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The Guru

Abstract

This is a review of *The Guru* (2002).

Ramu Gupta (Jimi Mistry) wants to make it big. Lured by a friend's promises of a New York penthouse, a Mercedes, and a bevy of women, he leaves India for the United States. Immediately upon arrival he realizes he's been duped. Instead of a luxury flat, he's sharing accommodations with three other men and the sports car is a taxi cab. Since prospects for becoming a film sensation also aren't forthcoming, he reluctantly takes a job as a waiter in an Indian restaurant. His situation brightens some when he gets an audition with Dwain (Michael McKean), a director at Ramrod Productions, unbeknownst to him, purveyors of pornography. Cast alongside the blond, blue-eyed Sharonna (Heather Graham), Gupta misses his cinematic chance when a part of him fails to perform.

But opportunity arises again while he's a server at a swank socialite's home. When the evening's entertainment, Swami Bu, passes out, Gupta dons a turban and guru garb and takes over, leading the attendees in a Bollywood song and dance routine, mesmerizing them with moves from the Macarena and dispensing carnal advice he's learned from Sharonna. Gupta impresses his audience with his exotic origins and ancient wisdom and soon becomes the talk of the town, earning the moniker, "Guru of Sex." Soon, he's gaining riches and fame, now only if he could get the one thing he desires most of all - Sharonna's heart.

Written by Tracey Jackson, "*The Guru*" combines Bollywood flash with the predictability of a Hollywood boy-meets-girl formula. Although the film is more

entertainment than intellectual exercise, it does provide cinemagoers with a moral: To thine own self be true or more specifically, "you must move your feet to the rhythm of your heart." A self-proclaimed Indophile, Jackson turned to screenwriting when roles became too few and far between for this former actress. Her intentions are good, and she wants to get behind the stereotypes - that some porn stars are wholesome and not all Indians are sages - unfortunately, she doesn't try hard enough. One of the characters in the film explains that "it's called the American Dream because it only happens when you're asleep," a sentiment so brilliantly explored in *"Fight Club."* It's true that in Hollywood Indians don't become A-list celebrities, unless they are named Apu and happen to be a cartoon character.

As she fails to bring much depth to her discussion on Hollywood stereotyping, so too does she disappoint when she turns to the subject of religion in the United States. In the film, Lexi (Marisa Tomei), a neurotic, codependent socialite is symbolic of everything that's shallow about the West's attraction to all things Eastern and its propensity for flavor-of-the-month, sound bite wisdom. The scene where Gupta performs the Macarena for his upper crust audience is indicative of this. Although his friends, right away, recognize the dance, Lexi is either too unaware or too pretentious to understand she's being duped. "I think it's one of those dervish, spiritual transient things," she tells her guests and joins in. It isn't until the end, when she's given up all her material possessions and ties that she finds her

"guru within." Gupta also learns a similarly trite lesson - that money and fame aren't everything without honesty and love.

What could have been a marvelous criticism of false gurus and the people who fall under their charms gets lost in a sea of fluttering eyelids and we've-seen-it-before-culture-clashes. It's a shame because had this script been given a bit more insight and a lot less cliché, it would have been a notable effort.