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New Teen Film Explores Transitions Of Indian Students in U.S.

By MATTHEW VALIA  
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For the many Indian high-school students in the United States, the transition from a strong traditional home environment to the freedom and cultural diversity of college life can be jarring. For Krishna Reddy, college is a time to finally abandon his heritage and move on as an all-American kid. Or so he thinks.

Krishna, the main character in the new movie, "American Desi," battles to accept his culture's differences on dating, marriage and the Muslim religion. The word "desi" is a slang term referring to anyone from the Indian subcontinent living somewhere else.



"American Desi" is the first English-language film distributed by Eros Entertainment, the largest film studio for Indian films in the United States.

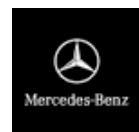
Opening in only about 24 theaters, the film has done well at the box office and has received praise from movie critics.

Based on his brother's college experience as a computer-science major at Rutgers University, in New Brunswick N.J., producer Gitesh Pandya said the movie is a story that needs to be told.

"The movie is about Indian Americans living the same life from an Indian background, trying to retain their heritage," he said. "The movie makes Indian Americans feel good about themselves and it validates their existence as an ethnic group."

In the film's story, determined to give up his family's Indian tradition, Krishna (played by Deep Katdare),

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who insists people call him "Kris," is thrust into a college campus full of Indian students just like him. All three of his roommates turn out to be desis dealing with similar conflicts between the American and the Indian lifestyles.

One roommate, Jagjit, (Ronobir Lahiri) is an aspiring artist who is miserable because his domineering father insists that he study engineering. Roommate Salim (Rizwan Manji) is a traditionalist who believes that Indian women in America are unfit for marriage, while the third desi, Ajay (Kal Penn) identifies himself as an African-American homeboy.

Tackling these cultural struggles throughout the movie, the film turns into a light romantic comedy as Kris falls in love with Nina (Purva Bedi), who teaches him to accept and appreciate his culture while living on an American campus.

The movie was written and directed by Piyush Pandya, a computer consultant.

Pandya said finding a talented Indian cast and distributor was not a challenge because of the comedic script and wealth of Indian actors in the New York and Los Angeles area. He said one of the reasons for making the film was the importance of putting new, diverse faces on the big screen and in television.

"There are a ton of talented East Asian actors out there," Pandya said. "It helps to get a more diverse reflection of faces on television. Outside of cabdrivers, convenience-store owners, and terrorists, there are not many East Asian roles."

Pandya was encouraged by word of mouth among Indian and non-Indian moviegoers who have seen the movie.

"It is about not segregating yourself to help your understanding," he said. "The more people know about a culture, the less they will discriminate."

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