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March 30, 2001 15:04 Hrs (IST)

This *Desi* strikes a chord with young Indian Americans

Sukhjit Purewal

SAN FRANCISCO: When Eros Entertainment first picked up the worldwide rights to *American Desi*, there was speculation among U.S. theater owners that the film would not strike a chord with Indian American audiences that are accustomed to the song-and- dance routines that Bollywood dishes out.

As it turns out, Indians Americans are clamoring to see *American Desi*. Producer Ditesh Pandya said he could understand the concern. After all, nobody had tried something like this before.

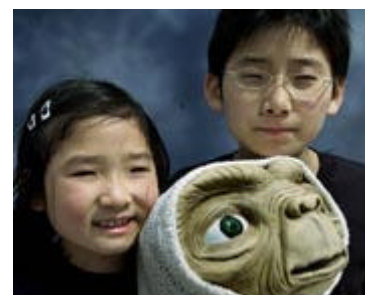
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Not only is the film a hit » **Box-office Beauty** with college going Indian Americans who it was targeted at, but Pandya said he is also pleasantly surprised that older moviegoers are also turning out to see the film.

"There is also a younger generation which doesn't go to Bollywood films," Pandya told India Abroad News Service. "This is basically a film for them -- made in America, in the style of American movie-making."

"American Desi" has remained in the Variety top 25 since it was released two weeks ago. "That is an accomplishment for an independent film as well as for an Indo- American film because every other movie in the top 25 is playing in several hundred or several thousands theaters," Pandya said.

In fact the film, which cost only \$250,000 to make, is showing at only 37 Indian American theaters and art house theaters, and has already raked in \$305,000 in the first week and



All I wanted was to choose the right films:

Vyjayanthimala

Staunchly defending this year's national awards for films, Vyjayanthimala Bali, who headed the jury, has said the way in which three members of the judges panel walked out was completely "unethical."

This *Desi* strikes a chord with young Indian Americans

When Eros Entertainment first picked up the worldwide rights to *American Desi*, there was speculation among U.S. theater owners that the film would not strike a chord with Indian American audiences that are accustomed to the song-and- dance routines that Bollywood dishes out.

National Film Awards not rigged: Sushma Swaraj

Angry about the controversy over the National Film Awards, Information and Broadcasting Minister Sushma Swaraj Thursday hit back at critics, terming as "baseless, malicious and untrue" the charges of saffronisation, stage management and the awards

already taken in \$300,000 in the first week and \$250,000 in the second. That makes the per theater earnings even more impressive. In Houston and Boston, the film did better in the second week than it did in the first, Pandya said.

In other cities, including Los Angeles and New York, the buzz has caught on and non-Indians are turning out to find out what the fuss is about, Pandya said. Others are turning out for a second and third time to try and catch the jokes they missed the first time around, Pandya said.

Pandya runs Box Office Guru, a Web site that tracks film industry box office performance. *American Desi* star Deep Katdare, who has appeared in Broadway plays and television dramas is also one of the film's producers. The third producer is Cyrus E. Koewing, CEO of Blue Rock Group, which produces independent productions.

Pandya's brother Piyush Dinker Pandya wrote and directed *American Desi* in his directorial debut. He has also worked on short films and has directed a television sitcom *Under One Roof*.

Also helping the film was the positive review from the Wall Street Journal: "Mr. Pandya tells a story of conflicted assimilation that's been told before, but he and his exuberant cast invest it with fresh energy and winning humor."

The film is about a New Jersey youth, Krishna, who learns about being Indian when he leaves for college. Krishna, who insists on being called "Kris," is an ABCD, the vernacular on college campuses for an American Born Confused Desi.

Kris hopes to leave behind the traditions of his "puja" (prayer) observing parents and Indian heritage which he finds embarrassing but finds he can't outrun the Indian in him when he is matched with three Indian roommates and soon thereafter begins the chase for Nina Shah (Purva Bedi), a girl who is proud to be Indian.

Pandya said the film's performance should be a signal to Hollywood that the South Asian population is an important group of moviegoers, as Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* did for African Americans. He said the team's hope in making the film was to inspire other Indian Americans who want to make their own films.

jury being a cabal.

Sound of Music's Trapp children reunite after 35 years

The children who shot to stardom in "The Sound of Music" have re-united 35 years later for a bittersweet reflection on the "Von Trappings" of fame.

India's National Film Awards a sham, say 3 who quit jury

A major controversy has broken out over the National Film Awards for 2000, with three members quitting the jury alleging interference by a "cynical political cartel."

Gautam Ghosh to reject national award for *Dekha*

Blaming a flawed selection process, director Gautam Ghosh said he will refuse his award for best regional language film.

It takes 18 seconds to say 'Thank you' at Oscars

He not only won an Oscar but also a television set. Keeping things short paid off for Michael Dudok de Wit.

Digital video makes it cheap and easy for filmmakers

Monday morning in Mumbai; the cradles and coffins of life; or the cauldron of religions at Times Square -- it's all there at the Digital Film Festival.

'Quiet American' writes new script for Vietnam films

If a new version of "The Quiet American" is anything to go by, it's lights, camera, action for Vietnam's fledgling film industry.

Kamal Haasan on why India fares badly at the Oscars

Taiwanese director Ang Lee may have cornered a sizeable portion of the Oscars for his martial arts fantasy, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden*

Pandya said *American Desi* has a chance at posting numbers similar to *Taal* which made \$2 million at the box office.

--India Abroad News Service

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Dragon, but another Asian country, India, still has no reason to rejoice.

Boom or Bust: Why getting an Oscar could mean both
Oh, to be an Oscar winner, standing on stage, holding a golden statuette, Hollywood at your feet and shiny stars in your eyes.

Benicio Del Toro wins Oscar in unstoppable year
More than 10 years after breaking into television playing bad guys, Benicio Del Toro won the Oscar award for Best Supporting Actor.

Kung fu epic *Crouching Tiger...* is best foreign film
The kung fu epic "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards.

Traffic stopper Steven makes Oscar history
Steven Soderbergh grabbed the Academy Award for Best Director for "Traffic."

'Hosting Oscars is like making love'
This time Steve Martin did not come out with an arrow through his head.

'Pretty Woman' Roberts gets her first Oscar
Julia Roberts won her first Oscar, a Best Actress award for her portrayal of a feisty legal assistant in the drama "Erin Brockovich".

Harden wins Supporting Actress Oscar for *Pollock*
Marcia Gay Harden won the Oscar for her portrayal the self-sacrificing but tough-talking wife of Abstract Expressionist painter Jackson Pollock.

The Oscar for Best Picture goes to *Gladiator*
The Roman Empire epic "Gladiator" won the Oscar for

Best Picture, to earn the movie industry's highest honor.

Russell Crowe's 'unobtainable' dream comes true

The New Zealand-born actor won the Academy Award for Best Actor in the blockbuster Roman epic "Gladiator."

Best Actor Oscar will be a tough call

They are the front-runners in one of the closest battles of the Oscars.

Heavenly Bodies: Stars get ready for close encounters

In Hollywood, the faces that make a fortune in the movies also cost a fortune to maintain.

The five minutes that sealed director Ang Lee's destiny

As a senior executive in Taiwan's largest filmmaker, one of Hsu Li-kong's jobs was to spot talent and give up-and-coming directors a break.

Nude Marilyn Monroe photos fail to sell at auction

Five photographs of a nude Marilyn Monroe taken against a blood red background failed to sell at an auction.

Steve Martin plans new image as Oscar host

Hoping for a "wild and crazy" Oscar night when comedian Steve Martin takes the stage on Sunday at the 73rd Annual Academy Awards?

'Bachchan is Bollywood's most powerful actor'

When Forbes.com released its list of the five most powerful Indian film stars, it wasn't any reigning heartthrob who came out on top.

I'm happier than I've ever been in life: Julia Roberts

For years she has been

For years she has been America's sweetheart. Now Julia Roberts is set to be officially crowned Hollywood's darling.

Cannes film festival to open with *Moulin Rouge*

The Cannes film festival will open on May 9 with *Moulin Rouge*, a musical starring Nicole Kidman.

Matt Dillon on his Cambodian love affair

The actor began a love affair with Cambodia in 1993 when he visited the war-torn country's fabled Angkor temples.

India's first Imax theatre to open in Mumbai

India's first Imax movie theatre which offers audiences the chance to feel they are in the thick of the action will open in Mumbai on March 25.

Africa becomes Bollywood's new hunting ground

Over the next three months, at least three major movies will be shot in South Africa and talks to shoot several others are on.

Akshay pulls off real life stunt at awards show

Akshay Kumar pulls off a real life stunt at the Lux-Zee Cine Awards.

Maverick artist's next experiment on film

M.F. Husain is undeterred by *Gaja Gamini's* flop show. He's finished scripting his next film.

Princess Diana was keen on acting: Costner

The late Princess Diana was "genuinely excited" about starring in *The Bodyguard* sequel, says Kevin Costner.

For the love of *Mohabbatein*

Trade figures indicate that

Trade figures indicate that *Mohabbatein* is the second biggest success of the year 2000. Yash Chopra adds why.

American Desi hopes to be the new box-office beauty
Indian-American filmmakers, inspired by Manoj Shyamalan, are making a rare foray into U.S. mainstream cinema.

Screen Actors Guild awards for Julia Roberts, del Toro
Julia Roberts and Benicio Del Toro walked off with the Screen Actors Guild's top individual acting honors.

DreamWorks buys rights to Lincoln biography
DreamWorks Pictures has purchased the film rights to a yet-to-be published biography of Abraham Lincoln by Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Doris Kearns Goodwin.

If you win an Oscar, please keep the speech brief
The best thing you could do if you win an Oscar is say "Thank you." But even better than that is to simply say "Thanks."

Ang Lee wins Hollywood award for "Crouching Tiger"
The Taiwanese-born director won the Directors' Guild award for "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon."

Buddhadeb Dasgupta's 'Uttara' premieres in U.S.
The 19th annual San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival will feature the works of three Indian filmmakers.

Mumbai theaters cut ticket rates to stay in business
The boom in TV channels and reduction in the release of new films have badly hit cinema halls in Mumbai.

Star Wars weapons... going,
going, gone

going, gone

A sword wielded by Mel Gibson in the Oscar-winning epic film "Braveheart" fetched \$170,000 at a charity auction.

15 years to fame: Julia, Pitt in 'The Mexican'

It took more like 15 years of fame rather than the proverbial 15 minutes to put Brad Pitt and Julia Roberts together in a film.

Mani Rathnam to team up with Kamal Haasan

It's the biggest director-star collaboration since Subhash Ghai signed Dilip Kumar in "Vidhaata."

Tom Cruise is most powerful celebrity: Forbes magazine

The star of "Jerry Maguire" and "Mission: Impossible" was named the most powerful celebrity in the world.

'Such a Long Journey' to end in India, finally

The screen adaptation of Indian-born author Rohinton Mistry's novel about the life of the Parsi community in Mumbai is being released in India.

BBC to honor Bollywood baddie Gulshan Grover

Bollywood villain Gulshan Grover will be presented with a BBC souvenir when he appears at the Mega Mela Asia Awards Show in Birmingham in March.

No more live concerts for Hrithik this year

Is he fed up with the fan adulation? Have the screaming hordes scared him off? Why won't Bollywood's hottest property perform live anymore? Find out here.

No opium for 'Quiet American' Caine

British star Sir Michael Caine plays an opium-addicted

journalist in a new adaptation
of Graham Greene's "The
Quiet American."

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