



How to Make Fun of Indian-American Immigrants

By Niraj Chokshi

Is this funny? (The following excerpt is from Joel Stein's latest article. Stein is Time magazine's humor columnist, a title often flanked by quotation marks.)

[A] few engineers and doctors from Gujarat moved to Edison because of its proximity to AT&T, good schools and reasonably priced, if slightly deteriorating, post-WW II housing. For a while, we assumed all Indians were geniuses. Then, in the 1980s, the doctors and engineers brought over their merchant cousins, and we were no longer so sure about the genius thing. In the 1990s, the not-as-brilliant merchants brought their even-less-bright cousins, and we started to understand why India is so damn poor.

Hell, read [the whole thing](#), it's short. In the July 5th issue, Stein laments the influx of Indian immigrants that hit his hometown, Edison, N.J. The column offended some and [upset](#) a lot of South Asians, sparking at least [one petition](#). Most people of Indian descent I know are thick-skinned about ethnic jokes (and often initiate them), but Stein's piece is ethnic humor minus the funny parts.

In an apology appended to the piece online, Stein says he's pro-immigration: "I was trying to explain how, as someone who believes that immigration has enriched American life and my hometown in particular, I was shocked that I could feel a tiny bit uncomfortable with my changing town." The first line of his piece is "I am very much in favor of immigration everywhere in the U.S. except Edison, N.J."

Let's put aside, for now, the question of whether Stein's piece is offensive. What's certain is that it isn't funny. It being a long weekend, here are a few case studies for Stein on how to successfully make fun of Indians.

A clip from the very funny "Diwali" episode of *The Office*, written by actress Mindy Kaling, whose parents are from India and who plays Kelly Kapoor on the show:

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<http://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2010/07/how-to-make-fun-of-indian-american-immigrants/59117/>

Here's Canadian comic Russel Peters, also of Indian descent, riffing on a typical Indian diet:

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The following clip doesn't quite poke fun at Indian Americans, it's just a song-and-dance number from an Indian movie edited to include as-I-hear-it subtitles. There's no way to explain it, but it's a classic. Enjoy, and happy long weekend:

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