

The Holy Cow

Synopsis

Second-generation Indian-American corporate exec ANWESH AGARWAL is at a crossroads in his life. Behind the closed doors of his high-achieving life in Stamford CT, he's on the verge of divorce from his wife; he can barely talk to his daughter; and disillusionment with his job as head of Insolvency at a Manhattan corporate raider firm is leaving him on the verge of walking out on his career to go take charge of an Indian restaurant in New Jersey.

Anwesh's life's mess started a little while back, when his father, PRAJESH, died, and bequeathed his son the family business, New Jersey's first and famous Indian restaurant, The Holy Cow. Prajesh opened the the restaurant after arriving in America in the 1960s, and it soon became the talk of New Jersey, the lifeblood of the community of Edison and the building block of what to this day is 'Little India'. Except these days, what Anwesh has inherited is a shadow of what it was in its heyday... it looks shabby, it boasts a sticky carpet, the sitar music sounds like it's been on a loop for decades and even the customary fish in its fish-tank look bored... oh, and the menu stinks.

But what Anwesh doesn't realise is that he was never supposed to inherit The Holy Cow! Prajesh, in the mumbling dotage of his deathbed, pleaded with Anwesh to SELL the place, not SAVE it... "*The Holy Cow will drag you to hell*"... but the old man's last words were in Hindi, and Anwesh's Hindi is rusty. Thanks to subtitling, we're in on the misunderstanding; Anwesh isn't... he's promised to save The Holy Cow!

The news of Prajesh's death reaches Anwesh's wife ANISHA, a dentist, as she's about to drill on a patient's tooth - he news reaches their daughter POOJA, a helpline operative, as she tries to explain air miles to a customer. On the face of it, the family is sharing grief in togetherness, but from the moment we see Anwesh scattering his father's ashes in the nearest reservoir we sense he's on a solitary journey.

With Anwesh's arrival back in his hometown and a reunion with DEEPAK, a legend of Little India and The Holy Cow's chef of over 50 years, come memories from the past... memories of happy times round the dinner table and at the restaurant, where young teenage Anwesh earned pocket money as a bus-boy, and where he first laid eyes on his childhood sweetheart and future wife, the young teenage Anisha.

Anwesh is now having to juggle jobs - hidden from the view of corporate colleagues, there's an Indian restaurant to turn around; and then there's the 'day job'. His latest assignment, after forensic examination of its accounts, has been to tell a tech firm to make drastic personnel cuts or face Chapter 11, and liquidation... which is where the final player in Anwesh's unfolding saga comes in. UDIT is a young Indian guy here on an H1-B speciality work visa - he worked in I.T. at the corporation that Anwesh has just half-decimated.

Anwesh first notices Udit while on a contemplative stroll whilst still on compassionate leave - he finds himself in one of downtown Stamford's leafy squares, surrounded by office buildings - Udit contentedly mops up the contents of his tiffin-tin lunch with a chapati bread, much to Anwesh's fascination.

The cracks in The Agarwal household are showing - Anwesh and Anisha sleep in separate rooms... for quite some time Anwesh has been a changed man from the one Anisha married, and it's his cutthroat corporate life that's done it. As for his relationship with Pooja, Anwesh lives in a constant state of guilt at accidentally running over her in his golf buggy - she has a prosthetic leg and needs a crutch - Anwesh can do nothing right for his daughter... her reaction to a present of a *Hindushaki* singles event?... horror.

Stamford's downtown square at lunchtime has become a regular haunt for the compassionate-leave Anwesh, and right enough, Udit is always there. Out of curiosity more than anything, Anwesh introduces himself to the timid Indian guy with colourful, pungent, mouth-watering food overflowing from his tiffin-tins. Udit tells Anwesh that that he makes the dishes himself... it's his life's love. He also tells Anwesh he's recently lost his job in I.T., and that he's allowed to stay in the U.S. for only another 60 days. Anwesh realises he is responsible for Udit's redundancy.

With his compassionate leave over, Anwesh is back in his Manhattan office doing what he does best... foreclosing on bankrupt businesses... it's where his MBA and years of loyalty have got him. But the flip side of Anwesh's life now means that he's the one with the near-bankrupt family business, its legacy deserving of being saved! Anwesh is starting to question the morality of what he does.

Anwesh's visits to The Holy Cow only go to reaffirm the financial edge on which it is teetering - but there's one thing he hasn't done yet... he hasn't eaten there... so it's time for Deepak to make him some signature dishes. Anwesh's fears are realised... Deepak's food is pure gunk! Sure, his swill was popular back in the day, when diners hankering for the allure of foreign spice had no where else to go; but now they do... they go to Little India's Shezan Restaurant, Mirchi, The Moghul Express, Paradise Biryani Pointe, The Delhi Deli, Nan Galore and The Dangoor Curry House, where there are clay ovens and serve things like '*Monkfish marinated in a garam and ginger syrup and gently cooked in our natural clay oven*'. The Holy Cow is on its knees, and it doesn't take Anwesh long to realise that Deepak's food is to blame. Customers have deserted - every minute The Holy Cow is open for business costs Anwesh money.

For Anwesh, there's not even any solace from the arms of his wife - he and Anisha are too busy dredging up their dirty laundry.

Pooja of course was never going to be part of the *Hindushaki* in the Sheldon Suite of the Marriot - she's shied out, preferring the bar instead. There's someone else who couldn't bring themselves to go in... Udit! The two find themselves at the bar-top, engaging in clumsy conversation... the in-your-face Pooja, and the timid Udit. Despite the obvious differences between the modern, liberated, attitudinal Pooja and the old world, repressed Udit, two of life's misfits, and there's a distinct suggestion that they'll see each other again.

Anwesh realises he can't juggle two jobs. He resigns. He's had enough corporate raiding, his head and heart are no longer in the corporate world of bankruptcies and repossessions - he doesn't want his career to be shutting down businesses - he has one to rescue! Anwesh is all in - The Holy Cow has to be saved - Anwesh is on the journey of fulfilling his promise, and with a newly-acquired clay oven to boot!

Just when it's all steam ahead, unwelcome guests pay Anwesh and his restaurant a visit - bankruptcy trustees tell Anwesh that The Holy Cow is in significant debt to the bank... they're going to have to shut down the restaurant. Anwesh now knows how it feels to be 'on the other side of the desk'. He pleads his case - The Holy Cow is under new management. He's given a stay of execution, but he doesn't have long to turn the place around.

Anwesh reckons he has a blindingly-obvious saviour - he dashes to the Stamford square... there's a confab with Udit to be had. With warped serendipity, Anwesh asks Udit if he'll be the chef of The Holy Cow!?! Udit, with nothing better to do with his days but sit on a park bench, accepts.

Back at The Holy Cow, Anwesh has to tell Deepak the difficult news that the restaurant now has a new chef! Deepak is shocked - he's been the chef for 50 years! Anwesh reassures Deepak that he'll always have a place in the kitchen of The Cow, but Deepak feels betrayed - who is this young 'upstart'? Udit is let loose in the kitchen - it's not until Deepak sees and tastes Udit's food that he realises they have a rare, old world culinary genius on their hands - someone who can transform the old place and give it back its reputation.

Pooja and Udit, the unlikely couple with nothing in common except their religious heritage, are officially dating. Udit is entranced by Pooja's worldliness; Pooja is drawn to Udit's integrity as a guy with a speciality visa, who's up-rooted himself from his homeland to give it a go in America. But their growing closeness is built on a lie... Udit is peddling the line that he's a vital I.T. cog in a corporation (as he indeed was)... he hasn't told Pooja that he actually works in an Indian restaurant. He's also unaware that Pooja is the daughter of the man he now works for!

The word on the street is out - murmurings of the unbelievable dishes on offer at The Holy Cow reverberate around Edison - customers are again frequenting New Jersey's famous curry house. Anwesh believes he's on the way to rescuing the restaurant from the clutches of the bank... he can start repaying the debt from the takings, rather than from his own pocket.

There's a knock-on effect on Anwesh & Anish's marriage too. Anwesh is freed from the hamster wheel of repossessions & insolvency; he's no longer the business-wrecking mercenary that he hated himself as, and Anisha can again see that her husband is back to being the man she fell in love with and married.

When Pooja finds out that her would-be boyfriend is not who he says he is, but rather is actually working for her father in his restaurant, all hell breaks loose - the contentious issues that they playfully debated... Udit's old-world Indian faith vs Pooja's modernity... can no longer be swept under the carpet. Pooja ultimately can't accept that Udit lied to her - their burgeoning liaison is no longer.

Udit takes the breakup badly - he can barely get out of bed, never mind leave his apartment. And Pooja being Anwesh's daughter is too close to home for Udit - he decides he can no longer be The Holy Cow's chef. Udit's absence is bad news for The Holy Cow - Anwesh is distraught - he's having to rely on Deepak and what he's learnt from Udit - but Deepak has learnt little... the maestro's abilities with hitherto unknown spices being too much for Deepak's understanding. Deepak's 'swill' is again what's on offer, and the customers are again drying up.

Just when things couldn't get any worse, Anwesh learns of the misunderstanding at his father's deathbed - Anwesh was never meant to save The Holy Cow, he was supposed to sell it. Anwesh is in a quandary - he's free and clear to sell the place... rid himself of the overbearing commitment - but he's a changed man - he's taken something on and he's supposed to have the integrity to see it through - and that's his decision.

Udit has also made a decision - he confronts Pooja and explains his misdemeanours and the misunderstandings and reasons behind them - but will this be enough to win her back?

The Holy Cow is gearing up for a grand re-opening - the builders and redecorators are in, and there's a brand spanking new kitchen under construction - but can Deepak step up to the plate? - Anwesh has more than doubts - so he tracks down Udit and pleads with him to come back - Anwesh offers to be Udit's new visa sponsor. Udit explains that his father has summoned him back to India, where an opportunity has been found for the disappointing son. Anwesh is left with no choice - he has nothing to lose - he will have to make contact with Udit's father... he'll have to tell him that his son's true calling is as one of the most unique chefs in America... and as happenstance would have it, he be plying his skills in Anwesh's restaurant! Will Udit's father allow this to happen?

The grand re-opening night of The Holy Cow has arrived. Pooja and Anisha marvel at what Anwesh has achieved... he's managed to return The Holy Cow to the splendour of what it once was. Anwesh is dumbfounded with relief at the sight of Udit waiting expectantly but nervously in the sparkling new kitchen. A hug from Pooja lets Udit know that he's been forgiven. Customers will soon be arriving. A prompt from the equally nervous Deepak to Udit... "Let's cook". The Holy Cow is back in business.

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