

I'm Glad Miss America Is Indian-American

I've never been a fan of beauty contests because (1) it's sexist to "rate" women based on their measurements; (2) average women don't feel comfortable parading in front of a TV audience wearing bikinis; and (3) I fail to see how a small panel of judges can determine true beauty for all of us.

But I will leave that topic for another day. My bigger concern is that many Americans reacted in disgust when Nina Davuluri, the 24-year-old Indian-American contestant from New York, won the Miss America crown on Sept. 15 in Atlantic City. She got a \$50,000 scholarship, which she plans to use to go to medical school—following in the footsteps of her father, who moved to the U.S. in 1981 to become an obstetrician.

It sounds like the American Dream. But racist comments were hurled in Davuluri's direction on Twitter and other social media sites after her win. Haters accused her of being an al-Qaida terrorist, a Muslim and an Arab. Some said she is "not American enough." One person tweeted, "Even Miss America has been outsourced to India."

How pathetic. While Davuluri's proud grandmother was watching the pageant from her home in Vijaywada, India, this ambitious young woman was being skewered by racists—in a country that should know better. Our nation was formed by immigrants (mine came from Ireland), but we are still schizophrenic about whether to put the welcome mat in front of the door.

If the Statue of Liberty could move, she'd be bowing her head in shame.

I say it's about time we recognized the Indian-Americans in our midst, along with all the other immigrant groups who have come to this country looking for a better life. According to

the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 3.2 million Indian-Americans in our country today. They are the third largest immigrant group from Asia, behind China (3.8 million) and the Philippines (3.4 million).

Indian-Americans have made a huge contribution to the United States. Of the Indian-Americans who live in this country, four have won Nobel prizes in science and medicine. Two are governors—Bobby Jindal of Louisiana and Nikki Haley of South Carolina. Other famous Indian-Americans include CNN correspondent Sanjay Gupta, MasterCard CEO Ajay Banga, filmmaker M. Night Shyamalan, Hotmail co-founder Sabeer Bhatia and actress Freida Pinto (*Slumdog Millionaire*).

Like other immigrants, Indians are victims of stereotyping and profiling. We assume all Indians are named Patel. We think all Indians work in convenience stores. We resent Indian high-tech workers for taking jobs in our companies. We complain about their thick accents.

Also, many Americans think all Indians are Hindus. Actually, a thriving Indian Christian community exists in the United States. And many exceptional Indian-American Christian leaders live in our country, including apologist Ravi Zacharias, evangelist Sujo John and church-growth consultant Samuel Chand.

There will always be rude, closed-minded racists injecting their poison into our national dialogue. But my prayer is that the church will lead the way in not just tolerating but celebrating the immigrants who have come to this country to find freedom and prosperity.

I've been to India four times, and I am helping to establish a home for underprivileged girls there. I have many Indian-American friends, and I find them to be strong, passionate Christians. I enjoy their big families, their knowledge of the Bible, their colorful clothes, their expressive worship and,

of course, their food—especially chicken biryani with naan!

My life is richer because of my friendship with immigrants from India, Brazil, Ukraine, Belarus, Nigeria, Mexico, Ecuador and many other countries. Why would I want a plain vanilla life when God offers the abundant life of multicultural diversity? God loves color—that's why He made people with different skin tones. And He wants His church to reflect the varied hues of His creation.

More white people of European descent are dying in the United States than are being born. By the year 2050, minorities will make up 54 percent of the United States population. America is changing! Instead of complaining about this or trying to slam the door in the faces of immigrants, we should be doing everything in our power to include foreign-born people into the life of our churches.

We must rediscover the mandate of biblical hospitality. God told Israel: "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself" (Lev. 19:34, NASB). Let's get rid of old prejudices and start making new friends. Let's show Christ's inclusive love to immigrants who probably wonder if Americans even want them here.

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