

An SVD involved in film industry

Fr. Dominic Emmanuel, a Divine Word Missionary, is heavily involved in the production of a film aimed at the commercial cinema circuit in India.

Indian Catholic church makes Bollywood movie to promote traditional values

by Elizabeth Roche

NEW DELHI, June 8 (AFP) - India's Roman Catholic Church, worried about traditional values breaking down in the country, has joined hands with Bollywood to make a movie highlighting dangers of risky sex.

The Hindi-language film, made in trademark Bollywood style with songs, dance and melodrama, includes an HIV-positive character and is titled "Aisa Kyon Hota Hain" (Why does this happen?").

The film, set for release in July or August, is the brain-child of Dominic Emmanuel, a Catholic priest and spokesman for the Delhi Catholic Archdiocese.

He says it "the first ever instance" of India's Roman Catholic church producing a commercial film.

"There are people who have made video films more along the documentary style but this is purely Bollywood formula with songs and dances," he says.

Bollywood heroine Rati Agnihotri -- who made her debut in the 1981 romantic hit "Ek Duje Ke Liye" (For Each Other) -- plays the lead role of a woman who singlehandedly raises her son after finding her husband cheating on her.

She is proud of her son, who excels in academics and sports, but the boy played by newcomer Aryan Vaid -- better known as the winner of the "Mr International 2000" title -- does not believe in love and commitment.

"The film deals with the consequences of this," says Emmanuel, who plays the role of a college principal in the film.

"The boy tests HIV positive (because of his relationships). But this is not a bleak film, it offers hope with the heroine professing her love for the hero even after the disclosure that he is HIV positive," says Emmanuel.

The film is low-budget, costing just 13 million rupees (288,000 dollars). But the film-makers have been helped by maverick Bollywood producer-director Mahesh Bhatt, whose company, Vishesh Films, is known for its steamy suspense hits, and who will be responsible for the launch and publicity.

Bhatt's involvement was aimed at ensuring the film "does not

FILM RELEASE



Greetings from Fr. Dominic Emmanuel svd.

I hope you do remember about the film I was making on the twin themes of HIV/AIDS and communal harmony. It gives me immense pleasure to share this news with you that the film named "Aisa Kyon Hota Hai" is being released all over India today, that is, Friday, February 17, 2006.

The film is showing in about 9 cinema halls in Delhi, 15 in Mumbai, 5 in Pune, 2 in Ahmedabad, 2 in Jaipur, 1 in Chandigarh, 4 in Kolkotta and several halls in Hyderabad and Chennai. The number of cinema halls will increase in the next week.

I would like you to pass this news around on your network. This is an important feature film with a lot of entertainment, made fully on the Bollywood formula. We have pre-tested this film with many young people and have got very positive feedback from them.

There is also a website <http://www.aisakyonhotahai.com>. Kindly visit the website for more information about the film and caste&crew.

Thanks and Regards,

Fr. Dominic Emmanuel svd.

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become preachy ... but retains its place in the genre of entertainment," says Emmanuel.

Convincing the church hierarchy about the viability of the project was not difficult. But he did encounter sceptics who wondered what he and the church were doing in commercial film production.

He had a ready answer: "Films are the most popular medium in India ... You find more people in the cinema than in the church. So why should the church not reach where you get the masses?"

"Profit certainly is not the motive of making this film. It is just using the vehicle of entertainment to put across a message."

The film, shot in Mumbai, formerly known as Bombay, will be dubbed into Tamil and possibly Telugu, the languages respectively of the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, home to many of India's 5.1 million people living with HIV/AIDS.

India has the second largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world after South Africa with 5.3 million cases.

The film which also has as a theme the need for religious harmony in the country of more than one billion people, was funded by voluntary groups promoting HIV/AIDS awareness and communal harmony.

"The villain who is a college boy brings up the issue of Hindu-Muslim or religious differences everywhere -- in the college canteen, on the basketball court, everywhere," says Emmanuel.

"Ultimately he is expelled" for trying to inflame sectarian passions, he says.

The introduction of this element was necessary after riots in the western state of Gujarat in 2002, Emmanuel says. The clashes claimed around 2,000 lives.

"Father Dominic came to us and said he was deeply concerned about the breakdown of familial ties and communal issues that are vitiating the atmosphere (of secular India) ... how communities are getting polarised," says director Ajay Kanchan.

Lack of a big-name cast, he adds, is compensated by a strong story line and catchy numbers that should attract young filmgoers.

"The story idea is original. It's a very youthful film with a strong emotional resonance," Kanchan says.

"The film communicates hope without preaching," he says. "People should know the HIV virus has moved from high-risk groups to the common population. The film is one families as a whole can watch without any feeling of awkwardness."

Still, the film has to overcome Indian audience resistance to films with HIV/AIDS as a theme. Other movies on the topic by top Bollywood producers such as Subhash Ghai or Yash Chopra have been box office flops.

"There's no sure formula for success," says Emmanuel, who is also hoping the movie can win an international release.

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'Aisa Kyon Hota Hai is entertainment with a message'

The film will hit the cinema halls on February 17

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