

AAPI ACTORS

Hollywood finds room for a gay and Indian American actor



Courtesy: Parvesh Cheena

POSTED BY SHRUTI RAJKUMAR | OCTOBER 12, 2021

By Shruti Rajkumar, AsAmNews Staff Writer

Actor Parvesh Cheena fondly remembers being cast in third grade as King George III in his elementary school play. He recalls making the audience laugh at one point, and in that moment he realized he wanted to become an actor.

“One night of the school [play], I think I said like, ‘Off with his head,’ which is not what George said, but that was my improv and then people laughed. So that’s where I was like, ‘Oh...I can make people
▼ and be funny.” Cheena said

Since then, Cheena has gone on to star in several TV shows and films such as *Outsourced*, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, and Netflix's *Centaurworld*. With a career spanning two decades, Cheena has navigated the acting industry as a gay Indian man over the years and watched it in terms of acting opportunities and representation on screen.



[People of color] don't get that opportunity.' We have to keep forging and making it."

Cheena persevered despite a lack of roles for Indian Americans for a long time, in contrast to the large amount of roles available for White actors. However, this started to shift after September 11th.

"9/11 happened, and it became a weirder moment. Some of my college professors were like, 'You're going to be playing terrorists, let alone the convenience stores.' [They] viewed it like 'You're going to work now there's [been a] Brown people event,'" said Cheena.

Cheena's best friend Sonal Shah said that the industry has come a long way in terms of Indian American representation on screen, and that Indian Americans are starting to be seen as more than just the stereotypical roles.

"It's awesome that [Cheena] is being seen to in roles, like his role in *Connecting* that he shot last year that was on NBC where he played a gay dad. And that was great. That's a role that he could essentially play close to home, and that matters. We just need more of it, all of it," Shah said.

Over the years, there has been an increase in people of color behind and in front of the screen, which has allowed for a layer of nuance in Indian American representation, said Cheena. Additionally, he noticed that there is more of an opportunity for Indian Americans to play roles that aren't solely focused on their identity.

For example, Cheena recently played a recurring role on the upcoming Starz series *Shining Vale*, in which he played a dad named Laird who
▼ going through a divorce. His character's son was played by an

about day to day. So when I think of projects, that's all it needs to be. I like seeing that more in work and art. I just want it to be...not like we have to talk about every little bit of it every minute, [but] I don't also want it to be erased. I feel like [the industry is] getting there," Cheena said.

In reflecting on his experience in the acting industry as someone who is both Indian and gay, Cheena said that he had the benefit of his sexuality not being an issue because of how people of color are perceived.

Parvesh Cheena in Mythic Quest. Apple TV photo

"When [people] see people of color, they would never even consider the fact that I might be queer, gay, bi, trans, whatever, because all they saw was the ethnicity first. They see your race before they see your sexuality, and so it's neither here nor there. I've been grateful [that] I've been starting to play more gay roles without it being issue," Cheena said.

Cheena said that initially, he had a level of fear as an openly gay man
▼ there would be an problem with him playing a character in which

“Just because [I’m] auditioning for it, you don’t have to change the character’s name to Raj and you don’t need to give them an accent. I also played straight roles a lot, and that was great, because [being gay] wasn’t relevant [to the storyline]. They didn’t change [it so] I had a husband now [just] because [I am] gay, they kept a wife. It’s just been interesting, but I do hope it won’t go backwards,” said Cheena.

Throughout the pandemic, Cheena said that he was fortunate to be able to do voicework in his role on Disney Jr’s show *T.O.T.S.* While Shah is proud of the roles that Cheena has had over the years, she believes that his biggest success is staying in the industry and paving the way for future generations.

“I think success in itself is not really determined by the results of the projects that he’s done. I think success is the process of doing it, of just continuing to commit to the journey of being an actor. By nature of living his purpose and continuing to pursue it, the good and the bad, and doing what he is great at, that’s what paves the way. The more representation we have, the more paved the road is,” said Shah.

AsAmNews has Asian America in its heart. We’re an all-volunteer effort of dedicated staff and interns. Check out our new [Instagram account](#). Go to our [Twitter feed](#) and [Facebook page](#) for more content. Please consider [interning](#), [joining our staff](#), or submitting a story or making a [contribution](#).

CATEGORIES

[AAPI ACTORS](#)[INDIAN AMERICAN](#)[LGBTQ](#)[SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN](#)

