



Glitter Ball or Mirror?

How Eastern Mosaic relates to YOU, the viewer.

As a magazine programme, *Eastern Mosaic* must reflect the realities of its audience while also tapping into the ideas, interests and aspirations of the viewers. Glitz and glamour is an indispensable part of the lifestyle genre – but while a glitter ball can add sparkle, it cannot present a recognisable view of the real world. *Eastern Mosaic* faces the challenge of being a vehicle for fun and entertainment as well as being a mirror to the South African Indian community and the nation's broader viewing public. From Chatsworth to Khayelitsha, from Reservoir Hills to Rivonia, *Eastern Mosaic* brightens up Sunday mornings in around a million homes across the country – creating common ground and exploring new territory for viewers whose mother tongue could be Tamil or Urdu – or seTswana. Accommodating this diversity involves tracking a moving target and furthermore, not only must the show reflect the past and the present – it must also project a vision with which the majority of the viewers can identify. These pose some daunting challenges, all within the very real constraints of schedule and budget – but over the past decade the new-look *Eastern Mosaic* has risen to the occasion.

Developing *Eastern Mosaic* has involved experimentation and refinement but it has not been a hit-or-miss process. Based on a great deal of brainstorming, research and feedback received from viewers the show has evolved into its present structure and form. Broadly, *Eastern Mosaic's* content package can be divided into the following four categories:

- Regular features: including fashion, popular music, Indian cinema, travel and eastern cuisine;
- Annual events, such as the Diwali festivities, the *Shared Histories* cultural programme and the International Indian Film Academy Awards;
- Ad hoc items – featuring noteworthy individuals, events, organisations and locations; and
- On-going campaigns and initiatives – such as the *Eastern Mosaic Helping Hands* initiative, the *Presenter Search*, the 150th Anniversary Celebrations and the *Go Green* campaign that is currently being launched.





Beginning with the regular features, it is a popular misconception that “culture” and “history” are synonymous. Fashion, films and music are all expressions of **popular culture** – and viewers are entitled to expect that they will see a reflection of **current** “Indian” style and entertainment. In fact, even apparently traditional art forms, such as the Odissi style of dance, are actually reconstructions of long-lost cultural practices. Similarly, cuisine is constantly developing with new dishes appearing alongside traditional favourites. Travel features are extremely popular, allowing many South Africans who cannot afford international travel to visit destinations in the East – including ancient temples, cities and places of interest, such as Kajoraho and the wilderness reserves of Madhya Pradesh. *Eastern Mosaic* makes a particular effort to keep its audience in touch with present-day developments in global South Asian culture – thus helping them to place themselves within the broader context of the Indian diaspora at large while also maintaining links with modern India.

Coverage of annual events plays a particularly important role in terms of promoting and popularising the cultural life of the South African “community” and the Indian diaspora. *Eastern Mosaic’s* involvement with the Durban Diwali Festival has taken the form of “Special Editions” of the show being devoted to coverage on location, as well as a live presence at the event itself. As part of its Diwali location coverage, Eastern Mosaic also visits at least two disadvantaged communities each year, including Westcliff, Bayview, Phoenix and Glenhills. In each case Eastern Mosaic has facilitated assistance to the communities by involving the private sector and NGOs such as **Gift of the Givers**. This coverage gives the communities in question an opportunity not only to highlight their plight but also to show their spirit under extremely difficult circumstances. A further benefit is that this creates an avenue whereby people across the cultural/linguistic/class divide can experience the culture that South Africans of Indian origin have contributed to our common heritage – making the show a nation-building tool.

Diwali coverage has also been extended to cover events in Gauteng and Cape Town although on a smaller scale, due to the cost implications. Other annual local events covered by *Eastern Mosaic* include Holi, Navratri and Eid celebrations and the eisteddfods held by Tamil cultural organisations in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.





The *Shared Histories* cultural programme is a joint initiative of the **High Commission of India** in South Africa, aimed at promoting Indian art, craft and culture in South Africa while also highlighting the common ground that our nations share. Eastern Mosaic covers these events extensively (including performances by classical and contemporary musicians, vocalists and dancers, art exhibitions, craft demonstrations, film festivals and writers' workshops). The **IIFAs** form another major annual effort, with the team covering the spectacular four-day event in overseas locations. With many South Africans not having access to satellite broadcasts, this is their only opportunity to enjoy one of the premiere gatherings of the Indian film industry – which is widely considered to be the largest in the world.

Ad hoc items range from charity banquets to interviews with authors, artists, cancer survivors and struggle stalwarts. The overwhelming majority of these features are sourced locally and focus on local people, places and events. The emphasis is not on celebrities but rather people who have made (or are making) a significant contribution to the community in some way – and the list includes Yasmin Bacus, Professor Adam Habib, architect Ruben Reddy, Ahmed Kathrada, the late Fatima Meer and India's diplomatic representatives in South Africa. Publicity is given to local exhibitions, plays, performances and stand-up comedy by means of interviews with the artists and where possible, excerpts of their work. Items of general community interest are also covered, including special features on topics such as arranged marriages, drug addiction and dealing with illness and disease (for example cancer, HIV/AIDS and heart disease). An effort is made to interview ordinary men and women, to hear their real-world experiences, as well as the views of experts in the field. This is done within the parameters of a magazine show format – which is community-driven rather than adopting a hard-news or investigative approach.

Despite extremely limited resources, by 2009, *Eastern Mosaic* had already launched two extremely successful initiatives, with a further two which were rolled out early in 2010. The *Helping Hands* campaign is an on-going effort to bring deserving communities, organisations and individuals into the public eye. To date the Eastern Mosaic team has visited schools in Igugulethu (Orange Farm) and Ethangeni (Dundee), communities in Rietriver, Chatsworth and Motala Farm and institutions such as the Aryan Benevolent Home.





In each case a previously voiceless group of people has been brought to the attention of the public at large, resulting in an outpouring of assistance from concerned individuals and organisations. On a lighter note, the *Eastern Mosaic Presenter Search* project drew well over 1 500 enthusiastic candidates from across the country. At each stage of the process candidates attended training sessions aimed at improving their communication and presentation skills, as well as honing their latent talent. Even those who did not make the final shortlist came away empowered with knowledge and experience. The 150th Anniversary of the arrival in South Africa of the first indentured workers from India formed a centrepiece of *Eastern Mosaic's* programming for 2010, with special features and interviews. Community involvement in environmental issues were also highlighted by the *Go Green* campaign, which encouraged viewers to **Reduce, Re-use and Recycle**.

Leaving aside the show's mandate to maintain commercial viability, *Eastern Mosaic's* mission is to graft the living branch of a specifically Indian experience onto the greater South African tree of life – acknowledging the demands of nation-building and the need to redress past inequities.

To illustrate this point it is worthwhile considering why *Eastern Mosaic* has approached Diwali with a particular focus. The Durban Diwali is a time when hundreds of thousands of South Africans throng the beachfront and though its public presence at the festivities, *Eastern Mosaic* has used the event to translate it into a story for all South Africans. But it has achieved more than this: *Eastern Mosaic* has supported poorer communities in celebrating this event – in keeping with the true spirit of Diwali. The biggest and most spectacular success has been 2009 in Chatsworth, in which the show sought to highlight the poverty of the area, but also reflect the spirit of the people. In so doing the integrity of the celebration was kept intact while showing how Africans and Indians are building a life together in places like Chatsworth. *Eastern Mosaic* has learnt to use an Indian religious festival and re-think it in an African context - using the moment to depict the realities of poverty but also to project the potential of the nation.





In 2010, Eastern Mosaic's Diwali Celebration took on a very special significance. It was exactly 100 years since the first officially sanctioned Diwali procession took to the streets of Durban. It was also 20 years since Nelson Mandela was released from prison. The EM team took the opportunity to celebrate Diwali by stitching it into the history of South Africa whilst at the same time reaching out to the broader South African by lighting up the lamp of hope.

A mosaic can be defined as a 'form or work of art in which pictures etc. are produced by joining together minute pieces of glass, stone, etc., of different colours...' The size of the images change, as do the artists and new colours are added, but *Eastern Mosaic's* mission remains what the name suggests: because that is the mission of our freedom – as an individual, a community and a nation. *Eastern Mosaic* is no empty glitter ball and we value feedback from you, as a viewer, to help us to reflect an entertaining, informative, inspiring and honest view of our communities, nation and world.

