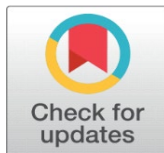
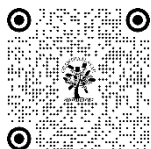


## REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THE *BRIDGERTON* SERIES

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Received 01 April 2023  
Accepted 29 July 2023  
Published 03 August 2023

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DOI  
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1SE.2023.508](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i1SE.2023.508)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to analyse the implicit and explicit rendering of cultural diplomacy in the popular Netflix series *Bridgerton*. This series is written by Chris Van Dusen and two seasons of the show titled *Bridgerton* have been premiered, the latest release of the series is *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*. The television series is an adaptation of the *Bridgerton* novel series written by Julia Quinn and is produced under Shondaland productions. In this paper, the second season of the series is taken into consideration, in which the representation of Indian culture and its portrayal during the Regency period in England is intricately analysed. Cultural Diplomacy refers to the idea of the exchange of culture, art, language so on between nations that can result in diplomatic relations between countries. The series re-tells the history of the British Empire during the Regency period. The recurrent themes in the series are love and courtship. This paper analyses Cultural diplomacy as well as the neo-colonialist tendencies demonstrated through the series. Cultural diplomacy can be achieved through cinema and various film studies have proven its effect on the people. The cinema also serves as a medium of capitalism in disguise of art. This paper looks into the nature of relation existing between the former colonizer and its former colony. Also, to know about Capitalism as a form of Neo-colonialism, and to understand its part in Cultural Diplomacy. This research paper tries to understand the *Bridgerton* series as part of Culture and Capitalism.

**Keywords:** Cultural Diplomacy, Neo-Colonialism, Capitalism, Representation, Culture

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Bridgerton* is a Netflix series that has been highly rated and viewed, the series as of now has released two seasons. The series came out during the COVID pandemic, a time when everyone around the world depended on OTT platforms for entertainment. The show is an American historical-fiction created by Chris Van Dusen, he is an American screenwriter and television producer. The show is adapted from the regency romance book series written by the American author Julia Quinn. *Bridgerton* became one of the highly-rated television series around the world with

its unique fictional retelling of British History. The series first premiered on December 25, 2020 and the second season on March 25, 2022, the latest addition to the series is *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* premiered on May 4, 2022.

The background of the story is set in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, during the regency period in England. It is set in the lavish high society of London, and reveals a seductive and romantic storyline with many dramatic plots. It reveals many scandals and secrets of the regency era and the high society, and discusses the power struggle between the different families in the “Ton”, it means the “fashionable society” (“Dictionary.com”,2022). The plot of the series follows around the Bridgerton family, the family comprises of eight siblings who are very close to each other.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper is primarily centred on the second season of the series, and is based on the book *The Viscount who loved me* from the *Bridgerton* book series written by Julia Quinn. In the second season of the series there is an introduction of the two Indian sisters Kate and Edwina Sharma, both of them are of Indian descent. Unlike the book, the series incorporates the idea of inclusivity, for this they have incorporated a colour-blind cast. Particularly in this season they have incorporated the Indian culture through the portrayal of the two sisters and their mother Lady Mary. Lady Mary was actually a ‘prospective diamond’, that is she was the most eligible bachelorette during her season until she ran away with a lower-class Indian clerk. Lady Mary was considered as an outcast for running away and for disrespecting the Queen. Kate Sharma is actually Edwina’s half-sister born to her father before his marriage with Lady Mary. Throughout the series there are constant references to Indian customs and language. The plot of the second series follows Anthony Bridgerton and his quest for finding an eligible and marriageable partner. He was deeply scarred by his father’s sudden demise that left him thinking that he would also die young. Kate is spinster girl who is against the idea of marriage, she is very protective of her sister. When she gets to know about Anthony’s interest in her sister, she tries to break it off since she knew about how Anthony is not marrying for love but just for the sake of it. In this animosity Kate and Anthony becomes attracted to each other and eventually fall in love. The series follows the trope haters-to-lovers trope. Anthony from the beginning of the series was attracted to the “mysterious” Kate whom he found different from the other girls of the “ton”.

Through this paper the aim is to understand the representation of India in the second season of the series and to understand how the series take advantage of the Indian audience. How does Cultural diplomacy work through the medium of cinema is a point to ponder about. Cultural diplomacy through art specifically through cinema saw a rise during the recent pandemic when people all over the world grew interested in other language films and culture, this also resulted in increase in interest in diplomatic relations between different countries. South Korea is one of the nations that have achieved many benefits by their entertainment Industry, the success of the movie “Parasite” proves that, the movie became a pandemic success. The “Hallyu” phenomenon which is the name for the Korean wave that hit the world, established the country’s position globally. South Korea thus became a popular global cultural market. In today’s globalized world diplomatic relations between nations are achieved through culture. The inclination towards financial and technological globalisation have increased the need for diplomatic relations to attain a stable economy among nations. Culture has become a tool in establishing a

good relationship between different countries. Culture has always been an instrument in various ways, but in recent times we see it through Movies.

Cultural Diplomacy is a policy in which nations seek to deploy their cultural resources to gain foreign policy objectives. Joseph Nye has used the word “soft power” to define the power exerted by the developed nations on other nation, he has explained the term as the power exerted by attraction rather than by force, this soft power is capitalism in disguise which is exerted in the name of diplomacy. In this present age to exert influence, threats and force cannot be used instead enticing people is the mode. [Clarke \(2020\)](#)

The term “cultural diplomacy” is also infamously attributed as neo-colonialism in the name of ‘soft power’, as explained by critics like Nye cultural diplomacy becomes a tool of control for a particular nation over other nations, in the modern age it is the power developed nations have over the developing nations. Sometimes this diplomacy does not occur at mutual concession. For a cultural diplomatic relationship to establish there should be an open intercultural dialogue which later results in the formation national policies. There are certain powers that exist with the developed nation that still questions the concept of cultural diplomacy as some nations still have the upper hand in global decision-making. Language plays an important role in the entertainment world, English being a global language has garnered many viewers for the Hollywood film industry, especially when the US is known for being the global melting pot of culture by incorporating people from different backgrounds. The second season of *Bridgerton* uses its global platform to attract the audience with their unique characterization and inclusion of coloured characters. [Halperin \(2023\)](#)

The relationship between Britain and India, one a former colonizer and the later a former colony that gained independence from the colonizer is something different. After almost seven decades of gaining independence, the former colony and colonizer have achieved a certain diplomatic relationship. The question is that how is cultural diplomacy between two countries having a formerly an unstable relationship established. When we look into the series *Bridgerton* and the second season in particular we can understand the use of Indian culture as part of inclusivity and as a form of appreciation. India is regarded as one of the key emerging markets with its ever-growing purchasing power and has created markets for several other countries. This consumeristic nature of this country is taken into advantage by other nations especially by the western countries. [Kumar \(2023\)](#)

This series is an American television show but set in Britain with characters belonging to different races. This inclusivity is seen as a marketing strategy used by the makers of this series, wherein inclusivity becomes an instrument of neo-colonialism. A Post-colonial era phenomenon, neo-colonialism, refers to the still existing colonial-exploitation of developed countries. The term has a negative intonation as it is referring to the global powers and developed nations taking advantage of developing nations. It is further understood as a form of Capitalism in a more developed form wherein which it enables global capitalist powers to dominate other nations indirectly through the working of International Capitalism. The term neo-colonialism is associated with capitalism as it is the capitalist agenda of the powerful nations to use the other nations for their capitalistic needs. Neo-colonialism is also viewed as the control of the former colonial powers and other developed nations over the developing nations as a means for cheap labour and other primary resources. Capitalism is an aspect of neo-colonialism; it has been a dominant phenomenon from an earlier time in the west. It arises due to coming up of industries and other private sectors. Cinema is not only an art but it is also an

industry, it is and entertainment industry that is an important field for capitalistic exploitation.

*Bridgerton* Season 2 became the most watched English Television series after twenty-eight days of its release on Netflix, currently this season holds the fourth position as the most watched English television show. Second season as garnered much attention for the introduction of the two Indian sisters, it was according to the plan of Van Dusen to portray the regency period as diverse as the world is right now by using two dark-skinned Indian women which is something rarely seen in English shows. This inclusivity has a positive impact on the world as Indian was a former colony of Britain. [Lee \(2021b\)](#)

The show has many ambiguities when it comes to the portrayal of Indian culture, as some facts regarding the language and ritual are wrong. With the knowledge of the turbulent history the two countries Britain and India shared that once had a colonized and colonizer relationship is intriguing. There are ambiguities regarding the language used, Edwina calls Kate “Didi” and Kate calls Edwina “Bon”, both these salutations belong to different regional languages in India, one belongs to the Hindi language and the other is Bengali, also Edwina calls their father “Appa” again a term which is used by the people belonging to the southern part of India. According to an online article in Mashable, “The biggest issue fans pointed out was the use of the term ‘Hindustani’ as if it were a language (note: it is not). In a scene from the show, Kate says her sister is proficient in many languages ‘in addition to Marathi and Hindustani of course’ And that was just episode one of the series” [Pardiwalla \(2022\)](#).

Film as such has been always a convenient mode of cultural diplomacy, it is a medium through which it imparts a unique effect in influencing people around the world. Film has been a mode of transcending borders and solidifying relationships between countries. A similar trope is seen in the movie *Pocahontas*, the movie tells the story of a Native American girl and British settler falling in love with each other breaking the cultural boundaries. Here the movie shows how the characters overcome the prejudices and understand each other. Through constant engagement they try to understand their differences and become more appreciative of each other. This is quite different from *Bridgerton*, although there are references to the culture and language of India the show is fictional and do not have any influences of the actual history. The writer has stayed away from intermixing the actual colonial history by only giving importance to the love plot. The series provides the viewers with a Jane Austen style of story-telling with steamy romance and drama, with England as its background. Excluding the History could be seen as ignorance to the atrocities the former colonies had to face in the hands of the colonizers, this is something that is avoided. [Piña \(2022\)](#)

Cultural diplomacy can be achieved through cultural appreciation but through the series there have been differentiated opinions among the audience regarding this, although they have included many Indian rituals and characteristics, but many of the depictions have been characterized as inaccurate. In the sixth episode of the second season of the series they have included the ‘Haldi’ ceremony, it is a celebratory ritual before the wedding which was nice to watch, even there where subtle usages of many Indian languages, but this inclusion lacked proper research, especially, in the usage of language. The characters of Edwina and Kate, the Sharma sisters did have a lot of screen-time, and the whole story revolves around them, this is first in the history of English television in having Dark-skinned Indian characters as the main leads in a show. [The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. \(n.d.\)](#)

The series still had to be more responsible especially when including other cultures, thus proper research is needed. The belief that representation is an upliftment to a culture is not true it is sometimes just for an aesthetic purpose as seen in the series. In an article in Al-Jazeera article titled “*Bridgerton and normal people expose romance’s colonial hangover*” the author speaks about the series as, “hegemony of white, Anglo-American culture established through the British empire and solidified through the neo-imperialism of the United States” [Garden \(2021\)](#). This shows how although it is an American series there is a shared ideology between the American and British about dealing with other developing nations. [Zamorano \(2016b\)](#)

### 3. CONCLUSION

The research attempts to understand various renderings of Cultural Diplomacy in the second season of the *Bridgerton* series. Also, to understand how the diplomatic relationship was established between a former colony and colonizer. Movies and series have become capitalistic especially in the recent times, the *Bridgerton* series could be the product by catering to the masses. The second season of the series has the inclusion of Indian culture and Indian characters. Use of Dark-skinned Indian female lead characters are a new occurrence in the history of English television series. The makers of this series incorporated characters belonging to different races to bring about a change and to induce inclusivity. This particular series is to be considered as fictional as it lacks historical and cultural accuracy. The audience of the series is made aware that it is purely a fictional entertainment that was made for pure entertainment. Representation of other cultures is to be done accurately and after proper research. *Bridgerton* was able to capture the audience with its unique plot and characterization bringing about a certain positive change by introducing coloured characters onto a platform that has only seen white race taking the lead role especially in historical dramas. Post-independence India and Britain have good diplomatic relationship, India having a growing economy is attractive to other nations. It is also said that India holds the second largest position as a FDI contributor in the UK. Economically and culturally there exists diplomatic relation between the two countries. *Bridgerton* series is a great entertainer that represents the culture of Britain and India written by an American production and released as an American television show.

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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