

The Comedy Connection

“Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.” (Victor Borge) However true that might be, the fact remains that extreme geographical distance can leave two people little to talk about, much less to laugh at, except perhaps the awkwardness of their conversations. A true relationship can only be formed on common ground; without this similarity, the relationship becomes more like an obligation. In order to avoid this sense of obligation in our relationship, my aunt and I use the common ground of our interest in Indian movies.

But, there are certain ways that an Indian movie must be watched in order for it to be fully and authentically enjoyed. An Indian movie will not be pleasurable unless watched with a comfortable companion, one who is equally interested in the film. This is the first and foremost step in learning how to watch an Indian movie; the true beauty of the movie simply cannot be experienced by anyone if they are in the company of an individual who seems uninterested or disagreeable. Similarly, in a playground, if the two sides of a see-saw are not balanced, the children will obviously find some difficulty in having fun together. For me, this balance at the other side of the see-saw is my aunt. Although being halfway across the world does not help us much in watching the movies together, we have come up with a system of providing movie recommendations for each other, helping us connect and feel as if we're still on that same see-saw.

However, before watching these movies, the viewer should probably understand the mindset. It is best, before watching an Indian movie, to clear your head of all rational and logical thought. Do not be surprised if you see any sort of irrationality or unrealistic behavior, because mostly, this is what makes up an Indian movie. A physically handicapped hero jumping off a

moving train unscathed or maybe overtaking a sedan with his broken bicycle while getting shot at, -all of course, to save his one and only true love - should not phase you anymore than the typical cliché lines about *dosti* and *pyaar* do. Partly, the beauty of an Indian movie is this irrationally romantic line of thought. In order to preserve this rare quality, the viewer should ignore logic as much as possible and focus on the big picture. For my aunt and me however, this lack of reason is precisely what compels us to watch the films as both of us are hopeless romantics.

Preparation is the best strategy to approach any new experience, so the first time viewer should have a general knowledge of what to expect when viewing a Bollywood production, beforehand. The basics of what this industry usually produces are the drama, the romance, and of course, the musical. Music is a huge part of Indian movies; rarely will you ever find a film without a song number at every other scene. Along with drama and romance, music offers a set template for Indian movies to be created. Some of these set rules are -

- 1) If in the romance or drama category, what you are watching will either be a) a tragic love story with a “uniquely” happy ending, or b) a story in which separated family members all reunite around twenty years later on the same date and place.
- 2) There will *always* be a “good guy” and a “bad guy” fighting each other in one of the later scenes for a) the girl, or b) the issue of their differing morals.
- 3) And as I mentioned before, there must be songs in the movie, - eight would be a good number for a minimum - however, in each of these two to five minute songs, all of the actors participating must be seen together in different parts of the world, wearing various brightly colored outfits.

These regulations have pretty much characterized the Indian movie from the 70's till

present day, so anything the viewer chooses out of this era will have a similar structure. The static progress of story plots has also allowed my bond with my aunt to strengthen, because the movies she liked to watch as a girl can compare very closely with the ones made now. Not to mention, both of us rather favor stability and relative permanence, preferring to stick to the routine rather than let any change occur, and knowing something isn't going to change that easily - such as our relationship or our Indian movies - puts a lot to rest in our minds.

Of course now after finding out about what to expect in an Indian movie, the only thing left to do is to view it. However, the process of truly watching does not stop there. After this viewing is over, the full enjoyment coming from it can only be attained if the viewer will participate in some heated discussion about it. As the viewer, you must give your opinion on the movie, the plot, the actors, the actors' lives and anything else that comes to mind. This is the only way to achieve an authentic purpose to your viewing. My aunt and I, after watching each other's recommendations, are constantly on the phone discussing the latest on- ditz surrounding the movie, it's making, the actors, and of course, the other random gossip containing the actors' personal lives. All the while we are laughing, criticizing and ridiculing the film, yet knowingly sounding ridiculous ourselves.

It is finally through our laughter - not to mention our *strict* obedience of the steps that must be used to watch these types of movies - that my aunt and I maintain our connection from ten thousand miles away. The amusement and other sunny feelings we acquire from watching Indian movies helps make the distance from Michigan to Mumbai a mere phone call away. I know that for a fact, our conversations would not have been so enjoyable had we not found this common ground. So maybe it is better to reassess Victor Borge's quote, and say that laughter, only if naturally induced by common ground, is the shortest distance between two people.