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The Rise of Raj Mathai

Television light fills a dark room as seven year-old Raj Mathai watches, entranced by the hosts of *Monday Night Football*. As he got older, this passion developed and transformed into a love of telling stories. Today, he is an NBC News Anchor, a friendly face for Bay Area residents. His experiences give insight into immigration to the Bay Area and the sphere of broadcasting journalism. His love for sports that he already had at the time lead him to watch the broadcasts. His interests extended here beyond the sports but to the broadcasting itself. He wanted to be able to do what the people were doing on the television.

He hasn't always lived in the Bay Area, in the late 70s at the age of 7, his family immigrated from India. His background gave him a unique perspective in the Bay Area at a young age, he didn't have many other Indian children at his school to relate with. This is not as true anymore, the demographic has changed and now there is a lot more racial and ethnic diversity in schools. Immigration to the Bay Area and San Francisco has continued to grow and grow since Mathai came to the area. The amount of diversity seen in the Bay Area makes it such a unique location for news and allows our newscasters to also make up a more diverse newsroom. This diversity comes with many benefits not only for those working on the broadcasts but also for the viewers.

More often than not, people immigrate to the Bay Area specifically because of the education and economic opportunities. Nevertheless, what they end up encountering is the severely high housing costs. Immigrants are not the only population here that struggles with this, it is a very widespread issue within the area, “1 in 4 Bay Area Families was struggling to afford basic necessities” (Narayan). California overall has an extremely high living cost, explained by the San Francisco Chronicle, the situation being so bad that some have to have 4 minimum wage jobs to afford a small apartment in San Francisco. The question then arises as to if this is truly worth it? Well, the area is overall benefited by the immigration here because it makes the area very diverse and filled with intelligent and hard-working people, making this workplace more and more desirable.

Raj’s Co-Anchor, Janelle Wang, corroborated this idea explaining, “The Bay Area [she loves] because it’s so diverse... all the different counties, and the culture is just so rich and the people are incredible. And we Silicon Valley is here. So I feel like there’s a lot of incredible news coming out of here. Ground breaking news, people who make changes with the government. So this is a great place to report” (Wang). With the diversity in the NBC Bay Area newsroom, there are many benefits for not only the company, but its employees and their viewers. These benefits can extend through their information being more reliable and less one sided. “The first benefit for companies stems from the different talents, experience, and skill sets that come from a diverse group, which can help companies develop creative and innovative solutions. Without diversity, a homogenized group may use standard approaches to problem-solving, which can stifle innovation” (“10 Benefits of Diversity”). When this is translated to journalism, we see that there are more stories and ideas that are thrown up for each evening news. This overall will allow

for more stories and takes that otherwise would not be present. This infographic also explains that employees often feel more included if there is diversity, as there are like-minded individuals working with them, but they likely won't stick out like a sore thumb. This as seen at NBC Bay Area has played out as the group of journalists and crew there have created a strong community that is able to push out material each day that is relevant and reliable. Raj reiterated this idea for the newsroom in specific, "that's where you need a diversity of opinion and thought a diverse newsroom because you don't want everyone thinking the same. And sometimes it's a battle. No, I want this. No, I want this. But that's what we want. We want people, not screaming at each other, but getting their point across of why we should air that story" (R Mathai).

After graduating from Los Altos High School, he went off to college at San Diego University and got his first internship at the San Diego affiliate of NBC. Then continuing to work for NBC, he went to work for NBC Fresno for a year and a half and NBC Arizona for two years. After all of this moving, he ended up back in the Bay Area, stationed at NBC Bay Area where he has been working since. During his time back in the Bay Area, he is raising a family with Sonia Mathai. Having such a unique job and schedule, his family life is quite different from what most of us are used to. Most of the time that he gets to spend with his kids during the work week is in the morning. Even with his late nights, he gets up early to help his kids off to school. He also spends lots of time with his kids on the weekends, being really involved especially in their sports as he still holds a strong interest in sports. His wife Sonia Mathai explains how she witnessed how the skills he gains from his job can transfer into parenting. Raj was on site reporting at the Olympics and had an earpiece in that allowed him to communicate with his coworkers, Sonia being given one to be kept in the loop. In their ears were dozens of voices at once trying to manage everything in regards to the big event they were covering. Sonia explained

how she was impressed by Raj's ability to take in everything that was being said and sort it out, responding all at the same time. Such a skill Sonia explains has been a really helpful in parenting as having two young children makes communication hectic like this.

News is still something so dynamic in people's lives as we heard from an NBC viewer, Suzanne Kasso. She has watched Raj Mathai for a long time and although other forms of media are presenting news as well, she is drawn to his broadcasting specifically because, "[she thinks] that he's personable. His delivery is good. He's able to talk about serious issues and sad issues. And he's also able to talk about sort of uplifting and cheerful issues. So it's a real talent to be able to cover sort of the gamut of what trends in news for sure." She feels that NBC Bay Area is able to provide her with more relevant news for the area as well as reliable news that she can watch every day, throughout the day.

However, not everyone is continuing to be avid news watchers like Suzanne Kasso. A lot of people are continuing to transfer over to social media as their source of information. This isn't just teenagers and millennials but in fact a large portion of the population. The Pew Research Center explains how the usage of the internet for news had increased from 38% percent to 43% over the span from 2016 to 2020 and with that, the television news watchers went down. Surprisingly the age group that is having the largest shift to online news would be the elderly population that are now becoming more comfortable using the internet and find the internet more resourceful. At the end of the day, what is important to Raj Mathai is that the news people are getting is reliable. Even though their demographic has changed, he is making sure that these stories are getting to the public in other ways. The news broadcasters are not unaware of this change in viewership and Raj Mathai is a user of twitter and other social media as well where he speaks out, "It's still storytelling, it's still journalism, and it's still accurate reporting. That hasn't

changed. It's just where do we distribute that information”(R Mathai)? Although his viewership has changed, he does make an impact on people. The News provides a familiar face to tie to the local area for people. Often when in foreign places he had been approached by people such as when he was in London, he was approached by some Bay Area people, who had recognized him for his work as a newscaster(R Mathai). Even with the Bay Area changing and developing at fast rates in technology and its social and economic situation, he is a consistent and safe space for people to feel they are getting reliable and helpful information about the place they call home.

Raj truly loves his job. He explains how he wants to continue doing it as long as he can, but only as long as he loves it. To him, he does it because he has a real passion for it. If he ever doesn't love it anymore, he will go find another job that he is passionate about. Knowing this, he is a great example of what news can really be, a reliable source, especially in a diverse and highly complicated area of the world like the Bay Area.

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