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Then what was happening to me was there was a period of time when I thought: Oh what am I doing here? I'm not of this pedigree. I'm not a fake journalist. The fact that I was the brown correspondent, it just all felt a little bit sort of like it wasn't me.

Then I thought I'm going to get fired; they're going to realize I'm all rubbish. And then eventually I realized that what we were doing on the show, the stuff we were writing, the stuff we were speaking out on the air was actually having an impact. It transformed me.

In the book I write about my relationship to Jon and the complex relationship that that *is* with one's own faith and the faith that one was brought up in.

That is one of those things where I just thought that I was the worst example of a Muslim; I should not be representing Islam in any way. That's something that made me uncomfortable about it.

On the other hand, I also realized that what we were saying on *The Daily Show*, even though I did not always write it, was having an impact on American Muslims.

It was in the years after September 11, in 2006. We were right in the middle of the Iraq War. G W Bush was in the second term and in America the fear was racketed up of Muslims (not that it isn't there today). At least at that time, I felt that I was having the ability to speak on behalf of an incredibly under-represented group of people.

The misinformation, the bigotry, the stuff that was out there... Sikhs would get attacked because they wore turbans. The Americans couldn't tell the difference. We were addressing these things. We were talking about these things. It felt really empowering for me.

I met Muslims, on the street who would come up to me and say "*Salaam Alekum*" and hug me and whatever. It was somewhat uncomfortable because I didn't really think I was like them.

I also recognized what it was doing for them. People began to see me in a larger cultural sort of zeitgeist context, much more than I had done previously. It definitely changed my life.

Tell us something more about the House of Patels. It is funny, but also serious. You write about how your father made these T-shirts lettered International House of Patel and how he thought it would signal loyalty for International House of Pancake and insisted that all of you, including your grandparents, wore it. Did he actually ask for discount at IHOP?

I wrote it as a kind of immigrant story. I wanted to make it funny and accessible. But it is a larger immigrant story.

My father did come to America, and when he first came here, he was fascinated and obsessed with this idea of brunch.

I remember him telling us that there is this thing in America called brunch. He thought there was a third meal between breakfast and lunch called brunch. He thought it was great...

I have taken some artistic license and amalgamated a lot of Indian fathers into my father to tell a larger story of the immi-



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grant journey.

There is this idea of my father coming from nothing and coming to the land of plenty — a sort of (I say in the book) a little kid with a golden ticket; America was really a Willy Wonka chocolate factory.

That *is* the immigrant mentality. That *is* the immigrant thing.

But I think what is nice about that story is the choice. In the sense that my father also understands what he is buying into.

For me, my American journey has been one of coming to America, always being obsessed with America, wanting to come here, finally coming here and then a level of disillusionment about America and what that means.

I feel *Sakina's Restaurant* was really about the disillusionment of America, that American dream and how to re-capture that. Then getting on *The Daily Show* and finding a voice in relationship to that disillusionment, in reaction to that disillusionment, and being able to comment on the culture that I have now adopted.

I think my father has had a similar journey where at the end of that story he is able to comment on the culture as somebody from the inside even though he is an outsider.

He has his own surprise ending in that story where you think he is just a man who is obsessed with food and America and its consumer culture and then you realize that under the surface here is somebody so has much more profound thoughts about America than you might assume from just meeting him.

That takes me to the story about his job with Verizon and how he was fired for using profanity at a customer.

After my parents came to this country, for

a long time they struggled in terms of finances. My parents would work in Florida in flea markets and they would go around to these markets across the state. They would get goods from India and they would sell it here.

We were not rich. My father was a businessman. He was not a doctor or engineer. He was self-employed. It was not like he just came here and fell into the American dream. He was very much a struggler.

Later in life, my father got a job. I tell the story of how my father got a job as a Verizon phone customer service representative, and, the English language that had always been the bane of his existence became his tool in this job.

The story is really about an incident that got him fired because he swore at a belligerent customer who was being racist towards him. That really did happen.

I wrote this story to imagine what my father would have gone through in that experience and try to imagine what my father's thought process might have been in that moment.

Also, what I wanted to address in that story was this idea that these were two men not looking at each other in the face. They were talking on the phone.

Some of the things I talk about in the book is this divide between East and West. There is a kind of aggressiveness and belligerence that happens to those men in that moment because there is an anonymity in being on the phone and they can say these things that they feel but have never said to someone's face.

That is the kind of the miscommunication that happens in global politics when you deal with the Middle East, in America or

Aasif Mandvi in Today's Special, which was loosely inspired by Sakina's Restaurant, inset.

whatever, when you have this misunderstanding, this miscommunication, the projection of stereotypes or racism or prejudice that is put on the other person. And that exists in that story. I wanted that story to be about that.

I wanted it to be about this divide that existed and this place where these two men were expressing these words.

For my father it was cathartic. He had spent years being called a Paki, a sand nigger, and all these things when he had his corner shop in Bradford in England.

Then, in the story, comes this cathartic moment when he finally gets to say the things that he wants to say to this guy who was calling him a terrorist and all that stuff.

I think that was a very important chapter in the book.

Well, a lot of the book is about identity, a lot of the book is about race, a lot of the book is about dislocation and I think that happens for me in a very specific way.

My parents took me out of India to England when I was only a year old and I came (*to America*) as a teenager.

So I've dealt with that my whole life and so have my parents, in their own way, dealt with that dislocation and identity issues in their adult life as well in a different way.

Has your father read the book? He should feel proud.

I think he feels proud. For my dad, I think it makes him feel conspicuous in this book. He suddenly feels exposed. His reaction when he first read the book was why would people care about these stories — who cares about when I got fired from Verizon, or about when I was obsessed with brunch.

I think he felt, in some way, revealed and exposed in a way that made him feel a little bit vulnerable.

But I said to him, "Hopefully if it works, these stories will resonate on a larger level for people."

I always try to write things on a very personal place so they resonate into a larger cultural context. I go from the personal to the general.

I think he liked the story. But, I think, it was something scary for him, having his son write about him in that way.

I think knowing my father, what will happen is that — I went to the book signing at Tampa, Florida; people were asking him as well to sign the book, so he was thinking maybe people *are* actually enjoying the book.

So, if people are reading the book and like the book, at the end of the day I'm a storyteller and my job above everything else is to entertain people and keep them interested in the book. If the stories are boring, it really doesn't matter.

What matters is what I'm trying to say. But if people are reading the stories, entertained by the stories, and enjoying the stories, then he feels that may be it's okay! ■

