aren't All White, The Desis Aren't All Straight: Exploring Queer Subjectivity in the Toronto South Asian Diaspora" as being caused by the creation of the Other amongst queer community groups, in which racialized individuals are separated from those who are not (Kanji, 2017). In these spaces, queerness and race cannot co-exist, as these people are deemed Other based on only one identity marker at a time; they are either queer, or they are racialized.

In Toronto, instances of Pride parades and community gatherings have repeatedly shown this division between queerness and race; interventions of Black Lives Matter Toronto in 2016 and Queers Against Israeli Apartheid Contingent have historically been neglected and met with exclusion, being deemed as "disruptions" by the queer, dominating white presence of the gatherings (Kanji, 2017).

From a South Asian perspective, one must consider the ways in which the culture possesses its own traditional ways of performing gender, which often includes the way in which women and men dress, and uphold their own gender identity markers. This is notable in Soma Patel's piece, ""Brown girls can't be gay": Racism experienced by queer South Asian women in the Toronto LGBTQ community." In this article, the ways in which South Asian performances of gender differ from white performances is highlighted through an individual named Parvati's experiences of discrimination as a Toronto resident for 24 years:

> She contextualizes the 1990s as "an era where if you didn't shave your head, you weren't out" to position her experience of being aggressively denied of lesbian identity by a White butch woman who asserted, "when I look at [Parvati] all I see is a woman of color." (Patel, 2019)

In this instance, Parvati's queerness is policed by Western ideas of masculinity and femininity, including the requirement to have a shaved head in order to be deemed a lesbian; in this space in which the White butch woman and Parvati are both minorities, the White woman's ideologies and criterions still prevail, alienating Parvati in a space that is meant to be equally accepting.

Diasporic and Western Cultural Exclusion of Queerness

Among the exclusionary practices and persistence of White queer communities to negate racialized queer experiences, the culmination of cultural upbringings in these racialized communities and the homophobia that is present is to be considered as well. The stigma in racialized communities contributes to the invisibility of queer racialized individuals, as well as discomfort in assimilating to Western society. In Patel's 2019 study,

these complications are made explicitly clear as the pseudonymous queer South Asian women relay their own experiences as the diaspora within their families, and separately, within their queer communities. One of these women presents a complicated binary between her falsified romantic and sexual interactions with men; she pursues these relationships in order to appease her parents, while still identifying as a lesbian. In doing this, she has her identity policed by queer White women who do not understand the pejorative pressures that her South Asian parents put on her, which lead her to pursue these relationships (Patel, 2019).

This judgement of one's performance of sexuality by other queer members of the community often leads to feelings of alienation, and invalidation, resulting in an internalized struggle. In this, it becomes increasingly difficult to find solace and areas for liberation as these closeted or "out but not acknowledged" individuals can no longer rely on their community of queer people for support.

Visual Communication as it Increases Queer Visibility

As with many minority groups, queer individuals often come together to seek avenues for liberation and increased visibility, with visual communication being one of the many ways by which this is facilitated. In the past 50 years, LGBTQ+ liberation through graphic design has been documented in its progression from pre-liberation, through to the 90's and liberation as it now exists in the 21st century. In Andy Campbell's *Queer X Design: 50 years of signs, symbols, banners, logos and graphic art of LGBTQ*, he writes of the urgency of recognizing design's role in facilitating liberation and innovation for queer communities (Campbell, 2019). As he explains it, "LGBTQ design is about audacity, trying things out, and sometimes failing," adding that the work that he includes in the book are of "courageous individuals and small groups working together to visualize and imagine new political horizons" (Campbell, 2019). In this collection, it is made clear through the countless symbols, posters, banners, and more, that visual communication has

continuously been a method used by LGBTQ+ people to advocate and fight for their existence and rights.

A notable instance of the power of visual communication for queer advocacy is in the AIDS activism work of gay men and lesbian women from the 1980s to early 1990s. During this time, designer Carrie Moyer and photographer Sue Schaffner joined to create Dyke Action Machine! (DAM!) for which they injected posters into advertising campaigns that broke heteronormative standards through lesbian imagery and created a newfound sense of representation (McQuiston, 2019). This radical retelling of the lesbian narrative created visibility for the community group, and ultimately contributed to the initials L, G, and B (Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual) being used to replace the word "gay" in greater society. This is a clear instance in which advocacy through art and design facilitated acknowledgement of the existence of a queer community group, which would previously have otherwise been overlooked (McQuiston, 2019).

Queer South Asian Organizing Through Visual Communication
In analyzing the creation of visual communication pieces to facilitate queer liberation and advocacy from a Canadian context, one is able to focus on the work created by South Asian artists, which often surrounds themes of organizing. In Anu Verma's "Remembering and Forgetting: Archiving Queer and Trans 'south asian' organizing in Toronto", her search for archival material from queer South Asians returns, primarily, pieces from Desh Pardesh, a political arts festival that occurred from the late 1990s to early 2000s (Verma, 2018). This festival sought out to bring together the queer South Asian community to participate in immersive, constructive, and creative expressions of their sexualities, and created a safe space for these members to feel liberated in their identities, which may have otherwise been shunned in their South Asian communities and white dominated queer communities (Jennex & Eswaran, 2020).

This reigns true in other grass-roots organizing collectives from Toronto, including *Khush,* which was a collective of South Asian gay men and lesbians created with the intention to increase awareness of South Asian culture within LGBTQ+ communities. Archival material from the organization depicts materials designed to invite queer South Asian community members to attend monthly meetings, displaying the use of visual communication to spread inclusive and critical messaging (Jennex & Eswaran, 2020).

Conclusion

Overall, the literature presents a recent shift towards beginning to understand the South Asian queer experience, yet the authors of this work are all of South Asian descent themselves. There is an overarching theme of exclusion for South Asian voices in material that is meant to capture the most significant historical events for queer people.

In recognizing strides made for the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, the creation of visual communication pieces by racialized minorities is not often included or acknowledged to the same extent as white queer individuals, and is especially absent for South Asian artists; this is present in various pieces of literature, including both Campbell and McQuiston's books on political design history. With this considered, it is quite difficult to locate archival work of South Asian queer artists, and even recurring festivals such as Desh Pardesh present a lack of this content. This thesis serves to understand the ways in which queer South Asians have or currently use visual communication to facilitate their liberation, and may now work to explore contemporary artwork and designs in order to bridge the gap between the past and the present.

Methodology

The point of research that was investigated for this study was the use of graphic design and visual communication by people of South Asian descent in order to facilitate queer liberation. Due to the nature of this study and its reliance on pieces of graphic art, qualitative data was required in order to uncover, in a visual way, how pieces of graphic design allowed for South Asian queer liberation between the late 1990's to the 21st century.

In order to begin to analyze pieces of graphic design, the secondary data to be studied was first curated and selected, which heavily included archival material from the ArQuives in Toronto, Ontario. The majority of work was sourced from this archival group due to their geographical location in Canada, which was highly relevant to the region from which this thesis was written. It also situated the pieces well from a diasporic perspective, encompassing queer people who lived in Canada but came from South Asian descent. The ability to access these archival materials was granted through Associate Professor of English, Dr. Craig Jennex at Ryerson University, who authored a book on the ArQuives and guided the use of these materials. Other areas from which materials were sourced included books on the history of queer graphic design and liberation, as well as social media platforms of artists and organizations who posted their work. The archival materials were selected for their credibility, as they came from a highly reputable source, which happened to be the largest LGBTQ2+ archives in the world ("Canada's LGBTQ2 Archives", 2020). The social media materials were selected as they were primary sources that came from the artists firsthand. In general, it was found that material created by South Asian queers was scarce and difficult to find, making it easier to hone in on the few examples that were indeed present.

The methodological approach taken for this study was a visual analysis. In qualitative research methods, visual research surrounds what is physically seen by the human eye, which encompasses photographs, artwork and other imagery (Lincoln, & Denzin, 2013).

This is discussed in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, in which Lincoln and Denzin write of this interpretation of visual content and how it is "mediated by physiology, culture, and history" (Lincoln, & Denzin, 2013). This mode of researching was highly relevant to this thesis, as it seeks to interpret visual materials within a South Asian cultural and historical context.

The visual analysis that was conducted consisted of several criterions, of which each piece of graphic design or illustration was compared against. The criteria was broken down into several components, each one being a fundamental of graphic design. In Chapter 3 of *Graphic Design and Print Production Fundamentals,* design is broken down by its most important aspects, including visual elements and compositional principles. Within the text, these visual elements are described as "basic things that can be seen", and encompass multiple aspects of design, including point, line, plane, colour, and typography. Compositional principles build upon the visual elements, as they are described as rules that "can be used to generate content as well as organize it" and include alignment, contrast, hierarchy, emphasis and more (Collins et. al, 2015).

For this study, a combination of visual elements and compositional principles were selected to be in the visual analysis, including colour, typography, hierarchy, and emphasis. These were chosen based on their universality and the ability to analyze them within each unique piece of design. In addition to these, content (logos, imagery, lines of text), and medium/end use (print, digital) were categories that were created as well, in order to capture the full visual context of each piece and understand how it was shared.

These key categories guided the actual questions upon which to extract and analyze information, which were organized into the chart below to facilitate ease of note taking. Within these charts, visual data that can be seen by the eye was recorded, while the analytical guiding questions were explored, if applicable, in the succeeding discussion.

Visual Analysis Criteria

Design Fundamentals	Guiding Questions
Colour	*What colours have been chosen in this work? What is the lightness and or saturation of the colours used? How many colours have been used?*
Typography	*What typefaces have been chosen in this work? Are they easily accessible by a designer? (e.g. expensive price, free) What language is the text set in?*
Content	*What type of content (e.g. imagery) is deliberately excluded or included? Who is represented in this work? How outwardly is queer sexuality depicted and expressed?*
Hierarchy And Emphasis	*How have colour, text, and content been manipulated to create hierarchy and emphasis?*
Medium	*Has the work been designed for print or digital? Who can access this work? Who is the intended audience of this work? Could the piece be adapted to other formats and how easily/conveniently? (e.g. a brochure, over a poster)*

This methodology was selected for this study, as it was most relevant to the subject at hand. The research question seeks to uncover how graphic design facilitates liberation for queer South Asians; the most viable method in understanding this was to deconstruct design pieces and analyze how each fundamental attribute contributes to creating an overall sense of liberation. Apart from its overall relevancy, the visual analysis method was also chosen as it was recommended by the thesis supervisor, Layal Shuman, whose expertise lies in critical design studies. Another approach that could have been used is

participatory research, which would involve speaking directly to queer South Asian artists in either a focus group or interview setting to understand their individual experiences from a primary research standpoint. This approach, however, presented a few different challenges. Firstly, the duration of this study did not span long enough to search for, contact, and organize meetings between queer South Asian artists, and obtain viable research results in the required time. As well, as is true with the pieces of design work, it was rare to find queer South Asian artists in general as their existence is not entirely well known.

Limitations of this visual analysis method included the inability to ensure that the study addresses queer South Asians' experiences from multiple demographics, as specific quantitative data such as age, gender identity, country of origin, etc. could not be specifically tracked. In countering this argument, however, there was not much existing data on queer South Asians to begin with, and the pieces that were selected addressed a range of gender identities from HIV Aids collectives for those identifying as men, the creative work of a queer South asian artist who identified as a woman, and general events such as a queer South Asian arts festival, of which all were invited and participated, including women, men and gender non-conforming individuals, from a variety of ages and sexualities.

Results

Khush: South Asian Gay Men of Toronto Handbill

Figure 1a. (left) and Figure 1b. (right): *Front and back of Kush handbill.*

Source: (Jennex & Eswaran, 2020)

Table 1. Visual Analysis: Khush

Design Fundamentals	Results
Colour	There is one dominant colour used in the handbill, which is green. The shade of green is dark, at a low lightness level. It is not overly saturated at a bright green, nor desaturated at a green that appears closer to grey, but sits in between the two. The background appears to be white, assumed to be the colour of the paper, indicating the use of only one ink overall (green) in the piece.

Typography	Almost all of the type in the handbill is set in ITC Novarese Bold Italic, except for one line, "Confidentiality guaranteed" which is set in ITC Novarese Ultra. These typefaces each cost $42.99 present day. All of the text is set in the English language. The name of the organization, "Khush", is a Hindi/Urdu word that translates to "happy", written using the English alphabet.
Content	The handbill contains minimal graphic elements and symbols, with an eight-pointed star included on both the front and back sides. The rest of the handbill contains only text, and the design is not overly complex as it is composed mostly of these blocks of text. There are no outward depictions of queer sexuality apart from the organization description for Khush, "South Asian Gay Men of Toronto."
Hierarchy And Emphasis	**Figure 1a:** Colour, text and content work together to create hierarchy and emphasis as the cover is predominantly green, with white text in large, bold font. The minimal white content against the dark background puts emphasis on the white elements, and the viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the star symbol and the word "Khush." **Figure 1b:** The line "Confidentiality guaranteed" is the only piece of text that is not italicized, and it is bold in the heaviest weight out of all text, emphasizing the singular line. There is a hierarchy in information presented as the majority of text is placed close together in paragraphs, yet the words "Join us" is on a singular line, drawing attention to the inviting words.
Medium	The handbill has been designed for print use, at a specific size of 3.477 x 3.687 inches. This was distributed in person to visitors of

	the Toronto neighbourhood known as The Gay Village. The intended audience of the piece is South Asian gay men. Aspects of the design could be adapted to other formats (e.g. the front cover could be replicated on a button pin.) The handbill could be redesigned into a poster with only the back cover for hanging in local areas.

**ASAP: Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention Handbill**
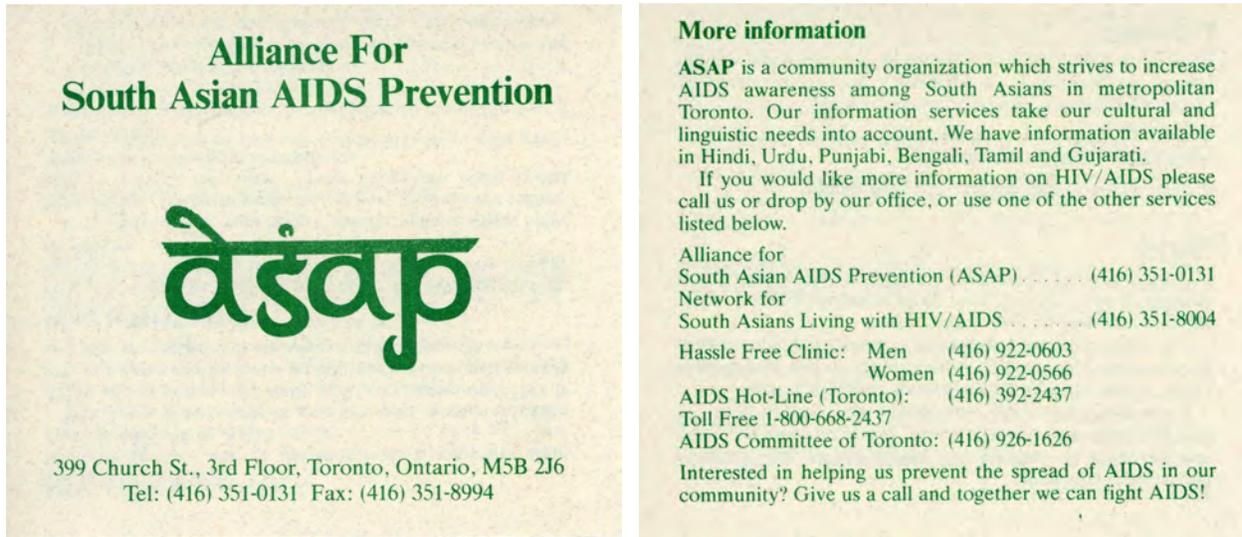
Figure 2a. (left) and Figure 2b. (right): *Front and back of ASAP handbill.*

Source: ("Alliance for South Asian," n.d.)

Table 2. Visual Analysis: ASAP

Design Fundamentals	Results
Colour	One colour is used in the handbill, and it is the colour green. The shade of green is neither light nor dark, but in between. It is at a medium saturation level, with higher vibrance. The background is off-white, assumed to be the colour of the paper of which it was printed on, indicating the use of only one ink overall (green) in the piece.
Typography	All of the type is set in the Times New Roman typeface, with two variations being Times New Roman regular, and Times New Roman bold. The cost of the font variations is $65 each. All of the

	text is set in the English language. The name of the organization, "ASAP," is written using the English alphabet, but has been manipulated to incorporate Devanagari, the script used to write Hindi, in a modern form.
Content	This handbill contains information for (ASAP) the Alliance For South Asian AIDS Prevention in Toronto. It contains information on the organization, their services, telephone numbers and additional resources for community members to turn to. There is no outward depiction of sexuality, but rather a hint towards it, as HIV/AIDS predominantly affected gay men.
Hierarchy And Emphasis	**Figure 2a:** Colour, text and content work together to create hierarchy and emphasis as the front side has a light background, with bold, green text that stands out against it. There is hierarchy in the content of information, as the full organization name is at the top, followed by the acronym (ASAP) in the largest type, as the central point. Below is the most crucial information about the organization, including its location and telephone number. **Figure 2b:** On the backside, emphasis and hierarchy are simultaneously created as there is a heading "More information" at the top that sits alone as a line of text and is the only bolded piece, apart from the "ASAP" acronym. Descriptive lines of text follow below in paragraph style, followed by singular lines that contain telephone numbers with dotted lines to follow along with the flow of information easily for each organization.
Medium	The handbill has been designed for print use, at a specific size of 3.918 x 3.427 inches. This was distributed in person to visitors of The Village. The intended audience of the piece is South Asian

	gay men who have been affected by HIV/AIDS or are seeking help in its prevention. Aspects of the design could be adapted to other formats (e.g. the asap text in Devanagari script could be replicated on a button pin.) The handbill could be redesigned into a poster with only the back cover for hanging in local areas.

Desh Pardesh Newspaper Article

This pink triangle has a brown lining

urvashi vaid is keynote speaker at desh pardesh

VAID'S VISION: Activist Urvashi Vaid says we need a "common ideology."

DESH PARDESH. Conference & Festival Exploring The Politics Of South Asian Cultures In The West. Pass: $40. Evening program: $6/single, $9/double. Afternoon panels: $8. Wed, Mar 24-Sun, Mar 28. Venues: The Euclid, 394 Euclid; Art Metropole, 788 King W; John Spotton Cinema, 150 John. 601-9932.

Story by Kaushalya Banerji

Urvashi Vaid

is one among many gay and lesbian participants in Desh Pardesh, an annual Toronto festival of progressive South Asian culture in the West.

Vaid, a lawyer and former executive director of the US National Lesbian and Gay Task Force (NLGTF), is the keynote speaker for the festival which, in the past couple of years, has won a large queer following. She is probably best known for her confrontation with ex-President George Bush. At an AIDS conference in March 1990, she interrupted the President's first and only policy address on AIDS and HIV by holding up a sign that read: "Talk Is Cheap, AIDS Funding Is Not — Remember Gay People With AIDS." She also denounced the Republicans' track-record on AIDS funding and, in the end, was escorted out by the Secret Service. She was threatened with arrest if she re-entered the conference.

When criticized by more conservative lesbians and gays who felt her direct action tactics were unbecoming to an executive director of a national lobbying organization, Vaid responded: "I don't agree. That's exactly what I should be doing."

During my recent interview with Vaid, she spoke about her six-and-a-half year involvement with the Task Force, the most prominent US gay and lesbian lobby group. She brought 10 years of community activism to the NGLTF, having worked in grass roots political groups fighting violence against women, as well as participating in Sisterfire, Washington's annual women's music festival, and other feminist cultural events.

Like many an activist-turned-paid-organizer, Vaid says she got involved as the Task Force's full-time media director because she was "tired of choosing between full-time work" to pay the rent and her growing "commitment as a volunteer activist on lesbian and gay rights."

Co-ordinating media and public relations for three years at the NGLTF allowed her to both pay the rent and work with a gay organization feared by the Republican-controlled White House. The Task Force funded and fought legal efforts to recriminalize homosexuality, made homophobic discrimination and hate crimes a prime time media topic, and lobbied hard for increased AIDS funding.

When Vaid was hired as the Task Force's executive director, she found the scope of its work broader than her previous local activist projects. But whether addressing city councils or Congress, she says, the process is basically the same. However, she did notice an absence of women at the national level of gay and lesbian organizing. In contrast, she notes that women are often the key strength of smaller local or state-wide organizing, such as last November's No On 9 campaign in Oregon.

Vaid feels she was expected to fail as executive director. "I was a woman of colour leading a white male organization." She was the only woman to reach the organization's upper echelon; most of the other women were secretaries. Although often controversial, Vaid left the Task Force in the best financial shape of its 20-year history. In 1992, its operating budget was approximately two million dollars.

Although never involved in the South Asian community as an activist, Vaid stresses that "I feel Indian. My family and upbringing was very Indian-identified culturally." Fighting entrenched racism has been difficult, however. She's experienced both overt and subtle manifestations of racism in the mainstream gay and lesbian communities.

Vaid feels that the movement for racial justice has been hampered as the progressive community, in general, has ghettoized itself by becoming a series of fragmented, identity-based, single-issue organizations. She attributes this to a "failure to develop a common ideology" that can encompass the various relations of power in contemporary US society. This task is urgent, since the right-wing has successfully maintained unity, sharing a homophobic, racist and sexist agenda that places conventional family values centre stage.

Vaid stays involved despite such obstacles. "For me activism is important," she says. "It gives me a sense of optimism."

▶ Arts & Issues

DESH PARDESH'S QUEER HIGHLIGHTS

Here are just a few events of interest to gays and lesbians. Consult the program for more lesbigay listings:

- **South Asian Women In-Sight.** Visual art kicks off the festival in an exhibit curated by Sharon Fernandez. Free. 9:30pm. Mar 24. Art Metropole.
- **SamiYoni.** All women are welcome to the launch of this journal for lesbians of South Asian descent. Free. 5pm. Mar 25. Epicure. 512 Queen W.
- **Caucuses: Mar 26.** HIV-positive South Asians. 10-noon, 45 Carlton, Apt 1715; Lesbians At Desh Conference, noon-2pm, Art Metropole; Gay Men, noon-2pm, Pints, 518 Church; Women At Desh, 2:15-4:15, Art Metropole.
- **Nach Music.** Hosted by CKLN's Masala Mixx, Vancouver's Indo Fijian pop-dancer singer Kavita; San Francisco's intra-national minstrel Sanxe Loveji and the UK's Ritu. PWYC-$10. 9:30pm. Mar 26.

California Dream. 137 Peter (new location).
- **Running From The Family.** A panel, including Urvashi Vaid, discusses "family values." $2. 2pm. Mar 27. The Euclid.
- **This Pink Triangle Has A Brown Lining.** Out South Asians mix it up, with featured speaker Urvashi Vaid, writer Shyam Selvadurai, the premiere of Shani Mootoo's new video, Wild Women In The Woods, and more. $6. 9pm. Mar 27. The Euclid.
- **AIDS Activism Workshop.** Community activists, educators and HIV-positive people share strategies for South Asian communities. Free. 11am-1pm. Mar 28. Art Metropole.
- **The Best Of Pratibha Parmar.** Films by the lesbian London filmmaker include A Place of Rage, with June Jordan, Angela Davis and Alice Walker. $6. 5:30pm. Mar 28. John Spotton.

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Figure 3. Newspaper promoting the queer South Asian art festival Desh Pardesh.

Source: ("Desh Pardesh," n.d.)

Table 3. Visual Analysis: Desh Pardesh

Design Fundamentals	Results
Colour	There are three colours used in the newspaper, including red, pink, and black. The red tone used in the headline text is bright and highly saturated. The pink that is overlaid on top of body text is less saturated than the red yet it is still bright against the dull brown of the newspaper. There are various shades of grey used, which are apparent in the photograph included in the newspaper.
Typography	There are three main typefaces used in this newspaper design. The headline text "This Pink Triangle Has a Brown Lining" is set in ITC Kabel Ultra, while smaller headlines are set in ITC Kabel Demi and ITC Kabel Regular. In every use of this typeface, the text appears to have been condensed (vertically or horizontally). The heading "Desh Pardesh Queer Highlights" is set in the typeface Metropolitaines. The rest of the text in the newspaper is set in a serif typeface, which is too small to identify but appears very similar to Times New Roman. Present day, ITC Kabel costs $41.99 per variation, as well as Metropolitaines. The price of the serif typeface is unknown. All text is set in the English language.
Content	The newspaper contains blocks of text and a photograph of a South Asian activist, Urvashi Vaid. The focus of all content is to promote Desh Pardesh, a South Asian queer Arts Festival in Toronto. The design follows the standard structure of newspaper articles with a three-column layout. Queer sexuality is depicted and expressed through the inclusion of the words "queer" throughout and the image of Vaid, who identifies as LGBTQ+.

Hierarchy And Emphasis	In the newspaper article, hierarchy and emphasis work together to convey the most important information. A hierarchy of information is presented, with a heading at the top, followed by an image and columns of neatly organized text. The layout of the newspaper includes negative space and bounding boxes around important content emphasizing its separate components. Colour and text work in conjunction, as the eye is drawn to the heading for its bright colour and bold type. At the bottom of the article, the text "Desh pardesh's queer highlights" is set in a unique typeface that draws the viewer in, and this title, as well as the text below, is all contained within a pink square background. As this is the part of the article that contains the most colour, emphasis is immediately put on it and its message.
Medium	The newspaper article has been designed for print, and would likely have been distributed to local residents of the city. There is no certainty about the ability of people outside of Toronto to access this article, though it may have been shared across cities. The intended audience is the LGBTQ+ community, indicated by the text "Here are just a few events of interest to gays and lesbians" under the highlights section, followed by events succeeding the publication date of the newspaper by 5-9 days. This piece could be adapted to other formats, such as a poster or flyer which simply contains the Desh Pardesh Queer Highlights section, in order to distribute to queer citizens to attend.

Gaysi Poster - Indian Penal Code Section 377

Figure 4. *A poster created by Korishma Dorai for Gaysi in 2014 during elections in India.*

Source: ("Gaysifamily," n.d.)

Table 4. Visual Analysis: Gaysi

Design Fundamentals	Results
Colour	This design makes use of every colour of the basic colour spectrum (ROYGBIV) with variations of these colours and additions throughout. Shades of black, white, and grey have also

	been used. Notably, a shade of brown has been used in the graphic of the person, representing the skin tone of a South Asian person. The overall colours are bright and highly saturated. Sixteen colours have been used in this design.
Typography	One main typeface has been used in this work for the two lines of text, which appears to be Nexa Rust Sans Book. There is a small piece of text that states "377", which is set in a bold, sans serif typeface. The cost of Nexa Rust Sans Book is $31.99. The cost of the bold, sans serif typeface is unknown. All of the text in the graphic is set in the English language.
Content	This piece contains a graphic of what appears to be a man, who is holding a flag in one hand and a handcuff in the other. From the Indian context and the brown skin tone of the man, it can be concluded that he is South Asian. There is a depiction of queer sexuality as the flag that he is holding includes the colours of the rainbow pride flag.
Hierarchy And Emphasis	There is a hierarchy of information in this design as the main lines of text sit at the very top of the design, and the very bottom of the design. In between is all of the graphic content, including the depiction of the man, the flag, and handcuffs. This structure creates a strong flow from the top to the bottom of the design, as the viewer absorbs the content step by step. There is emphasis placed on the top line of text as it is set in capital letters, which suggests a dominant voice. It also exists as a single line of text that is surrounded by negative space, which further adds to the feeling of emphasis.

Medium	This piece has been designed for both print and digital. It was originally created for resharing on the @gaysifamily digital platform in 2014. However, in 2015 it was published in the first Gaysi zine on a digital magazine platform (Issuu), as well as in print issues delivered to customers. Through the open sharing of the graphic on the internet, it is widely available and accessible around the world. The intended audience is the political parties in India that were not vocal about their stance on Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.

Priyanka Paul Illustration
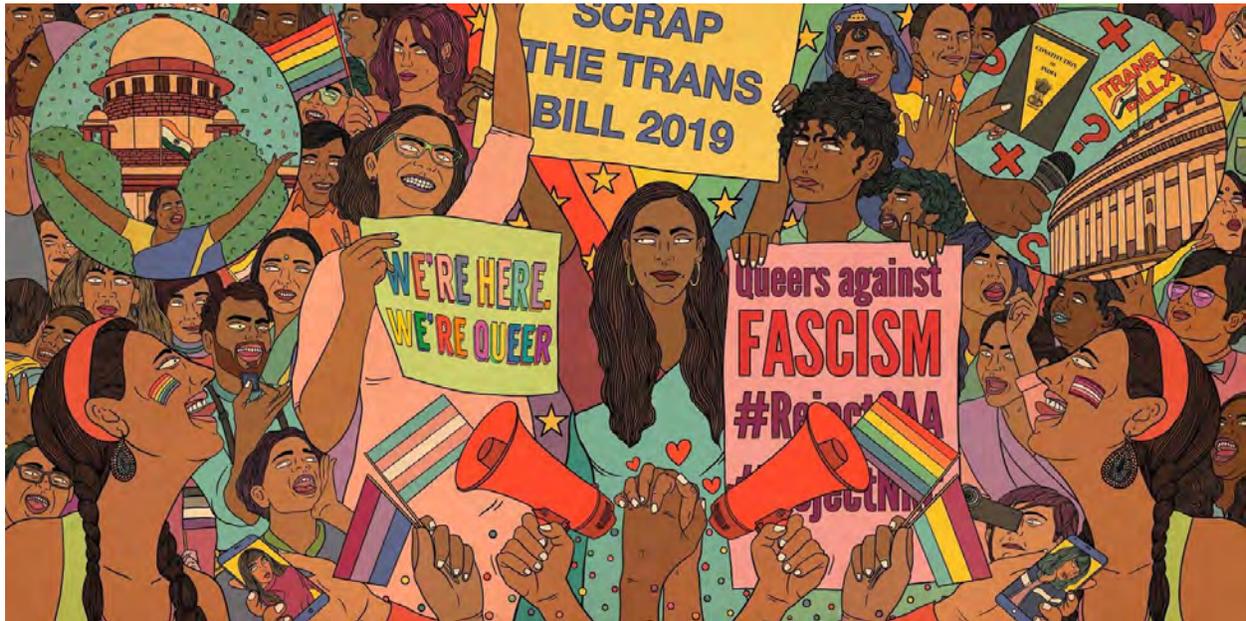
Figure 5. *An illustration created by queer Indian artist, Priyanka Paul.*

Source: (Balram, 2020)

Table 5. Visual Analysis - Priyanka Paul

Design Fundamentals	Results
Colour	This design makes use of every colour of the basic colour spectrum (ROYGBIV) with variations of these colours and additions throughout. The most common colour is brown, with shades used from light to dark, representing the diversity of skin tones of South Asian people. The overall colours used are bright and saturated, rather than dull and desaturated. There is a high number of colours and shades used.
Typography	There are two dominant typefaces used in this work, which are Helvetica Bold and Alternate Gothic Condensed ATF Bold. These

	typefaces make up the majority of the signage in this graphic. At a very small point size, in the "Constitution of India" graphic, a serif typeface has been used to match the typeface used on the actual Constitution of India. The exact typeface and cost is unknown. All text is set in the English language.
Content	This graphic contains illustrations of various South Asian people, holding up signs in protest of The Trans Bill 2019 in India. Several of these people are wearing traditional Indian clothing, and the Indian flag is included as well. There are several depictions of queer sexuality through the inclusion of LGBTQ+ flags including the rainbow pride flag, as well as the lesbian, bisexual, transgender, pansexual, and asexual flags. The people in the graphic are holding these flags and wearing them on their faces, as well as embracing each other in hugs and holding hands to signify queer love.
Hierarchy And Emphasis	Though there are many different images being shown in the graphic, a sense of hierarchy is created through the way that the content is depicted. Overall, the graphic contains visuals of people, and more detailed visuals are placed within circles at the top of the graphic to guide the viewer's eye and establish focal points. There is emphasis placed on these areas as they are the only graphics that are contained within a geometric shape. Colour and type has been manipulated to create emphasis as well, as the text in the signs that people are holding up is large, bold, and filled with a variety of bright colours that catch the eye.
Medium	This graphic has been designed for use in digital platforms. It was originally created by Indian illustrator Priyanka Paul as a header

	for an article in a South Asian journal called the Juggernaut. Though the journal requires a subscription to view online, the graphic has since been reshared on Priyanka's Instagram account @artwhoring, allowing for widespread access and sharing of it. This piece could easily be printed in a physical copy of the Juggernaut or by those interested in spreading it around India.

Discussion

The results of this study indicated various ways in which the South Asian queer community has utilized graphic design as a method to communicate, liberate, and advocate for themselves, ranging from the time period of the 1990s to present day. The fundamentals of design that were most relevant for each respective visual are discussed.

Khush: South Asian Gay Men of Toronto

When looking at the handbill for Khush, several aspects of the design reveal a greater message about the organization and the audience that they serve. Firstly, the most dominant colour, and the only colour used in the design of the handbill is green. The colour green is present in several flags of South Asian countries, and the dark shade used in the Kush handbill is particularly prevalent in the national flags of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.
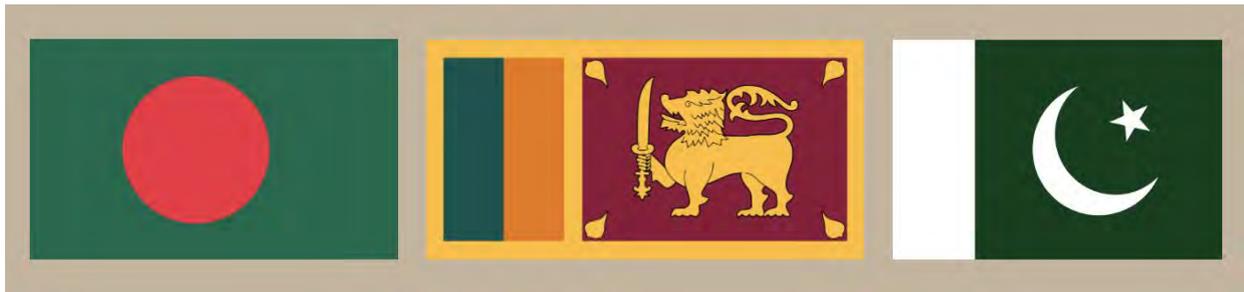
Figure 6. *(Left to right): The flags of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.*
Sources: ("BD Bangladesh," n.d.), ("LK Sri Lanka," n.d.), ("PK Pakistan," n.d.)

This use of green is highly significant in establishing a sense of cultural identity between the organization, which was a group of gay South Asian men, and the audience that the handbill was targeted towards, that being other South Asian gay men in Toronto. The subtle use of a prominent South Asian colour allowed for recognition of a collective identity, that viewers would feel familiarity with and therefore feel more welcomed and drawn to the space.

Similarly to colour, it is important to note the intentionality by which typography has been used to convey a specific message. The name of the organization is spelled using the English alphabet, but spells the word "Khush", which translates to "happy" in both Hindi and Urdu. By using a word that South Asian Hindi and Urdu speakers would recognize, a sense of identity and inclusion is created once again, and the positive connotations of the word "happy" suggest that Khush is a welcoming place.

In addition to this, on the backside of the handbill, there is only one line that is not set in italics, which reads "Confidentiality Guaranteed." Through the use of bold text and the design fundamental of emphasis, this line particularly stands out from the others. Designed at a time where homosexuality was not as accepted in society, the use of such messaging is important as it creates a sense of inclusion and safety from being outed to one's community. This, in turn, allows for these men to liberate themselves as they are given freedom to express their sexualities in this space with similar queer men, even if they cannot do so in their homes.

Although there are no explicit depictions of queer sexuality apart from the word "gay", the star present on both sides resembles the nautical star tattoo, an early symbol of identity for lesbians (Campbell, 2019). This tattoo was worn at the top of the wrist, in a location that could easily be hidden by a watch but was a clear identifier of their identity (Campbell, 2019). Though the star in the Khush branding has eight points, the resemblance is interesting to note as Khush went on to expand to include not just gay men of Toronto, but lesbians as well.

Figure 7. *The nautical star tattoo.*

Source: (Campbell, 2019)

ASAP: Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention

The handbill created by ASAP, the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention is also quite deliberate in its design choices. Much like the Khush handbill, there is a dominant green presence in the ASAP handbill, matching the green used in the Indian flag.

Figure 8. The flag of India.

Source: ("IN India," n.d.)

In addition to this connection to the flag, the ASAP text on the front of the handbill is written using the English alphabet, but carefully incorporates letterforms from the Devanagari script, which is used to write the Hindi language, commonly spoken in India (Kopparapu & L, 2018).

Figure 9. A comparison between the "asap" text and Devanagari script alphabet.

Sources: Asap: ("Alliance for South Asian," n.d.). Devanagari: (Kopparapu & L, 2018)

The deliberate inclusion of both the green colour and the Hindi script is significant in signalling and calling to queer South Asian members of the diaspora who may observe these handbills in Toronto. Without explicitly using Hindi script to write the text, it remains accessible to a variety of South Asian diasporic queers who may not speak their ancestral tongue, yet also pulls in those that do, and provides a sense of familiarity and overall safety.

Notably, the text within the handbill states, "Our information services take our cultural and linguistic needs into account. We have information available in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Tamil and Gujarati," all of which are South Asian languages ("Alliance for South Asian," n.d.). It is clear that this organization considers the intersections of race and queerness, as it understands that certain members of the community may need access to translation services. In addition to this, the handbill format by which the piece is designed is especially helpful in communicating information, as it was near 4x4 inches, quite a small print size. This size makes it suitable for carrying it around in one's pocket or wallet, as an easy and accessible way to access AID prevention services.

Desh Pardesh

In the newspaper article promoting Desh Pardesh, a queer South Asian arts festival that ran from the 1990s to early 2000s, there are several aspects of the design that stand out. Firstly, the way in which the bright red and bold type are used in the piece creates emphasis on the heading, which reads: "This pink triangle has a brown lining." In this context, a prolific symbol of homosexuality is mentioned, known as the pink triangle.
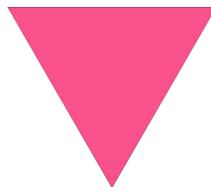

Figure 10. The pink triangle.
Source: (Campbell, 2019)

The pink triangle was a symbol that was initially mandated by Nazi germany as an identifier to be worn by gay men (Campbell, 2019). In recent years, it has seen a reclamation by the LGBTQ+ community, who have used it in their own campaigns. This commentary on the pink triangle having a brown lining hints to South Asian identity with the word "brown" to denote skin tone. The statement is powerful in communicating that queer activism is also lined by the work of South Asians and that their contributions are important.

In addition to the title text, there is significant content within the newspaper, including an image of a South Asian LGBTQ+ activist named Urvashi Vaid ("Urvashi Vaid," n.d.). At a time period where identities were mostly hidden of queer South Asians, as seen in the Kush handbill, the outward depiction of a queer woman in a newspaper article is noteworthy.

Another area that stands out in the design of the newspaper is the unconventional use of colour overlaid with a block of text. Behind the "Desh Pardesh's Queer Highlights" text is a rectangle filled with pink, that both highlights and draws attention to the summary of Desh Pardesh's scheduled activities. The main message of the newspaper article is to promote the upcoming events of the Desh Pardesh festival, including the text "Here are just a few events of interest to gays and lesbians. Consult the program for more lesbigay listings" ("Desh Pardesh," n.d.) The use of the pink graphic device to draw the viewers in, followed by the text inviting them to the event, is highly effective in conveying the message that Desh Pardesh is a place where queer South Asians can gather to celebrate their sexualities through art.

Gaysi

Unlike the previous pieces of design, the poster created for Gaysi Family, a social media platform showcasing queer South Asian work, centers around legislation in India. Designed in 2014, the poster acts as a commentary on the silence of politicians in India

surrounding the topic of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalized acts of homosexuality by deeming sexual interactions between the same sex as an offence when gay marriage was not yet legalized in the country (Gupta, 2006).

The components of the design work together to effectively create a commentary on the silence of these politicians, as the main graphic appears to be of a man holding up a flag that contains several colours of pride, including those of the original flag designed by Gilbert Baker, as well as colours of the Bisexual flag blended in.

Figure 11. *(Left to right): The Gilbert Baker Flag and Bisexual Flag.*
Source: (Campbell, 2019)

While there is a clear representation of queer South Asians in this piece, there is more notably a representation of how these individuals have been identified to be criminals and prisoners by the Indian government. This is clear through the handcuff in the man's hand, the "X" covering his mouth, and the use of the colour orange for his shirt, which is a colour typically worn by prisoners in jail.

After analyzing the way in which queer South Asians are constrained in this image, one must also observe how the design elements come together to break free and resist these constraints in order to fight for liberation. An example of this is the use of text at the top, which reads: "SILENCE SPEAKS LOUDER THAN WORDS" ("Gaysifamily," n.d.).

This text is set in all capital letters and is placed on its own line, creating a stark contrast between the background and the text. The use of this hierarchical structure is effective in conveying the message of the text, which is at quite a small point size but is still powerful, mimicking the use of something as simple as silence to send a powerful message. In addition to this, small details have been included such as the branded "377" stamp that has been crossed out, as well as the use of the colour white in the hair of the man, which is commonly thought of as a sign of old age. As a policy that was created over a hundred years ago, the old age of the man is a commentary on not only how outdated it is, but also how long the fight to eliminate it has been going on for years.

Priyanka Paul

The illustration created by queer South Asian artist Priyanka Paul also makes a commentary on Indian legislation, through the careful use of colour, content, and medium. In Paul's piece, there is perhaps the most outward depictions of queer sexuality by South Asian people of all the visuals that have been analyzed. Not only are these people waving and wearing flags of multiple different sexualities that fall under the queer term, but they are also holding colourful signs of protesting, communicating their existence to the world with text such as "WE'RE HERE, WE'RE QUEER" (Balram, 2020). There is also a sign that reads, "SCRAP THE TRANS BILL 2019", which acts as a direct callout to the Indian government to make changes to the 2019 Trans Bill, which currently requires trans people to provide proof of medical transitioning in order to identify as transgender (Glazer, n.d.). The use of big, bold text puts emphasis on the messages in the posters, and the saturated and dominating colours of pride, contrasted against the shades of brown in the skin tones of the people, are effective in illustrating the vibrance that is created when people of various appearances and sexualities unite to collectively fight for liberation.

Though originally designed for use in a journal known as the Juggernaut, Paul has shared the graphic on her Instagram account several times, allowing it to be accessed by

her following on this platform. As an application that allows for the resharing of posts and knowledge with a press of a button, her choice to use Instagram to share the illustration is highly inclusive and accessible for all. It allows for easy dissemination of the knowledge, and further advances the goal of spreading the message in hopes of enacting change in the country.

Overall, the results have communicated several ways in which design fundamentals have been used by queer South Asian artists to form messages of safety, inclusion, and political uprising. Though this discussion analyzes each piece in detail, there are some limitations of the results presented, which includes the fact that the exact details surrounding the creation and distribution of these pieces remain unknown, and can only be assumed. These include the date of creation, the software on which they were created, whether the individuals paid for the typefaces used or obtained them through other means, and where the items were distributed (e.g. the location in which the handbills and newspapers were given out is not entirely known.) Despite these limitations, however, the factual information presented has allowed for an interpretation to be made nonetheless.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which queer South Asians have used graphic design in order to facilitate a sense of liberation for themselves, specifically focusing on the variety of ways that this has been done throughout history.

A deeper analysis into the breadth of this work revealed varying and unique ways in which liberation was developed through the creation of these graphic design pieces, influenced by the time period and circumstances in which they were created. Pieces from the late 20th century in the 1990s were found to be created around the purpose to gather in groups and establish a feeling of collectivity in which freedom of sexual expression was allowed. This was notable through the organizing of queer South Asian lesbians and gays in Toronto under Khush, as well as the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention and during the queer South Asian arts festival Desh Perdesh. In each of these instances, visual communication was designed with the purpose of informing the public that these organizations and gatherings existed, and welcoming fellow queer South Asians to become a part of these collectives.

In graphics created during the 21st century, there was a shift in focus to protesting and fighting for homophobic and transphobic laws to be abolished, specifically in the South Asian countries in India. The visual communication that was created around this time was relentless in calling out politicians to speak up on the injustices that continued to occur towards queer South Asian people, and it held unapologetic depictions of queer sexuality, including the use of several symbols of pride.

In terms of design fundamentals, a repeating pattern was developed in that the pieces as a whole often made use of typefaces that were widely accessible and well-known, including Times New Roman and Helvetica. This brought a sense of universality to the designs and made the communication accessible to many audiences, as it was created with the intention of sharing information to as wide an audience as possible. As the

pieces progressed over the years, the inclusion of colours of national and prideful colours and content grew throughout the pieces, linking the two ideas together and illustrating how the South Asian identity projects its voice in queer spaces.

Among each of these pieces, lies a crucial finding that every piece of graphic design was created with a political purpose. Though some visuals may depict people who are freely able to express their sexuality to the world, more often than not these individuals are protesting for change to be created as the current treatment of queer South Asian people is not equitable or equal to other racial groups in the LGBTQ+ community. This political root stands true even in pieces that were created to promote celebration and gathering of South Asians, as they ultimately worked towards creating safety for these people in a world that deliberately excluded and often alienated them. There was less space made to celebrate themselves without worry as can be done at corporatized Pride parades in the Western world, and more space made to protect themselves from those who did not believe it important for their rights to exist.

Overall, as stands true with several other queer communities of colour, the fight for a voice and place in history is never over for this underrepresented group. There is still much left to be researched on how South Asian people continue to use and rethink ways of communication through visual means, and there are several gaps to be filled in books on graphic design history which have previously failed to mention the graphic art and contributions of queer South Asian groups.

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Appendix

Visual Analysis (Discussion)

Design Fundamentals	Discussion Questions
Colour	*What is the significance of these specific colours in relation to cultural identity and/or nationalism? Do these colours relate to established LGBTQ+ symbols? (e.g. flags) What is the significance of these colours in signalling sexuality or gender identity?*
Typography	*What does the use of text seek to communicate here?*
Content	*What does the level of design complexity suggest about the creator of the piece? Is the style of design more catered towards aesthetic, or need?*
Hierarchy And Emphasis	*What is the significance of these design choices in expressing cultural identity and/or nationalism? In what ways does hierarchy and emphasis create inclusion and safety?*
Medium	*How does the medium impact the way in which the information is shared?*