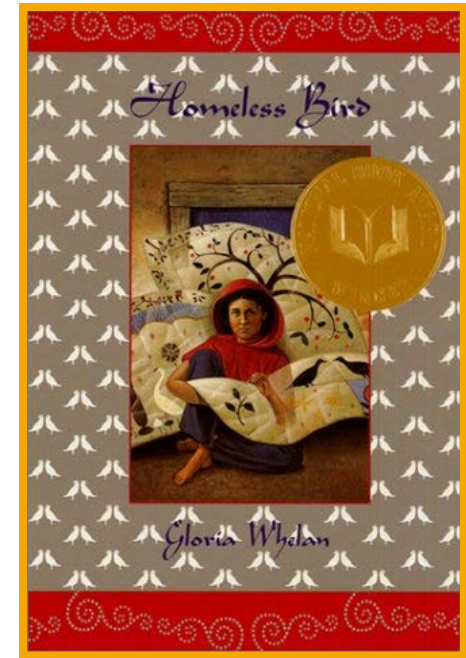
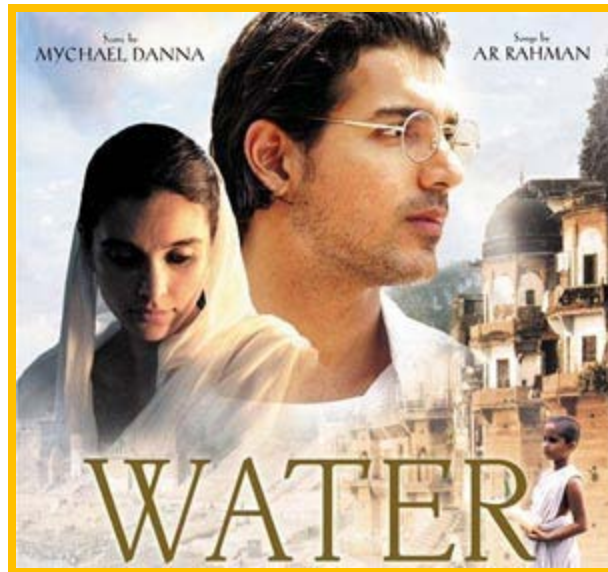
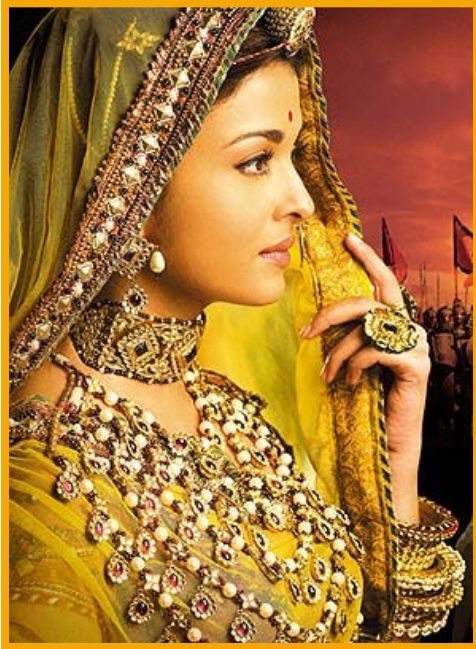


**issues in teaching**  
**dharmaic traditions**



**What is the purpose of  
social studies education?**



---

resource-based learning

**Are these portrayals  
fulfilling our purposes?  
If not, how can we fix  
that?**

# exotic • ization

“striking, unusual, or strange in affect or appearance”

-the ever-reliable  
dictionary.com

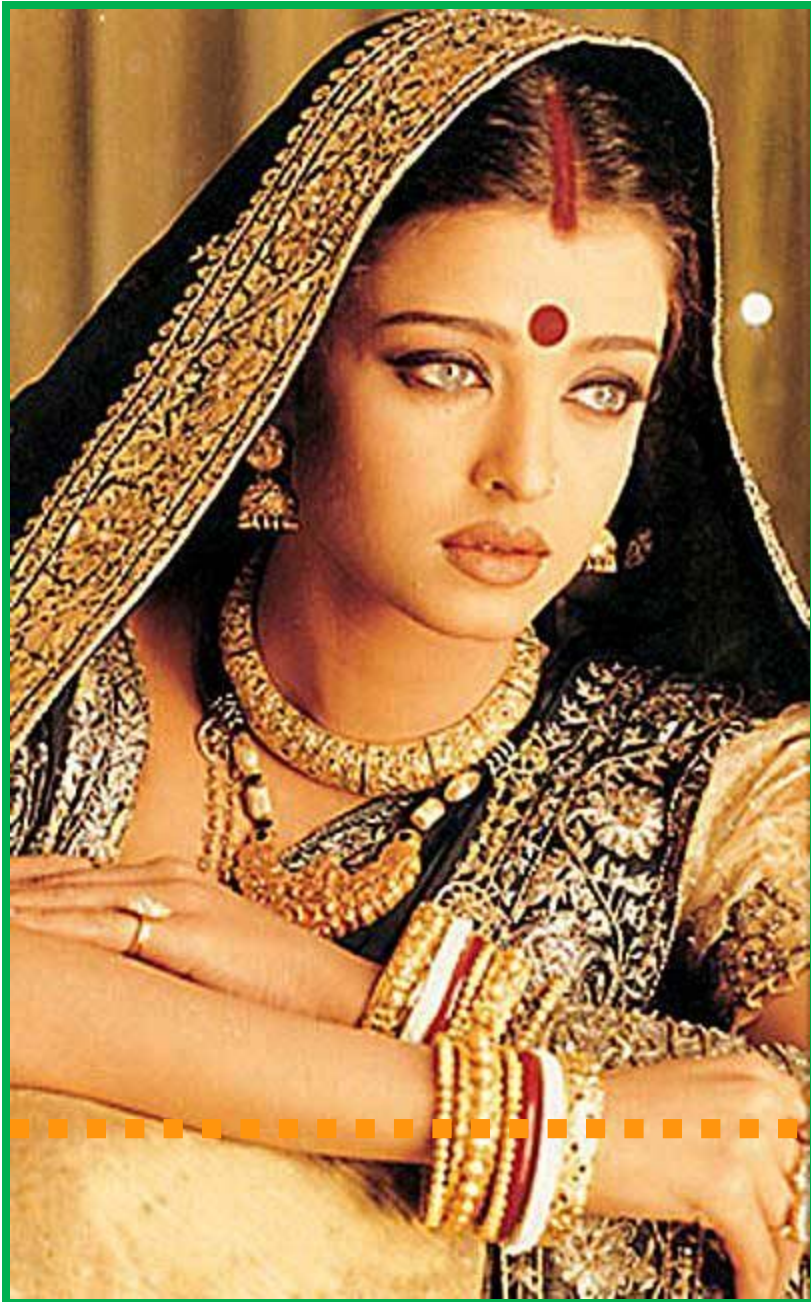


“beyond ordinary...  
unfamiliar...”

-Scientific American  
Mind

“...weird.”

-5<sup>th</sup> grader



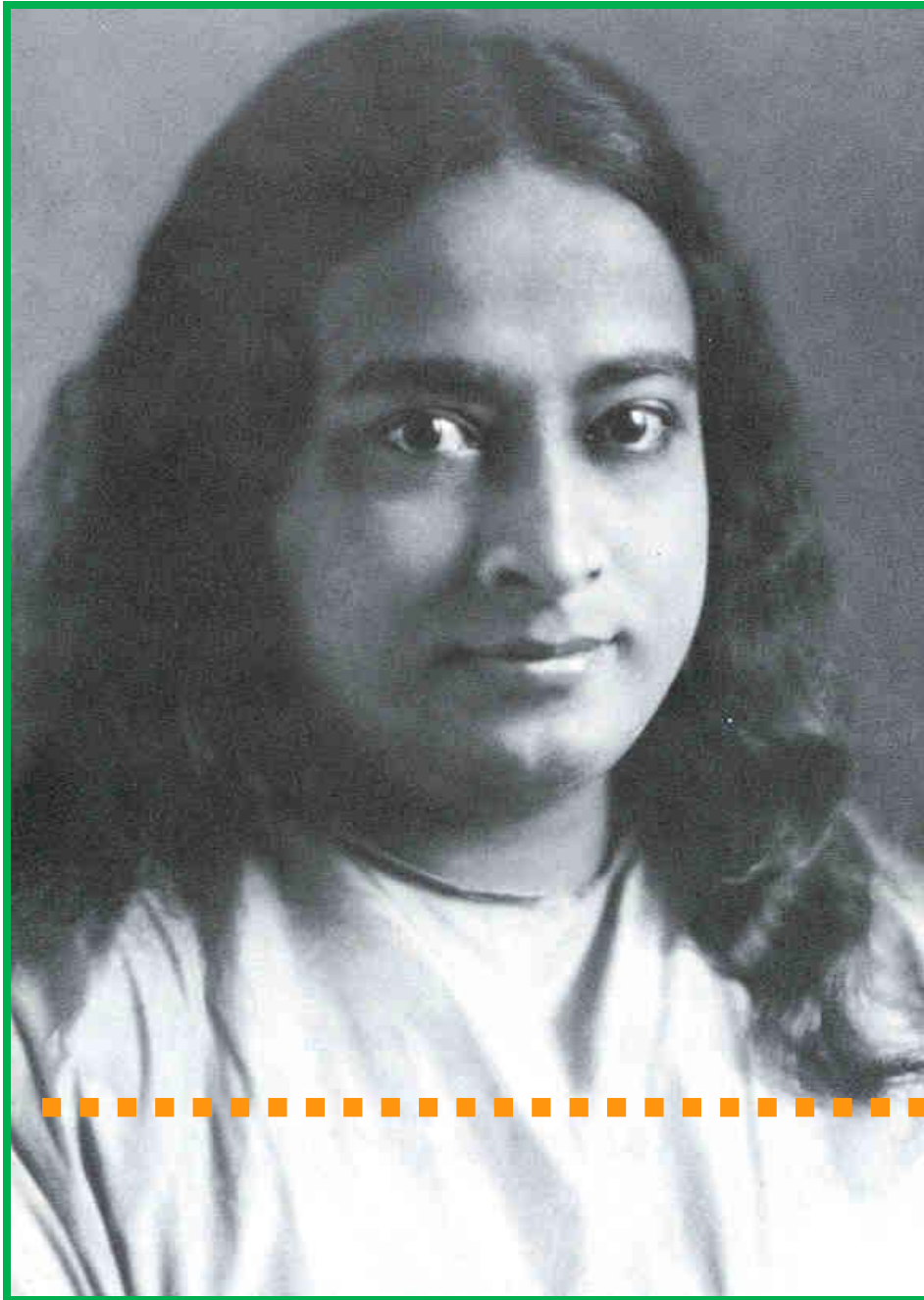
“...we see only a Hindu woman, **ethereal in her strange beauty** and accoutrements, including the **slash of red** on her crown...”

-Review quoted in BBC, film *Devdas*

---

mystery





“...unfathomable powers...  
**Mystical secrets** not known  
to mankind...”

-Jeffrey Kripal,  
*Kali's Child*

---

mysticism



**TOTALLY  
INCOMPREHENSIBLE**

**NOT BASED ON REASON**

**ADVANCED**

**PRIMITIVE**



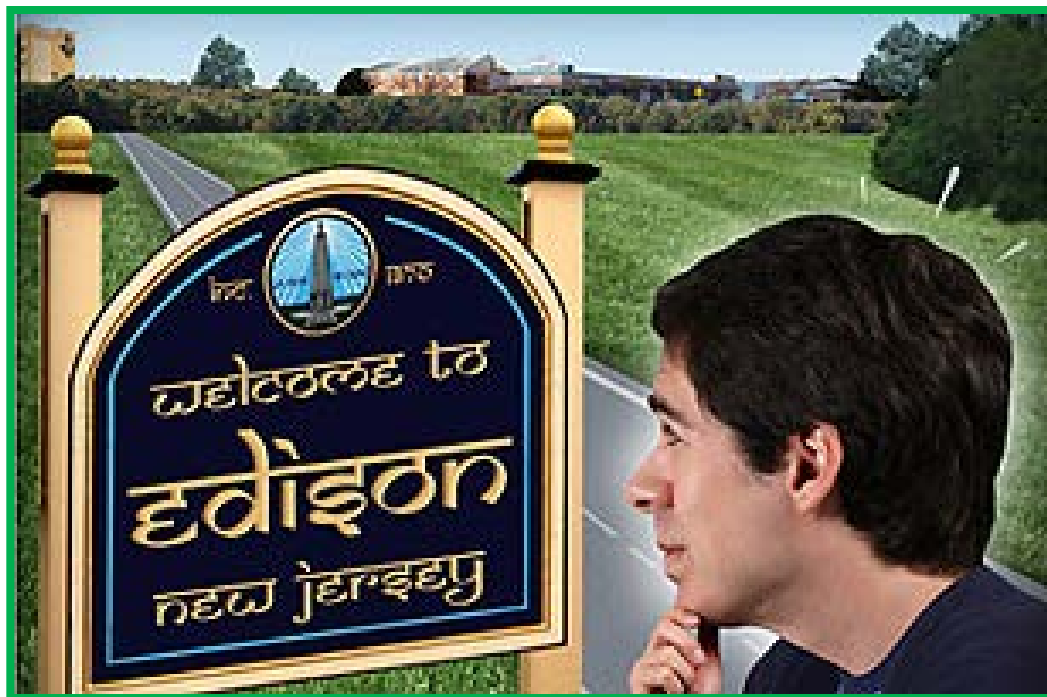
# Where there is an exotic...



...there is also a “normal.”

# Separate, but Equal





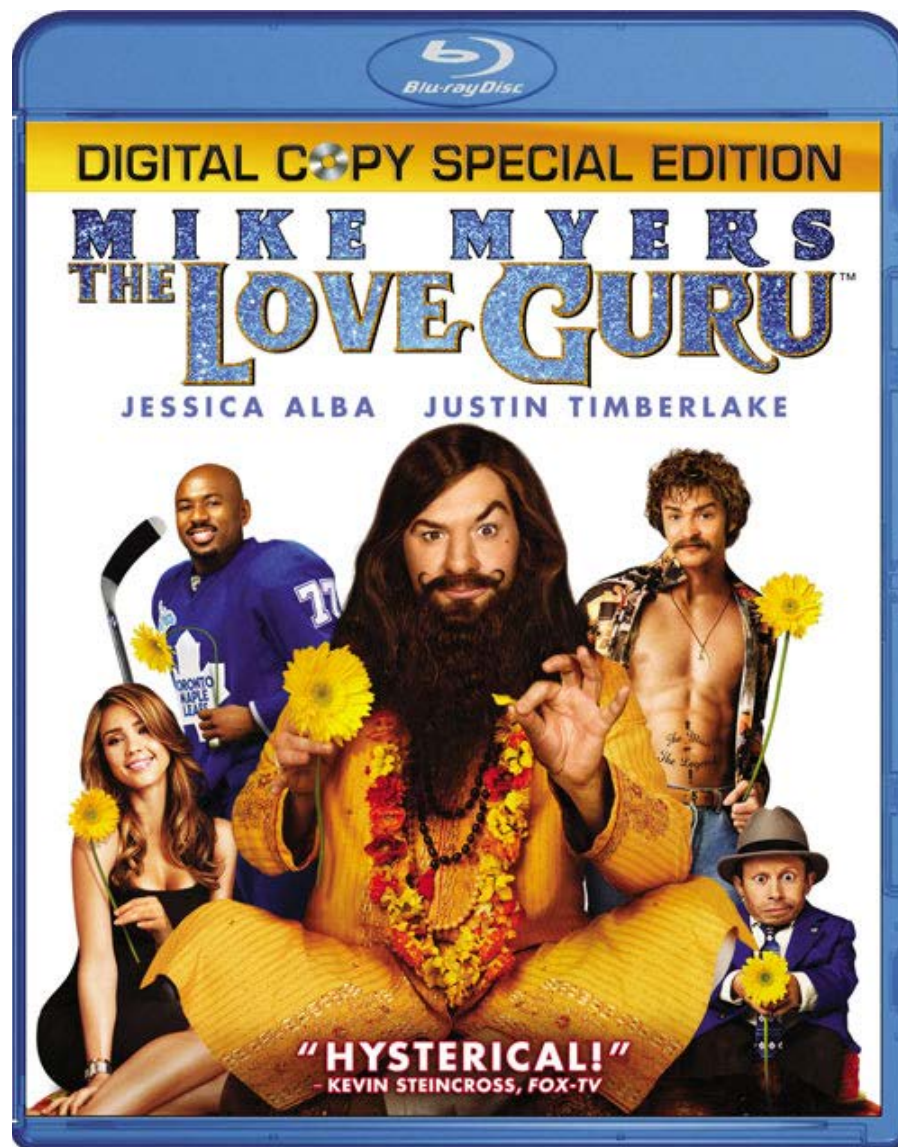
Didn't meant to insult Indians with my column this week. Also stupidly assumed their emails would follow that Gandhi non-violence thing

12:05 PM Jun 28th via HootSuite  
Retweeted by 32 people

[Reply](#) [Retweet](#)



**thejoelstein**  
Joel Stein



Classy entertainment

# CAUTION

Exoticization is  
NOT INTENTIONAL  
(usually)

# 1. sensationalize it!

---

Presenting material that incites an immediate emotional response as representative of a whole subject, the “norm”



Why does it happen?

- Gets students' interest, keeps their attention
- Sensationalized information is usually what we know ourselves
- Since it's different, it seems important
- Students want to know about it too
- It's fun!





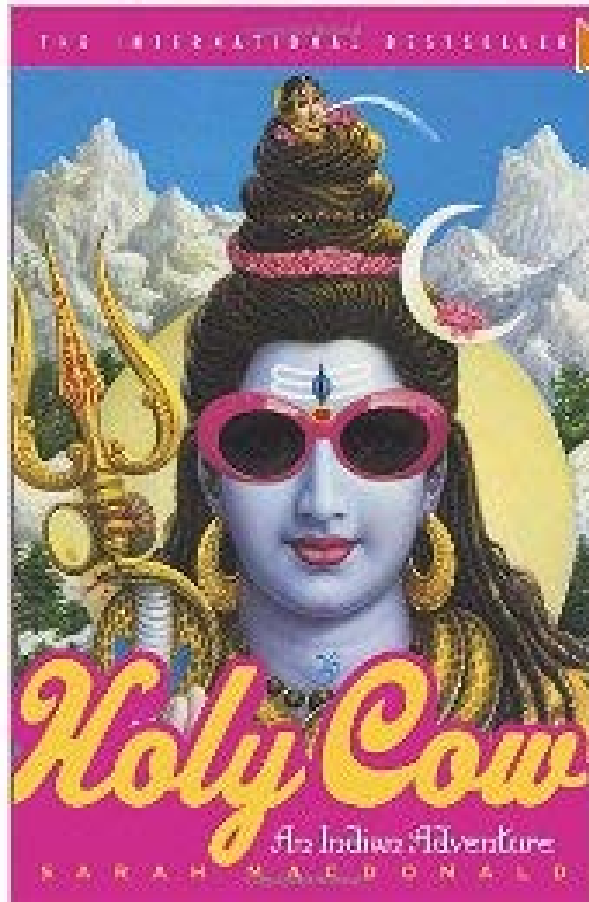
Ask some students to “be Brahmins for a day.” These students should lord over other students, sneer at them, command them to do things, and take their possessions. Ask other students how this made them feel.

-Lesson plan, 11<sup>th</sup> grade  
AP World History,  
New York

---

**sensationalism**

Click to **LOOK INSIDE!**



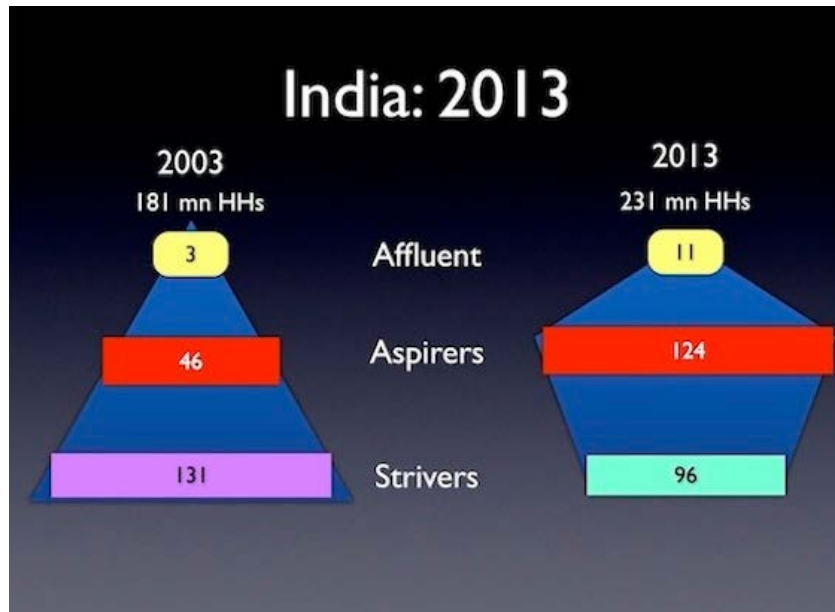
“Cows. That’s all you need to know. Cows, everywhere.”

“Looks like the vultures weren’t enjoying their delicious Parsi lunch.”

-Sarah Macdonald,  
author of “Holy Cow”

---

**sensationalism**



“Well, I didn’t really talk about the Indian middle class—it’s pretty standard stuff. Average families. Same as anywhere else.”

-my high school  
Introduction to World  
Cultures teacher



sensationalism



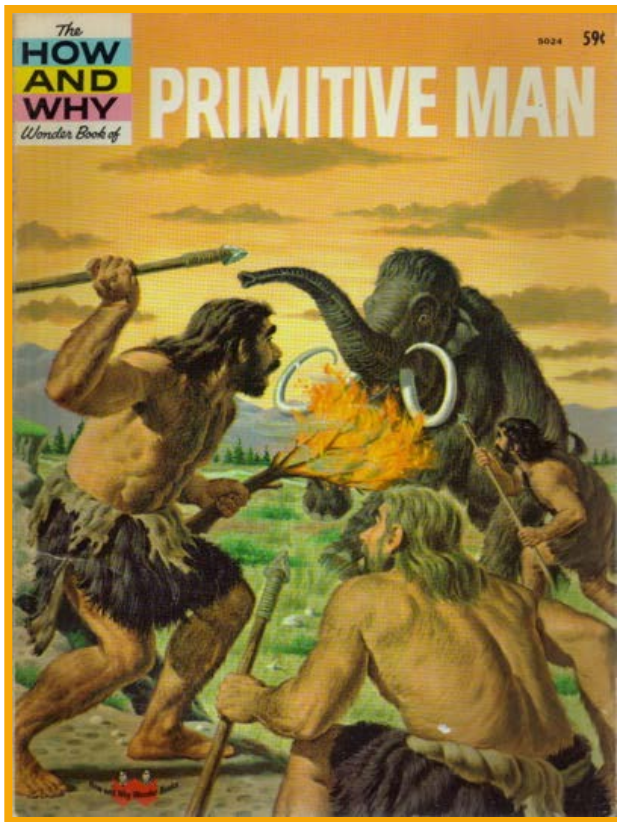
Nuanced:

India is a colorful, diverse country characterized by a complex interplay of modernity and poverty.

Typical:

India has a lot of scary mendicant mafias, and also awesome dancing.

.....  
**sensationalism**



Notions like  
“normal” and  
“evolved” created  
in minds of  
students



hierarchy

## 2. homogenize it!

---

Huge subject,  
generalized and simplified  
for students' convenience.



Why does it happen?

- Lack of time
- Lack of readily available knowledge about diversity
- Language and historiography limitations





“What is “Asian stir-fry” anyway? What country does it come from, and within that country, what style is it cooked in? Why does every cookbook have this? And where can I get a recipe for “European stew?”

- “Helping People Eat the Other,” blog about school potluck

---

# homogenization



**All Americans!**

### 3. timelessness: not just for jewelry

---

Nobody needs to know about the  
modern incarnation of culture.  
Nothing has changed since antiquity.



Why does it happen?

- Ancient is “authentic”
- Ancient is different and therefore harder to understand
- Part of a greater construction of mythos about Indian subcontinent and dharmic traditions



“Prayers for rain, sons,  
and other favorable  
circumstances.”

-brochure,  
“Introduction to Hindu  
Rituals”

“We use the idol because we  
want to remind ourselves to  
emulate the qualities that  
deity embodies.”

-practitioner, Jain temple

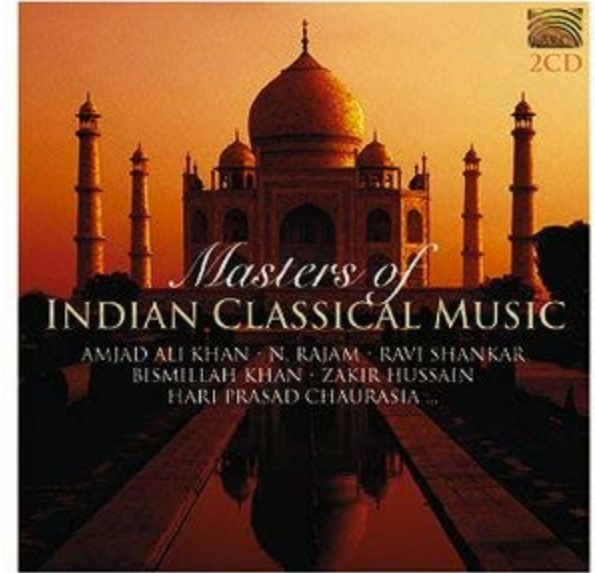
---

timelessness

# 4. superficialize it!

---

This is an Indian song. It's pretty.  
Moving on.



Why does it happen?

- Multimedia makes it easy
- Lack of time
- It doesn't seem necessary to provide all the “supporting information”



“A.R. Rahman has nothing to do with classical Indian music.”

-Oscars blogger

“I am particularly influenced by the Indian classical musical tradition.”

-A.R. Rahman

---

superficiality



# 5. stereotype it!

---

During my trip to India I visited some temples, did yoga, and dressed up in saris. I definitely had the Indian experience!



Why does it happen?

- This stuff is undeniably true
- If it doesn't get mentioned, students will wonder
- Some of these stereotypes really are important aspects of Indian culture and history

“Everyone has to go to India and feel it. It’s basically India’s unsung industry.”

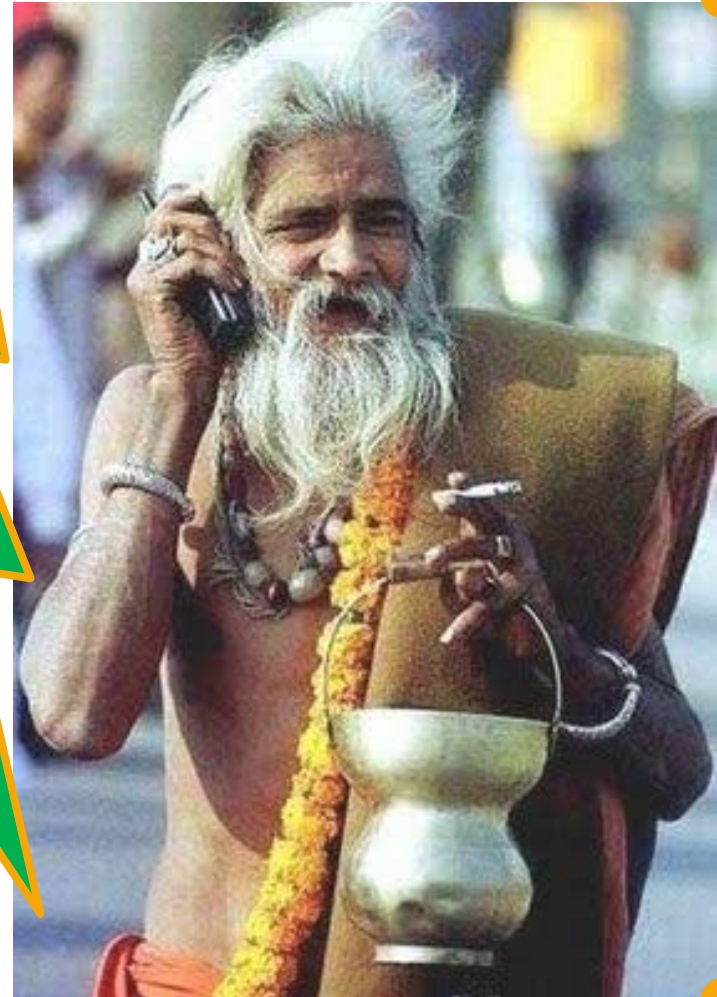
-Julia Roberts



EAT PRAY LOVE

---

stereotyping



# “weird”

-subject is simplified

“Saris are beautiful garments.”

-subject reinforces worldview

“India is still plagued by caste tensions.”

-subject holds momentary attention

“I like this song.”

# “interesting”

-subject is deepened

“The hundreds of types of saris are beautiful.”

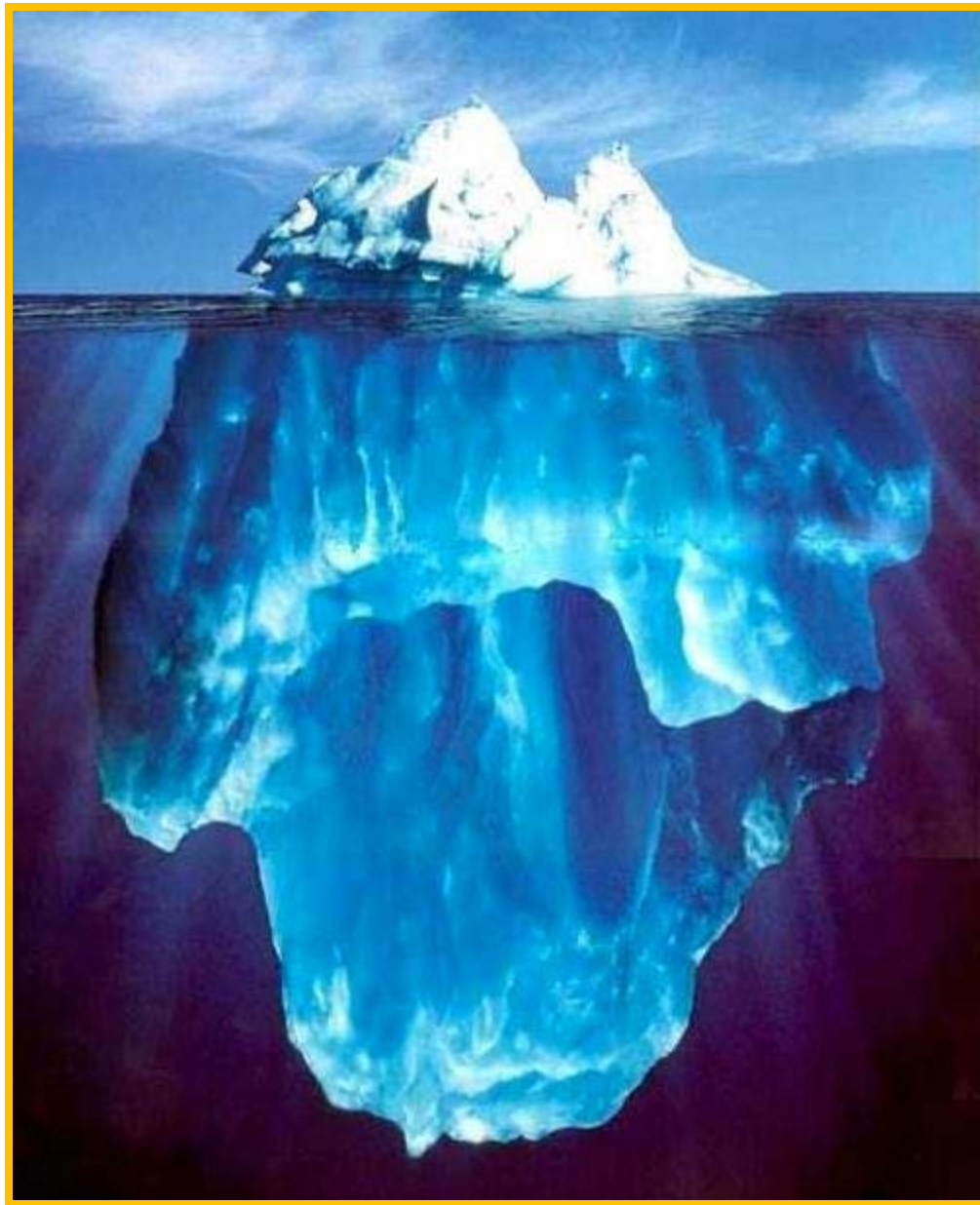
-subject challenges worldview

“Much like the US in matters of race, India is still plagued by caste tensions.”

-subject holds sustained attention

“I like Carnatic music.”





# *“information selection”*

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The part of the iceberg that we see—influenced by our own limitations, prior knowledge, and what we’re looking for

---

## **“World’s Fair Exhibition”**

- How does the way information is selected and displayed influence its “accuracy?”
- How does information selection result in the perpetuation of misconceptions, first impressions, and stereotypes?
- What can we do to circumvent these problems?






# World's Fair Exhibition



Imagine you have been given the task of designing a World's Fair Exhibition booth for an alien people who know very little about American culture. This booth will be the only impression of America many of the aliens will ever have.

The alien culture has a certain amount of knowledge of American culture, mostly composed of decontextualized, outdated, stereotypical, or outright random factoids. You have been given these factoids to work with in the form of 10 arbitrary images.

You can choose 5 images for your booth on American culture. However, you can also add a **caption** to each image, stating something you might change about the image, another image you wish you had to display alongside it, a statement about how representative you find it, or anything you wish to enhance its presentation.



**Your task:** Out of the 10 random pictures you have, create and caption an exhibition that you find to be an “accurate” representation of American culture.

# Hints and Questions

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Your group can discuss the following questions to determine what the purpose of your exhibition is and what the “important” features of American culture are:

- Which is more important for newcomers to know, the present or the past?
  - Are current trends important, or just fads that aren't part of “real” culture?
  - Do you need to represent the greatest number of Americans possible or some special segments of American society?
  - Do you want to illustrate an ongoing issue or current event?
  - Do you want to convey something the US is known for, or something new?
  - Is it important to clear up misconceptions about Americans? If not, are you okay with letting those misconceptions stand?
  - If you pick something odd or interesting to show in the exhibition, will it be interpreted as mainstream?
  - What does it mean for something to be “authentic” American culture?
- 

**Go ahead!**