



**National Ambulance
BME Forum**

Working to improve the experience of
Black and Minority Ethnic staff and
communities

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South Asian Heritage Month (18th July – 17th August)



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Introduction



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South Asian Heritage Month (SAHM) exists in order to commemorate, mark and celebrate South Asian history and culture, as well as to better understand the diverse heritage that continues to link the UK and South Asia.

It was launched in the House of Commons in July 2019. This year marks the second formal celebration of South Asian Heritage Month, taking place between 18 July 2021 - 17 August 2021

This annual event aims to transform how people connect with South Asian cultures and identity in three ways.

- Celebration of arts, culture and heritage
- Commemoration of the history and anniversaries.
- Education of the above

South Asia is formed of eight countries, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Each of these countries has been hugely impacted by its relationship with the UK, primarily through war and colonisation via the British Empire. Part of South Asian Heritage (**SAHM**) seeks to explore and embed understandings of these histories which are important to any understanding of present-day UK.



Key events



Unlike most commemoration months **South Asian History Month** takes place across two calendar months and the reason for this that it respects the traditions of the South Asian solar calendar and the 18th July – 17th August contains several significant dates.

18 July

The Independence of India Act 1947 gained royal assent.

26 July

Maldives Independence Day

8 August

Bhutan Independence Day

14 August

Pakistani Independence Day

15 August

Indian Independence Day

17 August

Partition Commemoration Day or the date that the Radcliffe Line was published in 1947, setting out where the border between India, West Pakistan and East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.

The month also very nearly coincides with the South Asian month of Saravan / Sawan, which is the main monsoon month when the regions habitat undergoes renewal.

Although still a young event, the importance of SAHM should not be understated in creating a culture of belonging within the NHS. 10 per cent of the NHS workforce identify as Asian, and 30 per cent of medical staff working in the NHS are from an Asian background.



Our stories

Pam Brown, West Midlands Ambulance Service From Kenya to Gravesend



I was born in Kenya but when the Asian community were effectively thrown out, due to the more draconian laws brought in, I moved from a lovely home in Nairobi with palm trees, space, light, and sunny days to Gravesend in the UK.

A place that felt it actually was the end of the world (apologies to those who live there!). It was cold, grey, with inhospitable neighbours and small rooms that felt claustrophobic.

My father who was a humanitarian let others arriving from Kenya find refuge in our attic room and I remember as a child sitting on the stairs and listening to my father and whoever was in the attic tell their stories of how they had had to leave Nairobi and the livelihoods they had lost. I think I believed that being Indian was somehow 'bad' that no-one wanted us in their country and that message was amplified by the racism that I and my family faced in Gravesend.

Fast track to the age of 16 and I went to India for the first time. From the moment I set foot outside the airport I felt as if I had arrived in heaven! I loved everything about it - the noise, the colour, the smell of jasmine at night, the cows in the roads that never managed to get hurt because the traffic just moved around them, the food, the amazing sense of family and belonging with every one being called auntyjee or unclejee! I had finally arrived at a crossroad and there was only one way to go and that was to embrace my Indian identity and cultural heritage with passion.



Pam Brown, West Midlands Ambulance Service From Kenya to Gravesend



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Yes, it is full of contradictions such as poverty and extreme wealth; of tradition and innovation; of mountains and deserts, of life lived behind closed doors and laid bare in the street but those contradictions are also part of me, and I revel in the dichotomies they bring to the soul.

My heritage and culture also bring me to a place that is peaceful most of the time. I say to you Om



om embodies the essence of the entire universe. How can I not feel proud of that culture or of that message to the world?

Pam Brown, nee Nanda
Head of Diversity and Inclusion, WMAS



Our Stories

Shy Das-Bharadwa, Scottish Ambulance Service From Kenya to UK - London/Manchester



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With Kenya moving towards Independence in the 1960's, the South Asian community started facing turbulent times. The 1965 Exchange controls hit the community hard. There was a choice then to either take up Kenyan citizenship or leave. The Immigration Bill was passed in 1967 and all non-citizens required work permits. The Asian Exodus started building up in 1968 and Asians started moving to the UK.

My husband is of Gujarati origin and he was about ten years old at this time. Each family was given about \$100 each and allowed one suitcase each for the move. They were given tickets on a plane from Nairobi and arrived in London. They left behind everything they had owned over the past years – a home, belongings, animal livestock and other possessions. There were strict rules and restrictions prevalent at that time.

They landed in London on 10 June 1970 and stayed with relatives. There were tiny little houses filled with 10-15 people at a time.



Shy Das-Bharadwa is PA to Chair and Chief Executive at Scottish Ambulance Service



Shy Das-Bharadwa, Scottish Ambulance Service From Kenya to UK - London/Manchester



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There were no toilets in the house as these were located outside the back of the house. Hot water was at a premium which was a hardship for Indians who are required to bathe after the use of the toilet every morning. My father-in-law started looking for a house and a job in London. He had been a printer back in Nairobi and though he found low-paying jobs, he could not afford to rent a house and manage a family with this salary in London.

Advised by some of the community, he came to Manchester to explore the options. He hired a house for £7 a month in Stalybridge for his wife and three children. It took him about 10 years to be able to afford to buy a house.

The upheaval in the life of my husband and his family did affect my husband's education. He had to learn English to get in to school at that age.

He never recovered from this ordeal in their lives.



Shy's Recipe - kathiyawadi gujrati khichadi



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Ingredients

- 2 Cups of Rice
- 1 Cup of Toor Dal (Yellow Split peas)
- 2 Chopped Potatoes
- 100 Grams Green Peas
- 1-2 Lengthwise Chopped Carrots
- 100 Grams Chopped Spring Onions
- 3-4 Finely Chopped Green Chilies
- 1.5-2 Teaspoons Ginger-Garlic Paste
- 1 Teaspoon Mustard Seeds
- 1 Teaspoon Cumin Seeds
- 2-3 Dried Red Chilies
- 3-4 Black Peppercorns and 3-4 Cloves
- ½ Teaspoon Turmeric Powder
- 1 Teaspoon Coriander Powder
- 1 Teaspoon Cumin Powder
- 1.5-2 Teaspoon Red Chili powder
- Coriander Leaves finely chopped for garnish
- Hot Water
- Ghee and salt, to taste

Method

1. Wash the dal-rice mixture a few times and keep aside.
2. Heat ghee and add mustard seeds, cumin seeds, dried red chilies, black peppercorns and cloves, and stir. Next add chopped spring onions and stir it well.
3. Now add in finely chopped green chilies, ginger garlic paste and sauté it well.
4. Add carrots, green peas and potatoes. Stir and coat them well in ghee base.
5. Add turmeric powder, red chili powder, coriander powder and cumin powder and stir. Add some coriander leaves, rice and dal. Again ensure everything is coated. Once done add your salt and the water and give it all a mix.
6. This khichadi can be cooked in a pressure cook or in a thick-bottom pan with lid. If in a pan, keep adding hot water slowly as required till the mixture is cooked through.
7. Once your Kathiyawadi masala khichdi is ready, top it with some ghee and serve it with pickle and roasted poppadum



Shy says "This recipe is a favourite in the family, it is a source of comfort and a reminder of our families' roots. In those days, money was scarce and this food was simple but nourishing with all that was available."

Our Stories

Sharifa Hashem, South Western Ambulance Service From Bahrain to Exeter



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I was born in Bahrain in 1984, an archipelago in the Persian Gulf, with beautiful sandy beaches and clear warm waters. Approximately every 10 years civil unrest breaks out, fuelled by government inequalities. Unrest was met brutally with well documented and wide spread human rights abuses. I have vivid memories of walking home through demonstrations with gunmen on one side and Molotov cocktails on the other.

In February 1996 my father said we would be leaving Bahrain in a few days, we should pack our bags and not tell anyone. What I didn't realise, as an 11 year old, was that he had just been released from political imprisonment and was told he had three days to say goodbye to his family. He was in prison because he didn't support the government, with many others alongside him. We arrived on a very cold February on the outskirts of London, seeking political asylum at Gatwick Airport.

We lived in temporary accommodation until a more permanent solution in London was found.



Sharifa Hashem is
Head of Diversity and Inclusion at
South West Ambulance Service



Sharifa Hashem, South West Ambulance Service From Bahrain to Exeter



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It was a culture shock to have moved from a small island in the Middle East to a big city like London, I didn't speak English and had to navigate a new schooling system. I struggled not being able to communicate so I learnt the language through reading until I'd read most of the school library. I was adamant that I would go to university but I had to defer my entry because we didn't have the leave to remain, this is an official document which allows you permanent residency in the country and access to further education and jobs. Just as I was about to defer for a second year our leave to remain arrived in the post. I went on to complete three degrees, BSc Psychology, MA Gender and Identity in the Middle East and MPhil Social Policy.

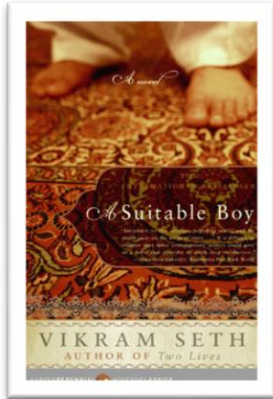
Although I'm a British citizen now, I continue to identify as a refugee. I spent some years campaigning for Human Rights and gave speeches at the United Nations and The House of Lords. My experiences continue to shape me as a person and fuels my passion for equality, diversity and inclusion at every level."



Read, Watch, Listen



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Growing up I loved to read and would read everything I could get my hands on. Sometimes it was easier to relate to the characters in a book than to navigate the intersection of two cultures. My English Literature tutor at Sixth Form gave me a copy of **Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*** and I was blown away. Here was a book that talked about issues that I could relate too, including the one question that everyone seemed to have an opinion on – the question of what path would I choose when it came to my own future marriage. This book is one of my all time favourites.

My Family, Partition and Me: India 1947

BBC presenter, Anita Rani explores the human impact of the Partition of India in 1947 through the stories of four British families, including her own. These moving and powerful episodes are available through BBC iPlayer. Anita is also the founding patron of SAHM alongside Dr Binita Kane who also took part in this documentary.



The Diverse Minds Podcast is a short podcast that talks about the importance of this month in raising awareness of seldom heard voices and parts of history.



Get Involved



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You can find out more about South Asian Heritage Month events by visiting the SAHM website which also includes details of a number of online events.

<https://www.southasianheritage.org.uk/>

You can also raise awareness that this month is happening by using the hashtag **#SouthAsianHeritageMonth**

Arrange a cultural event at your workplace, share stories or even recipes.

Even if you aren't South Asian yourself, remember South Asian history is fundamental to the history of the UK, and that makes this all our history.

