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Funny Feeling

Indian Russian or Russian Indian? Aspiring comedian Arun Khurana feels a little foreign wherever he goes

By Alastair Gill

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Much of Arun Khurana's comedy material is inspired by family issues. **ARUN KHURANA / PERSONAL ARCHIVE**

Born in Minsk, Belarus to entrepreneurial Indian parents, Arun Khurana has lived in Moscow since the age of one. He has an MBA in Finance and Banking, but dreams of pursuing a career as a comedian. For the last two and a half years he has been doing stand-up comedy as a member of the English Moscow Comedy collective, which holds regular events at venues around the city.

I live on the outskirts of Moscow, past the MKAD ring road. We have a three-story townhouse

there, it's like suburbia really. We live in a gated community, so the level of security is very high. Another bonus is that a lot of Indian families also live in this neighborhood, there are about 11 or 12 Indian families in our community, so there's always that sense of being in a Little India in Moscow. It's very comforting.

When I go to India I'm a foreigner, and over here I'm a foreigner, so I guess I could say that I don't belong to either place. But, in another sense, my parents are Indians, they gave me the culture and values of India, and I speak Hindi fluently. In that way, I feel I can adapt, and I have adapted, so I could live either there or here, but never fully anywhere.

The type of family atmosphere they have in India is something I've never seen anywhere in the world. Your family is very involved in what you do, and obviously they want you to succeed, they want you to have a good life. In India you often find that children live with their parents to the age of 25, 28, 30 even – until they get married, or maybe even after that. You don't get that in Moscow.

I've been to a lot of great cities around Europe and North America, and in Asia, and I'd still say that Moscow is my favorite city in the world. That being said, I don't know what the future holds for me, if there is a good opportunity elsewhere I'd be a fool not to take it, but I'd like to stay in Moscow. I understand the culture, the people; I speak the language.

I often perform at Jim 'N' Jack's, which is an expat bar run by a Syrian guy. It has English-speaking staff and great music. It's a small place with a cosy family atmosphere – you know everyone and everyone knows you. It's a home away from home, especially for foreigners who come here and don't really have any family.

Obviously my mom is the best cook for me. Whenever she's in town she always cooks great Indian food, and so I may be a bit spoiled, but restaurant food is obviously never up to that quality. That being said, I think the best restaurant in Moscow is definitely Darbars in Hotel Sputnik on Leninsky Prospekt. It's on the 16th floor and they have a great view – you can see half of Moscow from there. The owner's eldest son is one of my really good friends, and every time I go there I always leave with a full stomach and a satisfied grin on my face.

My comedic style is telling stories and anecdotes of what happens to me in daily life, or in my past. I frequently joke about my family, and about being an Indian in Moscow. Moscow is a great source for comedy, since so many crazy things happen here on a daily basis.

Audiences come to comedy shows to laugh, but with my material, particularly about Indian culture and family lives, they also get to learn a bit about a different culture. They also get a kick out of how long I've lived in Russia, and through my comedy, they get to see their own country through the eyes of a foreigner. This gives them a unique perspective into life in Russia.

A girl once asked me to marry her after I joked that I would never be able to choose my own wife. I mimicked dialing my mom so this girl could speak to her. The crowd loved it. I didn't get her number, but I hope my mom did.

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