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## Rajiv Satyal, The Funny Indian

Harsid talks up a storm with Rajiv Satyal. Yeah, a lot of talking!!

by Harsid Vaidya



We've got the best gig in the world. We get to meet people like Rajiv Satyal, need I say more? Here is a fresh face (not really) on the comedy scene, both mainstream and Desi. He's been making a lot of noise through out the country with his unique, self defacing sense of humor. Rajiv has headlined over 15 times for Russell Peters and has been catching a lot of buzz through his online video postings and nude appearances at the local Radio Shack. Ok, just kidding with the last part. Sorry for trying to be funny.

Let me introduce you to someone who is authentically funny and talented. He really is the Funny Indian!

Harsid Vaidya: When you found out you were on the Desiclub Top 50 Coolest Desis list for 2007, I heard you fainted from the excitement and needed medical care. Have you recovered yet and what happened to you?

Rajiv Satyal: Funny you mention that. I always wanted to be a doctor. In fact, when any Desi (South Asian) selects a major, all other options are grayed-out. I actually got into med school but didn't go. I think it's because I always cited as my reason the fact that I wanted to help people. But then it occurred to me - I don't even LIKE people. Why would I want to help them?

HV: Now that we got the very important investigative reporting aspect to this interview out of the way, tell me, where did you grow up and how was it like for you being an Indian in America

back in the 80's? What is your Indian background? Guju? Punjabi or what?

RS: Yes, your journalistic skills are formidable. I grew up in Cincinnati, OH. Well, I'm still 5'6" so let's say that I grew older there. I actually have to give much love, big ups, mad love, and respect to Ohio because I didn't experience racism - yes, even in the '80s. My family has always had good experiences with the white folk, as it were... which is good, because there are lots of 'em in Ohio. As far as my Desi background, I call myself the Punjabi with the Puns and the Jabs. Thank you. Thank you. Clear to see why I get paid for this.

"...I'm sure with Hollywood demanding skinny people, the higher your talent:mass ratio, the better you'll do..."

HV: When did you believe that it was time to give up your position at Procter & Gamble to pursue what you wanted as a comedian?

RS: Who said that was my decision? Ha. I was pleasantly shocked, if that's a term, at how supportive P&G was - and is - of my comedy career. I welcomed all of the incoming interns and co-ops during the summers... mostly to meet the new chicks, but hey, I did it, at least. I wrote for the Home Made Simple website, the newsletter which went to 15 million consumers. The Funny Indian was actually set up as a vendor in the system... which really only meant that it took 6 months for me to get paid. Anyone who has dealt with Corporate America knows what I mean. I hosted several P&G events - and in fact, the company still calls on me to do so. I can't believe that a company founded in 1837 could be this progressive. I suppose it shouldn't be a surprise, though - P&G invented the soap opera. That's why they're called "soap operas." Fast fact for ya. I guess in the end, the company was TOO supportive - I got enough traction to go do comedy full-time. That or maybe they found out my Dad used to work at Hindustan Lever.

HV: How did you come up with the term FunnyIndian? What makes you such a Funny Indian?







RS: A friend actually came up with the name. But I won't reveal whom - I'm into loyalties but not royalties. What makes me funny? I'm hilarious - but looks aren't everything.

HV: How much of your comedy deals with being Indian and Desi experiences?

RS: I'd say the Indian/Desi part of my material is about 30%. When I do South Asian gigs, it's about 90%. But when I do general market (alright - let's call 'em Black, White, and Latino), it's more like 30%. I actually didn't write any (Desi comedy) for the first 2 years. I started to later, partly influenced by the very first person for whom I ever did my act - at the time, the #1 tennis player in the world, Mr. Pete Sampras. That's a different story for a different day - after all, I want you to feature me again.

HV: You're aware that many youngsters want to pursue a career in comedy and showbiz in general. So

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tell us, is it harder for a Desi to succeed in these areas and how well do you think you've done up until now? Did your family help in achieving your goals? What do they think of your career?

RS: I hear every week of a new Desi entering the field. I think it's great that we're branching out into new arenas. Many people think "it's about time." It IS time, but we're not late to the game. It's but natural for an emerging community to go into established - or as my Dad would call them "sure shot" fields... gosh, now I'm reminded of the "foundation" conversations he had with me just about everyday... "Beta, these are the building blocks for the house..." I can't wait till the day my Dad no longer gives me advice - I hear it happens on or around your 70th birthday. Anyway, I don't think it's any harder for a Desi to succeed... in fact, I'd argue it's easier... the community has been tremendously supportive by giving me opportunities to host events, parties, etc. - both private and corporate. I'm very happy with my progress so far. A long way to go but I've been very fortunate and I feel the momentum building. I give a lot of speeches to high school and college kids... I would love to wax more philosophical about this topic as it's near and dear to my heart... but in the spirit of keeping this readable, I'll give you one tidbit: To succeed in anything, you need three things: Talent, Desire, and Drive. Talent is self-explanatory but you really have to be honest with yourself as to whether you really are talented enough to make it. Desire and Drive are two different things. The former speaks more to the fire within to achieve something great, but the latter is the motivation to get out of bed everyday and actually DO something about it. My family is the greatest in the world. Indeed, I couldn't do this without the love and support of family and friends. Phenomenally supportive, but they know when to employ tough love, too. My first time onstage actually went extremely well. But something like the 2nd or 3rd time I absolutely bombed. My Mom pulled me aside, put her arm around me, and said in this deceptively sweet voice, "Rajiv, we really wanted to laugh, but the stuff you were saying just wasn't funny." Thanks a lot, Mom. So, I think it's important for your family and friends to be honest with you so you get better. And for those of you out there who don't think I'm funny - both of you - sorry... maybe my family should've been even more harsh.

HV: I've seen some of your video clips, where you do parodies and such, and you have a ton of on-screen talent, are you actively working on getting movie roles or being on network TV? If so, what?

RS: You're too kind. I don't know about a ton. That's 2000 pounds and I only weigh 120 (let's round). That's pretty much a 17:1 ratio of talent to mass. I'm not sure where that gets us but I'm an Indian - I saw an opportunity to do math and I took it. Perhaps there is something here, though - I'm sure with Hollywood demanding skinny people, the higher your talent:mass ratio, the better you'll do. ANYway, yes, I would very much like to get on TV. I've hosted AVS a couple of times, which has been great. I'm well past the point where I should at least have done a Live at Gotham or an appearance on Kimmel or Ferguson. I have always seen myself as one of those "talking heads" on MTV or VH1 or a VJ or something. However, I was watching "History of the Joke" recently on the History Channel and what I noticed, though, is that pretty much everybody you see on those shows has been doing comedy for 10+ years. I'm at 6 - and not even really that - because I'm at 1.5 years full-time. So, it's early. Still, if you know anybody, hook me up, dawg! Interestingly, the History Channel had actually asked me to come in to audition to host a show. It came down to another guy and me - he got it. I couldn't have been too disappointed, though, right? I didn't even know of the opportunity till a fortnight before. As a result, the agency that submits me for commercials (I've been fortunate to book a couple.) is now considering me for TV hosting, which is cool. I haven't auditioned for movies, though I would like to. Is now the right time to plug the show I'm producing with another one of your Top 50 Desis list? I think it is. Check out the first episode of "That's What's Up," a several-period-of-days' news & entertainment program that Miss India 2006 - '07 Melanie Kannokada and I made.

HV: Nice plug Rajiv! Let me just add that she is also our 2008 Swimsuit calendar cover model. Now, back to the interview... what would your most ideal TV gig be? Describe it for us.

RS: Host the Oscars. Simply put, that's it. Or, as most comics say, "network sitcom." There are many definitions, but that's what most would define as "making it." I would love that, but more immediately, it'd be great to just appear on different shows as the Funny Indian - really develop that brand as an on-air personality so that I'm a kind of go-to guy for questions & input on things... whether that's bridging the gap between Hollywood and Bollywood... social commentary... political thoughts... anything. It'd be really cool to just appear on those VH1 or MTV or Bravo or E! shows as a guest, guest host, etc.

HV: I'm gonna get you booked! What do you think of Russell Peters' comedy? Do you think he's funny? And what do you think of his success? You can be honest, Russell is a big pussycat.

RS: Every single Desi comic owes a huge debt of gratitude to Russell Peters. He's the trailblazer. He singlehandedly created demand for Desi comedy where there was none before. As John Lennon said, "Before Elvis, there was nothing." He's our Elvis - maybe minus the gyrating hips and lip curl. Just think of the courage it took to jump in back in 1989 - that's 19 years ago, when the mere mention of becoming anything other than a doctor or engineer would be met with a parental slap. It also helps that he's amazingly talented - he can box, DJ, dance, do pretty much any accent out there. And his comedy happens to be hilarious. So, yes, I think he's funny and yes, he deserves all of the success he has enjoyed. Above all that, he's a nice guy. He has had me open for him 15 times all over the States, put in a word for me at major comedy clubs in LA, and has just been there to hang out and chill.

HV: You're absolutely right about him, he definitely is a pioneer in the field of comedy. Did you know he plucks? Yeah, he plucks his facial hair. That's some inside info for you. (hehe) Where can we find you to check out your comedy and get updates on what you're doing?

RS: Plucking you say... You ask really good questions. Not just because this one sets me up so well to promote myself, but really - I do a lot of interviews and your questions were actually very insightful. If my answers were even half as good as your questions, I think the readers will be entertained. You can find in da club, bottle full of bub... OK, really, in a lot of places: the central place is my site - [www.funnyindian.com](http://www.funnyindian.com). I send out a monthly newsletter. It's free. And funny. Or so I say. It'd be great if people can sign up for that - they won't get spammed. The site also has my show schedule, including the dates for when I'm co-headlining the Hindu-Muslim(-and-More) comedy tour "Make Chai Not War." It also contains a link for the Indian Invasion Comedy DVD, which you should go buy at this instant - it really is good. I also started the world's only Indian comedian booking site - [www.indiancomedians.com](http://www.indiancomedians.com). If you like Indian comedy, but are not sold on me, I can help find you someone you do like. You can shoot me an Add on Facebook - and join my wildly egotistical self-started group, The Funny Indian Fan Club. I'm also at [www.myspace.com/funnyindian](http://www.myspace.com/funnyindian) and [www.linkedin.com/in/funnyindian](http://www.linkedin.com/in/funnyindian). And you can search my name on YouTube and in iTunes and see what you get. Wow - that's some over-the-top selling. Really, I love to hear from people, so I hope your readers do get in-touch with me - to chat, say "hi," or better yet, book me. 120 pounds really is a starving artist.

For more info on Rajiv, the Funny Indian, please visit his website [www.funnyindian.com](http://www.funnyindian.com).

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