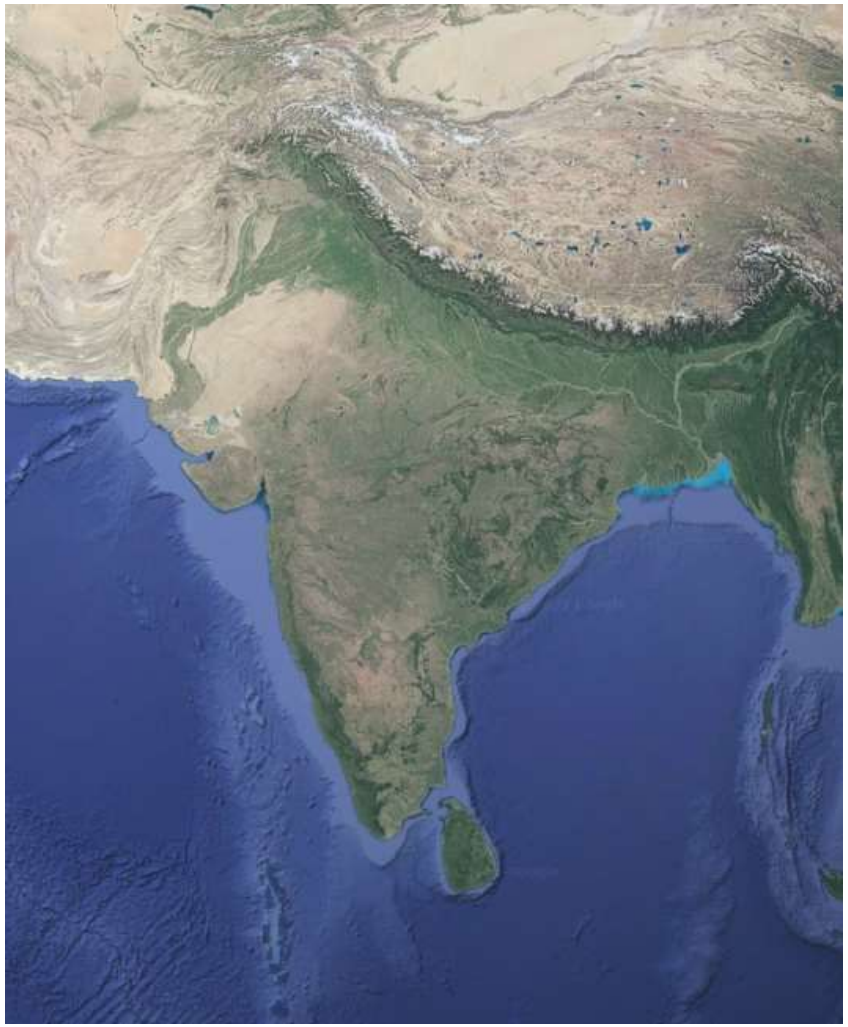
GRAVENEY SCHOOL

South Asian Heritage Month

What countries make up South Asia?

- Afghanistan
- Bangladesh
- Bhutan
- India
- The Maldives
- Nepal
- Pakistan
- Sri Lanka



Every single one of those countries has been hugely impacted by its relationship with Britain, primarily through **war**, **colonisation**, and ultimately via the **British Empire**. People of South Asian heritage are a significant part of the British population, with about 1 in every 20 people in the country being of South Asian heritage

RIZ AHMED

Riz Ahmed is a **British Pakistani** actor, rapper and activist. As an actor, he was initially known for his work in independent films such as *The Road to Guantanamo* (2006), *Shifty* (2008), *Four Lions* (2010), *Trishna* (2011) and *///Manors* (2012), before his breakout role in *Nightcrawler* (2014), alongside Jake Gyllenhaal.

In 2017 Ahmed gave a speech at the House of Commons, highlighting the lack of diversity in the film and television industry and has been an outspoken critic of stereotypical presentations of Muslims.

He was the first Muslim man to win an acting Emmy, & in 2022 he won his first Oscar for Aneil Karia's live-action short film The Long Goodbye, which he co-wrote and starred in.

CORNELIA SORABJI

Cornelia Sorabji was the **first woman** to graduate from Bombay University, the first Indian woman to read law at Oxford, and the first woman to become an advocate in India.

After a period in work, in 1892 she was given permission to take Oxford's law exams However, she was not awarded a degree simply because she was a woman.

She eventually landed a job as a legal adviser for the Indian government, but she was not admitted to the Allahabad high court until 1923, when the ban on female lawyers was lifted.

During her career she represented hundreds of purdahnashins - women who are forbidden by custom from talking to men outside their family.

These isolated women struggled to defend their interests in court, including their rights to inheritances, because all lawyers were men.

NIKESH SHUKLA

Nikesh Shukla is an author, screenwriter and one of the most prominent UK voices on diversity and inclusion in the arts. He is the editor of bestselling essay collection *The Good Immigrant*,

He is the author of a number of novels for both adults and young adults including *Coconut Unlimited Meatspace, Run Riot, The Boxer, Brown Baby* and Stand Up.

Nikesh is the co-founder of the literary journal, *The Good Journal* and The Good Literary Agency and a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a member of the Folio Academy. He has been awarded honorary doctorates from Roehampton University and the University of Bath. He hosts the 'Brown Baby' podcast which explores how we raise our kids with joy and wonder in uncertain and bleak times.

SIMONE ASHLEY

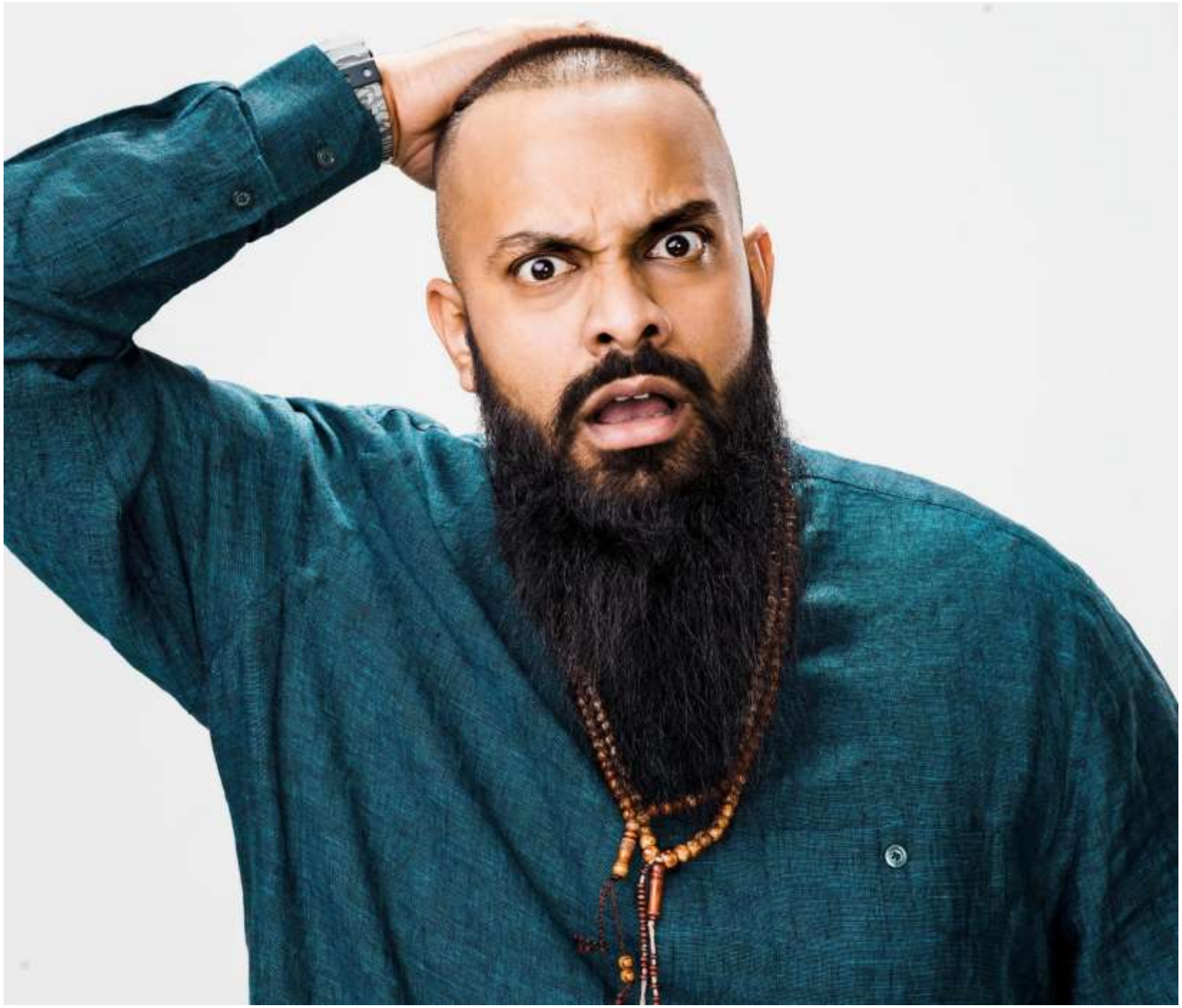
Born in 1995, Simone Ashley is a British actress of Indian heritage with a Tamil background.
Simone Ashley says,
"**Representation matters**". Having felt early in her career that she was being typecast for roles by the colour of her skin, Simone never imagined she'd end up starring in a smash hit period drama because she'd never seen anyone in one who looked like her.
Initially her family were initially unsettled by her showbiz ambitions. "My parents were quite protective over me. They're first generation. They came from India to this country, so they didn't really have a life where they could choose to be whatever they wanted to be," she says.
Still, they encouraged her. "My mum in particular, she was so supportive taking me to my singing lessons and dance classes,"

SOPHIA DULEEP SINGH

Princess Sophia Duleep Singh is best known as a suffragette and campaigner for **women's rights**. Daughter of deposed Maharaja Duleep Singh and goddaughter of Queen Victoria she used her fame, position and tenacity in the fight for gender equality in the early 20th century.

Sophia's campaigning attracted the attention of both the press and the government. Her tireless activities ranged from participating in landmark historical events such as 'Black Friday' to routinely selling copies of The Suffragette newspaper outside Hampton Court Palace.

Sophia's philanthropy extended far beyond women's rights and she supported many groups, particularly Indians and Sikhs wherever she encountered them. Her life was truly dedicated to the fight for equality and the support of others.



GUZ KHAN

Best known for his BBC comedy Man Like Mobeen, Birmingham-born, Coventry-raised, former teacher Khan came to prominence via social media, where he was known as Guzzy Bear. He is also a stand-up who's appeared on Live At The Apollo, and an actor who's appeared on Idris Elba's Netflix comedy Turn Up Charlie.

His commitment to representing the stories of his local community is clear as he speaks with care about how he uses a comedy. He says "there are always structural issues as to why these things are taking place and we try to explore that."

ZARA SULTANA

Zara Sultana was the Labour Member of Parliament for Coventry South.
She was elected in December 2019 at the age of 26. Born in the West Midlands and raised in the Lozells area of Birmingham. By her own admission, the house she grew up in wasn't particularly political. Her dad worked as an accountant at the nearby University of Central England (now Birmingham City), while her mum was a homemaker.

Her family moved from Kashmir to the West Midlands and her grandad was one of the workers who helped to make the region a booming centre of the motor industry. She studied International Relations and Economics at the University of Birmingham, where she was in the first cohort of students to pay £9,000 tuition fees.
"People always ask me why I'm so outspoken and why I don't just sit comfortably and try to be there for a long time," she says. "But everything I've done, in terms of campaigns and activism, hasn't been to be an MP. It's because I was angry at the system and what was happening to young people, to working-class people".

In 2025 Zara left the Labour Party to co lead a new party Independent Alliance.

THE AFGHAN DREAMERS

The members of the Afghan Girls Robotics Team are more accomplished than your average teenagers: Their ball-sorting robot, built to distinguish between contaminated and clean water, won them a silver medal for "courageous achievement" at an international robotics competition in Washington, D.C.

The team was already trying to leave Afghanistan when the Taliban movement reached Kabul and seized power on August 15. Nine of them arrived in Doha on August 17, while another six were evacuated to Mexico. The team were all offered scholarships to continue their education in Qatar's capital, Doha.

THE GURKHAS

The Gurkhas are **soldiers** from Nepal who are recruited into the British Army, and have been for the last 200 years. Gurkhas are known to be as fearless in combat as they are good natured in daily life.

To this day, they remain renowned for their loyalty, professionalism and bravery.

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Gurkhas are traditionally recruited from the hill people of **Nepal,** who trace their roots right back to an 8th century Hindu warrior, Guru Gorakhnath.

They first encountered the British in 1814, when the British East India Company fought against them during the Anglo-Nepalese War.

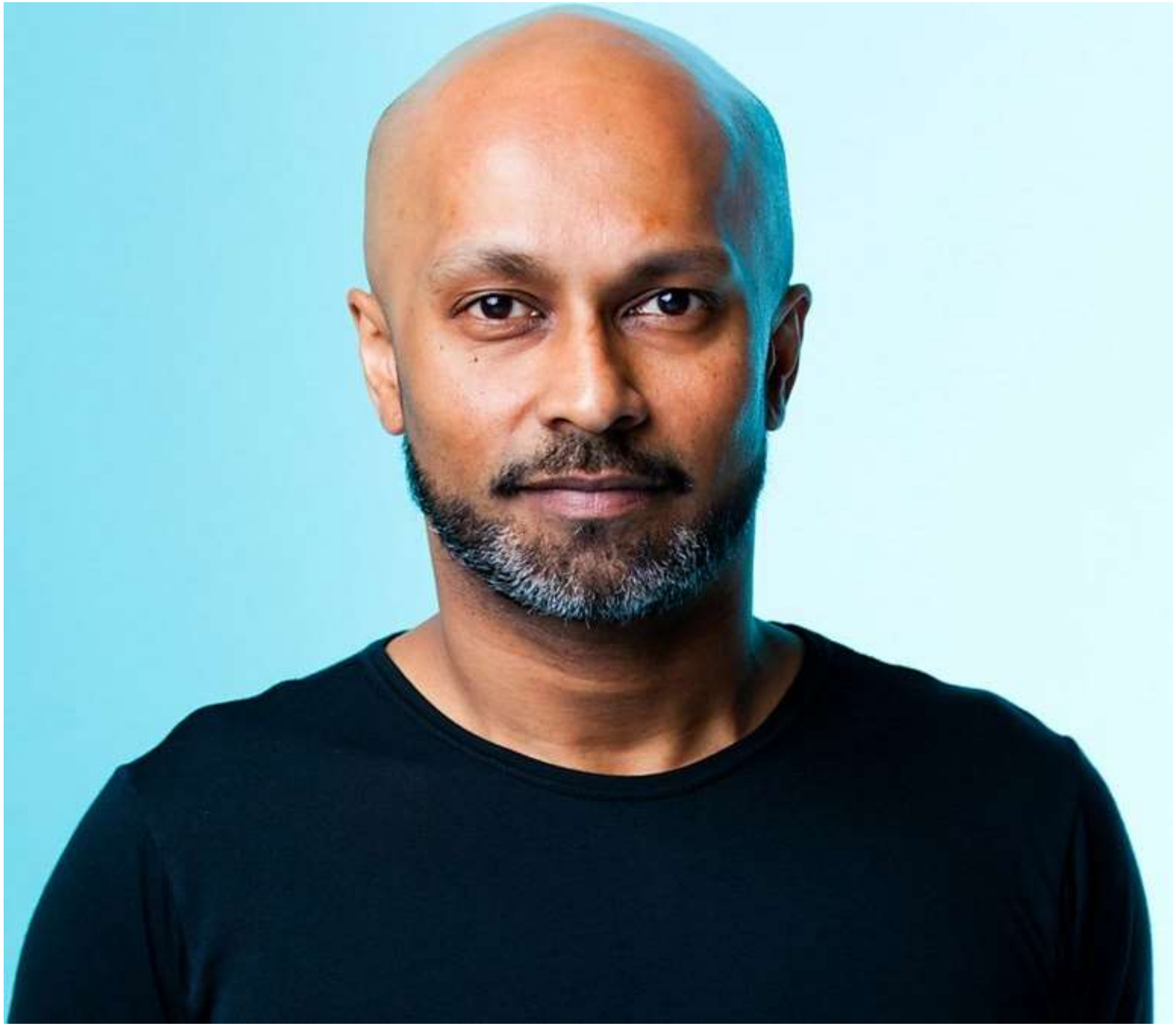
Since then the Gurkhas have served with distinction throughout the world, earning an incredible 13 Victoria Crosses for acts of extreme valour, along with countless other medals.

MOEEN ALI

Ali is of Kashmiri descent and it was two generations ago that his grandfather migrated to England. His grandparents lived in **Mirpur**.

Moeen, who has captained England in limited-overs cricket and was a member of the World Cup-winning squad and Ashes-winning team, has been recognised as part of the Queen's birthday honours.

He believes the award is as much about his contribution to equality in cricket as it is anything he has achieved on the field. Moeen has been a willing spokesperson for inclusivity as someone who has long described himself as British, Muslim and proud of both.
At a time when there are increasing concerns about the growing exclusivity of the sport, Moeen also hopes his success can inspire more people from inner-city and working-class backgrounds.



AKHRAM KHAN

Born in London in 1974 into a family originally from **Bangladesh**, Akram Khan began dancing **kathak** at the age of seven. His first public performance was at age 14 as a dancer in Peter Brook's legendary Mahabharata.

Maintaining his commitment to classical kathak alongside his modern work, he developed an innovative and contemporary language of movement.

He created a section of the London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony that was received with unanimous acclaim and in 2022 the English National Ballet toured his "Giselle" in New York

JASLEEN KAUR

Kaur was born in Glasgow in 1986. She went to the Glasgow School of Art before studying Applied Art at the Royal College of Art in London.

In 2024 she won one of the biggest awards in the Art world – The Turner Prize - for a piece called "Alter, Altar" a mixed media installation with sculpture, photography and sound.

It was an exploration of her Punjabi and Scottish heritage and included a Ford Escort covered in a giant doily which she said was "a representation of my dad's migrant desires"

MISHAL HUSAIN

Mishal Husain (born 1973) is a British newsreader and **journalist. She was a senior** BBC Television and BBC Radio presenter for many years and is now "Editor at Large" for Bloomberg News.

Husain was born in 1973 in Northampton, England to Pakistani parents. Her mother was a teacher and former producer for Pakistan Television Corporation, while her father was a urologist. She is the granddaughter of Syed Shahid Hamid, the first Director-General of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence.

Husain gained her first experience of journalism at the age of 18, spending three months as a city reporter in Islamabad, Pakistan, at the English-language newspaper The News. Then, while at university, she did several stints at the BBC as work experience

IMAN VELLANI

Iman Vellani, the actress cast as Marvel's first Muslim superhero headliner, was excited to bring "an entirely new diaspora of fans into the MCU."

22-year-old Pakistani-Canadian actress Vellani plays Kamala Khan/Ms Marvel in the Disney Plus series Ms Marvel, the seventh television series in the MCU.

Vellani told the BBC's Asian Network she was looking forward to seeing fans' reaction, as so much of the narrative is about what it means to be a Marvel fan: "I'm excited to see their reaction. All my family back in Pakistan are so excited."

She has two films currently in post production.

ROMESH RANGANATHAN

Born in Crawley to Sri Lankan Tamil parents Romesh Ranganathan is a British comedian, presenter and actor. In 2020, Ranganathan won the BAFTA TV Award for Best Features for *The Misadventures of Romesh Ranganathan*. In 2021, he won the BAFTA TV Award for Best Entertainment Performance for *The Ranganation*.

Joy Crookes

Joy Elizabeth Akther Crookes (born 9 October 1998) is a British singer-songwriter. She incorporates details about relationships, self-reliance, her Bangladeshi culture, her South London roots, and her identity in her music. Crookes has released three extended plays since 2017 and was nominated for the Rising Star Award at the 2020 Brit Awards. Her debut studio album, Skin, was released in October 2021 to wide critical acclaim and reached the top five in the UK.

In 2025 she performed at Glastonbury.

BENAFSHA YAQOOBI

Benafsha Yaqoobi is a disability rights activist. She studied Persian Literature in Iran and then completed two Masters degrees in Kabul. Yaqoobi and her husband are both visually impaired and together founded Rahyab aiming to provide education to visually impaired people in Afghanistan. In 2021 she was made one of the BBC's Top 100 Women.

PEYMANA ASSAD

Peymana Assad represents Roxeth, South Harrow on the London Borough of Harrow Council. She came to the UK as a child refugee from Afghanistan and is believed to be the first person of **Afghan** origin to be elected to a public office in the UK.