



FILM WALLAHS: RESTORATION UK PREMIERE

Amar Akbar Anthony

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Director: Manmohan Desai
Production Company: M.K.D. Films
Executive Producer: Subhash Desai
Producer: Manmohan Desai
Production Controller: Brij Chopra
Associate Director: Anil Nagrath
Assistant Directors: Ketan Desai, Naresh Sharma, Danny Desai
Screenplay: Prayag Raaj
Scenarios: K.K Shukla
Dialogue: Kader Khan
Director of Photography: Peter Pereira
Special Effects: Peter Pereira
Editor: Kamalakar
Art Director: A. Rangraj
Make-up: Govind Pawar
Music: Laxmikant-Pyarelal
Lyricist: Anand Bakshi
Playback Singers: Lata Mangeshkar, Mohammed Rafi, Kishore Kumar, Mahendra Kapoor, Shailendra Singh, Mukesh
Song Recording: D.O. Bhansali
Dance Director: Kamal
Action: Ravi Khanna
Cast:
Vinod Khanna (*Amar*)
Rishi Kapoor (*Akbar*)
Amitabh Bachchan (*Anthony Gonsalves*)
Parveen Babi (*Jenny*)
Nirupa Roy (*Bharati*)
Shabana Azmi (*Laxmi*)
Neetu Singh (*Dr Salma Ali*)
Pran
Jeevan
Yusuf
Mukri
Nazir Hussain
Kamal Kapoor
Hercules
Shivraj
Pratima Devi
Mulchand
Helen
Nadira
Madhumat
Ranjeet
Master Bittu
Master Ravi
Master Tito
Baby Sabina
India 1977
184 mins

Addressing the press after the success of his recent blockbuster *Pathaan* (2023), Shah Rukh Khan referred to the movie's female lead, Deepika Padukone, himself and his co-star, John Abraham, as 'Amar', 'Akbar' and 'Anthony', respectively. Khan was alluding to the faiths that Padukone, himself and Abraham were born into, as well as referencing the Bollywood classic *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977) – a multi-starrer potboiler that accentuated the underlying theme that despite diverse religious beliefs and customs, all Indians are united by love and brotherhood.

Considering the increasingly polarising climate under the current dispensation, Khan's invocation of the iconic film's protagonists was seen as a reminder to every Indian that love for each other needs to triumph over hate and petty differences. Incidentally, *Amar Akbar Anthony*, which was the biggest hit of its time, comes close to rivalling *Pathaan*'s box office collections in India (highest in Hindi cinema), inflation adjusted.

In Manmohan Desai's *Amar Akbar Anthony*, three brothers, Amar (Vinod Khanna), Akbar (Rishi Kapoor) and Anthony (Amitabh Bachchan), separated as children, are brought up by a Hindu police officer, a Muslim tailor and a Catholic priest, respectively. They reunite as adults towards the latter part of the film along with their lost parents (played by Pran and Nirupa Roy) and defeat the villain to ensure an all's-well-that-ends-well climax.

Desai's film reflects how popular culture at its best can sensitively deal with complex, passion-arousing themes such as crime and religion. The filmmaker's efforts towards propagating secularism can be noticed in the casting as well. Parveen Babi and Shabana Azmi, Muslims in real life, played the Catholic Jenny and the Hindu Laxmi, respectively, while Neetu Singh, a Sikh, played Dr Salma Ali.

Last year, to commemorate Amitabh Bachchan's 80th birthday on 11 October, Film Heritage Foundation in partnership with the multiplex chain PVR Cinemas ran a film festival, 'Bachchan Back to the Beginning', from 8 to 11 October across several cities in India. Out of the 11 Bachchan classics curated for the festival, *Amar Akbar Anthony* was one of them, running to packed houses and many film personalities attending the screening in Mumbai.

Its cult status can be gauged from the title of the 2008 Hindi film, *My Name Is Anthony Gonsalves*, alluding to the immensely popular song of the same name from Desai's film. Interesting trivia surrounds the character of Anthony Gonsalves. Pyarelal, who scored the film's soundtrack with Laxmikant, persuaded Desai to change the name of Bachchan's character from Anthony Fernandes to Anthony Gonsalves, so that the film's chartbuster, 'My Name Is Anthony Gonsalves', could be a tribute to his mentor, Anthony Prabhu Gonsalves. The song's opening line, '...sophisticated rhetorician intoxicated by the exuberance of your own verbosity', spoken by Anthony when he emerges from an Easter egg, is from a speech in the British parliament by Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli in 1878.

In mainstream Indian cinema, the success of a film relies heavily on its music. If the songs can get the audience swooning, then it's considered half the job done. Some of the biggest names in the Indian music industry of the time



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+ intro by Programmer Jelena Milosavljevic

Thu 6 Jul 18:10

Projecting the Archive: Son of a Stranger

+ intro by Josephine Botting, BFI Curator

Tue 11 Jul 18:15

Experimenta: Nico Night Part 1: Solitude +

Nina Danino in conversation with BFI National

Archive curator William Fowler + Key

Wed 19 Jul 18:15

Experimenta: Nico Night Part 2: The Inner Scar

(AKA La Cicatrice Intérieure) + intro

Wed 19 Jul 20:30

African Odysseys: Passing Through

+ intro & Q&A

Sat 22 Jul 14:00

African Odysseys: Wattstax + intro

Sat 22 Jul 18:10

Seniors' Free Matinee:

Summertime (aka Summer Madness) + intro

Mon 24 Jul 14:00

Art in the Making: Sickert's London + intro by

historian, writer and artist Kate Aspinall +

Walter Sickert: Painter of the Third Floor Back

Tue 25 Jul 18:10

Silent Cinema: The Signal Tower

+ intro by film historian Kevin Brownlow

Sun 30 Jul 15:40

Relaxed Screening:

Fantasia + intro and discussion

Mon 31 Jul 18:00

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provided vocals for the film's songs, with 'Humko Tumse Ho Gaya Hai Pyar' bringing together four renowned playback singers – Kishore Kumar, Mohammed Rafi, Mukesh and Lata Mangeshkar – for the first and only time. The superhit qawwali 'Parda Hai Parda', sung by Mohammed Rafi and performed by Rishi Kapoor's Amar on screen, continues to be a popular number on radio channels and qawwali-themed musical shows.

Amar Akbar Anthony is the quintessential Bollywood masala film, unabashed in its ostentation of familiar tropes associated with commercial cinema: slapstick comedy, melodrama, implausible action sequences, characters abruptly breaking into song and dance, and leaps of faith defying laws of nature. Desai doesn't waste time hopping on his flight of fantasy as he subverts medical science in the title-card establishing scene itself – a blood transfusion act in a hospital where the recipient receives blood simultaneously from three donors. The stage is set for the audience to be swept away into a rollercoaster ride sans their critical faculties.

Characters fleeing in random cars without possessing keys to them, police falsely concluding from far off that the driver of a crashed car is dead without bothering to inspect it, Bharati's (Nirupa Roy) terminal tuberculosis miraculously disappearing as the film progresses, and many more loopholes are unapologetically flaunted by Desai, as though an exercise in self-mockery. And the mother of all miracles sees Bharati regaining her lost eyesight owing to the blessings of Saint Sai Baba's idol, whose temple she accidentally stumbles upon while escaping the clutches of goons. Desai and his wife were ardent devotees of Sai Baba, who was worshipped by Hindus, Parsis and Muslims alike.

Desai's films are replete with miracles and frequently involve lapses in logic. Bachchan, who has worked with the filmmaker on eight films, once spoke about how Desai would ask his actors to not prepare for roles. 'We were not allowed to ask him questions. His stock reply used to be, "This is not a Satyajit Ray film. You do because I tell you."' In Desai's wonderland, anything was possible – as long as it was entertaining. The man himself said: 'There are a lot of problems on this earth, like where the next meal is coming from... The person who comes to the movies should be happy to see whatever he's seeing.'

Arun A.K., bfi.org.uk, 27 June 2023