

Monsoon Wedding: Matrimonio Indiano, Parte I

Mira Nair, Director (2001)

Please note: This not a literary translation of the photo-essay. This basic translation is a tool to assist intermediate-level Italian learners understand the text. Please see the blog for more information about our translation philosophy.

In writing our photo-essays, we aim for a fluid, standard Italian and then write an English translation to match it. The players in Monsoon Wedding use four languages: English, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu. We adjusted some of the Indian-British syntax and we explain some terminology and culturally specific content that readers might not be familiar with. As always, subtitles are not completely reliable. We had a consultant help us adjust the translations. She also told us which languages were being spoken at various points in the film, because we wanted to reflect just how fluidly the characters move between languages, and which languages they use for which situations.

We hope that this language-learning tool will be engaging and enlightening. We're just telling the story here, not analyzing it. It's no substitute for material written at a native-language level that explores the film in depth!

The images are an important part of the photo-essay. Each paragraph refers to specific images. Even if you don't understand Italian, please read this translation alongside the Italian version on the blog, so that you can have context for the words. These visuals also help us to know the movie better: they not only enrich the story, but they also show camera movements, editing, the symbols chosen by the director and thematic ideas. You will also have access to the links to other references in the blog itself. Note that an underline in this translation document indicates a hyperlink in the cineracconto on the blog.

From far and wide, two families gather at an upper middle class home in Delhi for an arranged marriage. Conflict, comedy, surprise romances, and the revelation of a deep dark secret. Images that explode with the vivid colors of saris and marigolds. At the same time very Indian and very universal, this is a big-hearted tale of community and diaspora.

Lalit Verma, the head of the family,* is stringing up orange marigolds over an arch in the yard of his upper middle class house. His daughter Aditi's engagement party is tonight! Petals fall on his head and in a heap at his feet. The lawn is vivid green. The neatly trimmed bushes stand well ordered in rows. He yells, "Dubey! Dubey!"

A voice from off-screen answers, "He's not here."

*There are many members of this extended family. If you need help understanding who is who, [please see the list here](#).

“He’s not here yet? He’s an impossible fellow!” Lalit grumbles as he tries unsuccessfully to arrange the garlands on the arch.

Finally, he gives up, and he walks towards the house calling out to his wife in English, “Pimmi, please bring the phone!”

Pimmi runs out with the phone and hands it to him saying, “Lalit, do you want something else: Tea? *Nimbu pani?*”*

“No, no,” he replies, walking away with the phone, “and that bloody bastard Dubey hasn’t come yet.”

“Oh, dear!” she replies sympathetically in Punjabi.

**Indian lemonade*

Lalit dials and puts the phone to his ear muttering, “He wants money, but he doesn’t want to work.”

He walks under the arch as someone answers the phone. “Dubey? Lalit Verma, who else? Very kind of you to answer,” he adds angrily. He looks around and then yells into the phone, “What’s going on? There’s no one here!”

Meanwhile, Pimmi runs upstairs, calling the maid, “Alice!”

When we see Alice, a graceful young woman wearing a bright red sari and carrying a tray, the way the light shines on her tells us that she might just be the star of this story...

Pimmi instructs her in Hindi, “Fry the *pakoras*. * Tea for the master. Hurry!”

Alice puts her tray on a table that has already been set with several plates.

*A deep-fried chickpea snack.

Seated at the table, Pimmi's sister Shashi says in English, “Pimmi, I’m sorry to say, but Lalit gets too tense. It’s not good. You’ve seen so many young men having heart attacks these days.”

An older woman says, “God forbid! The wedding is so soon.”

“And Lalit is doing everything single-handed.”

“Hundreds of things to get tense about.”

Out in the yard, Lalit is still on the phone, talking to Dubey in Hindi. “The marigold gate is falling apart. The flowers are everywhere. What’s going on?”

Now we see the event planner P.K. Dubey, a gangly man with a scarf fashioned into a sort of ascot. He cheerfully shrugs off his client’s concerns and tries to calm him, “No need to get so upset, sir. Flowers? What’s a few flowers?”

Dubey walks while he talks on the phone, behind him we see stacks of bricks and men at work. Hammers tap. He seems to be at a construction site. “For you, I’ll bring Kashmir’s Mughal Garden.* Just say the word. I’m stranded in a traffic jam.”

Lalit counters, “Enough! Get here on the double!”

“Ten minutes, exactly and approximately,” Dubey assures him in English.

**Actually not one garden, but a group of lavish, architecturally sophisticated gardens that include pools, gardens and canals within their walls.*

Just as the conversation is ending, Lalit sees a car rolling backwards into the driveway, blasting hip-hop music. “What’s that idiot up to?” he mutters, as he walks to the car.

The car is backing up way too fast and brushes against the tidy rows of potted shrubbery at the edge of the driveway. Lalit scolds the driver, a handsome fellow in a T shirt and a small hat. It’s his nephew, Rahul, who defends himself: “I’ve only got one hand to drive with.”

“Who told you to break your hand, idiot? Where were you?”

“I went to the airport to get your sister and her husband.”

“Where are they?”

“I didn’t see them.”

“What do you mean by ‘you didn’t see them’?”

“I don’t even know what they look like.”

“Why didn’t you hold a placard that says, ‘Mr. and Mrs. Tej Puri from the USA’? They could have seen you.”

In response, Rahul yawns and stretches, opening his arms.

“Why are you yawning so much?”

“Cause I’ve hardly slept, not to mention that I got back from Australia yesterday.”

Rahul agrees to go back to the airport and Lalit, not at all mollified, tells him, “Make sure you’re there on time. Don’t put on the AC when you go to pick them up. Take off that stupid hat.”

“Chill, man,” he responds.

As the next scene opens, a television is showing a cooking show. Pimmi stands at the doorway of her son’s bedroom, wearing a white robe patterned with red flowers. With a pained expression, she asks, “Oh, God, Varun. What are you doing?” Varun looks at her, frowning. He’s lying on his belly, watching the screen and writing in a notebook. “Why haven’t you gotten ready? Didn’t you hear Papa? He’s getting so angry.”

“Ma, it’s the last step –” he says, talking about his cooking show. She grabs his wrist. “Coconut curry, Ma!” he protests again.

“No,” she says, pulling off his shirt, “Now don’t give me a hard time. And this TV, I’m so sick of it. Come on, hurry up!”

She switches to Punjabi, reflecting the family’s ethnic identity, and scolds him lightheartedly, before changing back to English: “Did you change your underwear?”

“Ma!” he protests.

She goes back to Punjabi, “Did you? Out with the truth!”

He laughs, caught red-handed. She squeezes his cheeks affectionately and gives him a big kiss.

The next scene opens on a busy Delhi street, where there is a boxy white car with a 1960s look. It’s an Ambassador, an Indian-made car not seen much anymore. A female passenger is seated in the back seat.

At journey’s end, the passenger, a young woman, her hair cut short in a modern style, wearing bright red lipstick and a sari in shades of green, enters a TV studio. It is Aditi and it is her engagement party that Lalit is preparing. We hear a man’s voice asking rhetorically, “Just because India has gone global, should we embrace everything? What about our ancient culture? Our traditions, our values?”

The panelists of the TV program – some in Western dress and others in traditional clothing – are discussing censorship, in English. Aditi smiles, enjoying the show.

The camera pans around the studio showing the panelists, the TV crew and the audience, all listening attentively. The lone woman panelist, in a purple patterned sari, interjects in Hindi.

Vikram, the moderator, is carefully groomed: his hair greased back, a trim beard and mustache, the pastel shirt cuff protruding just so from the sleeve of his jacket, a bulky and expensive wristwatch. He introduces a voice actor: “one of the top dubbists in Delhi.” The woman enters shyly, dressed modestly in an aqua sari, and the female panelist asks her to read their new script.

The dubbist puts on a headset and begins to read her lines. She begins with a sexual moan. Then, breathing heavily, she recites in Hindi, “Give it to me. Come on. Again, big boy, more.” Some of the panelists – but not all – laugh at this explicit monologue delivered so deadpan and so out of context.*

**This scene is Director Mira Nair’s comment on censorship in India, where films of social significance are often censored, while those of little social value are not.*

The dubbist goes on, “I like it like that. Give me more.” The crew and the studio audience giggle nervously.

The demonstration finally finished, Vikram says, “We have to take a short break, ladies and gentlemen, but please stay tuned to delhi.com.” The audience applauds.

He leaves his seat and Aditi follows him.

We catch up with him in his dressing room, looking at his phone. Aditi enters and they greet each other quietly. We see them in the mirror’s reflection.

“How are you?” he asks Aditi in English.

“Fine.”

“Are you happy?” he asks, referring to her upcoming marriage.

“Yeah,” she answers but when he kisses her, she readily accepts. Wait... isn't her wedding in a few days? And it is not to him.

“I miss you,” he murmurs.

Just then an assistant bursts into the room. Aditi jumps from the embrace. “Oh, hi, Aditi,” the woman says. “Sorry. We're starting in 20 seconds.”

“I'll be there,” Vikram tells her.

“Okay. Sorry,” the assistant whispers, and backs out the door with a complicit smile.

“I have to go,” he apologizes to Aditi. He kisses her hand and leaves, telling her to call him. She gazes at him mournfully.

Back in the car, Aditi is passing by a park. A red disk of sun is setting behind a row of trees.

A woman's voice asks, “Aditi, why are you doing this?”

“Doing what? What am I doing?”

It's Aditi's cousin, Ria . “I don't think you're ready for marriage,” she says, a little sternly.

“I just want to settle down,” explains Aditi.

“So, what do you do? Get married to some guy selected by Mommy and Daddy. You've barely known him for a couple of weeks. You are so mature,” she finishes sarcastically.

Aditi explains, “I can't wait to see if Vikram's wife is ever going to agree to divorce him. I've read too many magazines. I know it may never happen.”

“Do you get all your life's directions from fucking *Cosmopolitan*?”

“Don't get so superior with me.”

“But we're family,” responds Ria, “I can tell you what I think, and I will.”

“That's right, my older unmarried cousin, Ria,” Aditi replies meanly. “Now what would she know about passion?”

Ria, wounded, looks away, out the car window.

Aditi feels guilty immediately, “I didn’t mean that.”

Ria turns back to her. “For all this talk of passion, how about marrying for love, Aditi?”

At last Dubey has arrived at the Verma home, bringing his employees. The men joke with one another companionably. He asks if they’d like some tea and then calls out his order for four teas to someone offscreen.

Lalit greets him a little sarcastically, “King Dubey!”

“At your service,” he replies, extending his arms forward in a humble gesture, notwithstanding that his hands are holding his phone.

“Gracing us with your presence?” asks Lalit, as he descends the garland-strewn stairs. With a towel over his shoulders, he is putting shaving soap onto his face. The two men continue to talk, switching easily from Hindi to English.

“Your daughter is like my daughter. Why worry?” insists Dubey.

“The wedding is in four days,” says Lalit, annoyed. “The groom is on his way. Want me to lose face?”

This is an ironic statement for a man with a mask of shaving lather up to his eyes.

The ring of Dubey’s telephone interrupts the conversation. “Important call,” he explains to Lalit. He yells into the phone: “Call my pager, dammit!” and snaps it shut.

“More important things to do?” asks Lalit, still brushing foam onto his face. “You’re an event manager. Fix this now!”

Dubey briskly summons his employees: “Fix it! Insolent bums! Want tea, do you? To work!”

Lalit adds for good measure, “I want this done now!”

Up the driveway come Aditi and Ria with shopping bags. Apparently, they’ve had to leave their car because Dubey’s van is blocking the way.

Lalit orders, “King Dubey, move your van.”

Dubey screams to his workers, “Move the van!”

Lalit scolds his daughter for the lateness; people are about to arrive. He tells the girls to get dressed. He teases his daughter Aditi, brushing her face with shaving foam before she goes inside.

“How lovely,” comments Dubey as the girls depart. Lalit, still with shaving soap on his face, stares at him disapprovingly. It seems that Dubey has forgotten his place in this complex social microcosm. “Take it easy!” Dubey responds.

Lalit’s scorn is focused next on his nephew Rahul, who’s lounging on the stairs.

“What are you doing here?” Lalit snaps at him.

“Just chillin’.”

“Just chilling! Idiot...” Lalit mutters as he goes back inside.

At the sound of his pager, Dubey whips it out and gazes at it with disgust.

In this large cast of characters, everyone is busy doing something – even if it is just chillin’.

Back in the house, Pimmi – dressed up, but still with rollers in her hair – is having a cigarette in the bathroom. Hearing Aditi’s voice – “Hi, Mom, we’re back!” – she launches into a series of wild motions with her hands, to disperse the smoke. She flushes the cigarette down the toilet and sprays air freshener, waving the spray canister around frantically.

Out in the garden, Alice collects the tea glasses that Dubey’s men have left scattered amidst the marigolds and sets them on her tray, as lilting music in Urdu plays offscreen.*

Today, the weather's very fickle

Some storm is on its way...

You're beautiful, and the season is young...

Alice seems to float along. For a moment, she glances back at Dubey, who’s on his phone.

**One of the most popular singers in India, Mohammed Rafi, sings this romantic classic in the film.*

Picking up one of the bright orange marigolds that are strewn along the steps, she tosses it gently in the air, while the tune plays. Then she catches the marigold and tucks it carefully behind one ear. We notice she’s wearing a silver crucifix.

In contrast with Alice's restrained and gentle movements, Dubey is extrovert and loud. He's talking on the phone with his mother in Hindi: "I'll stop at the temple. It may get late."

His urgent gestures and harsh voice alternate with images of Alice, who seems to be swaying along in slow motion with the music.

"No, I won't eat at home," he continues. "I'll come late." As he paces heedlessly, Alice, perhaps lost in her own thoughts, walks right into him. The tray of glasses falls to the ground at his feet with a crash.

Alice stoops to pick up the shards, staring wide-eyed up at him. "Forgive me," she says quietly. He winces in pain, but is oblivious to her. After all, she's just a lowly servant. We hear him tell his mom to let him take care of the stock market. He's annoyed that, when she calls him on his mobile, he's paying 12 rupees a minute. Dubey is a man much put upon.

Above him, one of his employees is stretched out on the ledge of a wall positioning marigolds. Dubey glances down and sees that a marigold has landed on his shirt. Moving in slow motion, like Alice, he studies the flower, as more petals drift around him. Then, as if in a dream, he pops it in his mouth.

He looks back – in slow motion – in Alice's direction, looking confused, chewing the flower thoughtfully. Is a spell being cast? As the beguiling music continues to play, it certainly seems a magical moment.

Ria, in her robe, is getting ready for the evening. While she examines some clothes in the closet, she hears someone giggling: it's her little cousin, Aliyah, sitting on the closet floor with a big book on her lap.

Aliyah brags, "I saw cousin Aditi naked and I almost saw you naked, too."

Ria retorts, "You're so disgusting. Get out, now!"

"What does this mean?" Aliyah asks, pointing to a word in her book. It's an exam preparation book in English.

Ria glances at it. "Why are you so irritating?"

"Why are you still not married?" The ten year old girl knows how to get to her.

"Enough!" she says, frowning and shaking her head. "Get dressed for the engagement party."

In one of the bathrooms, C.L. hums to himself as he struggles to arrange his hair. Aliyah approaches him, the book in hand.

He adjusts his handkerchief in his pocket and sprays on some cologne, humming happily.

Smiling at Aliyah, he says, “Hello, sweetie! What is it, my child?”

“What does this word mean?” she asks him, pointing at a page.

He takes the book from her and looks.

She reads, “It’s *uxorious*.”

He exclaims, “In God’s name, what on earth is written here? There is no such word, my child. It’s a spelling mistake. There should be an *l* here. It’s *luxurious*,” he says, not knowing the word that she’s asked about.

He hands the book back, sprays himself again – crazily, right into his eyes – and then propels her out of the room.

NOTE: “The English words that appear in the dialog are “uxorious” and “luxurious.” The latter word is the cousin’s misspelled version of “luxurious”. We’ve adjusted the word to give an equivalent mistake in English, so the translation of these paragraphs don’t quite match.

Out in the courtyard, Lalit is going over the setup with his nephew Rahul, who will be the barman at the evening’s festivities. Lalit is dressed in a long *kurta*,* white pants and sandals, all ready for the engagement party. He shows Rahul where he’ll be working.

* *A long, loose shirt.*

Continuing his grumpy ways, he scolds, “No need to be so happy about being the barman. You’re not supposed to touch even one drop.” He smacks his nephew on the head. “Understand?”

“Okay.”

“A barman should be absolutely sober. Keep this list,” he says, handing over a piece of paper. “Make sure the servants don’t swipe anything, eh? Make sure all these bottles are there. Make small drinks for everybody. Not too large.”

Suddenly Lalit remembers, “The whiskey hasn’t come yet! Uday was supposed to bring it. Here he comes.” A small red car pulls into the driveway. “My unpunctual brother!”

Uday stops the car. Lowering his sunglasses, he looks out the window and cheerfully says, “Good morning!”

Not bothering with the niceties, Lalit gets right down to business, “Have you brought the whiskey?” “What do you think?” he answers grouchily.

Uday’s wife gets out of the car, with a big smile. “We got some real Scotch from Uday’s client.” “Thank you, Sona. That’s so nice of you.”

Ayesha – another of the many cousins – emerges from the car, leans over the roof and greets her Uncle Lalit. Rahul raises his sunglasses to get a better look.

“Why aren’t you staying over?” Lalit asks her.

“I have to study for my exam.”

Sona walks around the car and tells Lalit, “I hope my little Aliyah didn’t trouble you.”

“No, she’s a little delight.”

Rahul and Ayesha gaze at each other with interest across the car roof.

“Let’s take the whiskey in!” Lalit demands, kneeling next to the car. “Australian idiot! Pick it up and take it in.”

Looking at his watch, Lalit complains to his brother, “This is no time for a family member to arrive.”

“It’s only 4:00,” protests Uday. “You get stressed over nothing. Just relax.”

Uday introduces his daughter to Rahul and leaves them to unload the whiskey.

Noticing Ayesha’s bare arm, Rahul comments, “You have a tattoo.”

“Yeah.”

Next we see Dubey way up on a structure of bamboo poles, trying to carry on a conversation on the phone. “Talk fast. I can’t catch the network,” he yells into his phone. Then, “Let me come down. One minute!” As the camera pans, we see just how precariously he has been perched on the structure.

He to come down. “Yes, I’ll be there. That’s correct. Okay, bye.” Smiling, he jumps down to the ground with a small thud. He snaps his phone closed.

He reflects for a moment. “Life’s such a comedy,” he observes. “No signal up there. But there’s one down here.” He laughs at the absurdities of life and at himself. He’s a good natured man, after all.

The three young women are upstairs getting ready for the evening. Ayesha comments to Ria, “The virtuous virgin look really suits me. I think your cousin Rahul would really like it.”

Ria replies, “You have to know this: I heard your mother tell him and his sister that your bra size was 36C.”

Alice is working unobtrusively in the room. She’s not really part of the group, but she laughs along with the others.

Aditi asks, “Why would she do that?”

**Equivalent to a US 36C (an ample size).*

“I know that!” answers Ria, “but we can’t tell them it’s 32A. I mean: breasts like baby mangoes.” She gestures with her hands to explain better.

**Equivalent to a US 36C (a small size).*

Their laughter is interrupted by the sound of a car horn. Alice looks out the window. She sees Lalit running toward the car.

“Dubey, come on!” he calls.

Alice exclaims enthusiastically, “It’s the groom!”

At that, Aditi’s smile fades. A look of concern – maybe even dread – comes over her face. “Oh, shit,” she mutters.