

## “Monsoon Wedding” Parte II

Mira Nair, Director (2001)

A caravan of cars has arrived and the family goes out to meet the guests: the Rais – Hemant, the groom, with his parents – and other relatives.

“Welcome! Welcome!” cries out Lalit. “Congratulations, Mr. Rai.”

“Thank you, thank you,” replies Hemant’s father, Mohan (Roshan Seth).

Lalit introduces him to Pimmi’s brother, C.L., who’s flown in from Muscat, Oman, and embraces him.

He beckons his nephew to lend a hand: “Rahul, idiot, come here!”

The air is filled with the voices of people greeting each other. The families exchange gifts: containers of food and flowers. Even Varun has his arms full! Mohan’s scarlet vest, the women’s vivid saris, the flowers: the screen is a riot of color.

Somehow in this crowd, Lalit has gotten Hemant alone. “Hello, young man, how are you? So, excited?” he asks. Then, raising his voice, he announces, “Soon to be in the family way.” This gets some chuckles and a few raised eyebrows from the people there.

“So, do you like India?” Lalit continues.

“Yes,” the other answers, shyly.

“Better than Houston?” The answer is inaudible, but Lalit comments, “Good, good, good. India needs young men like you. Computer engineers are India’s biggest export.” As Lalit knows, the couple will be living in the United States.

Inside, Lalit offers a drink to the father of the groom. Mohan asks for “Scotch on the rocky-olies.”\*

A little puzzled, Lalit asks, “Rocky-olies means ice?”

“Two lumps exactly.” Mohan indicates the amount with his fingers.

His wife calls across the room, “I’ll have the same, thanks.”

Lalit tells Rahul to prepare the whiskies, “Two cubes of ice, exactly.”

*\*Note: "Tiny cubes" and "lumps" are bizarre ways of saying "on the rocks" and "cubes" in Italian. They correspond to the bizarre way in which Mohan says it in English. The correct term for on the rocks is "con ghiaccio" and ice cube is "cubetti di ghiaccio."*

And now we see that the young ladies have entered the room. All look beautiful in their traditional dress. Hemant's father opens his arms wide to Aditi, saying, "Oh, my goodness, look at you."

Hemant watches them from across the room. "Oh, how lovely you look. Live a long life, child,"\*  
Mohan concludes, kissing Aditi's forehead and then stepping back.

\*"Jeete raho beta" – literally "Keep on living, child" – is a standard way of blessing a younger person.

Rahul is tending bar, assisted by C.L. and Varun. Asking for a drink, Ayesha makes his acquaintance again.

Aditi's duty now is to introduce herself to her future in-laws. First, she kneels before Hemant's grandmother, Saroj, who gives her a bracelet and comments that Aditi is such a lovely girl: "So fair." She also explains to Aditi why God has made this marriage happen in such a hurry: so that she would see a great-grandson before dying. We watch this exchange in a suffocating close-up, reflecting exactly how Aditi must be feeling.

The girl turns her head to see her cousin Ria smiling at her, perhaps in encouragement, but also as if to say, "I told you so." Aditi certainly was not ready for this marriage.

Despite his uncle's admonitions, Rahul is drinking.

Lalit takes the video camera and Pimmi tells Aditi to say hello to Hemant. Bride and groom greet each other tentatively, as little Aliyah looks on.

Shashi intervenes, saying, "Enough! Give them some privacy." So they are seated on a sofa in the center of the room, surrounded by chattering guests.

The grandmother we met earlier has turned her attention to Ria. "Don't you feel like getting married?" she asks. Ria's bright smile fades. Her mood darkens, but only for an instant. She has lived with her pain a long time and she knows how to fake it.

In a beautiful composition of sinuous forms and shimmering colors, many women's hands arrange Aditi's jewelry. Rahul and Ayesha are talking quietly at the bar, until Lalit summons him: "Rahul, idiot, come here. Hold the camera."

Posing for a group portrait, Aditi and Hemant sit together on the sofa, surrounded by their families. He seems to have relaxed a little. But her expression is hard to read: dread, disbelief, suppressed panic?

"Put on the ring! Put on the ring!" instructs Lalit, an inveterate micro-manager. Hemant puts a ring on Aditi's finger, as everyone applauds. Next it's her turn: everyone applauds as she also puts the ring on him.

Hemant smiles, but Aditi looks sad. It's as if she'd rather be somewhere else, with someone else.

They're offered pastries on a platter and told, "Sweeten your mouths, my dears." Lalit takes photos as they each put a small pastry in the other's mouth to "sweeten their lives."

With the sudden arrival of Tej, who's married to Lalit's sister, the noisy chatter of the room becomes even louder. We notice that Ria looks stricken.

With a warm embrace, Lalit says, "Just in time! My dear brother-in-law!" Pointing proudly to Varun, he adds, "Look at him. He's almost a young man." But Tej seems to be looking across the room.

"How did you manage?" Lalit asks. "I sent Rahul to fetch you at the airport. He told me the flight was late."

"No, it was not late. Nobody was there at the airport and so we took a cab and came."

"You had to take a cab?!" Lalit is outraged that his brother-in-law had such a poor welcome at the airport.\*

"It's okay," Tej assures him.

*\*Travelers who arrive after a long journey who don't find anyone waiting for them: a similar scene opens Rocco and His Brothers, another film dealing with the challenges of a family in diaspora. In that case, Rosaria, the mother of the family, can't believe that her son Vincenzo is not at the Milan railroad station to welcome her and his brothers, who have just arrived from the South.*

*Coincidentally, those travelers soon find themselves at an engagement party. But in the Milan party conflicts erupt, while in Delhi a dark secret festers beneath the surface.*

But Lalit turns to his nephew. “Goodness, Rahul, you idiot. I sent you to the airport and you tell me their flight was late? What a complete idiot.”

Rahul looks upset. His mother, Shashi, reproaches Lalit: “He’s been working day and night. He doesn’t know India.”

But Lalit disagrees. “Number One most stupid duffer.”\*

*\*Duffer means idiot in British English.*

Greatly offended, Shashi mutters in Punjabi, “Calls my son an idiot, then calls him a duffer. Who does he think he is?”

Unnoticed, Alice struggles with the guests’ huge suitcases.

Ria sits alone, with a pained and haunted look. She declines the offer of treats from a platter with a gentle movement of her head.

Lalit explains to Mohan, “This is Tej Puri. Married to my sister, Vijaya. After my older brother, Surinder, passed away, Tej has been the head of the family. He has really looked after us.”

So far, everyone at this party has been speaking English, but Tej greets the grandmother in Hindi, saying, “Namaste.”\*

*\* In India, it is customary to greet others with the Hindu namaste gesture: a small bow, with hands pressed together up at the heart, as if in prayer. Literally, it means, “I bow to the divine in you.” But nowadays, it is just a common, respectful greeting.*

Then someone catches his eye. “Ria! Is that you?”

We see her unwilling face partly obscured by Alice, who is serving food to the guests. An invisible presence, Alice is keeping this party functioning.

“Come here, come here, come here,” Tej repeats. At last, Ria stands up and approaches him, looking down, without meeting his gaze.

He kisses her forehead and stands back to look at her. He says, “God bless. You look really good.”

With his hand, he raises her chin so that she has to look at him. She looks angry, her eyes filled with tears. He gives her a pat on the head.

Outside, event planner P.K. Dubey and his crew are eating and laughing. Dubey is telling about a client who, although broke, was insistent on a “White House” theme for his daughter’s wedding.

As the men laugh raucously, Alice approaches hesitantly from behind. She calls Dubey, who answers rudely, without even turning to look at her.

“We need more ice,” she tells him in Hindi.

“What?”

“Ice!” she exclaims in English.

Dubey says impatiently to his men in Hindi, “I’ve told them once, I’ve told them a thousand times, they will need ice. They never listen.” Then he continues to eat, leaving Alice standing there.

“Now what?” he asks brusquely, not even bothering to glance at her.

“Do you need some water?”

“Eh?”

“Water?” she repeats pointing to the big empty bottle on the ground at his side.

He seems surprised. He reaches and picks up the bottle, and regards it, frowning. He turns and looks at Alice for the first time. “Here,” he says, handing her the bottle with a puzzled look.

She is about to leave, but she asks one last question: “Fridge water or tap water?”

When he turns back to her, he seems almost awed or touched.\* “Fridge water,” he says quietly.

*\*In India, workers are not asked their preference. Fridge water – a relief in that hot weather – is for guests and normal tap water for workers.*

She wobbles her head, showing that she acknowledges his wish.\*

“Thank you,” he adds in English as a sign of courtesy. Something has touched him. Alice.

*\*Indians commonly use this gesture as a sign of comprehension or agreement.*

When Dubey turns back to his little group, he is subdued and pensive, for once.

Someone breaks into a love song:

*"The eyes meet, dropping a hint,*

*Sitting idly, I find an anchor to life"*

The others join in, teasing him.

Dubey orders, “Shut up, you assholes!” and they all laugh.

Back at the party, Alice is invisible again. The shot of her is so quick that we wonder ourselves whether we even saw her.

The groom’s family has left but Lalit and his relatives are still gathered around a table. He offers a cigar to Tej, who declines.

“America makes everyone quit smoking,” complains Lalit.

Rahul, seated next to Ayesha, lightly touches her hand. More than one romance is blossoming in this story!

When someone says, “The Rais are so cultured,” Lalit protests, recalling Mohan’s *rocky-olies*. He says, “Speak a little English and you become a very cultured family.” He adds disdainfully, “Mohan Rao,” mispronouncing his future in-laws’ last name.

Changing the subject, Lalit tells Tej, “I wanted to talk to you about Ria’s plans” and summons her: “Ria, come here please.” He continues, “Ria wants to study in America. We were hoping you could perhaps give us some advice.” Ria looks downcast.

One of the aunts asks, “What do you want to do, Ria?”

“I’m applying for creative writing programs.”

“She wants to become a writer,” confirms Lalit proudly.

“Very good,” answers Tej, wobbling his head.

The grandmother asks Ria, “Where do you think the money will come from?”

“My teacher’s salary?” she suggests.

“Make her understand,” the grandmother tells Lalit, “Why can’t she be like Aditi and do the right thing at the right time?”

Lalit counters, “There’s lots of money in writing these days.”

Uday chimes in, “That girl who won the Booker Prize became an overnight millionaire. Just one book!”\*

With Ria’s hand resting lightly on his shoulder, Lalit says, “Who knows, it might happen.”

*\*She is referring to Arundhati Roy, the Indian author who won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 1997 for her novel The God of Small Things.*

“Ria, you must go to the States,” adds Shashi. “You know, Umang is also there.” Umang is her son.

There are cries of delight through the room.

Tej says, “You must give us his phone number.”

Sashi exclaims, “He’s coming here tonight!” And she adds, “We are hoping that Ria and Umang will like each other.”

“Two weddings in one!” jokes Uday.

Then Uday begins singing and the people around the table cover their ears or laugh quietly.

His brother Lalit starts a different song and soon everyone is singing and clapping, including Ria. At first, Uday looks a little hurt, but then he joins in, too.

With everyone distracted, Aditi slips out of the room and picks up the phone, which sits right next to the basket of nuts that Hemant brought as a gift. The basket glows golden and red at the bottom of the frame.

As she walks away to make her call in privacy, her father catches up with her. He puts a *dupatta* over her head and holds her captive for a moment.\*

\* *A dupatta is a large, multi-purpose scarf.*

But she escapes and leaves the room, walking past the cousins who are celebrating her engagement with a song.

When she finds that her little brother is watching TV in the room that she has chosen, she says sternly, “Varun: out.”

“What’s your problem?”

She grabs him by his shirt and lifts him off the couch, demanding, “Can’t I have a little bloody privacy in my own house?”

As she pushes him away, he protests, “It’s my house, too, you know.”

Varun leaves the room and she shuts the door behind him. Outside, the party is in full swing, and no one is concerned about Aditi’s absence.

Varun joins the party sulking. From off-screen, his father asks, “Varun, what happened to you?” Ria gives him a questioning look.

When Aditi dials, it’s Vikram’s wife who answers, “Mrs. Mehta speaking, who’s this?” Aditi hangs up.

Asking for quiet in the room, Tej makes an announcement: “I’m thinking that if Ria wants to study in America, I will fund her entire education.”

Lalit protests, “No, no, no.”

Ria looks horrified.

But Tej insists, “No arguments. This is my family. I won’t listen to you or Ria’s mother. If she wants to write, we must encourage her.”

Lalit tries to explain that this wasn’t at all his intention. Switching to Hindi, he says, “I can still work.” Tej shouts, “The decision is final!” Then more quietly, he adds, “We’ll talk about it later, okay?”

Changing the subject, Tej says, “Now you tell us what needs to be done for the wedding.” His wife adds, “Now you don’t have to worry about anything. We are here. We’ll take care of everything.” Overcome with emotion, Lalit embraces his brother-in-law. “Oh my God, I don’t know what to say.” Ria looks stunned. Her eyes fill with tears.

Lalit goes on, “This is enough for me, that we are all here together. It’s wonderful, isn’t it, Pimmi? After so many years... I think this is the first time since Surinder passed away that our whole family is here together.”

Noticing that Ria is crying, Lalit tries to comfort her, making a mistaken assumption. “Don’t cry. I know you are missing him. We are all missing your father. But he’s here with us. Your papa’s hand will always be on this family. Always.”

Suddenly the lights go out. “This is India’s big problem,” comments Lalit. Pimmi lights a candle and Lalit shouts for Dubey, who is responsible for fixing anything that goes wrong. A phone rings.

In the darkness, Pimmi calls for Alice to answer the phone, but Ria says she’ll get it.

Lalit tells Rahul to go start the generator.

He protests, “I don’t even know where it is.”

“It’s behind the house, idiot.”

“Come, I’ll show you,” says Ayesha.

It’s Umang who’s calling. Uday takes the phone from Ria and asks, “When are you arriving?” In turn, Shashi takes the phone, but the line goes dead.

Dubey is fumbling around in the dark. He lights a match and looks around, befuddled. When the match burns down to his fingers, he winces at the pain and curses.

Alice appears behind him, carrying a lit candle. Intent on lighting another match, he doesn’t notice her. Finally, Alice clears her throat to get his attention.

His expression changes at once. With a big smile, he announces: “All the fuses have blown.”

“Pardon?”

“Which is the house fuse?” he asks.

She shows him.

“I’ll fix it right away,” he says. “The light, a little closer, please.” Fiddling with the fuse box, he asks her to move the light first this way, then that. Finally he says, “Your shadow is in the way.” Then, “A little closer.”

Now we catch up with Rahul and Ayesha, who are sweating like crazy as they crank the handle to start the diesel generator to restore power to the house. She’s not wearing her sari anymore. She is wearing a tank top; he’s in a T-shirt.

We go back to Dubey and Alice at the fuse box. The lights suddenly go on. Alice realizes it. But Dubey continues working furiously.

He tries to strike up a conversation with her. “It’s been hot today.”

She breaks the news to him: “Switch it on. The power is back.”

He looks at her, mortified.

She gives him a sweet smile, blows out the candle and leaves.

In slow motion – that seems to be the motif of this love that is unfolding – he walks to the door in her wake. “What a silly asshole I am,” he mutters to himself, in the darkness.

Alice walks outside in the dark, humming softly to herself. She picks the petals off a marigold, at first one by one and then in great bunches, until she gets to the heart, which she pensively puts into her mouth. In the distance, thunder rumbles. The screen goes dark.