

# Aadit Shah

## Who Am I? A journey of multiculturalism & discovery

*I don't think you know me  
I think you think you do but it's  
only*

*On the surface, growing up in  
an emerging country that  
Emerged when this country  
dismembered it, if only  
We could pretend like it didn't  
happen and say I'm crazy if I  
remember it, if only... It's a  
lonely place to live, but thank  
God I entered it  
The Hate U Give is subtle,  
there's no ending it.*

*Where are you from?* I know it's often asked with genuine curiosity, but it's probably the toughest question to answer when you don't really know, especially when it depends on who's asking the question. If it's an international student then I'm British, if it's a local student then I'm Indian. My identity depends on *you*, understand my confusion? I spent most of my childhood going back and forth from Britain to India, from speaking with an Indian accent so my Grandparents could understand me to learning slang that dominated the urban culture in South London. On the surface I had a dual identity, but in reality I had none. I was never *British* enough to truly fit in with my classmates that discussed *James Bond* movies I had only seen *Bollywood* remakes of, and I was never *Indian* enough to be accepted by childhood friends that saw Britain as the land of '*tea, crumpets & the Queen*'. I didn't realize it at the time, but my search for identity dominated my teenage years and culminated at University.

*My etiquette is elegant but,  
I'd be remiss if I don't mention the elephant in the room The element of abuse we feel is a testament to you  
Your independence, your principles and Winston Churchill killed four million Indians,  
What was I doing praising him in a History exam?*

I first experienced what cultural differences can really entail while doing a Science project about food diets at Primary school. We had to keep a diary about everything we ate and present it back to the class at the end of the week. The aim was to learn about nutrition & health, so how did it become about culture? South Asians *love* food, we spend get together either reminiscing about the *Biryani* we had last month or fantasizing about the *Pani Puri* we'll be to be treated to at *Diwali*. My food diary should have listed every

delicious meal my Mum made during that week, but sadly, I didn't have the slightest clue how to translate any of it into English. I knew my teachers and classmates wouldn't understand what *Roti Dal Bhat Shak* (a typical *Gujarati* meal) meant, so I just wrote bread, vegetables, potatoes and/or rice. By hiding my culture to fit in with classmates who commonly listed their dinners as *Roast Chicken, Fish & Chips, and Mashed Potato*, I was actively trying to become more *British*. The teachers were actually worried that my parents weren't feeding me enough after hearing the lack of food in my diary, though none of them considered the cultural strains the assignment had placed on me. It wasn't the last time I would feel *othered* by teaching, but it may be the most impactful.

*All these microaggressions that stem from psycho oppression, That still exists in your brain, it's not mighty offensive*

*It's not overtly racist, but it's still highly regressive... "I don't see Race" is just a privileged perspective.*



I went into University with a clear understanding of who I am and what I represent. Three years later, I'm still the same person with the same values and beliefs, but that's OK. I spent most of my teenage years forced to figure my *otherness* out, so the idea of self discovery as an Undergraduate never really resonated with me. Instead, being an Undergraduate was about having the freedom to just be myself, and to me that's really what multiculturalism is. It's the *French-Kenyan-British-Indian* group dynamics that bag you top marks in *HRM* presentations, it's the authentic dinners you're treated to with *Italian* flatmates, it's the sheer diversity of faces you see in the Library a day before *that* exam; it's the confidence to be yourself in the midst of everything University entails, whether it be social interactions, class discussions or post-exam celebrations. It's my personal experience of multiculturalism that makes me so disappointed when I hear people say "I don't see race" or "we're all just human"; if we promote a society that encourages sameness, how can we celebrate our distinctive cultures? We're not all the same, I was forced to realize that when I wrote my food diary and I'm reminded of it every time I'm asked *where are you from?* Regardless, my experiences at University make me hopeful that society can celebrate, promote and facilitate both unity *and* distinctiveness. For that very reason, decolonizing curriculum *is* important, providing representation *is* important, staff diversity *is* important; *multiculturalism is important.*

*I don't really know who I'm going to be Maybe, just another anomaly.*