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**JANHVI  
KAPOOR:**  
ACE UP HER  
SLEEVE



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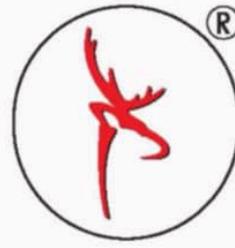
**NAWAZUDDIN  
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UNPLUGGED

**GOING FOR  
GOLD**

**KRITI SANON  
AIMS HIGH**

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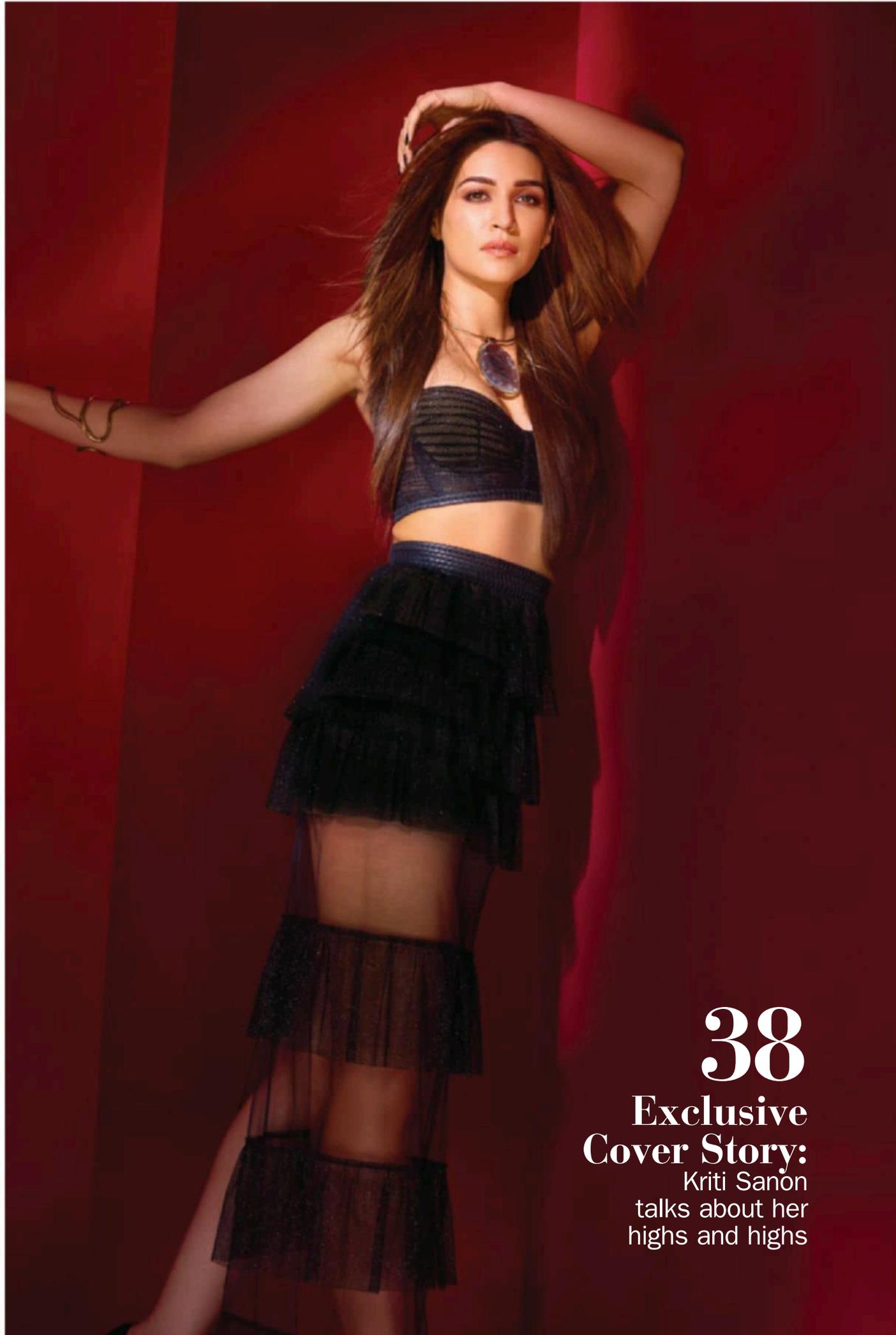
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# Letter from the Editor

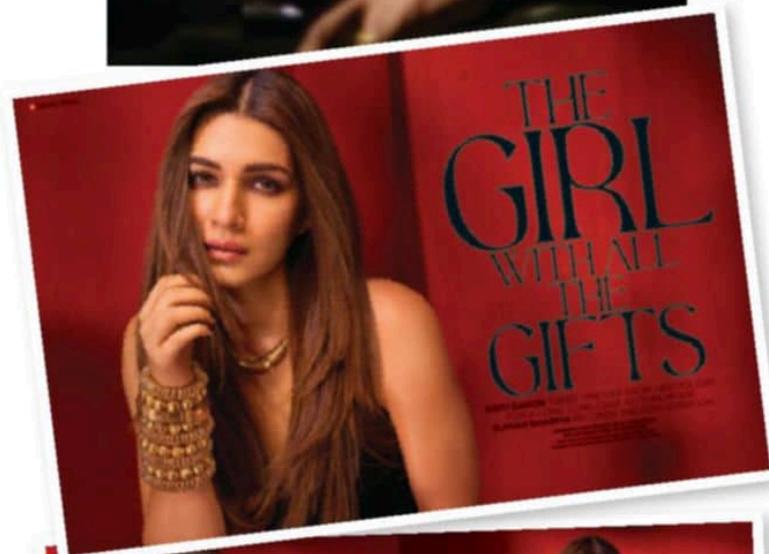
## Flying high

When she first started out a decade ago, the tall and beautiful Kriti Sanon felt like a wild filly who is meant to run wild and free, unhindered by the limelight focussed on her. Ten years later, she's been considered a prize horse, a thoroughbred who can carry a film on her well-shaped shoulders across the finish line on her own. She hasn't let herself be encumbered by the stringent norms of the industry and has effectively charted her own path.

One of my pet peeves with actors, especially female actors, is that they blindly sign anything and everything that comes their way. Kriti is one of the few stars who doesn't do that. Despite her first Hindi film *Heropanti* (2014) being a sleeper hit and her next *Dilwale* (2015), co-starring Varun Dhawan, Kajol and SRK proving to be a blockbuster, she didn't sign on the hazaar offers that came her way. Instead, she chose to invest in middle of the road cinema like *Bareilly Ki Barfi* (2017) directed by young hotshot director Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari. The film showcased a young, ambitious girl hailing from smalltown India who feels she's the muse for a respected author. Though she did a sign multi-starrer like *Housefull 4* (2019), her versatility as an actor got cemented through *Mimi* (2021). She played a young surrogate mother who takes the decision to carry the term and bring up the baby on her own when the couple who had hired her leave her midway. The range of emotions, from naivete to a tiger mom's ferocity, got her a Filmfare Award, and she even won a National Film Award for it.

She has never shied away from taking risks and acted as a female werewolf in *Bhediya* (2022). Her transformation into a wolf from human was the surprise factor of the film and won her praise. In *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya* (2024), she played a humanoid robot called SIFRA and again, the scene where she goes rogue and becomes an agent of destruction proved to be the most impactful scene of this sci-fi romance. There are talks of a sequel and we're sure looking forward to seeing more of her robot with feelings act. In her last release *Crew* (2024), she acted alongside actors of calibre like Tabu and Kareena Kapoor Khan and proved her mettle in this heist comedy. Her role was integral to the plot and her camaraderie with her co-stars was spot on. The movie proved to be a hit and showed that even female stars can draw in the crowd today and don't need the crutch of a big name male star to rake in the moolah.

The pretty and talented actress is on our cover this month. Turn the pages to know more about this feisty and fun star who is destined to soar higher and higher.



*Jitesh Pillai*

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Leena Bhandari  
[leena.bhandari@wwm.co.in](mailto:leena.bhandari@wwm.co.in)  
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[sriram.krishnan@wwm.co.in](mailto:sriram.krishnan@wwm.co.in)

#### BANGALORE

Ruchin Gupta  
[ruchin.gupta@wwm.co.in](mailto:ruchin.gupta@wwm.co.in)

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Aditi Shrivastava  
[aditi.shrivastava@wwm.co.in](mailto:aditi.shrivastava@wwm.co.in)

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Anjali Rathor  
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a bird's-eye view of show town's happenings

# masala fix

## DINNER AND A MOVIE

Who says new parents shouldn't have a life of their own. Take Varun Dhawan and Natasha Dalal for instance. They took some time out from parental duties to catch a movie together. We caught them twinning in black at a suburban theatre. We love how the lovebirds glowed in each other's presence. Natasha seemed to have slimmed down much in a short time after her pregnancy and going by his recent shirtless pictures, Varun seems to be in the best shape of his life. They sure know how to set couple goals for their fans.

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Ranveer Singh signs for  
Aditya Dhar's action film  
*pg 12*

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Sonakshi and Zaheer  
first met at Salman's  
house *pg 14*

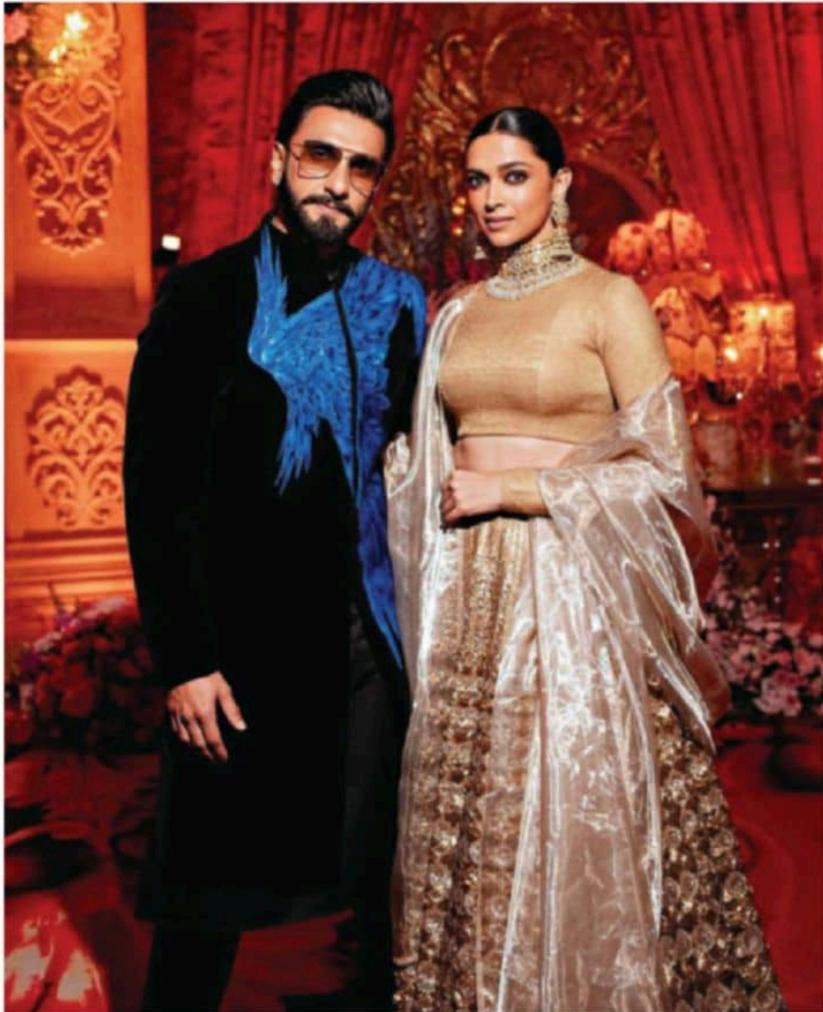
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Irrfan was the original  
choice for *Maharaj's* title  
role *pg 16*

PHOTOGRAPH: MANAV MANGLANI



# Rumours & More



## RANVEER SINGH ADORES A PREGNANT DEEPIKA PADUKONE

**Ranveer Singh** recently shared his thoughts on seeing **Deepika Padukone** portraying a pregnant character in the film *Kalki 2898 AD* while she was pregnant in real life. Deepika had expressed her gratitude for the film's reception on social media, prompting Ranveer to comment on the unique experience of watching her on screen in that state. He previously praised the film's technical brilliance and described it as a grand cinematic spectacle on his Instagram stories.



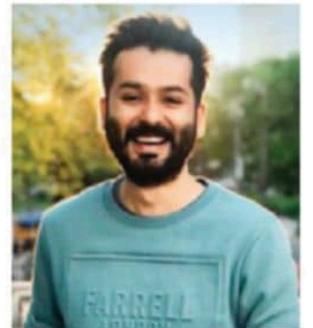
## SHAHID KAPOOR'S *DEVA* TO RELEASE ON VALENTINE'S DAY 2025

**Shahid Kapoor's** upcoming film *Deva*, slated to hit theatres on February 14, 2025. This high-octane action thriller, directed by acclaimed Malayalam filmmaker **Rosshan Andrews**, promises a blend of thrill and drama. Shahid Kapoor portrays a brilliant yet rebellious police officer in the film, with **Pooja Hegde** starring opposite him as a journalist.



## RANVEER SINGH SIGNS FOR ADITYA DHAR'S ACTION FILM

Get ready for **Ranveer Singh's** return to the big screen! Recent reports indicate that the actor is set to commence shooting for **Aditya Dhar's** upcoming film focussing on Indian Intelligence Agencies. Sources reveal that the initial shoot will kick off in Thailand, with subsequent filming planned across various locations in India and the UAE. Though the official announcement is yet to come, the production aims to wrap up within six months and target a release in the latter half of 2025. The screenplay is said to draw inspiration from real life events, and the film features a stellar cast including **Sanjay Dutt**, **Akshaye Khanna**, **R Madhavan**, and **Arjun Rampal** in key roles alongside Ranveer.



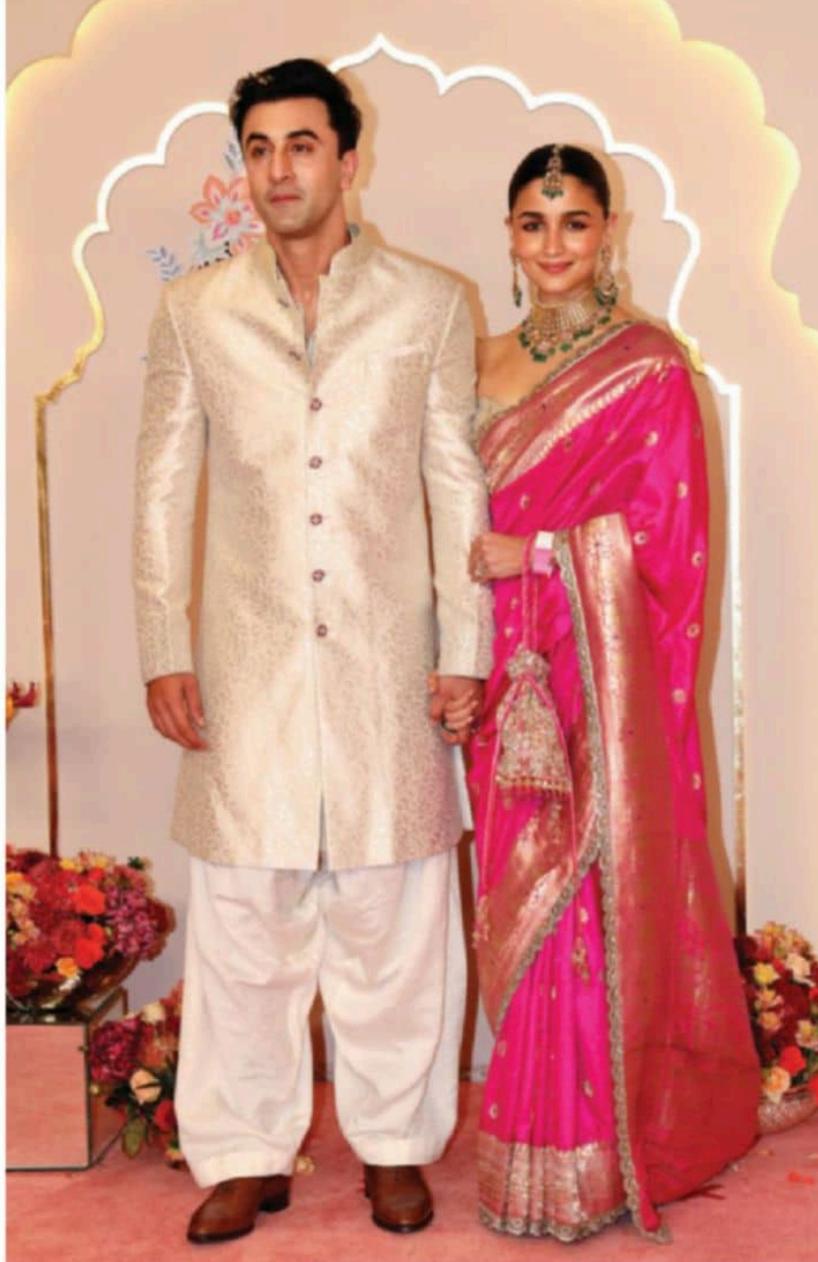
## TABU ON WHY SHE HASN'T WORKED WITH SRK

**Tabu**, recently discussed why she hasn't collaborated with **Shah Rukh Khan** since their 2002 film *Saathiya*. In a recent interview, she clarified that she isn't involved in script selection or filmmaking decisions, indicating she has no control over the projects SRK chooses. Despite fans' hopes for a reunion, there are currently no plans for them to work together again. Tabu has garnered attention for her upcoming role in the *Dune* prequel series *Dune: Prophecy*, where she portrays Sister Francesca, delving into the origins of the powerful Bene SGesserit.



## JANHVI KAPOOR AND ISHAAN KHATTER TO REUNITE AFTER SIX YEARS

**Janhvi Kapoor** and **Ishaan Khatter** are set to reunite in a new film, nearly six years after their debut in *Dhadak*. Directed by **Neeraj Ghaywan** and produced by **Karan Johar**, this project is scheduled to start filming in October 2024. The film, described as an ensemble drama, will also star **Vishal Jethwa**, known for his role in *Mardaani 2*. Ghaywan, acclaimed for his work in *Masaan*, is returning to feature films after nine years and brings a fresh narrative that promises a compelling cinematic experience.



**TWO GOOD:** Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor sure look haute in their traditional best.

## FAWAD KHAN TO PLAY A CHEF OPPOSITE VAANI KAPOOR

Recently, heartthrob **Fawad Khan** confirmed his involvement in multiple projects during a media interaction. In this much-anticipated film directed by **Aarti Bagdi**, Fawad will play the role of a UK based chef opposite Vaani Kapoor. The movie is scheduled to be shot entirely in London and Dubai in a continuous schedule. Fans have eagerly awaited Fawad's return to Indian cinema since his appearances in *Kapoor & Sons* and *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* back in 2016.



## SONAKSHI AND ZAHEER FIRST MET AT SALMAN'S HOUSE



**Sonakshi Sinha** and **Zaheer Iqbal**, who recently tied the knot, actually first met at **Salman Khan's** residence in Galaxy Apartments. Zaheer revealed in an interview that their first encounter happened unexpectedly there. He mentioned, "The first time we met was at Salman bhai's house. I didn't know she was there, and she didn't know that I existed!" Their relationship blossomed further during the after-party of Salman Khan's *Tubelight* premiere on June 23, 2017, where they spent hours in conversation and realised there was a special connection between them.



## NATASA STANKOVIC AND HARDIK PANDYA PART WAYS

Actress **Natasa Stankovic** and cricketer **Hardik Pandya** have confirmed their separation after four years together. In a heartfelt Instagram statement, they expressed mutual respect and commitment to co-parenting their son, **Agastya**. Despite the decision being tough, they emphasised their dedication to Agastya's happiness and requested privacy during this sensitive time. Natasa has since relocated to Serbia with Agastya.





**FAMILY FUN:** Shah Rukh Khan, Gauri, Suhana and SRK's mom-in-law **Savita Chhibber** look good posing together.

## HERE'S WHY VICKY KAUSHAL CAN'T STOP PRAISING KIARA ADVANI



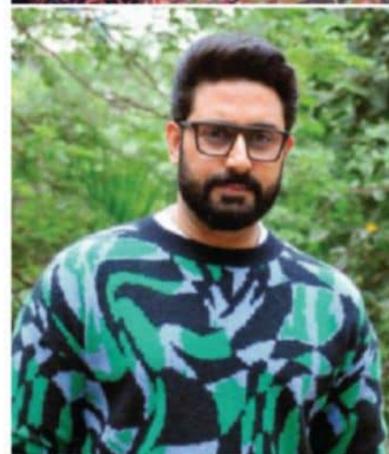
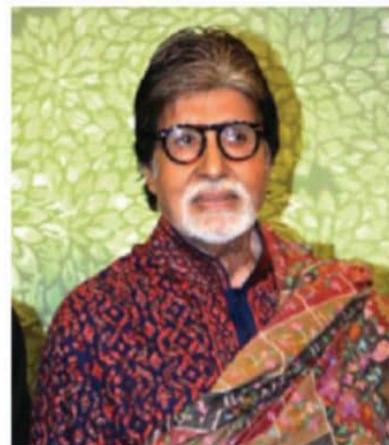
**Vicky Kaushal** recently showered praise on **Kiara Advani**, his co-star from *Lust Stories*. Kiara

has really made a strong impression on Vicky. "Kiara is one of my favourite people in the industry. I admire her both as a human being and as an actor," Vicky said. Despite not frequently communicating or meeting, he cherished their collaborations in *Lust Stories* and *Govinda Naam Mera*. "When I work with her, there's a unique sense of ease and comfort. It feels like we have each other's backs," Vicky continued. "There's so much I could say about her; it's quite emotional for me... She truly is a gem of a person."



## AMITABH BACHCHAN IS EXCITED ABOUT ABHISHEKH'S ROLE IN KING

**Amitabh Bachchan** has exciting news for Bollywood enthusiasts: his son, **Abhishek Bachchan**, will take on the role of the antagonist opposite **Shah Rukh Khan** in the upcoming film *King*. Directed by **Sujoy Ghosh**, with **Siddharth Anand** overseeing the action sequences, the film also stars **Suhana Khan**. Amitabh shared his excitement on his social media, praising Abhishek's talent in negative roles, reminiscent of his performance in *Raavan*. He wrote, "All the best Abhishek... It is TIME!!!" This announcement has sparked anticipation among fans who eagerly await the clash between Abhishek and Shah Rukh on screen. Abhishek's portrayal as the villain marks a notable shift from his recent roles, showcasing his versatility.

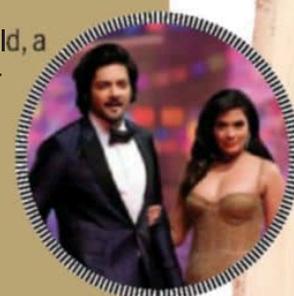


## IRRFAN WAS THE ORIGINAL CHOICE FOR MAHARAJ'S TITULAR ROLE

During a recent press event, **Siddharth P Malhotra** disclosed that the late **Irrfan** was the intended choice for the significant role now portrayed by **Jaideep Ahlawat** in *Maharaj*. Malhotra explained, "When we envisioned this role, we immediately thought of Irrfan Khan. There was no one else who could have done justice to it like him." However, following Irrfan's passing in 2020, the director turned to Jaideep Ahlawat. Jaideep's commitment to the role was remarkable. After completing the filming, Malhotra felt that Jaideep's introductory scene needed to be re-shot. Despite having gained weight, Jaideep was determined to regain his fitness, and re-shoot the sequence.

## RICHA CHADHA AND ALI FAZAL BLESSED WITH A BABY GIRL

**Richa Chadha** and **Ali Fazal** have welcomed their first child, a baby girl, born on July 16, 2024. The stars expressed their joy and gratitude, saying, "We are thrilled to announce the arrival of a healthy baby girl! Our families are ecstatic, and we thank everyone for their love and blessings." Fans and well-wishers flooded the couple with congratulatory messages, celebrating this special moment in their lives.



movies on the block, set-talk, talent-buzz, hotties to watch out for

# preview

## REACHING FOR THE STARS

### ANMOL VERMA

#### X FACTOR: VERSATILITY

Anmol Verma is a Mumbai-based actor and model with a diverse and extensive portfolio. His modelling experience spans working with esteemed designers like Manish Malhotra, Shantanu & Nikhil, and Tarun Tahiliani, among others, as well as prominent brand shoots, advertisements and featuring in music videos like *Ek mohabbat* alongside Ankit Tiwari and *Vichora yaar da*, produced by Daboo Malik. In addition to his modelling credentials, he also has had the privilege of playing the lead role in the upcoming Hindi feature film *Icecream*, a thriller shot in Jaipur, where he portrayed a complex character.



Newbies Jibraan Khan, Pashmina Roshan. Naila Grrewal and Viraj Ghelani tell us their dreams and aspirations *pg 18*

# KIDDING AROUND NO MORE

CHILD ACTOR JIBRAAN KHAN IS ALL GROWN UP NOW AND HAS IMPRESSED VIEWERS WITH HIS PERFORMANCE IN *ISHQ VISHK REBOUND*. SRIJANI ROY CHOWDHURY CHARTS HIS JOURNEY

Jibraan Khan, the dynamic newcomer who burst onto the scene with *Ishq Vishk Rebound* (2024), is making heads turn with his amazing dancing and acting chops, not to mention his striking good looks. He's living a dream he never wants to wake up from. Before his adult debut, Jibraan starred in films like *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001), *Kyo Kii... Main Jhuth Nahin Bolta* (2001), and *Rishtey* (2002) as a child actor. He also gained invaluable experience as an assistant director on *Brahmastra* (2022), calling it the ultimate film school. Working alongside stars like Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt, Amitabh Bachchan, Nagarjuna Akkineni, and Mouni Roy was an eye-opener. Their professionalism left a lasting mark on me," Jibraan recalls fondly. "The first shot

was picturised on Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt. It was the scene where Ranbir was stopping the fire and Alia was hugging him. I gave the clap' for it," he says with pride.

Grateful for the guidance of industry seniors like Ramesh Taurani, Jaya Taurani, Karan Johar and Ayan Mukerji, Jibraan acknowledges their role as mentors and pillars of strength. However, Jibraan's journey wasn't without challenges. He faced countless auditions before landing the role of Sahir Singh Rajput in the rom-com *Ishq Vishk Rebound*. Reflecting on his path, Jibraan recognises the uncertainty of the industry, stressing the importance of determination. "There's always uncertainty. Even after a film, the work isn't guaranteed. It's been tough but I'm not one



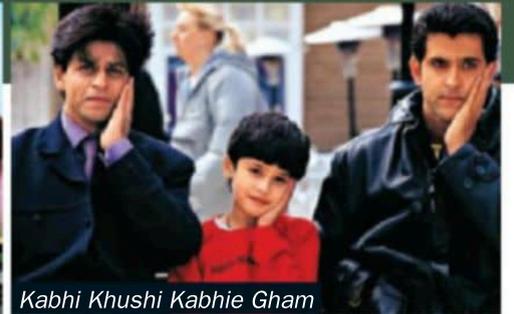
“WORKING ALONGSIDE STARS LIKE RANBIR KAPOOR, ALIA BHATT, AMITABH BACHCHAN, NAGARJUNA AKKINENI, AND MOUNI ROY WAS EYE-OPENING. THEIR PROFESSIONALISM LEFT A LASTING MARK ON ME”



“ IF MY PERFORMANCE IS BEING APPRECIATED, IT IS ONLY BECAUSE OF HOW GOOD MY CO-ACTORS WERE. I HAD MOST OF MY SCENES WITH ROHIT. IF HE DIDN'T GIVE HIS BEST, I DON'T THINK I WOULD HAVE DELIVERED AS MUCH. SAME GOES FOR NAILA AND PASHMINA ”



Ishq Vishk Rebound



Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham

to give up,” he paints out. His experience working with co-stars like Rohit Saraf, Naila Grewal, and Pashmina Roshan was enlightening. “Their support elevated my performance. If my performance is being appreciated, it is only because of how good my co-actors were. I had most of my scenes with Rohit. If he didn’t give his best, I don’t think I would have delivered as much. Same goes for Naila and Pashmina. If your co-actors are not good, you’re not good,” he observes.

**A**side from acting, dance remains Jibraan’s passion. Yet if he had to choose, acting wins hands down. “I’ve trained with Shiamak Davar for years but acting is where my heart is. The energy I feel on stage or in front of the camera is unmatched. Even the feeling I get when I go for an audition - in between action and cut - is the best feeling in the world,” he says enthusiastically.

Jibraan fondly recalls

a special moment while dancing as a backup dancer in the *Phir milenge chalte chalte* song from *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (2008), where he reunited with his on-screen parents, Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol from *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*. “I wasn’t even in the first line. Shiamak kindly escorted me upfront and made me meet them. While Shah Rukh sir asked about my studies, Kajol ma’am couldn’t believe how much I’d grown. It was surreal,” he remembers with a grin.

Looking ahead, Jibraan aims for longevity in Bollywood, focusing on roles that showcase his talent and screen presence. “I want more screen time and meaty roles that challenge me. Whether it’s drama, action, or romance, I’m up for it,” he declares confidently.

With his youthful energy and determination, Jibraan Khan is set to carve his own path in the ever-changing world of Bollywood. ■



# Feels like magic

*PASHMINA ROSHAN CONFIDES IN TANZIM PARDIWALLA THAT SHE HASN'T YET COME TO TERMS WITH HER DEBUT IN ISHQ VISHK REBOUND*



I can't put into words the amount of gratitude I have. Life has been

Oh my God, it's a dream come true.

treating me king-size since my debut," chirps Pashmina Roshan. Her bubbly voice gives away the sheer thrill and joy she's feeling. You can tell she's been waiting for this moment. Her debut film,

*Ishq Vishk Rebound*, a reboot of the cult classic 2003 rom-com *Ishq Vishk* starring Rohit Saraf, Jibraan Khan, and Naila Grrewal, was released recently. Besides *Ishq Vishq Rebound*, her claim

of fame is the Roshan Surname. She's music director Rajesh Roshan's daughter and Hrithik Roshan's cousin. Talk to her about her family and she gets nostalgic about the time spent on the sets

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of Hrithik Roshan's iconic film *Koi... Mil Gaya*. "My first experience of being on the set was *Koi... Mil Gaya*. It was like magic personified. They made the makeshift town of Kasoli in Film City. Me and my sister, Suranika, were on the set every day. The kids in the film were older than us, so we would look up to them. It was this little make-believe world, like a storybook world but it felt so real. I never felt like going home," she grins.

She adds, "We were not allowed around my dad's music recordings because we were naughty.

yelling at me on the mic. I have a picture with Jadoo as well. In college, just to mess with people, I used to tell them I played Jadoo in the film and they used to believe it." Pashmina admits that she was influenced by films as a kid. She even cut her hair like Kajol's Anjali in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*. Pashmina has come a long way from playing pranks. She's taking cousin Hrithik Roshan's advice more seriously than ever. "His feedback is one of the most important things in life. I value the work he puts out and I value the kind

sheltered life. She muses, "I was born and brought up in Juhu; my school was down the block. I had not seen enough of Mumbai, let alone India. And there was a thought that, okay, I need a degree. I need to fall back on something. So I studied mass media at Jai Hind. I had done Bharatnatyam but that is again not enough. I need to do more." Just when she was about to leave for further studies in the UK, she realised something was amiss. "I was sad to the point where I couldn't do anything other than take naps in the afternoon." That's when Pashmina recalled her father's advice, "My dad has always said that, look, an artist should always create his art. No matter how big or small, that's the only way you're going to be satiated and happy. That's the day I took a leap of faith."

and we got even closer during the promotional events," she shares.

That being said, it isn't all fun and games. Pashmina is self-aware of her last name. Speaking about her privilege, she shares, "I completely understand that there is a discussion about nepotism. And I respect that. I can understand that the audience will view me through that lens as well. But I have worked hard. I have auditioned for this role. I have auditioned for many other roles and I've often been rejected. I'm here today after all of that. I know that maybe going forward, my last name will have a lot of weight. But I feel if I think about this too much, I'm not going to go further. My focus can't shift to too many different things. It has to be my performance."

While the enormity of entering Bollywood hasn't fully hit her, the debutante is choosing to find joy in the little things. She says, "My name is part of a cult film's legacy. I cannot

**T**he *Ishk Vishq* gang had a rollicking time on the set. "We are all of the same age; our

**“His (Hrithik Roshan) feedback is one of the most important things in life. I value the work he puts out, and I value the kind of human being and soul he is. I look up to him”**



With Hrithik Roshan



*Ishk Vishk Rebound*

**“My first experience of being on the set was *Koi... Mil Gaya*. It was like magic personified. They made the makeshift town of Kasoli in Film City. Me and my sister, Suranika, were on the set every day”**

Even on the sets of *Koi... Mil Gaya*, while filming the last scene where the aliens are going back, I remember we were having a field day in the forest. I remember Chittu Papa (Rakesh Roshan)

of human being and soul he is. I look up to him. Be it film, or even if it's like a small piece of art, I seek his feedback," she says.

As she reflects on her journey, the newcomer admits she's had a

teams are the same age and even the assistant direction team was of similar age; it felt like everyone was going in as students. Our humour also matched. We were close throughout filming

explain to you the gratitude I feel. So everything is small compared to that. At times, it's a pinch-me thing. I can't even believe that this is happening," she concludes. ■

# LIGHTS! CAMERA! FULFILMENT!

NAILA GRREWAL tells SRIJANI ROY CHOWDHURY that facing the camera gives her joy



**N**aila Grrewal, the latest breakout star from *Ishq Vishk Rebound*, is riding high on the wave of love from her fans and critics. Her character, Rhea, has struck a chord with audiences who can't stop showering her with calls and texts. They're totally digging her as the spirited activist in the film. Even though this role was a bit of a departure for her in terms of story and character vibe, Naila feels incredibly blessed by the appreciation. She thinks it's because she brought a touch of vulnerability to Rhea's strong-willed persona. "I infused Rhea with a softer side, which was new for

me. My previous roles were all fierce, bold, and headstrong. Rhea needed that softer touch, and I dove right into it," the actress shares with a grin.

Beyond *Ishq Vishk Rebound*, Naila has left her mark in memorable films like *Thappad*, *Bareilly Ki Barfi*, and *Tamasha*. But acting wasn't always on her radar. "For the longest time, I never saw myself as a film actor. I was deeply into theatre during my college days at Lady Shriram College in Delhi. It was there, after a play, that fate intervened with an offer to act opposite Ranbir Kapoor in *Tamasha*. How could I say no to Imtiaz Ali and Ranbir Kapoor?" she recalls with a laugh.



*Ishq Vishk Rebound*

**“I was studying journalism and mass communication, which I loved. Acting just sort of happened when I stepped onto the sets of *Tamasha* and realised how much I enjoyed being in front of the camera”**

**W**hile her family was supportive of her acting dreams, they also nudged her towards a backup plan—journalism. “I was studying journalism and mass communication, which I loved. Acting just sort of happened when I stepped onto the sets of *Tamasha* and realised how much I enjoyed being in front of the camera.” Her big break came with *Thappad*, a film that made her feel validated as an actor. “*Thappad* was a turning point. I thought it was a small role, but Anubhav Sinha had crafted every character so beautifully. The love and recognition I received after that film made me feel like I truly belonged in this industry.”

Naila’s journey led her to web series like *Maamla Legal Hai*, where she faced new challenges. It proved to be a daunting experience for her, transitioning from films to her first

series were markedly different, requiring a shift in approach and mindset. “I wanted to play my character in a realistic way and went to the Bombay High Court and other courts to follow how the young lawyers conducted themselves on a daily basis. I also wanted to

observe the way they wore their black capes before entering the court. I wanted to be perfect with the nuances.”

She draws inspiration from actors like Manoj Bajpayee, Vikrant Massey, and Rajkummar Rao. She dreams of someday sharing screen space with the likes of Kareena

Kapoor Khan and Tabu. “I don’t pay much mind to who’s deemed the lead hero. Audiences today are discerning. They gravitate towards actors and characters they connect with, regardless of screen time. I’m not interested in labels or titles; give me a well-crafted role in a compelling story. Whether big or small, if it packs a punch, count me in.”

Naila Grewal is definitely one to watch as she continues to carve her path in Bollywood with talent, passion and a lot of heart. ■

**“I don’t pay much mind to who’s deemed the lead hero. Audiences today are discerning. They gravitate towards actors and characters they connect with, regardless of screen time”**



*Maamla Legal Hai*

web series. Accustomed to the concise format of movies, she understood the challenge of keeping audiences engaged over several hours. The demands of screen time and the extensive workload inherent in a



# DREAMING BIG

Viraj Ghelani talks to Vedanshi Pathak about his big Gujarati debut, *Jhamkudi*, his Bollywood aspirations, and the creator-celebrity debate

**V**iraj Ghelani, a well-known content creator and actor, recently debuted in the Gujarati film *Jhamkudi*. As the movie gains traction, Ghelani has discussed the challenges confronting Gujarati cinema and why it lacks the widespread popularity of other regional film industries. He also expressed his frustration about the transactional nature of relationships between stars and content creators. Excerpts from a candid interview with Viraj.

**Tell us about your recent release, *Jhamkudi*.**

The only stress was recovering the money from the producer. They placed their bet on me, and I didn't want them to regret it. I noticed that *Mr. & Mrs. Mahi* sold over 12,000 tickets all across the country, whereas *Jhamkudi* has sold over 8,000 tickets in just two states. When it comes to box-office collections, the film has already crossed over Rs 9 crore, and *Laapataa Ladies* made somewhere around Rs 7 crore.

**What's the Gujarati film industry like?**

There are mainly two-to-three lead actors who are offered all roles in the Gujarati film industry. Gujarati films were earlier watched by people who were mostly 40 years old or older; however, my presence in the film attracted the youth towards it too.

**“ In Bollywood, everyone is a thorough professional. However, in Gujarati cinema, everyone works like a family. They work together and cover up each other's mistakes on set ”**





**Do you feel the success of *Jhamkudi* will bolster Gujarati cinema?**

I'll tell you a story. I went to watch *Animal* in a very small place in Gujarat, and that place only had posters of Bollywood and South superstars like Prabhas. There was no poster of a Gujarati actor. When you don't have actors from regional languages to look up to, why will films be made in that language?

**List out three differences between Hindi cinema and Gujarati cinema.**

In Bollywood, everyone is a thorough professional. However, in Gujarati cinema, everyone works like a family. They work together and cover up each other's mistakes on set. The Gujarati film industry does not place a lot of importance on good looks when it comes to lead actors. Lastly, I feel

**“If you can use creators to get your film's promotion, it shouldn't hamper your ego to give something back in return when they need you. That's my only problem”**

there is a lot of fakeness in Bollywood. I still remember when I attended my first ever Filmfare Awards. I couldn't believe the fact that actors leave after taking their awards. I was waiting to talk to a couple of stars who follow me on Instagram, and they just looked past me. That day, I realised everything is transactional here.

**Have you personally had an incident when a transactional bond hurt you?**

So many celebrities just call us to promote their films and then completely forget about us. When *Jhamkudi* was released, only a few of them posted about it. Ayushmann Khurrana called me and congratulated me. I respect him for that; he didn't need to, but he did. I called Paresh Rawal and requested that he attend the screening of my film. He told me he never attends screenings, but he did give me his wishes and blessings. Bhumi Pednekar also posted about the film, which meant so much to me.

**How important do you feel it is to be relevant on social media for actors today?**

For new-age actors like me, it is important. Because that's the only way we can stay connected with the audience. You won't believe it, but for my first ever stand-up show in Mumbai, I sold over 1500 tickets, which were priced over Rs 2500. That day, I realised that these people were only coming to watch me after seeing my content on social media.

**Will you continue creating content?**

I will never leave content creation; even if I reach Shah Rukh Khan's level, I'll always keep creating content on the streets.

**Recall one of the best experiences during *Jhamkudi's* theatre visits...**

Shashank Khaitan, from Dharma Productions, told me he wanted to watch my film. I called him to a screening, which would be on the Gujarati side of Mumbai. Also, I put up

a story on social media saying to come watch the film in the theatre for the first time. And in no time, the theatre was full. Shashank got to know that day that people love me and appreciate my work.

**Do you want to work only in Gujarati cinema? What about Bollywood?**

I'm doing a Bollywood film as we speak. My only problem with Bollywood comes when the creator-actor debate starts. If you can use creators to get your film's promotion, it shouldn't hamper your ego to give something back in return when they need you. That's my only problem.

**The biggest creator-actor debate of recent times was because of the guest list at the Cannes Film Festival. What's your take on it?**

Lots of people on the internet are plain jealous. If I get an opportunity to go to Cannes, why won't I go? You'll also go. Anyone would.

***Jhamkudi* is all set to premiere in Sydney; how excited are you for that?**

I am supremely excited for it. The film will be screened at the Opera House. I always dreamed of doing a film; I never knew what would happen if the film did well. So, everything feels new but also exciting. When my film premiered in India, I isolated myself in a separate room because there were people in huge numbers just wanting to see me or get clicked with me, and I did not know how to deal with that. It was all surreal. ■

# Lifestyle

*fashion, fitness, food, beauty & travel*

They are hot, they are cool. Meet our trend makers and breakers



## POWER AND GLORY

Arpita Mehta gets candid about her passion for fashion that led to an empire in the business. replete with her signature style.

## THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

Designer Mac Duggal is bringing his collection for the first time to india

# BEST SERVED HAUTE!

ARPITA MEHTA HAS SUCCESSFULLY MARRIED TRADITIONAL MOTIFS TO MODERN CHIC. TANISHA BHATTACHARYA EXPLORES WHAT MAKES HER DESIGNS INSTANT CLASSICS

Arpita Mehta, renowned for her exquisite hand-embroidered mirror work, has carved a niche for herself in the fashion industry with her distinctively Indian yet contemporary designs. Inspired by childhood memories of vibrant Navratri *lehengas* adorned with intricate mirror work from Gujarat, particularly Jamnagar, Arpita's journey into fashion was rooted in familial influences. Her mother and grandmother, with their distinctive styles spanning sarees, jeans paired with t-shirts and elegant salwar suits, instilled in her a deep appreciation for fashion early on. Married to designer Kunal Rawal, Arpita brings a unique perspective to her craft, shaped by both personal style icons and professional collaborations within Bollywood. Her design philosophy resonates with Bollywood stars such as Alia Bhatt, Karisma Kapoor and Ananya Panday, who have graced her runway as showstoppers, enhancing the visibility and allure of her creations. With a penchant for blending tradition with modernity, she envisions her brand as a reflection of elegance and innovation in Indian fashion. Excerpts:



Ananya Panday



All Magazine Hindi English international magazine

Journalism (Indian)  
India Today Frontline Open  
India Legal Organiser The Caravan  
Telhka Economic and Political Weekly The Caravan

Journalism (International)

Time The Week The New Yorker  
The Atlantic Newsweek New York Magazine Foreign Affairs National Review  
Money & Business

Forbes Harvard Business Review  
Bloomberg Businessweek Business India Entrepreneur inc ET Wealth  
Monyweek CEO Magazine  
Barron's Fortune International Financing Review Business Today  
Outlook Money Shares Value Research Smart Investment  
Dalal Street Investment Journal

Science, History & Environment

National Geographic National Geographic Kids New Scientist  
Down to Earth Scientific American  
Popular Science Astronomy  
Smithsonian Net Geo History  
Science Philosophy Now BBC Earth  
BBC Wildlife BBC Science Focus  
BBC History

Literature, Health & General  
Interest

The Writer Publishers Weekly TLS  
prevention OM Yoga Reader's Digest  
The New York Review of Books  
NYT Book Review Harper's Magazine The Critic Men's Health  
Mens Fitness Women's Health  
Womens Fitness Better Photography  
Architectural Digest Writing Magazine Pratiyogita Darpan

Sport

Cricket Today The Cricketer  
Wisden Cricket Monthly  
Sports Illustrated World Soccer Tennis Sportstar FourFourTwo  
Auto & Moto

Autocar India UK BBC TopGear  
Bike Car

Tech

Wired PC Magazine Maximum PC  
PCWorld Techlife News T3 uk India  
DataQuest Computeractive  
Popular Mechanics PC Gamer  
Macworld Linux Format  
MIT Technology Review

Fashion & Travel

Elle Vogue Cosmopolitan  
Rolling Stone Variety Filmfare  
GQ Esquire National Geographic Traveler Condé Nast Traveler  
Outlook Traveller Harper's Bazaar  
Empire

Comics

Tinkle Indie Comics Image Comics  
DC (Assorted) Marvel (Assorted)  
Indie Comics Champak

Home & Food

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Vogue Living Good Housekeeping  
The Guardian feast The Observer Food Monthly Nat Geographic Traveller Food Food Network

Other Indian Magazines

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Mutual Fund Insight Wealth insight  
Electronics For You Open Source For You Mathematics Today Biology Today Chemistry Today  
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Grazia India Filmfare India  
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Indian Management Fortune India  
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ET Wealth Vogue india Yojana  
Kurukshetra Évo INDIA New India Samachar Small Enterprise India  
Voice & Data

हन्दी मैगज़ीन

समय पत्रिका साधनापथग हलकषमी उदयइंडिया नरिंगधाम मॉडर्न खेतीइंडिया टुडेदेवपुत्र  
कुरकिट टुडेग हथोभा अर्नखीहनिदुस्तानमुक्ता सरति चंपक परतयोगिता दरपण सक्सेस मरि  
सामान्य ज्ञान दरपण फारम एवं फूड मनोहर कहानियां सत्यकथा सरस सललि स्वतंत्र वार्ता लाजवाब आउटलुकसचची शकिषावनति  
मायापुरी रूपायन उजाळा ऋषि पुरसाद जोश रोजगार समाचार जोश करंट अफेयर्स जोश सामान्य ज्ञान जोश बैकग और एसएससी  
इंडिया बुक ऑफरकिरइसपरक् तमिल  
राजस्थान रोजगार संदेश राजस्थान सूजससखी जागरण अहा! जदिगी बाल भास्कर योजना कुरकषैन्  
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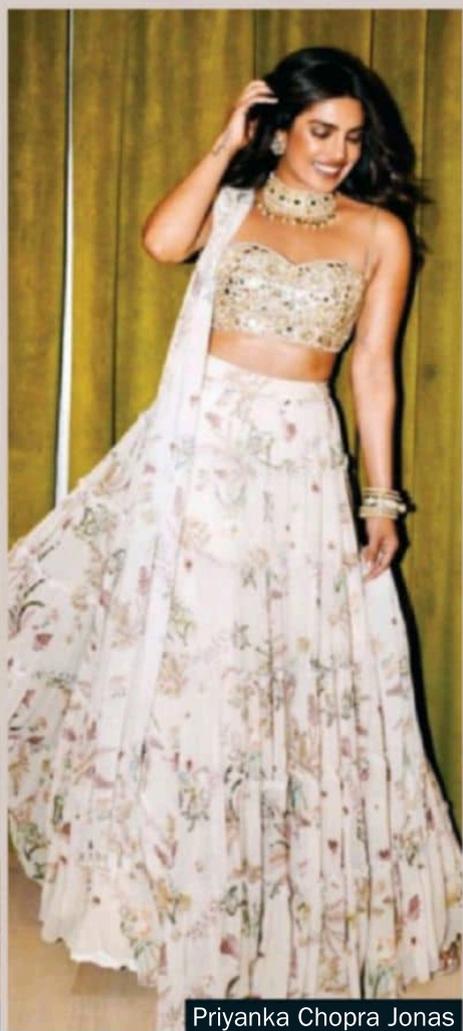
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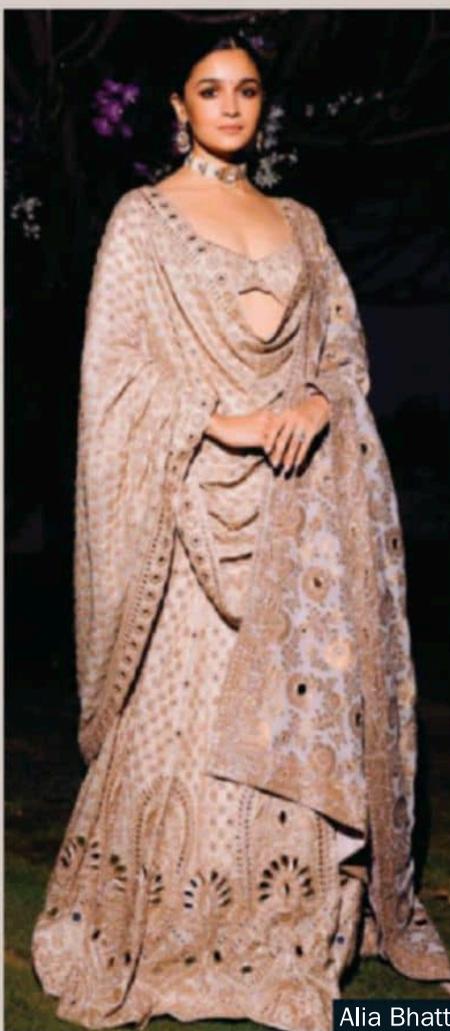
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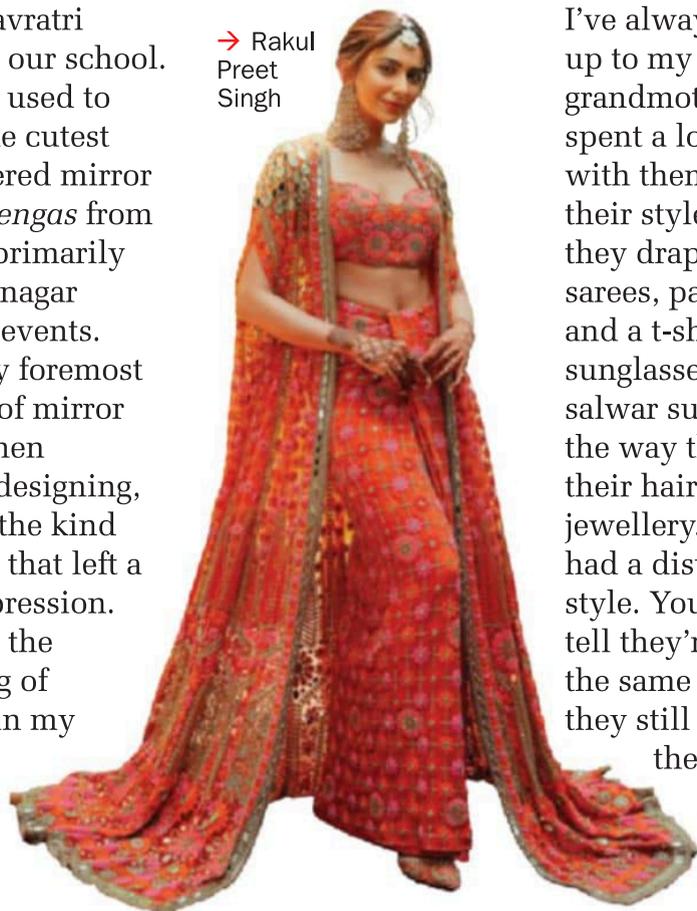
**Let's begin with your signature style of hand-embroidered mirror work. When and how did you develop a taste for this?**

Mirror work is something that came to me when I was a child. We used to have these yearly Navratri events in our school. My mom used to get me the cutest embroidered mirror work lehengas from Gujarat, primarily from Jamnagar for these events. That's my foremost memory of mirror work. When I started designing, that was the kind of design that left a deep impression. That was the beginning of the idea in my system. Once

I started experimenting with it and started building up the kind of clothes I wanted to make, this trend was what came to my mind first.

**Your website says that it was the distinctive**

→ Rakul Preet Singh



## **WHEN I WAS IN SCHOOL I WAS OBSESSED WITH BUYING SECOND HAND FASHION MAGAZINES. MY FAVOURITE FASHION ICONS WOULD BE '80S SUPERMODELS LIKE KATE MOSS AND NAOMI CAMPBELL**

**styles of your mother and grandmother that motivated you to start your journey...**

I've always looked up to my mother and grandmother. I've spent a lot of time with them and I love their style. The way they draped their sarees, paired jeans and a t-shirt with sunglasses and wore salwar suits...Even the way they tied their hair and wore jewellery... They had a distinctive style. You could tell they're from the same family but they still owned their unique

personalities. That inspired me a lot.

**Who were your favourite fashion icons growing up?**

When I was in school, I was obsessed with buying second hand fashion magazines. My favourites would be '80s supermodels like Kate Moss and Naomi Campbell. In the Indian landscape, I love Karisma Kapoor's style. She's iconic in all possible ways.

**You're also married to one of the most renowned designers in the industry, Kunal**

**Rawal. How exciting is that?**

Marrying Kunal was one of my best decisions in life. And the most exciting part is that we've known each other since we were designers. We understand each other. And being in the same profession, we kind of know how things work. So it just makes life so much easier that you don't have to explain the nitty-gritty of how daily life is. It's exciting to marry the human that I love, who happens to be a designer.



Suhana Khan



Sonakshi Sinha

## QUICK TAKE with ARPITA

FAVOURITE FASHION ERA  
**'80S**

FAVOURITE '90S TREND  
**LEGGINGS**

A FASHION FAUX PAS  
YOU CAN NEVER MAKE  
**WEAR FUNNY HEADBANDS**

ONE BOLLYWOOD ACTRESS  
THAT WOULD  
BE A DREAM TO HAVE  
AS A SHOWSTOPPER  
**DEEPIKA PADUKONE**

A BOLLYWOOD ACTRESS  
YOU'D LOVE TO HAVE  
AS A BEST FRIEND FOR  
HER FASHION SENSE  
**SONAM KAPOOR**

A FASHION ICON OF  
ALL TIME YOU'D LOVE  
TO DESIGN FOR  
**REKHA**

A BOLLYWOOD WEDDING  
ENSEMBLE YOU LOVED  
**ANUSHKA SHARMA  
AND VIRAT KOHLI**

**Your wedding saw the presence of many Bollywood stars: Malaika Arora, Arjun Kapoor and Varun Dhawan. Who are you the closest to in the industry?**

Yes, we did have a lot of celebrities at the wedding. But talking about Arjun and VD, they all happen to be Kunal's close friends. I have a small and a tight circle of girlfriends. We've kind of had our own thing going on since childhood. So if you ask me who I'm closest to in the industry, I'd probably say no one particularly.

**Tell us about your favourite muse and showstoppers over the years, because the trend of having Bollywood actresses as showstoppers is common.**

It would be unfair to pinpoint a favourite muse or a showstopper because I adore all of them. That's why they've been a part of my show as showstoppers. They are truly the women whom I admire and look up to. We've worked with Karisma Kapoor, Malaika Arora, Kriti Sanon, Ileana D'Cruz,

Ananya Panday and Shanaya Kapoor, to name a few. They're all my favourite girls.

**If you had to pick a Bollywood actress whose style you love, who would she be?**

It varies from time to time, but I'd say my current favourite is Ananya Panday.

**When a superstar like Alia Bhatt wears your design to the Ambani bash, does it help with the visibility of the brand?**

When an actor of massive calibre like Alia Bhatt wears our creation, styled

by Rhea Kapoor at a huge wedding, that makes it exciting for a brand like us. Firstly, we get to put a gorgeous look on a gorgeous person like Alia Bhatt. Secondly, having it conceptualised by such a talented stylist like Rhea Kapoor helps with a lot of visibility. Also, there's a lot of goodwill, putting our best work out there and showing everyone what the brand has to offer. It's a win-win situation.

**Has there been an instance where some**

**MARRYING KUNAL WAS ONE OF MY BEST DECISIONS IN LIFE. AND THE MOST EXCITING PART IS THAT WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER SINCE BEFORE WE WERE DESIGNERS. WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER, AND BEING IN THE SAME PROFESSION, WE KIND OF KNOW HOW THINGS WORK**



Pooja Hegde



Khushi Kapoor



Bhumi Pednekar



Sara Ali Khan



Kiara Advani

**MY INSPIRATIONS ARE PRETTY RANDOM. IT COULD BE NATURE OR A HOLIDAY. THE FLOWERS, THE SUN, THE SEA, THE SAND, THE ARCHITECTURE, THE INTERIORS... I WOULDN'T HAVE A SPECIFIC INSPIRATION FROM A BOLLYWOOD OR HOLLYWOOD MOVIE**

**Bollywood A-lister has worn your design and you've had a client wanting the same after seeing it?**

An episode like this happens pretty often when an actor wears your garment and people want it. This happened in 2013. This is back in the day when Anaita Shroff Adajania, the stylist, sourced from us for Deepika Padukone when she was promoting *Chennai Express*. At that time, the idea of wearing brands and promoting them was fairly new. I have to say that for Anaita, to

go ahead and do that and give the credit to the designer was incredible. That was one of our first looks to go viral. We got more than 3000 orders for the same look. It was so new and so exciting to have that kind of opportunity. To see the kind of business that came in after that, it was pretty insane.

**Have you ever taken inspiration from films for your design?**

My inspirations are pretty random. It could be nature or a holiday... The

flowers, the sun, the sea, the sand, the architecture, the interiors...

I wouldn't have a specific inspiration from a Bollywood or a Hollywood movie but it could probably be a scene in one of the movies that has inspired me to do something. And that is how I guess my inspiration works from time to time.

**Have the opportunities to design for a feature film rolled in yet?**

Yes, there have been opportunities in the past to design costumes for a

feature film. But that is something I feel I'm not willing to do yet. I'm enjoying the space that I'm in so much that it's not something that I want to dwell on currently.

**Which director's vision would you say will align with your brand's signature aesthetic?**

It would be Karan Johar because he's flamboyant, super stylish and understands fashion. And of course, I've heard he's generous when it comes to fashion and styling for movies. Apart from him, it would be Sanjay Leela Bhansali because his vision is something else that is so opulent and detailed that I would love to be a part of it. ■



# HOMeward BOUND

CELEBRATED AMERICAN COUTURE DESIGNER **MAC DUGGAL** TALKS TO **VEDANSHI PATHAK** ABOUT FINALLY BRINGING HIS COLLECTION TO HIS HOME COUNTRY, INDIA

**K**nown for his opulent hand-beaded designs in the United States that are reminiscent of to India, Mac Duggal enters India with multi-brand outlets. Duggal has built a globally thriving fashion legacy spanning across 51 countries. His creations are retailed in popular stores across the world. The Spring/Summer '24 collection is an ode to an ethereal dream with a romantic-edgy modern twist. Elated about launching his brand in India and expanding into the 52nd country, Mac says...



→ Genelia D'Souza



**WE CHOSE TO ENTER THE INDIAN MARKET BASED ON A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF ITS DIVERSE CULTURE AND DYNAMIC YET EVOLVING FASHION LANDSCAPE**

Mouni Roy



Tyra Banks

**What's been the reason behind you launching your brand in India much later than in other countries?**

We chose to enter the Indian market based on a deep understanding of its diverse culture and dynamic yet evolving fashion landscape. Upon evaluating India's fashion landscape, we recognised its growing expansion and promising opportunities for luxury fashion. There is a noticeable increase in demand among Indian consumers for affordable luxury, mainly looking for exclusivity and sophistication. This trend is evident not only in major metropolitan cities like Delhi and Mumbai but also in Tier 1 and 2 cities

across the country. India's rich cultural heritage and vibrant social calendar offer numerous opportunities to serve a market seeking designer pieces that combine elegance with modern style seamlessly.

**How excited are you now that it has finally been launched in India?**

Of course, it is a proud moment for our fashion label Mac Duggal, as well as for myself on a personal level. Because I am of Indian origin and I have spent significant years of my life growing up in India. My love for the opulent hand-beaded designs, regal embroidery and traditional jewelled details inspired by the rich

cultural tapestry of India has been the inspiration behind the silhouettes for Mac Duggal. Therefore, it is almost like a dream come true to expand into India and show what we have to offer to our patrons.

**The one celeb you love to see in your clothes, and why?**

We have dressed Hollywood celebrities such as Shakira, Beyonce, Eva Longoria and Khloe Kardashian in the past. For me, I wouldn't pick a celebrity I would love to dress as I believe that a Mac Duggal dress is here to make every woman feel like a celebrity. There is a silhouette to make each one feel special and beautiful in their own way.



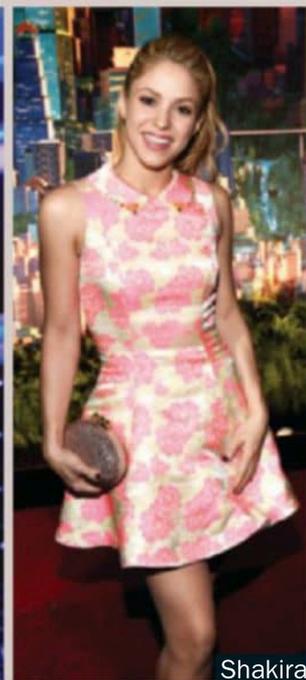
Carrie Underwood



Gina Rodriguez



Khloe Kardashian



Shakira

**IN 2024, PEARLS WILL EMERGE AS A DEFINITIVE TREND, ADORNING EVERYTHING FROM OPULENT GOWNS TO SLEEK SAREES ON RUNWAYS WORLDWIDE. THEIR VERSATILITY KNOWS NO BOUNDS**



Sharvari Wagh

**The top five Indian celebrity muses for your pieces.**

Deepika Padukone  
Alia Bhatt  
Kiara Advani  
Suhana Khan  
Khushi Kapoor

**Who according to you is the biggest fashion icon of India today?**

The biggest fashion icon of today is Sonam Kapoor. She is well known for her impeccable and versatile style, perfectly aligning with the essence of the Mac Duggal brand. She is empowered and confident. Her edgy yet versatile style

always determines fashion trends for the next few years.

**Indian celebrities you'd love to see in your creations?**

The younger girls of Bollywood are just about to make their mark in the industry with their fashion, such as Ananya Pandey, Shanaya Kapoor, Alizeh Agnihotri, and Khushi Kapoor.

**The memorable evening/gown looks of celebrities that you rate highly.**

Alia Bhatt at the Met Gala in 2024. She represents



Patralekhaa

timeless elegance Natasha Poonawala's archival looks, She understands the gravity and the timeless significance of fashion moments Marilyn Monroe's iconic white silhouette, which is a fashion moment etched in time.

**What's the one thing that will always be in fashion?**

I would say that the eternal icon that transcends time and culture is using pearls as an embellishment in occasion wear like heavy gowns. It will certainly always be in fashion, as you see these heavily embellished silhouettes everywhere on the runway. Their timeless elegance effortlessly elevates any ensemble, lending a touch of sophistication and refinement that never fails to captivate. In 2024, pearls will emerge as a definitive trend, adorning everything from opulent gowns to sleek sarees on runways worldwide. Their versatility knows no bounds, seamlessly complementing both traditional and contemporary aesthetics with equal grace.

**What makes your pieces different from other designers' evening wear?**

I believe that our creations encapsulate a unique fusion of traditional Indian craftsmanship with contemporary Western silhouettes. This blend creates a mesmerising aesthetic that appeals to a global audience, especially with a presence in 51 countries, while staying true to my cultural roots. In essence, my evening wear designs offer a harmonious blend of the East and the West, tradition and modernity, making them distinctive and sought-after in the realm of fashion. The size inclusivity factor just further adds to the desirability of Mac Duggal, as we have a dress for every occasion and every woman to feel beautiful.

**A colour you personally love creating pieces in...**

It is definitely hard to pick a specific colour, but rather, a range of colours that we have created silhouettes in would be deep hues such as plum, olive green, antique gold and royal blue, perfect for evening dressing. The lighter hues and tones preferred for daytime occasions vary from sage green, taupe, slate blue and champagne to vibrant tones like marigold yellow, fuschia and cobalt blue. ■

# exclusives

what's on their mind?

## CALL OF THE HEART

It's rare to discover your passion and then turn it into your career, and I'm grateful that I found mine. It feels like this is where I was meant to be. I've had experiences as an engineer and a model, but I truly believe I've found my true calling now.

Kriti Sanon has grown as an actress from year-to-year. She knew what road she had to follow and went marching right ahead, the courage of her convictions being her guiding light. She's on our cover this month and in her interview, she introspects about her career choices and candidly reflects about the life she has led.

PHOTOGRAPH: TEJAS NERULKAR



# THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS

KRITI SANON TAKES TIME OFF FROM HER HOLIDAY  
FOR A LONG, LONG CHAT WITH *FILMFARE*.  
SUMAN SHARMA RECORDS THE CONVERSATION

PHOTOGRAPHS: TEJAS NERULKAR | STYLIST: SUKRITI GROVER  
HAIR: AASIF AHMED | MAKE - UP: ADRIAN JACOBS  
Outfit: Aadnevik | Neckpiece: Viange | Rings: Misho, Zahra  
Handstack: Amama Jewels, Eurumme Jewellery | Footwear: Tista



# KRITI SANON

LOOKS LIKE AN  
ANGEL AND ACTS  
LIKE SHE WAS  
BORN WITH A  
CLAPBOARD IN  
HER HAND.

She's in London and we connect over a long-distance video call which turns into an audio call due to bad connection. I can feel her joy as she describes the sights and the sounds of the English capital and how coming here has always been a soothing process for her. She's extremely pretty and not just a pretty face. Her rogue robot avatar in *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya* sent a chill down your spine. Till that point it was a comedy and then suddenly turned into a thriller. Tell her that and she beams big time and adds you've made her day. Likewise, she got the audience batting for her all the way when she played a surrogate mother who brings up her child against all odds in *Mimi*. We loved her sassy avatar in *Bareilly Ki Barfi* as well. She's lived a decade in the big, bad world of showbiz but hasn't lost her innocence. She still approaches every role with a child-like glee, looking forward to losing herself in the magic of cinema. She's happiest when she's on the sets and even on her holiday, a part of her is counting the days towards facing the arclights again. Presenting excerpts from a straight-from-the-heart chat-a-thon.

Suit: Gaurav Gupta | Top: Ankita Jain  
Neckpiece: Amama Jewels | Rings: Misho, Zohra  
Belt: Sakshi Jhunjhunwala | Footwear: Taro Ishida



**What's been keeping you busy these days?**

Currently, I'm enjoying my holiday. When I'm not working on a film, I like to keep this time free to travel with friends, cousins and my sister. This has become a summer tradition, which I started last year and am continuing this year. Of course, if there's a film shooting that takes priority.

**You've been in the industry for almost a decade now. Does it still feel like a dream?**

Absolutely, it does feel like a dream and an incredibly fulfilling journey. There are moments when I pause and reflect on how I didn't even know I wanted to be an actor. I feel incredibly blessed and grateful when I think back to those times. It's rare to discover your passion and then turn it into your career. I'm grateful that I found mine. It feels like this is where I was meant to be. I've had experiences as an engineer and a model, but I truly believe I've found my true calling now.

**Despite being an outsider you made your debut with a big production house, Sajid Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment's *Heropanti* which was a blockbuster film...**

I feel really lucky to have had such a strong debut with *Heropanti*, thanks to Sajid Nadiadwala and Sabbir Khan. They provided a fantastic platform for us and marketed the film in a way that treated Tiger (Shroff) and me equally. It wasn't about being a star kid or not; it was about introducing two new faces. I'm grateful that my debut was successful and that it

helped me establish myself in the industry.

**From *Heropanti* to *Crew*, you've come a long way**

Yes, definitely. I've never attended acting school or done theatre. Everything I've learnt about acting has been through hands-on experience. Starting from being a complete newbie on set who didn't even know where to stand or how to face the camera, I've grown to understand the intricacies of each character and what works best for me as an actor. With each film, I've striven to absorb as much as possible and constantly evolve. I've always been curious and am always asking questions on the set, which initially led some to say I ask a lot of questions. However,

that curiosity has been crucial for my growth and development as an actor. Hearing compliments about my latest performance being my best yet, is validating and shows me that I'm improving with each role.

**You seem to be taking it slow in the sense you've only done some seven-eight films in a decade.**

I'm aware that progress can be slow for female actors, especially coming from outside. It takes time for people to notice you and recognize your name. For the longest time, people would sometimes recognize me as 'Oh, she was in Tiger Shroff's film,' before recognizing me as Kriti Sanon. It's been a journey to establish my own identity.

**Do you like to ponder over your options and then choose?**

I strive to select better films. My perspective is that even if a film doesn't succeed, one shouldn't dismiss the effort of those involved. I've come to understand the importance of persisting and having faith in the film's concept and the team behind it because things can improve over time. It's essential to be willing to try new things, take risks, challenge yourself and face fears, as this is how personal growth occurs. Additionally, I consider myself fortunate to have had a significant opportunity with a film like *Dilwale* early in my career. It broadened my exposure to global audiences and allowed me to learn from my talented colleagues.

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I FEEL REALLY LUCKY TO HAVE HAD SUCH A STRONG DEBUT WITH *HEROPANTI*, THANKS TO SAJID NADIADWALA AND SABBIR KHAN. THEY PROVIDED A FANTASTIC PLATFORM FOR US AND MARKETED THE FILM IN A WAY THAT TREATED TIGER (SHROFF) AND ME EQUALLY



Outfit: Cilvr | Earrings: Baala Jewels  
Cuff: Womenscode | Footwear: Taro Ishida

A woman with long, wavy brown hair is posing against a vibrant red background. She is wearing a black, multi-tiered, ruffled dress with a matching strapless crop top. Her arms are raised, and she is looking towards the camera. She is wearing black high-heeled shoes and several pieces of jewelry, including a necklace, a bracelet, and rings.

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Outfit: Aadnevik | Cuff: Manifest Design  
Rings: Misho, Zohra | Footwear: Taro Ishida

**What's your process for picking up a project?**

Sometimes, what excites me as an actor is the entire film itself or the opportunity it presents to explore something new. Other times, it's the people involved or the director whose work I admire and want to collaborate with. There have been moments when I've finished a deeply intense film and felt the urge to switch gears and do something light, comedic and entertaining. It can also depend on the phase of life you're in as an actor. I believe in constantly evolving. Now, I've reached a point where I don't just want to like a film; I want to love it and feel enthusiastic about taking on the role.

**You proved yourself with *Bareilly Ki Barfi...***

*Bareilly Ki Barfi* was probably the first milestone that really made a difference for me, where people started recognizing my acting abilities. I think it made them take me more seriously as an actor. Before that, perhaps they couldn't envision me in roles that weren't glamorous. The film portrayed a vibe of an urban girl, which is true to who I am. But ultimately, it's important to believe in the actor and not just the persona. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to break out of that stereotype, showing that I can excel in diverse roles.

**...And then *Mimi* further cemented your reputation.**

*Mimi* has truly been a game changer for me. It was the first film where I carried the weight of the lead role, which provided me with

ample opportunities to showcase my skills as an actor. I always say the more you invest as an actor, the more you can deliver. So if the role is substantial, I can deliver more. *Mimi* gave me that larger canvas. While working on *Mimi*, I thoroughly enjoyed the process and it unlocked something within me. I realised that I'm capable of tackling intense scenes and overcoming my fears as an actor. The love the film received, including the National Award, were incredibly fulfilling.

**Are you happy with your career so far?**

I'm currently feeling content and secure. I feel happy and calm, no longer caught up in a constant race. At times, I've felt frustrated when I believed I deserved opportunities that didn't materialise, especially compared to others who may have had a better surname and

stronger connections. These moments are part of the journey towards success and validation. When your hard work is recognised or appreciated, it brings a deep sense of satisfaction. While I am happy with where I am, I still have a restless drive to explore new opportunities and challenges.

**Are there any more goals left for you to achieve?**

I'm incredibly ambitious. I have numerous dreams still ahead of me. As soon as one dream is achieved,



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I'm already envisioning the next goal. I'm constantly driven to accomplish more, to discover something that propels me to new heights, and to surprise both myself and audiences with ground-breaking projects. Perhaps doing a film in Hollywood is my next goal. But it must be meaningful and truly excite me. I have many aspirations because I sense there's still so much left to achieve. I believe I've only tapped into about 60 per cent of my potential.

**The much hyped *Adipurush* didn't**

**do well at the box office. How did you handle the criticism?**

When a film doesn't succeed, it's truly disheartening. You feel a deep sadness and might even find yourself in tears, wondering what went wrong. The goal is never to hurt anyone's feelings; the intention behind every project is always positive. However, we must face the reality that sometimes things just don't click, and it's crucial to learn from these experiences. As an actor, the best approach is to stay focused, put in the



me honest feedback on what they liked and didn't like. I believe constructive criticism is beneficial. But it's important not to let all types of criticism get to you too deeply.

**How do you react to all the gossip that's written about you?**

When false negative information is published about me, it's not just frustrating for myself but also impacts my family. They shouldn't have to deal with the repercussions of something untrue. It's

I'M AWARE THAT PROGRESS CAN BE SLOW FOR FEMALE ACTORS, ESPECIALLY COMING FROM OUTSIDE THE FILM INDUSTRY. IT TAKES TIME FOR PEOPLE TO NOTICE YOU AND RECOGNIZE YOUR NAME



particularly aggravating when random rumours, like me supposedly getting married, start circulating. Friends then message me assuming it's true and I have to clarify that it's not. People often don't bother to verify facts before spreading stories, especially on social media where negativity spreads quickly. Having to constantly correct these falsehoods is incredibly irritating and ends up being more bothersome than anything else.

**Celebrities are now more accessible to their fans. Does it make it easier for people to pass judgments on artistes?**

Nowadays, judgments are thrown around recklessly without any consideration. People often forget that the person on the receiving end is also human. In the past, without social media, individuals might have silently formed opinions after reading something in a newspaper. Now, there's a trend where people derive satisfaction from posting negative comments online. With so many individuals expressing their opinions freely, it feels like everyone believes they have the right to say whatever they want without filtering their thoughts. The widespread access to social platforms and ample free time contribute to this phenomenon.

**That's why perhaps, celebrities have become more reticent...**

We've become increasingly cautious. We're aware that anything we say can be misinterpreted or become fodder for trolls. This cautiousness has made us step back from freely expressing

effort, and concentrate on the next project. There are many variables beyond my control, but I strive to ensure that I fulfil my role to the best of my ability.

**Do you get bothered by criticism?**

If feedback is constructive and makes sense, I embrace it positively. However, if it's simply trolling or negativity, I don't let it affect me personally. I can distinguish between genuine feedback and comments driven by others' frustration. When someone critiques my performance, I take it seriously. At home, after watching my films together, we have a *chai* session the next morning where my family gives





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ourselves. In the past, people used to speak more freely without worrying about the consequences. Conversations were more intriguing back then; even shows like *Koffee With Karan* were more captivating because people didn't face severe backlash for their words. Nowadays, any statement can be easily twisted or criticised, which has changed the dynamics of how we communicate.

**Is social media a necessary evil?**

Social media isn't essential but it's a valuable tool for connecting with people, especially with fans, beyond your on-screen appearances, which might be just a few times a year. It's a great way to show a different side of yourself and engage with them on a personal level.

**It can also be quite addictive...**

Sometimes I catch myself mindlessly scrolling for hours, achieving nothing. The stress it unknowingly adds is awful. I notice I often open my phone and instinctively tap on Instagram without reason. This addiction isn't healthy. To combat it, I occasionally take breaks from my phone or limit my Instagram use. During work or vacations, I make a point to ignore my phone entirely. Finding these moments helps me stay present and avoid the urge to check my phone.

**When you weren't getting films, did you feel insecure?**

Yes, there was a time when I didn't shoot for about 14 months. I felt insecure about not being visible. Being new in the industry, I worried that if I wasn't seen, I might be forgotten. At that time, I was eager to work and be

WHILE WORKING ON *MIMI*, I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED THE PROCESS AND IT UNLOCKED SOMETHING WITHIN ME. I REALISED THAT I'M CAPABLE OF TACKLING INTENSE SCENES AND OVERCOMING MY FEARS AS AN ACTOR



Outfit: House Of Masaba | Earrings: Equivalence  
Bangles: Ishhaara



noticed. Now, visibility isn't a concern. I prioritise quality over quantity. Currently, I have a strong desire to be on a film set; it's where I thrive and feel alive. But I won't commit unless I love the project, so patience is crucial. Insecurities vary at different stages of one's career.

**In moments of doubt, what gives you courage?**

I take courage from those who believe in me. It's essential to reflect on your journey—from where you began to how far you've come. Sometimes, you didn't even imagine such a journey. There's something within you that has brought you to this point, and you must believe in that. Also, it's crucial to learn from your mistakes. Instead of just complaining about a film that didn't succeed, analyse why it didn't work and what lessons you can glean from it. Doing so helps you move forward more effectively.

**Whom would you give credit for your success?**

It's truly been a journey for me. I've had the opportunity to work on numerous films with many directors and collaborators who believed in me. One of my biggest supporters has been Dino (Producer Dinesh Vijan) and Maddock Films. From the days of *Raabta*, Dino saw more potential in me than what was evident in my previous work. His belief in me was pivotal, especially with a film like *Mimi*, where he not only trusted that I could deliver but also invested significantly to support the project. This faith and financial

backing were instrumental in shaping the film into what it became. Many of my unconventional and unique films have stemmed from collaborations with Maddock Films.

**You shared a great chemistry with Shahid Kapoor in *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya*. Are you doing another film with him?**

The sequel for *Teri Baaton Mein...* is currently being written. We're both eager for it to happen soon. Working with Shahid has been a joy for me. I believe we also have great chemistry together. Sometimes with certain actors, the chemistry just naturally clicks, you don't have to force it. Shahid is one of those actors for me.

**Varun Dhawan and you are great friends...**

I've known him since *Dilwale*. We've been friends since then. He's one of the few actors I can truly call my friend. We chat even when we aren't working together, which is rare in this industry. I can't believe he's become a father. He is like a child who's had another child. He's genuinely warm-hearted.

**You're a self-made woman who seemingly has it all. What would a man add to your life?**

You want people who contribute positively to your life. You thrive in their presence because they motivate and inspire you to improve. They support you during your lowest moments. You desire a partner who will be there for you when you return home, sharing both happy and sad moments. Even if you achieve great success in life, without someone

to share it with, it feels meaningless. In this industry, loneliness can be intense because you have very few consistent relationships. You go from one film set to another, forming bonds that feel like family. You eat, drink and spend entire days with these people. But after three months, they're gone. Then it's on to the next film and another "family." Everything feels temporary, so having constants in your life becomes crucial.

**Are you a romantic at heart?**

I'm a big romantic at heart and truly believe in love. It's something that grounds you and makes you feel whole.

**How would you describe love?**

Love is about feeling something for someone unconditionally. It's accepting them as they are, without trying to mould them into your ideal image. Love should inspire growth and personal evolution, encouraging you to become the best version of yourself. It should add to your happiness rather than solely being responsible for it—you should already have happiness within yourself. Maintaining your individuality while feeling like the best version of yourself defines what love means to me.

**You recently bought a new house in Alibaug...**

I've always dreamt of owning property in Alibaug. Sometimes, when you simply need a weekend getaway to relax and find peace, Alibaug seems like the perfect destination. So, I finally made that dream a reality and recently bought a house there. It's a fantastic property. ■

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# Infamed AND uncu

JANHVI KAPOOR IS BOTH SMART AND SASSY,  
AND WISE ENOUGH TO KNOWS THE DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN THE TWO, FINDS RACHIT GUPTA

Janhvi Kapoor has a fierce new determination and aptitude. She's taking her craft seriously and leaving no stone unturned to hone her skills. That's why, in the middle of a seemingly fluid English conversation, she often changes gears to express herself in Hindi. She is a Hindi film actress after all. The conscious recalibration will help her become more fluent with the language that she must command on screen. God is in the details, and there should be no inhibition when it comes to learning and self-growth. That's a theme that seems to dominate Janhvi's vision right now, and the same runs through her upcoming release, *Ulajh*, where she plays an IFS officer accused of conspiracy and nepotism. Janhvi's character must clear her name and reputation, as her family and country's image are at stake. The situation is not all that different from where Janhvi stands in her own career. She has successfully managed to step out of the shadow of her illustrious parents—the late Sridevi and doting dad, producer Boney Kapoor. But the journey for young Janhvi has only just begun. She confesses that she continues to learn and imbibe from her directors and her peers on a day-to-day basis. And she's smart enough to know that she needs to learn from those who know more than her. She's savvy enough to use her social media sway to create hype for her film releases. Beauty and brains are just two sides of the same coin. And we are convinced that this new version of Janhvi is totally untamed and uncut. Read on...

men and you have something to say that you know, objectively, makes more sense than anything anyone else is saying, you have to be mindful of how you put it across without seeming like a *dedh shaani*. Do you understand that?

**Yes. So, is it difficult to be opinionated or articulate**

**We know *Ulajh* means entanglement. In real life, are you the kind of person *jo kisi se bhi ulajh jaayegi*? Or are you a non-confrontational person?**

I'm usually non-confrontational. But it also depends on my mood. If someone decides to take up an *Ulajh* with me on the wrong day, then I'll take on anyone.

**Are there any aspects of your role in *Ulajh* that you could identify with? Are there any parallels to your real self?**

Suhana, as an IFS officer, as a diplomat, as primarily a woman in a man's world. She combats male egos a lot. And at every juncture, she has to do her job without hurting anyone's ego. She must do so without disappointing anyone. These aspects are important when you're dealing



Mr & Mrs Mahi

with situations like national security and how your country is represented. So, for a character like Suhana, she has to be cognizant of managing people's egos much before her own self-respect. I guess that is something that I've done in life, too. Another aspect is that of perception. Suhana has to be wary of her perception and her country's perception. She has a legacy to look after, and she's living up to the pressure. I guess I have dealt with all of these things in my life, too.

**When you talk about navigating male egos, is that similar to how a female artiste has to go through the film industry?**

I don't think navigating egos is just an actor thing. I think it is a female thing. I don't think you, as a man, have thought about it. I hope I don't make this girl feel bad with my actions. I know that as a man and a good person, you're aware that you don't want that to happen,

Suhana has to be wary of her perception, her country's perception, and how she is representing her country. She has a legacy to look after, and she's living up to the pressure. I guess I have dealt with all of these things in my life, too



Ulajh

**when you're a commercial film actress?**

There have been so many times where you need to put your opinion across without seeming like you're too opinionated, without seeming like you're trying to overstep. These are things that every woman in a workspace has had to deal with. It was something that I was dealing with without even being aware of it. Even to have that confidence, *ke shayad jo mai bol rahi ho woh sahi hai*. It's not easy. I've learned all of these things through the course of shooting this film.

**Popular physicist Neil deGrasse Tyson says if you ever find yourself in a room where you're the most influential or the most intelligent, find a new room.**

Yes, the sentiment is that you're in the wrong room. Get out of that room immediately. But honestly, I think this statement is sometimes misconstrued. Sometimes people think of it as surrounding yourself with people who have more than you so you can aspire for more. Maybe that's a very small aspect of it. What he means is that you need to surround yourself with people you can learn from and grow from. If in a room, you're the only one who has opinions, who is curious, and everyone else is kind of stagnating in life. Then that room or crowd doesn't have much to offer you intellectually.

**Which individuals have contributed to your personal growth?**

My parents have contributed to my personal growth. They've basically brought me up; they've conditioned me. Many of my teachers in school have done that too. I had a teacher called Peter Clinton, who was my TOK (theory of knowledge) teacher.



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It was a subject that I think only IB schools had, where you discuss the human psyche, philosophy, and things like that. I loved that subject, and I loved the way he taught that

class. There was one teacher who hated me as well. He was Mr. Bruce Lewis, but I loved him, and I loved his classes. He was a literature teacher, and he really made me fall in love with

literature, writing, and reading. Even Pandit Birju Maharaj had an impact on me. I got to spend time with him only briefly, but just to be in the room with him and his years of experience, his art,

and his greatness was enriching. Every time I was around him, I knew I was in the presence of someone special, almost godly, someone who transcends even the greatness of their art.

**You've often credited your directors for having a positive influence on you.**

Shashank Khaitan and Nitesh Tiwari sir have had a big influence on me in the way that I approach my craft. Neeraj Ghaywan sir has had a huge influence on my thinking and understanding. We started interacting during the lockdown, and he really opened my eyes to a lot of things, like caste and creed in society.

**Have you ever had a hard taskmaster whip you into shape?**

People around me have told me to whip myself a little less. My friends and colleagues keep telling me you

**Do you think you got it from your mom or your dad? Or is it self-inculcated?**

I think maybe I got it from my mom.

**There's a reference to nepotism in the *Ulajh* trailer. Have you re-ignited the 'nepo kid' arguments all over again?**

No, it's a part of my character's situation. It is her truth, like it is mine. And I think that this whole narrative and this whole word have become so popular in society and pop culture that people resonate with them and use them often. There's also a flip side to that. Before others can say anything about nepotism, *humne khud hi bol diya*.

producers face. I know how an actor's behaviour can make a producer's life easier or infinitely more difficult. And I always try to make it easier. If a producer has ever asked me to skip on a vanity van or not travel with my entire team on a certain day because of whatever condition, I've done that. I think as actors, ultimately what you care about is making the best possible film and alleviating as much of the pressure as you possibly can. But in other situations, if you ask me for my wish list, of course, I'll want my team. I want all of us to be comfortable, but

taking Viji with you? Viji is like my sister. She's been working with us for years. Papa will ask, Why is your manager not travelling with you? Why is Viji not going with you? She needs to be there for you when you come home from shooting. Now I've started taking Viji everywhere with me. But, because I realised I really do need her, Initially, I was convinced that I wanted to travel by myself. There have been times when I have told my producer that if we're changing ticket bookings, I will pay for them. But Papa has insisted they need to look after these expenses.

**Actors often have a very symbiotic relationship with sets. At times, you're only as good as your co-star. So on a film set, are you a giver or a receiver?**

I am whatever the person wants me to be, I guess.

**What about actual relationships in real life? Is that giver/receiver role clearer in a family or romantic relationship?**

No, it's always a give-and-take relationship. It can ever be lopsided. You can never function where I'll only be the provider, the nurturer, and the caretaker, and the other person will just keep taking all that energy and

affection. It doesn't work like that.

**Looking back at your fashion choices over the years, is there a particular phase or look that you're especially fond of? Or, on the contrary, is there anything that you now look back at and cringe at?**

I definitely cringe at my post-*Dhadak* phase. I think two or three years after my first film came out, I was very lost, even in terms of my fashion and self-expression. I was just trying to be someone I wasn't, and I wasn't comfortable in my body.

**We've seen your method of dressing, especially during and after *Mr. And Mrs. Mahi's* promotions. Does that come out of your love for fashion? Or is it to sort of rule the social media trends and headlines?**

It comes from my love for fashion. I'm genuinely excited by it. To be very honest, I did it for fun during *Mahi's* promotions. There's always been a good amount of attention paid to how I dress, and I wanted to bring that attention back to the movie, so I really used it as a ploy. And it worked out well. I might repeat it, and hopefully it'll have the same effect on my future films. But I'll only do it as long as I have fun with it. ■

I'm very aware of the pressures that producers face. I know how an actor's behaviour can make a producer's life easier or infinitely more difficult. And I always try to make it easier



with sister Khushi, father Boney Kapoor and mother Sridevi

should chill.

**Are you often hard on yourself?**

Yes.

**Why?**

I don't know. It's just my predisposition, I guess.

**Being a producer's daughter, have you been sensitised to the fact that you should be a more frugal actor or star? Is the pomp and show an inevitable part of stardom?**

I'm very aware of the pressures that

never at the cost of the movie.

**Has your father ever tried to coach you as a producer?**

No, *unka oolta chalta hai. Woh kitni baar bolte hain ki, why are you not*

# Hey goodlookin', whatcha got

**RAVEENA TANDON** HAS ALWAYS LIVED LIFE HER OWN WAY. SHE REAFFIRMS HER MAXIMS AND BUSTS SOME MYTHS IN A CHAT WITH **JITESH PILLAI**



**To this generation, who know her mostly through her songs, Raveena Tandon is someone who made the saree look sexy.**

*She said it all through her expressions without unnecessary skin display. But there's more to Raveena than being an item girl. I remember meeting her as a rookie journalist and being swayed by her charm and warmth. Those days, we used to chase the stars to their shooting locations and conversations happened during the shooting breaks. Raveena always made sure the journos were comfortable and had plenty to eat and drink. And her off-record conversations were legendary as she knew everything about everyone. Her personal take on people and trends were howlarious. Her journey, from being labelled "Miss Arrogance" to earning accolades for her profound performances in films like Shool, Daman and Maatr, reflects her dedication to meaningful storytelling and social issues. As a mother, Raveena champions independence and resilience, believing that mistakes are part of growth. In an industry known for its scrutiny, she has embraced challenges with dignity, inspiring a generation both on-screen and off. Excerpts from a chatathon with the actress with whom you can talk all day and not get bored.*

**You were one of the first girls I met as a rookie reporter at 19 and I noticed you didn't have a chaperone on the set. Many heroines then were accompanied by their mothers. But now you're a mother to a budding heroine, Rasha. Do you feel protective? Should your daughter make her own mistakes as she debuts soon?**

I come from a film-oriented background but never expected to be in the movies. I was working with Prahlad Kakkar, modelling, and assisting at an advertising agency. My father was in movies, but my grandfather was a high court judge, my aunt a doctor, and my uncles were lawyers. I had a diverse upbringing. My mother's father was in the military. We had film stars visiting, but my dad

ensured we weren't influenced in the typical filmi way.

**I've met your parents—they're so non-filmi.**

The glamorous perception isn't accurate we have normal homes and great education. My mom trusted me and didn't need to be on the set. I managed my own travel for shoots and studies, even taking exams while filming my debut, *Patthar Ke Phool*. Having male friends helped me bond with my co-stars. Now, Rasha chooses her own career. As parents, we should support our children's dreams, not live through them. We must let them make mistakes because life is the best teacher. That's how we grow and develop as individuals.

**In your times, you didn't have social media, you had the most nastiest headlines.**

We faced the worst headlines. Social media is a boon today because facts can be shared immediately. In the past, once allegations were made, you couldn't share your side; it depended entirely on editors. Now social media has drawbacks like nasty trolling, and sometimes it feels like giving a sword to the monkey. Still, if used wisely, it's beneficial. Technology has its upside and downside.

**How have you prepared your daughter for the setbacks and the highs?**

Can I tell you something? I think she's more my mother these days than I am hers.



# cookin’

When I look at her, I say, “Cookie, how did you become so mature? How are you so wise?” Then I look at myself and I say, “Great job, girl.”

**Do you think journalism then was more judgmental and scathing?**

I had many titles like Miss Arrogance and Miss High And Mighty, often due to complaints from directors or actors about my boundaries. I never kissed on screen and wasn’t comfortable wearing swimsuits or bikinis. I had personal rules; I would only accept roles that aligned with my comfort. I managed to do even rape scenes without tearing my clothes, insisting, “my clothes won’t tear.” I wanted to live by my rules, and people mistook that for arrogance. I believed that if I wasn’t comfortable, no one could force me. If they didn’t want to hire me, they could choose someone else.

PHOTOGRAPHS: SURESH NATRAJAN | FEMINA

*My mom trusted me and didn’t need to be on set. I managed my own travel for shoots and studies, even taking exams while filming my debut, Patthar Ke Phool*

**I remember *Darr* was one of the films you had to say no to.**

Unfortunately, sometimes I think, “Oh, God, why?” There are many regrets. Even for *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, Karan still tells me, “You didn’t do my first film.” I had my reasons. I was trying to reestablish myself at that time. I couldn’t have played second lead to Kajol. I’m not ashamed of my decisions. I had temporarily left my career for personal reasons and had to re-enter the industry on my own terms. Every time the film’s title song plays, I tell Rasha, “Imagine, this song could have been mine.” She asks, “Mama, why didn’t you do it?” And I reply, “I had my reasons.”

**I don’t think you were convinced about doing *Shehar ki ladki*.**

*Shehar ki ladki* happened when I was trying to reestablish myself. The producer and Sunil Shetty were friends. They were struggling to complete their

film. They asked me to help with a song. And I agreed to do it for free out of goodwill. The song received great reviews and marked my return. The producer later offered me a large cheque as thanks but I refused, valuing the goodwill more than money. To this day, I haven’t taken that money. I believe saying no with grace is significant.

**There were 52 girls the year you won the Filmfare Debut Award. You want to recall that moment?**

My uncle accepted the award as I was shooting for *Andaz Apna Apna* in Ooty. Rauf Ahmed, the editor, urged me to attend but as a newcomer, I couldn’t take two days off. There were no direct flights, it would have taken too long to travel. I didn’t have the courage to ask the director, Rajkumar Santoshi, for permission. Surprisingly, we got a call at 12:30 AM from my uncle,



*We faced the worst headlines, and social media is a boon today because facts can be shared immediately. In the past, once allegations were made, you couldn’t share your side*

who said I won the Filmfare Award. My mom and I regretted not going. But as a newcomer, taking time off would have caused financial loss to the unit. That sacrifice made my first award even more precious. Thank you, Filmfare and Rauf, who was a sweetheart.

**Did you lose films because a hero favoured another actor?**

Yes, that happened. I still find similarities when I read interviews of Priyanka or others. I was never insecure. I signed *Patthar Ke Phool* casually, just to meet Salman Khan because my friends wanted to meet him. I was in college and had already rejected several films. I wasn't sure about acting as I had no training. When *Patthar Ke Phool* came, I bragged about the offer because Salman was a big star after *Maine Pyar Kiya*. My friends insisted I accept it so they could join me on the set, so I did. While filming *Patthar Ke Phool*, I signed five or six more movies and there was no turning back. I always give 100 percent and have never been insecure or jealous. If you ever hear I had someone removed from a movie, I'll change my name to Champa Kali. I believe in

honest dealings and have never played politics, though I was on the receiving end. Believing in myself was enough.

**It was interesting while these catfights and all were going on, you also hung out a lot with other actresses. There was Manisha Koirala, Pooja Bhatt, there was you...**

All of us heroines are still well-connected. I'm friends with Pooja and Juhi (Chawla), and we constantly support one another on Instagram. I haven't seen Manisha in a long time, but I'm happy for her. Shilpa (Shetty), MD (Madhuri Dixit), and I boost one another up on social media. I often meet Ayesha Jhulka at Otters' Club, where we chat and hang out. Despite a few who remain insecure and haven't kept bonds, there were never any catfights. The camaraderie from back then still prevails today.

**I buy that.**

There might be a discussion like, "Why are you doing this? What's the need?" and an effort to bridge the gap. But it was never a catfight, just hype and exaggeration. Back then, without social media or cameras, it was hard to clarify things. Men had fistfights,



*If I fell in love, I was open about it. Unlike my college friends who changed boyfriends every two months, as an actress, I couldn't date openly*

so why call us "cats"? What would you call the men?

**Did the men have dogfights?**

Men had fistfights in those days, but we women didn't. At most, we'd have discussions to resolve issues. Some people didn't want to, so it was labelled a "catfight," which was overhyped and exaggerated. We learned to accept it as something the public wanted for entertainment.

**Were there any films that you refused because you were principally against them?**

Yes, of course. That might be why the "Miss High And Mighty" label came about. I almost signed a movie with Shah Rukh until we discussed the costumes, which were uncomfortable and objectifying. I refused and Shah

Rukh was surprised, asking, "Are you mad? Why are you saying no now?" We were already working on *Jaadu* and *Zamaana Deewana*, and we got along well. Shah Rukh is one of the wittiest, warmest, and most decent co-actors I've worked with. I told him, "Shah, I can't wear that stuff. I'll feel strange." Throughout my career, my costumes have always been decent and regular.

**I remember you've done this lovely, sensual song in *Zamaana Deewana*.**

Yes, with Shah. It was a saree and the same with *Tip tip barsa pani*. But the costumes in that other film were too objectifying and not classy. I refused roles because of such costumes, which made people think I had a high opinion of myself.

**Also they called you a prude...**

Yes, yes. They thought I was prudish because I would not agree to do these things.

**Which also extended to your private life. With the exception of one very high-profile romance, no one said she's having an affair with someone.**

If I fell in love, I was open about it. Unlike my college friends who changed boyfriends every two months. As an actress, I couldn't date openly. People would speculate about marriage and kids before I'd even said, "I do."

**You must have been 21-22, when you adopted two girls, which was amazing.**

Yes, it seemed like the right decision. I had been involved with my mom in NGO work focused on girl children, addressing issues like the female child ratio and female infanticide. My mom's efforts inspired me to work for the empowerment



*I always give 100 percent and have never been insecure or jealous. If you ever hear I had someone removed from a movie, I'll change my name to Champa Kali*

of girls and women. When the opportunity arose, I stepped up without worrying about societal warnings or concerns. Despite some naysayers, society largely accepted my decisions. I took on legal guardianship since single moms couldn't adopt at that time. So as legal guardians, it was me and my mom who signed up. Today, I'm a proud mom of four.

**So technically, are you a grandmother?**

Yes, technically I'm a glam-ma for them. They call me glam, glam-ma because I'm so glamorous.

**The heroines keep getting younger opposite the heroes, while the older actresses are sidelined. Did you face ageism?**

**With OTT, there's been a resurgence. Actresses like you, Madhuri, Juhi, Tabu, and Manisha Koirala are all doing great work.**

I've heard of older heroes working with much younger girls, half their age. But that seems to be changing now. Five or six years ago, it was different. Today even our heroes are more conscious. There's a growing awareness among younger actors who prefer age-appropriate roles and films. Heroes are embracing their age, as are actresses. This realism in scripts is beneficial for everyone. Personally, I've worked with heroes who are actually younger than me.

**Is there also pressure to surgically enhance yourself? Was there any kind of pressure on you from your producers?**

No pressure but looking good doesn't hurt. Science has advanced and people are seeking ways to stay youthful, though not all are readily available. I've been genetically blessed with good skin, thanks to my dad. Treatments like lasers for acne and various skin uplifting machines are now options. Despite criticisms like being called "thunder thighs," I've never opted for surgery. I embraced my body's changes during pregnancies. Surgery is daunting; one shouldn't tamper with their body unnecessarily. Modern

science offers enhancements like hair colouring, but surgery is a serious decision I've completely avoided. I prefer methods like intermittent fasting to maintain health.

**So, you were body-shamed a lot during your youth?**

I was always a plump kid. That's why I never thought I'd be in the movies. I was a fat kid with oily hair and two braids. So, no one thought I'd become an actress.

**Did it affect your mental health when you were body shamed? Did it make you anxious?**

It did. Because I always knew I was taller and broader than other heroines. Now I'm proud of my Punjabi genes. My 16-year-old son is 6'2" and broad like me. Be proud of your solid, heavy bones. I used to weigh a lot and my hero would joke about it. But I can't change my genetics. I'm fine as I am. At 16 or 17, public scrutiny hurts. But with family and friends, you'll get through it. In India, we rely on family and friends, not therapists. Reach out without shame.

**You never felt the need to meet a therapist over the years? You never felt the need for counselling?**

My therapist is Rasha Thadani these days. Like, I tell Rasha, what did I do now? Why am I always getting into trouble? And she says, "Mama, relax. It happens to everyone. It just shows that you're a celebrity." I was like, okay. She mothers me more than I do these days.

**Where did you meet Anil? How long was the wooing period?**

Anil has now become the most unromantic person I can sit with. Please god.

**But how long did you date before you married? How long did we date?**

Two months.

**That's it?**

Yeah, it was quick engagement and marriage, true Punjabi style. We just knew we were similar. Our upbringings, morals and family values aligned. I judge people by how they treat others. That's

what impressed me about him.

**How has he been as a husband?**

He's been a hands-on father always. I'm admitting, I did not clean my son's potty. It was too stinky. Also I had long nails. It would all just go in. So, Anil has done all the potty cleaning for Ranbir. Rasha, I did.

**You weren't working when the two kids were born.**

No, I didn't work then, despite film offers. In one, they wanted the lead to be pregnant but I was too overweight. I'd gained a lot, eating gulab jamuns. During Rasha's time, I ate everything I'd deprived myself of. Anil would say, "You're eating so much?" I'd reply, "Yes, I'm going to eat." He'd joke, "Blame it on hormones."

**But the romance has gone out of the window after marriage?**

That won't happen; I was kidding earlier. Our kids are grown now. And they dominate our lives. Anil is the stable force for all three of us, even his mom. We can't imagine life without him; we depend on him for everything. Emotionally, I rely on him. We balance it with our kids and family. No candlelit dinners; every anniversary and Valentine's is a family dinner.

**What's the most romantic thing that he's done?**

There are many romantic things, but one stands out. For my 50th birthday, I was shooting in the hills. Despite his severe car sickness, he travelled up to the hills to be with me, planning it without my knowledge. He was sick for two days but he stayed with me. Knowing he'd get sick but still coming was the most romantic thing he's done.

**You won the Filmfare Best Actress again for Aranyak. What made you take it up?**

I received many OTT offers, which I planned to pursue. I'm also doing a lot of movies, having finished *KGF 2* and now working on *Welcome 3*, with more big films to be announced soon. While OTT was a space I wanted to

explore, I waited for the right project. Some shows which I refused were big hits, but I'd have just played myself in them. I wanted something different, which *Aranyak* provided with its unique accent, character, and portrayal, exciting me more than other options.

**Personally, whether it's Daman or Ghulam-e-Mustafa, has anything impacted you deeply?**

When I did the film *Maatr*, I was deeply shaken, crying even during dubbing. The Nirbhaya incident profoundly affected me, especially as a mother of three girls committed to women's empowerment. The delayed justice, especially the release of the juvenile perpetrator, was horrifying. *Maatr* resonated with me, and I felt compelled to do it, regardless of box office success. Recently, the ex-municipal commissioner praised my performance, saying it was an earth-shattering film. This feedback affirmed that I had made a meaningful film. The experience of shooting, dubbing and releasing *Maatr* was emotionally overwhelming. As a parent, the thought of Asha Devi's pain is a nightmare. ■

*I had many titles like Miss Arrogance and Miss High And Mighty, often due to complaints from directors or actors about my boundaries. I never kissed on screen and wasn't comfortable wearing swimsuits or bikinis*



*A*  
you like it

**NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI HAS THE CHAMELEON-LIKE  
KNACK OF TURNING INTO HIS CHARACTER WITH  
EVERY OUTING. JITESH PILLAAI SOUNDS HIM OUT ON THE  
METHOD BEHIND HIS TRUE-TO-LIFE PERFORMANCES**

How do you still or ease that which makes you uncomfortable? How does someone show you their wounds without flinching? How can they tell you an entire story in just the preamble? How do they reveal their soul with just a twitch? Good actors show you their scars; great actors reveal their entire being. They lay bare their lacerations and their mental and physical agony. What's the word I'm looking for? Visceral? Nawazuddin Siddiqui is that visceral actor. He shows you both what's on the outside and what lies within. In *Manto*, his words scorch you; he is irascible, yet he reveals deep moments of vulnerability and brokenness. It's this very brokenness that makes you identify with him because every single one of us is broken in immeasurable ways, and we are all trying to piece ourselves back together. He holds up a mirror for you. It's the same brokenness he portrays in Season 1 of *Sacred Games*. It's the same chaotic, manic brokenness he embodies in *Raman Raghav 2.0* and *Manjhi: The Mountain Man*. Even in his diabolical role in *Badlapur*, you see a man trying to reconstruct himself. And then there's his vulnerability, which shines through in *The Lunchbox* and *Photograph*. It's like pages of life unfolding; the wounds have healed, and he wants to start all over again. How can an actor convey vulnerability, meanness, lunacy and manic anger all in one stance? What is that volcano that bubbles within? How does he do it? He offers no false hopes or assurances. He doesn't promise redemption; he simply urges you to lick your scars. He's going to dive deep into yet another role and offer you brilliance but no salvation once again. I recently met with Nawazuddin for a marathon Q&A. Excerpts:



Gangs Of Wasseypur

“ When I portray a dark character, I relish the opportunity to explore their complexities. In Bollywood, however, deep characterization is not always the norm; many roles tend to be superficial ”

**darker themes?**

When I portray a dark character, I relish the opportunity to explore their complexities. In Bollywood, however, deep characterization is not always the norm. Many roles tend to be superficial. If I were to play such roles repeatedly, I'd quickly lose interest. But when a character like Ramanna from *Raman Raghav 2.0* comes along, I feel compelled to delve deeper and uncover new aspects of myself. That's why I have a strong affinity for characters with shades of grey or darker personas.

**These days, heroes have multiple vanity vans. The size of the entourage determines the stature of the hero. How do you avoid all that?**

Personally, I've never felt the need to indulge in it. If I'm surrounded by 15-20 people who only agree with me, I feel it hinders my ability to act. I prefer to keep just a few close associates around me, who give me honest feedback. During my time on the English series *McMafia*, I observed something interesting. It featured many prominent actors, who arrived in regular clothes and used a modest vanity setup. When they performed, however, I realised their true talent and stature as actors.

**If you're playing a negative guy like Raman Raghav, do you feel judgmental?**

If I judge, I won't be able to do the character. I need to fully believe in my character's philosophy. That I can also be like this. That I can also kill any person, if I feel like killing someone, I can. To believe this was difficult for me. You have to believe. Otherwise, don't go for it.

**When you do big-budget films, can you save yourself from this facade?**

(Laughs) No, I can't save myself then. But I know that this is all for show. I think it's also important to show off a little bit.

**Tell me about your Cannes experience. It's said that when you first went there**

**At 50, you've been in acting for 25 years. Can you recall a pivotal film that made you feel you'd truly made it as an actor?**

For me, *Kahaani* was definitely one. In *Talaash*, I had the chance to observe and mimic my younger brother, who has a slight limp. Seeing how well it translated on screen was incredibly satisfying. Drawing from real life rather than just

movies can bring out a character's nuances more authentically.

**You play such dark characters. How do you tap into that darkness?**

Who doesn't have darkness within them?

**You seem to have too much of it.**

I have poured mine out and become empty.

**When you read a script, do you naturally lean towards**

**you didn't have a suit and you borrowed it from someone...**

I started going to Cannes in 2012. I think eight of my films have gone to Cannes. *Miss Lovely*, *Manto*, *Gangs of Wasseypur*, *Monsoon Shootout*, *Bombay Talkies*, and a few more. When I went there for the first time, I was amazed at how much respect they give to independent cinema. This year, Payal Kapadia won the Grand Prix for her film *All We Imagine As Light* and Anasuya Sengupta won the Best Actress prize for *The Shameless*. It's wonderful. Great. And I hope that people also watch these movies. But I don't know why the taste is not being developed. When I was in NSD, our seniors used to tell us to go and watch Birju Maharaj's Kathak. We used to go and listen to Bhimsen Joshi, Amjad Ali Khan, Pandit Ravi Shankar, and Bismillah Khan. Initially, I found it a bit boring but after a year, I couldn't live without it. So, for a certain kind of art, the taste takes time to develop.

**You have worked extensively in South films. Don't you encounter a language barrier?**

The director also briefs me about the upcoming scene. Understanding the emotions and then the prompting makes it easy.

**For instance, in a role like *Raman Raghav 2.0*, you maintain control but do you find a lack of control there?**

Yes, indeed. Because when I portray Raman Raghav, my emotions, thoughts, my very soul – everything is in control. In regional

## NAWAZ'S ROUTINE AS A FARMER

- He started working on the farm when he was around 15.
- He's grown sugarcane, mustard seeds, and wheat on the farm.
- He tends to the cattle when he's in Budhana.
- Nawaz's youngest brother manages their farm in his absence.



“ If I'm surrounded by 15-20 people who only agree with me, I feel it hinders my ability to act. I prefer to keep just a few close associates around me, who give me honest feedback ”



With Anurag Kashyap

cinema, sometimes it feels like I don't grasp it fully but due to financial reasons, I take on such projects.

**So do you compromise?**  
Yes, compromise is the apt word.

**Does the audience know?**

The audience may not, but I am aware.

**When you were at NSD, you tackled roles like *Othello* and *Hamlet*. Vishal Bhardwaj adapted several Shakespeare works. How would your portrayal of *Hamlet* differ from Vishal Bhardwaj's interpretation?**



With daughter Shora Siddiqui

“ When I first came to Mumbai, I struggled for ten years before work started coming my way. During that time, the fervour of doing theatre gradually faded within me ”

If I were to play it, I would undoubtedly bring a distinct approach. I even played Romeo in *Romeo And Juliet* once. Can you believe that? And do you know who played Juliet? It was Geetanjali Kulkarni.

**Reflecting on your NSD colleagues, like Vijay Raaz, what discussions do you share when you meet now?**

We spent so much time together that now our interactions can seem mundane. We reminisce about cinema from our time. Nowadays, it's mostly just, "How's it going?" and "It's going well."

**Do your colleagues envy your success?**

I don't think so. We take pleasure in one another's achievements. When Rajpal (Yadav) accomplishes something noteworthy or when Vijay (Raaz)

excels, I am genuinely delighted. There is no envy.

**During your time at NSD and beyond, which actors inspired you?**

Actors like Peter O'Toole, Sir Lawrence Olivier... their performances in works like *Hamlet* and *Othello* left a lasting impression. I was captivated by their performances because they involved no camera tricks—just pure acting.

**You coached Kamal Haasan on Hindi dialogue for *Abhay*. How did that come about?**

A senior from NSD informed me of the opportunity that Kamal *ji* needed coaching in Hindi dialogue. I would hold the script and assist with the dialogue. I also had a scene in *Hey Ram*, but unfortunately, it was cut. During that time, I had the chance to converse

with Kamal *ji* about acting. Once, I even performed Tughlaq's speech for him. He then challenged me to perform the same character in 10 different ways.

**Did you manage it?**

I could manage two or three but how could I do 10? He has exceptional control over his body due to his background in dance. He's a choreographer. That's why he can do it. I can't. That's what makes him a great actor.

**And what about actors like Balraj Sahni, Dilip Kumar and Sanjeev Kumar?**

Certainly, Balraj Sahni's simplicity and his ability to convey so much with so little was remarkable.

**I believe you also embrace the less is more technique.**

I try to. Initially, you feel compelled to do more, to prove yourself.

Later I realised that in cinema, less is more impactful. That's when I began to understand that everything is magnified in front of the camera. Even a slight expression can appear significant. That's why Robert De Niro said, "If it's conveyed through an eyeball shift, there's no need for a long speech or passage."

**Did you have to unlearn what you learnt in theatre when you transitioned to movies?**

Absolutely. Movies operate under a completely different system. The camera explores activities, while the stage demands acting. For instance, if I want to portray a villain on stage, I would express it through body language and dialogue delivery. But in cinema, a single activity can convey how dangerous the character is because

## NAWAZ'S MUST-WATCH PERFORMANCES ACCORDING TO HIM



MISS LOVELY



PHOTOGRAPH



ANWAR KA AJAB KISSA



LIAR'S DICE



NO LAND'S MAN

the camera captures these small nuances.

**Why haven't you pursued theatre in Mumbai? Is it because the money is less?**

It's not about money. If I were after money, I would have opened a sugar factory in my village. Sugarcane grows in our fields.

**Then why aren't you doing theatre?**

When I first came to Mumbai, I struggled for ten years before work started coming my way. During that time, the fervour of doing theatre gradually faded within me. Theatre demands a lot of dedication and rehearsals. I can't just be handed a script, practice for a couple of days, and then perform.

**How much does a co-actor contribute to your performance?**

Great actors like Irrfan support you. When you look into their eyes, you understand the scene and the dialogue. For example, I've worked with Mr. Bachchan in three films. When working with him, if I start thinking of him as Mr. Bachchan, I'm disrespecting his character. It's character-to-character interaction. For the first five-six days, I might be in awe, but after that, I have to act. Otherwise, it's disrespectful. So, you have to shed that awe. More than half of acting is reacting.

**You own a bungalow in Mumbai now. Do the perks of stardom lure you?**

I'm not interested in cars, bungalows, jewellery, or watches. I never wear any of those things. However, my brother showed me this property. It appealed to me because of the greenery all around. You wouldn't believe you're in Mumbai. So I bought it.

**How often do you spend time at your bungalow? And how much time do you spend in Budhana?**

I spend less time in Budhana now. It's been about a year and a half since I last visited.

**Looking at your impressive track record, do you ever feel like you have done everything?**

I won't feel that way my whole life. I feel there will always be some things left. I want to do more creative work.

**Whether it's Guru Dutt or Manto, not much is talked about men's mental health. Have you ever felt the need for therapy or counselling?**

I did go to therapy during *Manto*. If I were to meet *Manto* today, I would ask him where he found the courage to write so candidly, especially in a world that often discourages such honesty. Considering his proximity to the film industry, as evidenced by his insightful essays, I would also inquire about his experiences and interactions with figures like Sitara Devi and other intriguing personalities he encountered.

“Initially, you feel compelled to do more, to prove yourself. Later I realised that in cinema, less is more impactful. That's when I began to understand that everything is magnified in front of the camera”



Manto

## PEER BONDING

**Actors who admired Nawaz's performances**

- Irrfan Khan started crying after watching Nawaz in a scene
- Kamal Haasan called and complimented Nawaz after watching *Manto*.
- Sanya and Nawaz's chemistry in *Photograph* impresses him to this day

**Is mental health an issue for you?**

No, mental health is not an issue for me. When I portray a dark character, it affects me for about a month. When starting a new film, I have to reset and completely leave behind the previous role.

**In *Sacred Games*, you have an affair with a transsexual. Now, in *Haddi*, you portrayed a transsexual. Given your strong alpha male presence, how did you access the feminine energy required for this role?**

As artistes, we're blessed to explore thousands of characters

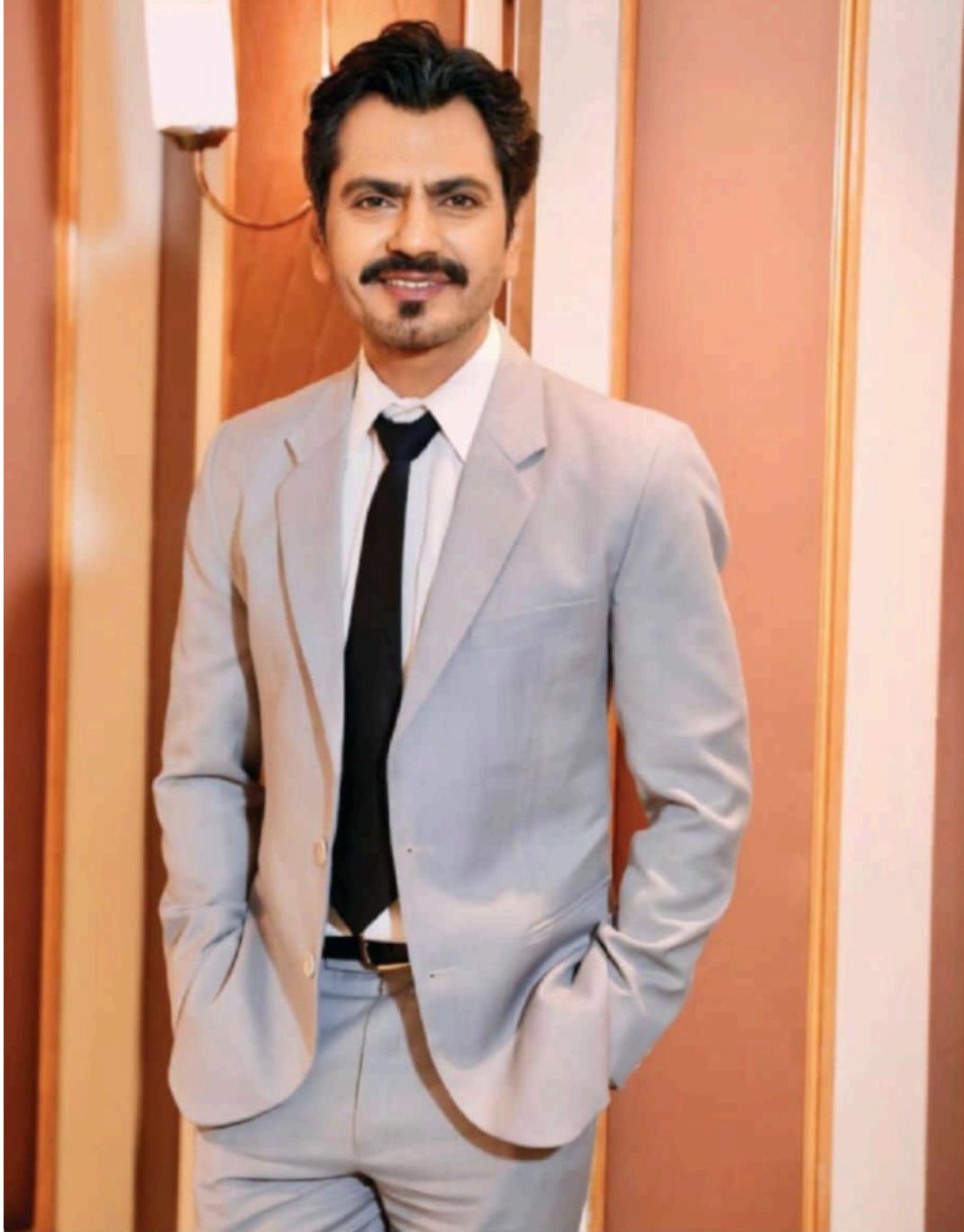
within ourselves. Each of us harbours a good girl, a mother, a father, a brother, a friend—all waiting to be discovered. The universe resides within us. Thanks to my directors, I've had the privilege to uncover these roles through challenging characters.

**In *Haddi*, there's a poignant love scene with your co-star. What emotions did you experience during that moment?**

I delved into the feeling of female jealousy intensely in that scene with Zeeshan. The character believes he's everything to her, and if he leaves, her world would collapse. This kind of insecurity resonated deeply with me. Despite some thinking, I portrayed a transgender character, I played a female role. It's said that when a girl loves, she loves intensely each time, even if it ends abruptly. I aimed not to portray this character in a caricatured manner, wanting to maintain authenticity.

**Tell me a little about your struggling days. Did you lose work because of your looks?**

I was told, "You don't look like an actor."



“As artists, we're blessed to explore thousands of characters within ourselves. Each of us harbours a good girl, a mother, a father, a brother, a friend—all waiting to be discovered”

Now, anyway, there has been so much change. If a person of my height and size goes to an office, saying I am an actor, people take it seriously. They didn't take me seriously before.

**And if the same producer, director, wants to come back and sign you now?**

Yes, it happened many times. But why would he give me work? Who was I? I did not look

extraordinary. He's right on his end.

**Do people constantly tell you to recite your dialogues?**

And I say, brother, forgive me. Because my acting was the worst during that time.

**Gangster Of Wasseypur was one of your most famous roles. Are you suggesting that your acting was bad?**

It was bad in that dialogue, which was popular. *Baap ka, dada*

*ka, bhai ka badla lega.* What kind of dialogue was that? The dialogue may be good, but the way I spoke was bad.

**You've worked with Anurag Kashyap right from *Black Friday* to *Raman Raghav 2.0* to of course *Gangs of Wasseypur*. Is he your favourite director?**

I don't see him as a director; he feels more like a supportive brother. When I look into his eyes, I sense a safety net. I know he'll catch me if I falter. For example, on the first day of filming *Gangs*, I was overacting, trying to channel Al Pacino. He called me out, saying, "What are you doing? Why are you showing off?" That moment made me realise I needed to approach my role differently. The next day, I went in with a humble mindset, embodying a character like Faisal Khan—just an ordinary person acting with genuine emotion.

**Do you understand your parents better now that you have children?**

I certainly do. When I was in college in Haridwar, my father would travel from the village, carrying food and supplies for me. He had to change buses and was quite old, but I didn't appreciate it then. After he passed away, I realised the sacrifices he made. Despite his failed businesses, I learned from him that perseverance matters.

His struggles fueled my determination to succeed.

**Do your kids know you're a star?**

Not really. They've heard my dialogues, but haven't seen my films. Because most of my movies are rated for adults. They say my lines are great, but they haven't watched the movies yet.

**As for your daughter's interest in acting, is it in the genes?**

It seems to be a natural interest. She approached her school's performing arts faculty in Dubai and asked to join. The teacher accepted her. She's also taking workshops.

**Isn't she too young?**

She's 14 and going to a summer workshop in London. She's already showing promise in her performances, understanding nuances like motivation and timing. It's impressive, especially since we learned these things much later in life.

**Does she ask you for help?**

No, she handles it herself. I think it's great that she's serious about it. I haven't intervened because I believe it's important for her to earn her successes and not take them for granted.

**Do you feel you missed out on their growing up?**

Yes, definitely. Every time I see them, they've grown so much. ■

# Unbreakable!

**SONALI BENDRE** IS THE OG DIVA WHO HAS LET NOTHING COME IN HER WAY INTO LEADING A FULFILLING LIFE, FINDS **TANISHA BHATTACHARYA**

*Sonali Bendre was the OG national crush. Much before the crown went to the likes of Rashmika Mandanna and Triptii Dimiri, she mesmerised fans all over with her come-fall-in-love-with-me face. There was no social media during her heyday but going by the glowing references to her even now on the internet, we have no doubt she'd have dominated the socials scene. But there's steel beneath her velvet glove persona, evident from the fact that she successfully battled stage four cancer and became cancer free in 2021. She blazed her way into our hearts after surviving cancer through her gritty performance in the OTT show **The Broken News** (2022). The second season of the series too is being appreciated and Sonali is thankful for all the love coming her way. Presenting excerpts from an engaging interview with the original diva, where she talks about her past and looks forward to the future.*

## HOW EXCITING WAS IT TO PLAY A JOURNALIST ON SCREEN IN **BROKEN NEWS**, BEING AN ACTOR WHOSE EVERYDAY JOB INCLUDES DEALING WITH THE MEDIA?

As an actor, I have always been surrounded by journalists, many of whom have become dear friends. In the days before social media, journalists were our primary means of communication. There was always a slight defensiveness towards them. When I played the role in *Broken News*, I stepped into the journalist's shoes and gained an understanding of their expectations and the pressures they face. It's not just about the journalist approaching you; it's about what is expected in the current moment. Today, it's all about clickbait, whereas back then, it was about the



*Broken News 2*

headline and the pressure journalists faced to secure that quote. So, I sympathise with them.

## YOU MENTIONED SOCIAL MEDIA. HOW MUCH DOES ITS POWER AFFECT YOU?

(Laughs) I joined social media reluctantly but I found some positives. I appreciate its democracy

and the ability to communicate directly with my audience, without a journalist's filter. Sorry, I couldn't resist adding that. However, since last year, I've grown weary of social media and everything it entails. It's not contributing to my personal growth. Also I sometimes feel it's making people less

thoughtful. I have a great team who manage my social media. I prefer it that way because I'm not particularly fond of using it myself.

## WHAT TRAITS OF YOUR CHARACTER AMEENA QURESHI IN **BROKEN NEWS** DO YOU ADMIRE AND DISLIKE?

I don't think there's anything I dislike about Ameena. She's a remarkable person. Her greatest strength is her authenticity. It's easy to stereotype her as perfect but she's flawed like any other human. She's dedicated to her career and the truth professionally, but her personal life is a mess. That contradiction is what makes her compelling.

## WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO HAVE YOUR CHARACTER KILLED OFF?



— “ —  
*When I joined social media, I found some positives. I appreciate its democracy and the ability to communicate directly with my audience, without a journalist's filter*  
— ” —

**IT WAS A SHOCKING TURN OF EVENTS.**

Practically speaking, *Broken News* was based on the BBC series *Press*, which only had one season. When our Season 1 was successful and we moved to Season 2, we didn't have a precedent to follow. There was no Season 2 of *Press* to build upon. Season 2 of *Broken News* was entirely the creation of Vinay Sir and the writer. With so much happening in Season 2, we felt it was best to conclude the storyline strongly rather than dilute it by thinking about Season 3.

**HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN BRUTALLY HONEST IN YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH JOURNALISTS, OR HAVE YOU KEPT YOUR GUARD UP?**

Most of the time, I haven't been completely honest. It became a game for me because certain questions would always come up. "What's your favourite colour?" or "What's your favourite dish?" I would change my answers each time because I found the repetition irritating. After ten years in this career, I expected journalists to be better prepared. It became a running joke with my sisters when my answers were published differently each time. It kept things amusing for me.

**WHAT IS YOUR IDEA OF SELF-CARE? WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN NOT WORKING?**

I enjoy thinking about work and find it relaxing. It energises me. I love working, so when I'm not, I think about how to keep busy.

**ARE YOU A MULTITASKER, OR DO**

**YOU PREFER FOCUSING ON ONE THING AT A TIME?**

About five or six years ago, I had a realisation that I'm not inherently inclined towards multitasking. It was during a period of illness when my sole focus was on recovering my health that I truly grasped my preference for tackling tasks one at a time. Even in my marriage, I've noticed a distinct difference: while my husband effortlessly juggles multiple tasks, I find myself more comfortable and effective when I concentrate on one task until it's completed. It took some time for me to understand and embrace this aspect of myself, but now I appreciate the clarity and productivity that come with a more focused approach..

**WHAT ARE SOME NON-NEGOTIABLE FACTORS FOR YOU WHEN CHOOSING A SCRIPT?**

When it comes to choosing a script, several factors are non-negotiable for me. Firstly, I prioritise the people I work with. Positive energy on the set is crucial because filmmaking demands long hours and intense collaboration. No matter how compelling a project may be, working in an environment tainted by negativity drains my creativity and passion. Therefore, I place a high value on a harmonious and supportive team dynamic. It's not just about the project's potential but also about enjoying the journey with like-minded professionals, who share a commitment to excellence and a positive work environment.

**WHEN YOU LOOK BACK AT**



**YOUR CAREER, WHAT WAS THE CAMARADERIE LIKE WITH YOUR CO-STARS, SUCH AS DURING HUM SAATH-SAATH HAIN?**

During the time of *Hum Saath-Saath Hain*, the camaraderie with my co-stars was truly special. Interviews during that period often led to us sharing delightful anecdotes from behind the scenes. Those moments of bonding off-camera were as cherished as the on-screen chemistry we portrayed. However, while I appreciate the nostalgia associated with the film, I tend not to dwell on those specific memories now. Instead, I find fulfilment in knowing that *Hum Saath-Saath Hain* continues to hold a place in people's hearts and remains a memorable part of my journey in the industry.

**AN ACTOR'S LIFE HAS CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY TODAY.**

**WHAT DO YOU MISS ABOUT SIMPLER TIMES?**

Reflecting on the changes in an actor's life today, there's a noticeable evolution that I find both intriguing and nostalgic. While I don't often dwell on the past, I do occasionally reminisce

— “ —

*No matter how compelling a project may be, working in an environment tainted by negativity drains my creativity and passion. Therefore, I place a high value on a harmonious and supportive team dynamic*

— ” —



about simpler times in the industry. Back then, there was a certain charm and intimacy on the sets that's evolved with time. Today, I'm genuinely enthused by the dynamic shifts in filmmaking and storytelling. It's a thrilling era where sets are more inclusive, with a notable increase of talented women. This trend is particularly empowering to witness. Gone are the days when women faced discouragement in pursuing careers in this field. Instead, their presence is celebrated for the confidence and professionalism they bring. It's inspiring to see how their contributions enrich the creative process and shape the narratives we bring to life on screen. As I embrace these exciting new developments, I appreciate how the industry continues to evolve, fostering a more inclusive and empowering environment for all involved.

**HOW HAVE YOU IMPROVED AT DEALING WITH REJECTION?**

Dealing with rejection has been a continuous journey for me, one that hasn't necessarily become easier over time. Each rejection still carries a weight that can be truly heartbreaking. It's a process that demands a period of mourning where I confront disappointment and recalibrate my expectations. However, with each setback, I've learned to find strength in resilience. It's about picking myself up, even when it feels daunting, and summoning the courage to keep moving forward. Over time, I've come to

understand that rejection is not a reflection of my worth or abilities but rather a natural part of an actor's path. It's in these moments of challenge that I've grown the most, both personally and professionally, developing a deeper understanding of perseverance and the unwavering determination required in this industry.

**IF YOU COULD GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF ONE PIECE OF ADVICE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

If I could impart wisdom to my younger self, it would be to embrace the power of presence. In the rush of youth, it's easy to feel the weight of expectation and the urgency to achieve milestones quickly. Oh, how I wish I could tell myself then to just breathe. To understand that life unfolds at its own pace, and there is ample time to explore, learn and grow. In those fleeting moments of impatience and uncertainty, I would remind myself that each breath holds within it the essence of living fully. It's about finding joy and gratitude in the opportunities presented, rather than fixating on what lies ahead. Learning to live in the moment, appreciating the journey as much as the destination, is a lesson that has unfolded gradually over the years. Now, with the wisdom of experience, I understand that life's richness lies not only in achieving goals but in savouring the small victories, cherishing relationships, and embracing the unexpected twists and turns that shape our paths. ■

**“WHEN I MOVED FROM BIHAR TO MUMBAI, I NEVER ONCE THOUGHT ABOUT THE BIG STARS HERE OR WHETHER PEOPLE WOULD BUY TICKETS TO SEE MY FILMS”**

# AMAN

PANKAJ TRIPATHI HAS LED A LIFE LESS ORDINARY. HE SHARES SOME HOME TRUTHS WITH TANISHA BHATTACHARYA

# APART

*They say you can take a man out of Bihar but you can't take Bihar out of the man. Pankaj Tripathi loves making Bihari food.* When he's not busy acting, which is increasingly rare these days, given his work load, you'd find him in the kitchen making *Litti Chokha* and other Bihari delicacies. He promises to feed me some scrumptious dishes if I ever drop by his place. He's a method actor who has assimilated himself seamlessly into both art and mart cinema. Roles are being written for him and he was even the lead in the sleeper hit *OMG 2*. *Mirzapur Season 3* too is being appreciated. He's on a high alright and deservedly so. On a zoom call, we chat about his career and more. Excerpts:



**WHEN YOU MOVED FROM BIHAR, DID IT EVER OCCUR TO YOU THAT THERE ARE SUCH BIG STARS HERE, SO WHY WOULD SOMEONE BUY A TICKET TO SEE YOUR FILM?**  
*(Laughs)* When I moved from Bihar to Mumbai, I never once thought

about the big stars here or whether people would buy tickets to see my films. Looking back now, maybe I should have. I remember the moment vividly when I was on the RORO Ferry from Mandwa, coming

from Alibaug. It was a large boat and I stood on the rooftop deck watching the Mumbai skyline in the distance. I turned to my wife and wondered aloud why we had come to such a huge city.

Despite my initial doubts, we managed to establish ourselves here, which is truly wonderful. Sometimes I don't quite grasp it all, but then I believe it's a result of divine blessings. Countless aspiring actors

arrive in Mumbai every day. Yet, I also believe that everyone's circumstances are partly shaped by their own actions.

**IN A FILMFARE INTERVIEW, SHARMILA TAGORE MENTIONED THAT YOU ARE HER FAVOURITE ACTOR AND SHE LOVES YOUR FILM MANGO TREES...**

When an actress of her stature compliments you and says such wonderful things, I feel deeply grateful beyond words. *Mango Trees* was an independent film that is now available on online platforms. Her appreciation means a lot to me; I can only express immense gratitude to the almighty and to legends like her for taking the time to watch and appreciate it. Interestingly, I had the good fortune of meeting her about 24 years ago when I was studying at the National School of Drama. She had come to see a play and though she might not remember, I vividly recall greeting her during that occasion.

**DO YOU FEEL THE NEED FOR VALIDATION IS LESS THAN COMPARED TO WHEN YOU WERE STRUGGLING?**

Receiving a compliment from someone like Sharmila ji for *Mango Trees* means a lot to me. She's a seasoned actor who truly understands an artiste's talent. This validation is crucial because it comes from someone with deep knowledge and experience in the craft. Apart from that, I'm quite self-critical; I constantly evaluate and check myself every day.

**IS IT CHALLENGING TO DECLINE OFFERS WITH SUBSTANTIAL PAY BUT UNEXCITING ROLES?**

Yes, I decline them now. In the past, I would accept such projects and find ways to make them engaging. Every job can be made interesting; there's no work that can't be made captivating. A dull role can become appealing when approached creatively. Ultimately, it's up to us to make it so.

**REGARDING MIRZAPUR SEASON 3 ENDING WITH A CLIFFHANGER, DO YOU WORRY ABOUT MEETING CHANGING AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS?**

I never get nervous during the release of any film or show. That's just how I am wired. I remain balanced without getting overly excited or anxious. Our job was done during the shoot; now it's out of our control. Fingers crossed.

**THIS KIND OF CALM AND COMPOSURE MUST BE BENEFICIAL FOR AN ACTOR.**

Absolutely, it's been integral to my approach. While many seek calm through meditation and other means, I find it amidst chaos, and it has served me well thus far.

**ANIRUDDHA ROY CHOWDHURY, HAS GLOWING PRAISE FOR KADAK SINGH.**

I can't praise Tony Da enough. Besides being an outstanding filmmaker and writer, he's a remarkable person. Working on that film holds cherished memories for me; it always brings a smile to my face. He gives his all on set, and he even jokes, "My body is rejecting this shot, not me," which I found amusing and unique. I spoke with him just yesterday; I encouraged him to write a story, and he mentioned he's considering

it. We bonded really well during the making of *Kadak Singh*. The bond was great and our fun lies in the process. With Tony Da, that's what clicked. I also really like Kaushik Ganguly's work.

**YOU'VE OFTEN MENTIONED HOW YOU WATCH A LOT OF REGIONAL FILMS, BENGALI BEING ONE.**

Yes, I do not watch Hindi mainstream cinema, I prefer films belonging to the independent arena.

**TELL US A FEW OF YOUR FAVOURITE BENGALI FILMS.**

I liked *Haami* (2018) directed by Shibhopsad Mukherjee and Nandita



Mirzapur

Roy. Kaushik Da toh hai hi. Buddhadeb Dasgupta was also a favourite, I loved his work. I believe there's some connection with Bengal from my last life I guess. Because I'm also so fond of the food, film festivals and landscape that true-blue Bengalis also enjoy.

**WHEN YOU CONNECT WITH A DIRECTOR, WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THAT BOND?**

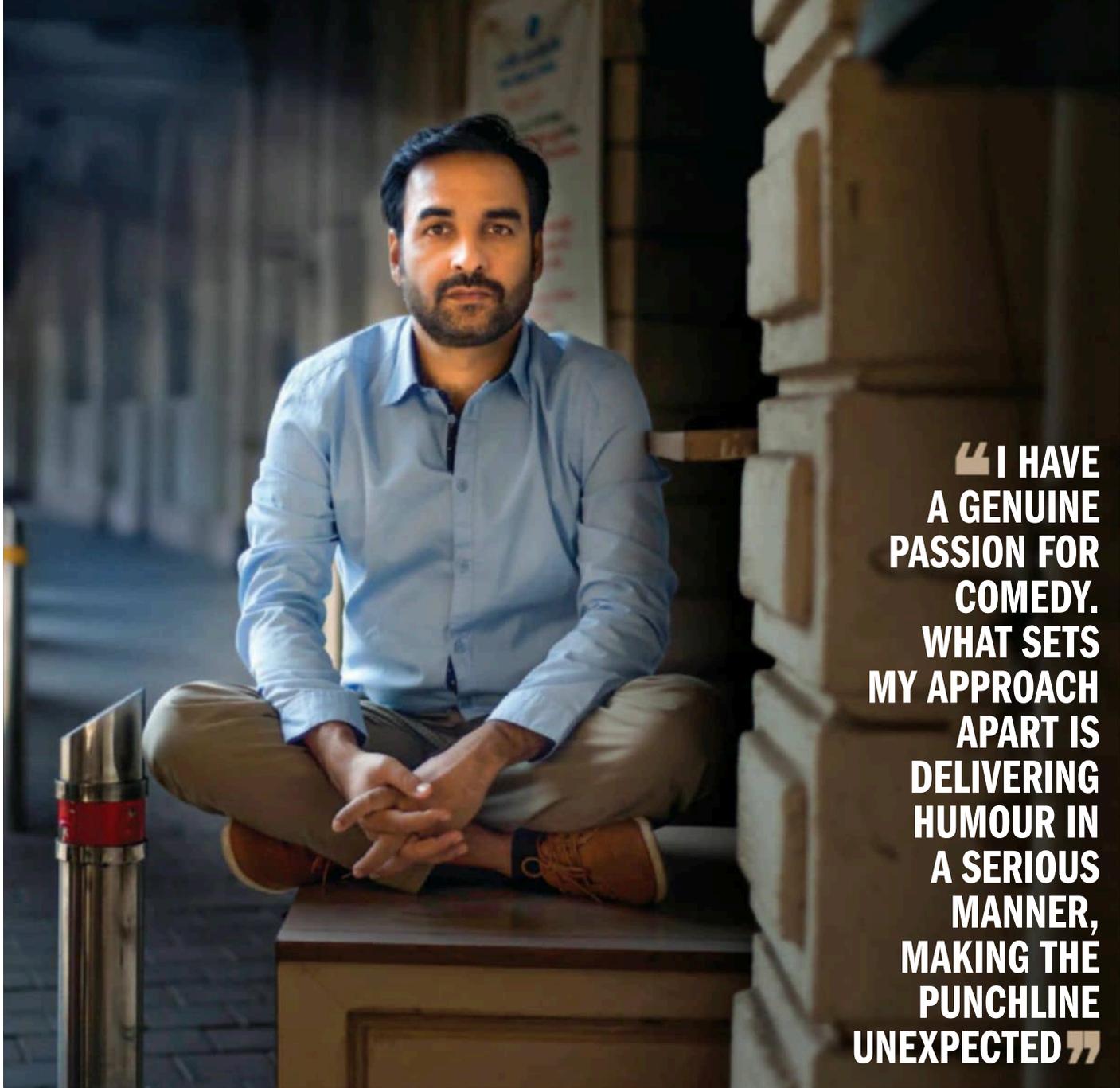
Shared interests are fundamental; they foster conversations that flow naturally. In my case, both my passion for food and engaging discussions

**“I NEVER GET NERVOUS DURING THE RELEASE OF ANY FILM OR SHOW. THAT'S JUST HOW I AM WIRED. I REMAIN BALANCED WITHOUT GETTING OVERLY EXCITED OR ANXIOUS”**

revolve around Bengal. As I said earlier, it's like there's a connection from a past life.

**YOU EXCEL IN COMEDY, OFTEN CONSIDERED THE TOUGHEST GENRE. WHAT GIVES YOU THAT EDGE?**

I have a genuine passion for comedy. What sets my approach apart is delivering humour in a serious manner, making the punchline unexpected. I'm not fond of exaggerated facial expressions or forced humour. For me, perfect comic timing and natural situations are crucial to



**“ I HAVE A GENUINE PASSION FOR COMEDY. WHAT SETS MY APPROACH APART IS DELIVERING HUMOUR IN A SERIOUS MANNER, MAKING THE PUNCHLINE UNEXPECTED ”**

#### WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Some people video call their family members after taking a picture with me. They introduce me as their long-lost uncle or a dear family member, not just an actor. Some even invite me to visit their city and meet them someday. I always agree and appreciate their affection. It's their love and I feel truly grateful for it.

#### DO YOU BELIEVE IN ADVISING NEW AND ASPIRING ACTORS?

Oh, I do give advice when they persistently seek it from me. But seriously, I always tell them that my advice might not apply to their journey because everyone's path is unique. You have to carve your own way; imitation won't lead you anywhere. Instead of following me or anyone else, discover yourself. In acting, we often unconsciously mimic actors we admire. However, it's crucial to understand who they are, what they've accomplished, and how they've made an impact. Then, find that unique element within yourself because that's where true originality lies.

#### BUT CAN ANYONE REALLY GET UNDER YOUR SKIN WITH CONSTANT PESTERING?

Oh no, that's quite a challenge. It takes a lot to make me impatient, angry, or provoke me. It just doesn't happen easily. I decide when I want to feel angry I used to give a lot of advice in the past, but not anymore. Nowadays, there's so much advice everywhere, even unsolicited. It's like the sun radiating sunlight without being asked. ■

avoid falling flat. I believe everyone faces challenges, and audiences turn to movies for entertainment. Even in serious films, I find ways to inject humour subtly to keep them smiling. Life itself offers unexpected moments of humour; let me share an incident from the sets of *Mirzapur*.

#### PLEASE CONTINUE...

In Season 1, Kaleen Bhaiya calls Guddu and Bablu home after their fight with Munna. When I arrive at Kaleen Bhaiya's living room, I notice the imposing throne-like chair with a smaller one beside it. Instead of sitting on the throne, I choose the smaller chair. The director immediately reacts, saying,

'Sir, you're supposed to sit on the bigger chair.' I explain that's their preconceived notion. For me, unpredictability is key. It's expected that a don rules from the throne, but I prefer sitting on the smaller chair, challenging expectations. I believe in breaking preconceptions and surprising the audience each time. Life's more fun when it's unexpected, right?

#### IN AN INTERVIEW, YOU MENTIONED EXPERIENCING ODD MOMENTS WHILE TRAVELLING ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND SEEING YOUR FILM POSTER.

(Laughs) Yes, once I saw my *OMG 2* poster on the back of an auto rickshaw and ended up having a full conversation with

the driver who couldn't believe it was me. Another time, I was on the metro with my mask on, sitting between a passenger and a team member. I asked the passenger about a destination, and upon hearing my voice, he said, 'You sound like Pankaj Tripathi.' I confirmed, it was me, but he still couldn't believe it. I joked that if he didn't believe me, then maybe I wasn't Pankaj Tripathi after all. He persisted and even followed me to the end of the metro station, insisting we take a photo together without revealing to anyone at his banking job. We found a secluded spot, took the photo, and then I left. Truly, stranger things have happened.

# “Life’s full of surprises”

...SAYS **DIVYA DUTTA. SUMAN SHARMA**  
JOTS DOWN THE ACTOR’S MUSINGS

**D**ivya Dutta has carved a niche for herself through a career that spans across genres and languages. From her memorable debut in *Train To Pakistan* to her impactful roles in *Veer Zaara*, *Delhi 6* and *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, Divya has consistently chosen roles that resonate with audiences on a profound level. Beyond the silver screen, Divya is a champion for recognising women’s contributions and the importance of self-love in relationships. Her candid observations on societal dynamics reflect not only her wisdom but also her commitment to portraying authentic, relatable stories that resonate with audiences worldwide. Our interviews have always felt like conversations between friends rather than work because of the way she connects with you on all fronts. Excerpts from an engaging chat with the fine actress.

## HOW WAS IT WORKING WITH TAHIRA KASHYAP IN SHARMAJEE KI BETI?

When I was approached for the film, the producer insisted I hear the story from Tahira. She is so skilled at narration that it felt like I had watched the entire film. They executed it well and were clear about their requirements from the film and its actors. The best thing was we had a lot of fun on the set. It’s important not to feel pressured and to enjoy the work. I found my role interesting.

## YOUR CHARACTER, KIRAN SHARMA, BATTLES LONELINESS AFTER MOVING TO MUMBAI. DID YOU FACE A SIMILAR SITUATION WHEN YOU LEFT A SMALL TOWN IN PUNJAB FOR THE METRO CITY?

Kiran didn’t know what to do other than manage a household. I came to pursue work, so I was prepared. Nevertheless,

everyone experiences a journey of loneliness. Even with help, you must fight your own battles. The city teaches you self-reliance.

## DID YOU RESONATE WITH THE CHARACTER OF KIRAN SHARMA?

I believe we all have a Kiran Sharma within us—vulnerable, somewhat childish and as time passes, we start to limit ourselves due to societal pressures. In today’s social media dominated world, this is everyone’s story. I’ve wanted to play such a role for a long time. Tahira made me do everything in the film, even turning me into a superwoman. We both believe in having complete fun.

## DO YOU FEEL THAT HUSBANDS OFTEN TAKE THEIR WIVES FOR GRANTED IN OUR SOCIETY?

Yes, it’s true. Balancing these dynamics in relationships is crucial. Women are



Sharmajee Ki Beti



“

**Women are multitaskers but often lack appreciation. Even a small gesture like expressing gratitude or saying “thank you” or “I love you” can boost a woman’s energy significantly**

”

multitaskers but often lack appreciation. Even a small gesture like expressing gratitude or saying “thank you” or “I love you” can boost a woman’s energy significantly.

**WHAT IS ONE THING A WOMAN SHOULD NEVER TOLERATE IN A RELATIONSHIP?**

Disrespect. Self-love is crucial. Continuously compromising oneself to sustain a relationship is unhealthy.

**YOU STARTED YOUR CAREER WITH TRAIN TO PAKISTAN. HOW TOUGH WAS IT TO MAKE YOUR MARK IN THIS INDUSTRY?**

No one’s path is straightforward. I pursued acting as my career goal. In earlier times, actresses like Shabana Azmi, Deepti Naval and Smita Patil excelled in both artistic and commercial cinema. However, by the time I entered the industry, such versatility was less common. The blending of these cinematic styles led me to seek unconventional roles, such as those in *Veer Zaara* and *Delhi-6*, which were ahead of their time. Throughout my journey, I have consistently aimed to select the most compelling roles in each film. It’s gratifying when people affirm that they trust my film choices and enjoy the outcomes. This feedback validates that I’m on the right track. Sometimes I’m labelled as an unconventional star, other times as a distinguished actor—a distinction I appreciate. I’ve never confined myself to a single image. When I look in the mirror, I find my appearance intriguing, much like the diverse roles

I embrace. I value the freedom to choose my roles.

**WHAT WAS THE DEFINING MOMENT OF YOUR LIFE?**

I always wished Yashji (*Yash Chopra*) would introduce me in his films and he did so unexpectedly with *Veer Zaara*. *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* gave me global recognition.

**WHAT ARE YOUR MEMORIES ASSOCIATED WITH YASHJI WHICH YOU STILL CHERISH?**

Yashji’s depiction of romance in his films was unparalleled; no one else could capture it in the same manner. He was truly ahead of his time, as evidenced by his earlier works such as *Waqt*, *Kabhi Kabhie*, *Lamhe*, and *Chandni*, which I grew up watching. When I finally met him, I discovered him to be a simple, humble, lovable and fascinating person. We shared a love for sweets, a bond reinforced by our Punjabi roots. Even after wrapping up *Veer Zaara*, he encouraged me to visit him. And I often went to his office to share details of my life. This connection made me feel like I had someone I could call my own in this unfamiliar city. In this industry, Yashji and Amitabh Bachchanji are the only two who never forget people’s birthdays, which adds to their legendary status.

**DO YOU THINK THE INDUSTRY IS NEED-ORIENTED?**

Indeed, it’s a fact. When they require your services, you’re put on a pedestal, but if not, you’re overlooked. I



make a point to reach out to former colleagues who are no longer active and have aged. I enjoy conversing with them. Connecting with talented individuals in this industry is a gratifying experience. One important lesson I’ve learnt is that you encounter diverse personalities here. By identifying like-minded individuals with whom you can form bonds, navigating this environment becomes more manageable.

**DO YOU FEEL CINEMA HAS CHANGED IN RECENT YEARS, ESPECIALLY WITH THE RISE OF OTT PLATFORMS?**

OTT has shifted focus to characters over traditional heroes and heroines. Women now get roles with many layers, not just

glamorous ones. It’s positive.

**YOU WERE CLOSE TO YOUR MOTHER. HOW DID YOU COPE WITH HER LOSS?**

Dealing with her loss took considerable time. After her passing, I fell into depression. In my mother’s time, she would refer to it as “ghabrahat”. It’s only now that we recognise it as depression; at that time, it wasn’t well understood. Fortunately, my brother is a hypnotherapist, so



“ In earlier times, actresses like Shabana Azmi, Deepti Naval, and Smita Patil excelled in both artistic and commercial cinema. However, by the time I entered the industry, such versatility was less common ”

express strong emotions. During Covid, I wrote a poem anticipating better times. My book, *The Stars In My Sky*, is about those who influenced my life.

**WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON LIFE?**

Life is full of surprises. I'm constantly prepared for them. Similar to films, life presents numerous twists and turns and it's important to embrace them just as you do in movies. That's the essence of life. In this world, you'll encounter diverse individuals; the key is to find those who resonate with you, making life smooth sailing.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO NEWCOMERS TODAY?**

If you are really passionate about films, then go for it. But if you are coming here just for glamour, then you shouldn't. Because working in films is definitely not a bed of roses. To be a part of this film industry you need to have these 3 Ps - Passion, Patience and Perseverance. ■

I received the support I needed at home, which helped me through a difficult phase. It's crucial not to underestimate the importance of mental health, as many of our challenges stem from it. I haven't completely overcome the grief; rather, I've learnt to live with it. Even now, when I feel lost, I find solace in remembering and talking to her.

**ANY ADVICE FROM YOUR MOTHER THAT YOU CHERISH?**

My mother was my closest companion. I have drawn my life lessons from her. She used to say to accept life as it comes, without denying its form. In the past, when I faced decisions about roles, I often hesitated. My mother's advice was to commit fully to whatever role I took on, so much so that roles would eventually be tailored for me. That's exactly what transpired after *Veer Zaara*.

**NOW THAT YOU'RE ESTABLISHED,**

**ARE YOU CONTENT WITH LIFE?**

I'm not greedy but I've always eager for work. Maintaining excitement is essential. Tahira jokes I act like a newcomer and I embrace it.

**IS THERE SOMETHING ABOUT YOU THAT HASN'T CHANGED?**

I've retained my inner child. My niece and nephew think I'm younger than them and I like that.

**YOU WRITE POEMS AND ARE AN AUTHOR. WHAT INSPIRES YOU?**

Writing allows me to

“ **SUCCESS IS NOT SOMETHING THAT I HAVE CHASED. IF I GET SUCCESS, THEN GREAT, IF IT DOESN'T COME, IT IS ALRIGHT. SO FOR ME, IT IS ALWAYS ABOUT BEING ABLE TO LIVE A CHARACTER, LIVE A NEW LIFE, BE HONEST, AND BE AS SINCERE AS I CAN** ”

# MARATHON

SAIYAMI KHER, WHO LOVES TO RUN AND ACT IN EQUAL MEASURE, TELLS SUMAN SHARMA SHE'S THERE FOR THE WHOLE HOG

# WOMAN

**Saiyami Kher is known for her distinctive roles, navigating both mainstream and independent film landscapes with equal finesse. Her journey reflects a deliberate choice to engage with narratives that resonate deeply with her aspirations. In her pursuit of roles, Saiyami trusts her instincts, forging collaborations with acclaimed directors like Anurag Kashyap and Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra. As she navigates the complexities of fame and personal fulfilment, Saiyami remains grounded by ingrained values like patience, integrity, and the importance of self-reliance. Excerpts from an interview with the actor who is also a consummate athlete**

**What impressed you about *Sharmajee Ki Beti*, considering your last film, *Ghoomer*, was also based on cricket?**

Tahira Kashyap narrated this film to me almost six or seven years ago. Generally, I go by my gut feeling. A lot of people are asking me, 'Why did you do cricket again?' Actually, *Sharmajee Ki Beti* was offered to me first. I had already committed to it. Then I got *Ghoomer*, which for me has been the most amazing and life-altering experience.

**The film discusses gender inequality. Did you have to fight discrimination in any area, on a personal or professional level?** Fortunately, I am

surrounded by very strong-headed women, be it my *nani*, *dadi*, my mother or my sister. I've never faced discrimination, maybe because of the way I have been brought up. A woman can do the same or more than what a man can do is what my upbringing has always been. Having said that, I've felt that little bit of disparity working on certain films where it was also male-dominated. Otherwise, I feel it is such an equal playing ground.

**8 A.M. Metro is a beautiful film and was different from the rest of your movies...** 8 A.M. Metro is

**“ WHATEVER I HAVE GOT HAS BEEN THROUGH AUDITIONING PROCESSES, STANDING IN LINE, GOING THROUGH THE STRUGGLE. WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE THE BACKING, IT IS VERY TOUGH IN THE INDUSTRY TO SURVIVE ”**



Ghoomer



Special Ops

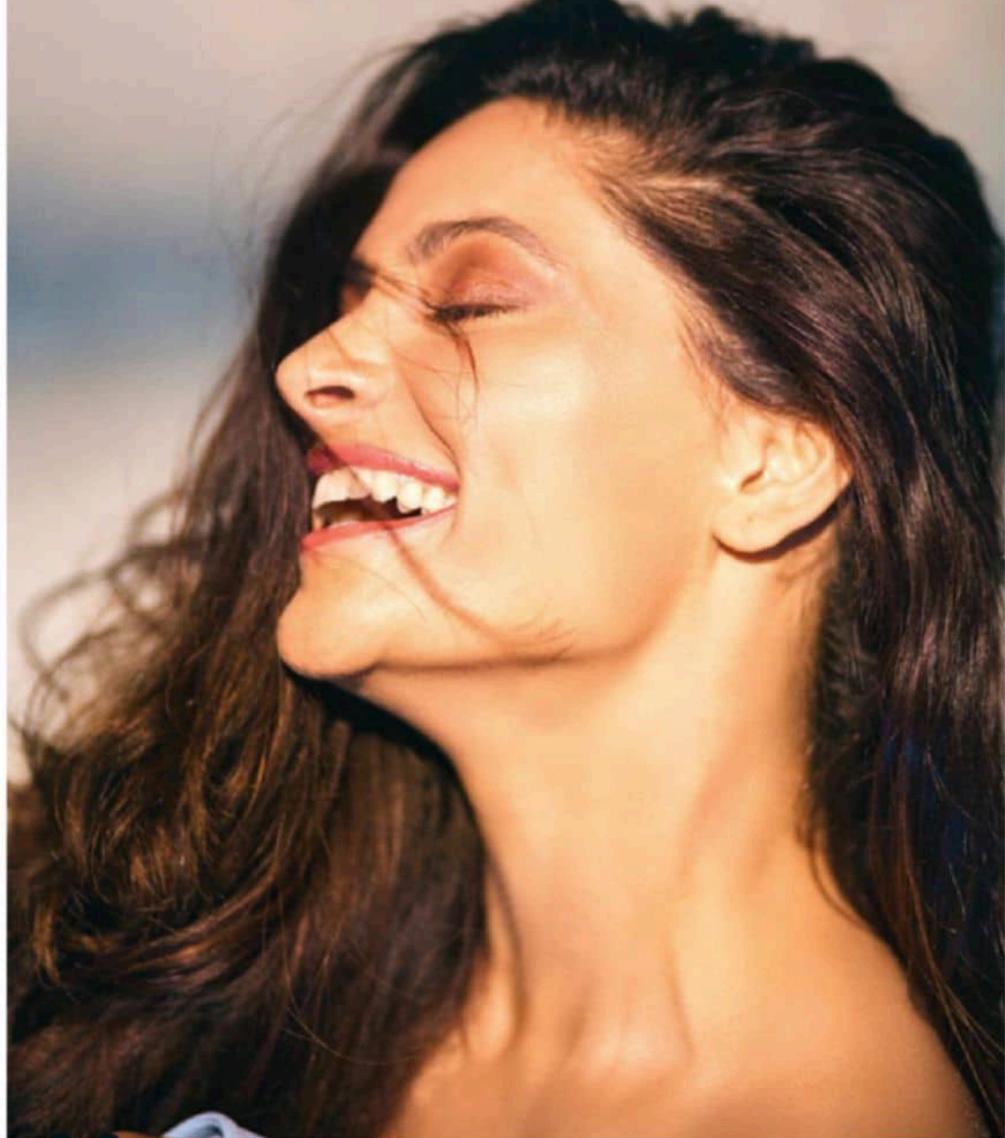
close to my heart. It is a complete passion project made by people who did not think about the box office or reviews. Raj Rachakonda is an independent filmmaker who is passionate about telling a story and Gulshan Devaiah, who I really adore as an actor. It is a story that talks about mental health, which I feel we speak little about. When I was reading the script, I was tearing up. And then of course, Gulzar saab's poems made it refreshing.

**The film spoke about mental health and suicide but sadly there wasn't much buzz about it at the time of its release.**

The same happened with *Ghoomer*. I feel it didn't reach the audience so I was like 'arrey what's the point.' But then it released on OTT and reached a larger audience, so I felt okay. But a film like

8 A.M. Metro is from a completely unknown director and an unknown producer. He put his own money into it, so there was no money for marketing at all. Even though he tried really hard, it didn't get the visibility it should have gotten. But this is part and parcel of the business. I was advised against doing it because it is not a big film. But I wanted to be a part of the film and make a difference, even if it is to one life. I have counted at least 11 messages

**Did you undergo mental health issues in real life?**  
As an actor, you are constantly thrown into so much negativity. There are so many ups and downs in your career, you may be rejected at a certain point, or you may put in so much effort but things don't work out, it is natural that you may feel low. I have gone through that and felt very low. Fortunately, I have my parents and my sister who have been there for me. Every actor you speak to has



**“ WORKING IN FILMS HAS BEEN THERAPEUTIC. I AM SOMEBODY WHO DOESN'T LIKE TO EXPRESS TOO MUCH IN REAL LIFE. SO, IF I HAVE A HEARTBREAK OR A FIGHT, I BOTTLE IT UP AND VENT IT ALL OUT IN FILMS. I ACTUALLY ENJOY THE CRYING SCENES ”**



8 A.M. Metro



Sharmajee Ki Beti

saying that they were suicidal and how this film has been a balm on what they were going through. If a film can positively make a difference in someone's life, I feel that film is successful.

gone through this. Because it is just the nature of the profession, I guess.

**How did you deal with it?**  
It is important to be able to speak to people. I am someone who has always spoken about

getting professional help when needed. I have always been fortunate that my coaches have always helped me out. I ran a marathon and trained for an Iron race. This is my way of pulling myself out of any kind of low that I am in.

**How would you define yourself?**

My name is Saiyami, so I try to embody the meaning of my name, which is patience.

**How important is instinct for you while choosing a script?**

To be honest, when Anurag Kashyap said he is directing

*Choked*, I said whatever it is, I want to work with you. Because I knew as an actor I would grow working with him. There are certain filmmakers that I will trust blindly. So if Rakeysh (Omprakash Mehra) sir, Balki, Anurag offer me a role, I will say I don't want a script, I will work with you.

**Do you think you have reached a stage as an actor where you are getting the roles you've wanted to do?**

I am definitely not in a place where I am getting roles that I would like to do. I've been lucky that certain filmmakers

like R Balki, Anurag Kashyap, Neeraj Pandey have backed me. Like a greedy actor, I would like to do certain kind of roles and with certain kinds of makers. But unfortunately, those opportunities haven't been easy at all. I wish that I got more opportunities where I can showcase more of my talent.

**Are you happy with the way your career is shaping up right now?**

I'm somebody who is always wanting to get better and wanting more. But then everyone says the market is bad. The big films are not working. Whatever



“  
**AS AN ACTOR, YOU ARE CONSTANTLY THROWN INTO SO MUCH NEGATIVITY, SO MANY UPS AND DOWNS IN YOUR CAREER WHERE YOU ARE REJECTED AT A CERTAIN POINT, OR YOU PUT IN SO MUCH EFFORT AND SOMETHING DOESN'T WORK OUT**  
”

I have got has been through auditioning processes, standing in line, going through the struggle. When you don't have the backing, it is tough to survive in the industry. I am grateful that I have survived it and been a part of some memorable films.

**What's the harsh truth of the industry?**

That it is a money-driven business and sometimes business takes over creativity, which I have still not understood.

The harsh truth is you need someone to back you in this industry. If you have good enough backing and a solid PR behind you, you can make it.

**What has the film industry taught you?**

Patience. And not losing self-belief is important. When you undergo some experiences in life, your innocence is robbed. As an actor, you have to keep that innocence alive because that is visible on screen. I

go away to Nasik my home, to get away for a bit. It is also about maintaining your sanity.

**According to you, what works in the industry?**

If it is written in your destiny, you will get all that success. But success is not something that I have chased. If I get success, then great, if it doesn't come, it is alright. For me, it is always about being able to live a character, live a new life, be honest, and be as sincere as I can.

Acting is not a job for me; it is something that gives me a lot of joy. What gets commercial success, I have no idea. But if any of my work manages to bring a smile on someone's face, if it manages to influence them in a good way, that for me is success.

**Coming to your personal life, how important is love in your scheme of things?**

Love has always been important. Having someone in my life, to be able to share my joys and my sorrows is important. I don't think the world can survive without love.

**Do you miss being in a relationship?**

Right now, I wouldn't say I miss it. I have been really busy for the last three years, so I wouldn't be able to give enough time to someone. And it's not fair—not being able to give time to a relationship. Besides, I have some really solid friends who have been there with me in my joys and sorrows. So right now, I am not missing it at all.

**Have you ever had your heart broken?**

I had a heartbreak a long time ago. My first relationship was when I experienced my heartbreak, which I feel is always the toughest heartbreak

that everyone goes through. Once your heart is broken, you learn how to look after yourself.

**How did you deal with heartbreak at that time?**

*(Laughs)*. I started running marathons. Running seems to be the solution to all my problems. Also, working in films has been therapeutic. I am someone who doesn't like to express too much in real life. So, if I have a heartbreak or a fight, I bottle it up and vent it all out in films. I actually enjoy the crying scenes. I cried a lot in *Ghoomer*, and I found it quite cathartic.

**What is the best thing a man has ever told you about yourself?**

Someone once told me how my simplicity and innocence have remained intact despite being in such a harsh industry.

**How much does financial security mean to you?**

Being financially secure is extremely important to me. My mother always told me to never depend on anyone for money—neither your parents, nor your husband, or anyone else. You should be financially secure. I have been earning since I was 17 and have managed my own finances, investing in the stock market and in real estate. ■



# *Long way home!*

*TAHIRA KASHYAP TELLS  
SUMAN SHARMA THAT  
SHE DOESN'T BELIEVE IN  
COUNTING THE MILESTONES  
AS HER JOURNEY IS A  
DESTINATION IN ITSELF*

*Tahira Kashyap is not a bra-burning feminist. Her brand of soft feminism is something you can connect with. She believes in mutual respect and mutual growth amidst mutual harmony. She understands that due to familial concerns and motherhood duties, a woman's career might take a backseat but she doesn't believe in being a martyr to these realities. After a long gestation period, her labour of love, Sharmajee Ki Beti finally bore fruit and was released on OTT. Though Tahira would have been happier if it had a theatrical release. She narrates the genesis of her maiden effort as a director and also takes us through her life's journey in this captivating interview. Excerpts:*

What was it like when your film *Sharmajee Ki Beti* was shown for the first time at the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival and it garnered a lot of appreciation?

I was nervous at the MAMI film festival. When the film received a standing ovation, I was bewildered. The most beautiful part was that not only women but also men were appreciating it. Each character in the film has become a favourite of someone or the other, which is a win-win situation for me. Despite taking seven years to complete, the film still appears relevant and fresh. Unfortunately, the issues that were pertinent seven years ago remain relevant even today. So, as a society, how much have we truly progressed?



Sharmajee Ki Beti

**You wrote this film in 2017. Why did it take seven years to reach an audience?**

The challenge lay in securing financial investment for this project. While the story was universally praised, there was always a caveat. "But there's no hero in this film," they said. Even if there is a heroine, she isn't 20 or 21 years old. Suggestions came to cast an A-lister so the film could ride on their name. Many such temptations came our way. Then there was the task of securing studio backing, followed by a personal setback (being diagnosed with breast cancer).

Just as the project gained momentum, the pandemic struck, depleting our budget over time as we retained the crew. Despite these hurdles, I completed the film in 32 days.

**You must have faced numerous disappointments.**

Sometimes, choosing one's own path and refusing shortcuts is a matter of self-respect. I broke down many times during this journey, but I wiped away my tears and persisted. Through this experience, I learnt to find happiness even amidst crisis. Ultimately, I realised my vision for

**SOMETIMES, CHOOSING ONE'S OWN PATH AND REFUSING SHORTCUTS IS A MATTER OF SELF-RESPECT. I BROKE DOWN MANY TIMES DURING THIS JOURNEY, BUT I WIPED AWAY MY TEARS AND PERSISTED. THROUGH THIS EXPERIENCE, I LEARNT TO FIND HAPPINESS EVEN AMIDST CRISIS**



the film without succumbing to external pressures to cater to a specific audience or alter its essence. Tanuj Garg has been the backbone of this project and I have truly invested myself in it.

**All the women in this film struggle with self-worth. Have you also faced similar challenges?**

Certainly. After

the film's release, I received both positive and negative tweets, which made me doubt myself. However, I counselled myself and disregarded the negative comments, reminding myself that I had done a good job and had given it my all. Self-doubt isn't exclusive to women; men experience it too, though they may be adept at concealing it. Women tend to be more vulnerable and open about their emotions. Yet vulnerability isn't weakness; it's a mode of expression. A fleeting moment in one's day that doesn't define me. If I experience a breakdown, it doesn't define me; it's simply a passing phase.

**You often address inequality, whether through film, poetry or your opinions.**

Indeed. I come from a progressive background; my father was a news editor and my mother was a vice principal. In our home, gender inequality was never discussed. When my mother went to work, my father would prepare me for school, meticulously oiling my hair and tying it into a ponytail. I grew up assuming all families functioned similarly. It was only when I visited

friends' homes that I realised not all men supported their wives. At the age of 13, I was incensed. Why wasn't my mother at home, and why was my father handling household duties? It was then I realised I'm a feminist, though initially, my expectations were solely from my mother.

**What's your definition of feminism?**

Equal love, respect and dignity for all genders, regardless of one's sexual identity. Every human being deserves equal pay, rights, respect, and dignity. Often, feminism is made into a larger issue without recognising that it's rooted in behaviour.

**You relocated from Chandigarh to Mumbai with Ayushmann. Do you believe there's loneliness in metropolitan cities?**

When I first arrived in Mumbai, I found the city baffling. I immediately joined corporate PR. Later, I taught at National, Raheja, and Mithibai colleges. Initially residing in Malad, I observed that people in the neighbourhood were too busy to engage. Everyone seemed rushed, though I couldn't fathom why. With my family absent and Ayushmann

**“MUMBAI IS RELATIVELY EASY TO INHABIT BECAUSE, UNLIKE SMALLER TOWNS, IT LACKS BIASES AGAINST WOMEN. THERE'S ACCEPTANCE HERE, BUT THE ISSUE LIES IN PEOPLE'S LACK OF CONCERN FOR ONE ANOTHER, FOSTERING A SENSE OF LONELINESS”**



occupied with his shoots, I had to carve out a life for myself. Mumbai is relatively easy to inhabit because, unlike smaller towns, it lacks biases against women. There's acceptance here. But the issue

lies in people's lack of concern for one another, fostering a sense of loneliness.

**How much effort have you and Ayushmann put into achieving equality in your relationship?**

Ayushmann hails

from a patriarchal family devoid of sisters. Fortunately, we met in college, where he saw me as a student and during my theatre days. Given our shared interests, we frequently crossed paths. Having

shared a bench, he understands that he isn't entitled to more than me. We encourage open conversations at home, a luxury many couples lack. Women should never settle for less; they deserve equality.

**In fact, we deserve more...**

Absolutely. Biologically, I bear children. How can we equitably divide this process? Men don't have to navigate pregnancy or hormonal fluctuations. They're governed by testosterone, a constant throughout the month. Women endure numerous bodily changes, yet they must maintain a composed demeanour in professional settings to avoid losing opportunities. While I champion feminism, I recognise that complete equality is impractical. I believe

particularly after we welcomed our daughter. Understanding the opposite gender requires continuous learning. I'm also striving to comprehend men—their complexes, insecurities, joys, and aspirations. Communication is key; both parties must converse openly.

**What's the secret to your successful marriage?**

Every relationship encounters ups and downs, with its fair share of arguments. Effective communication and mutual respect are crucial. Love

**you like him to grasp about his interactions with women?**

Having a sister, my son knows how to behave well with women. I treat my children equally. Disparity shouldn't exist. While he may not experience inequality at home, he may encounter it elsewhere. Patriarchy often stems from the belief that men inherently deserve more. Millennials must model equitable behaviour to shape the next generation. Once, my son Rajveer asked why Ayushmann's career flourished while mine had only just begun. I could have been offended. But instead, I explained that my choices allowed him to exist and ask such questions. Life offers perspectives and he's free to choose his own. I emphasised

goal. I can proudly say I've reached that milestone through dedication, perseverance and unwavering support from my loved ones.

**Both you and Ayushmann are intellectuals and artistes. Do creative clashes often occur?**

We do have our disagreements. But we respect each other's choices and value personal space. Mutual respect enables us to explore our creativity without interference. Despite our occasional disagreements, we maintain a deep-seated respect for each other's choices and cherish our individual personal space. This mutual respect serves as a cornerstone, allowing us the freedom to explore our creativity and pursue our passions without any

**Were you always this optimistic?**

No, Buddhism transformed my outlook after I began chanting in November 2016. Two years later, I was diagnosed with cancer, which further reshaped my perspective. Challenges like cancer prompt personal growth.

**What advice do you have for today's women?**

Believe in yourself and pursue personal development. Often, encouragement from others may be lacking, so become your own cheerleader and hustle for yourself.

**What message do you wish to convey to husbands, boyfriends, brothers, sons and male bosses?**

Respect and cherish the women



With Ayushmann, son Virajveer and daughter Varushka

**“SUCCESS MEANS BALANCING A CAREER WHILE RAISING HAPPY, HEALTHY CHILDREN. TODAY, I’VE ATTAINED THAT GOAL. I CAN PROUDLY SAY I’VE REACHED THAT MILESTONE THROUGH DEDICATION, PERSEVERANCE AND UNWAVERING SUPPORT FROM MY LOVED ONES”**

I deserve more than what's currently afforded.

**How well does Ayushmann understand you as a woman?**

Ayushmann has come a long way since college,

fluctuates but respect should never waver. When mutual respect diminishes, the relationship falters. Every individual deserves respect and dignity.

**As a mother of a son, what message would**

that homemakers too can achieve success.

**What does success mean to you?**

For me, success means balancing a career while raising happy, healthy children. Today, I've attained that

sense of intrusion or hindrance. It fosters an environment where we can thrive independently yet come together harmoniously, appreciating each other's unique perspectives and contributions.

in your lives. Encourage them. This is vital for men. Patriarchy is deeply rooted across generations and resides in our DNA memory. Everyone benefits when men support women's empowerment. ■



“  
*Nasir Saab has  
been a huge  
influence on me in  
everything I know  
today. He taught me  
the fundamentals,  
which are very  
difficult if not  
taught correctly*  
”

# SMALL *is* BIG!

RASIKA DUGAL CONFIDES IN TANISHA BHATTACHARYA THAT SHE HAS NEVER LET THE LENGTH OF HER ROLES DEFINE HER

**T**here's a separate fan club made up of people who find Rasika Dugal hot. Tell her that and she blushes. She'd rather be known for her acting chops than her oomph quotient. Thanks to *Mirzapur*, she's been appreciated for both. The series has made her a household name. She has a degree in mathematics and was all set for a life in academics when the acting bug bit her. That led her to gaining an acting diploma from FTII. Her breakthrough role came in *Qissa* (2013), where she played a girl duped into marrying a girl masquerading as a boy. Her role of Manto's wife Safia in Nandita Das' autobiographical film about the celebrated playwright further cemented her career. OTT series like *Delhi Crime* and *Adhura*, besides *Mirzapur* have made people aware of her versatility. Presenting excerpts from a chat with the actress who knows how to make an impression even through bit roles.



**DID YOU EXPERIENCE A CULTURE SHOCK MOVING FROM A SMALL TOWN LIKE JAMSHEDPUR TO MUMBAI?**

I studied in Delhi, so I was already used to being away from home. It wasn't new to me. When I first moved to Delhi, I did feel quite homesick. But there were so many people from Jamshedpur there, so I was okay. Then I moved to Mumbai to study Communications Media at Sophia's. After that, I went to Pune and completed my acting course before returning to Mumbai once again. So, I have been around and lived in different cities.

**WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO RASIKA FROM JAMSHEDPUR TODAY?**

I would love to tell myself that life is going to be good and filled with lots of fun experiences. Pace yourself and have more fun. I was always so focused on work. When you're from a small town living in a big city, you feel the need to justify your presence. I always felt that pressure to make every day count and to achieve quickly.

**WHAT KIND OF FILMS DID YOU LOVE WATCHING WHILE GROWING UP?**

There was one about a Romanian gymnast called Nadia. My parents recorded it. I was mesmerised, especially by the third episode where she scored a perfect ten at the Olympics. Anything with women at the centre always drew me in later in life. In Jamshedpur, the culture of going to cinema halls wasn't that prevalent. It was unsafe for girls to venture out. We had many clubs where movies played on weekends. There was an open-air theatre that's still there.

**WHEN YOU MEET YOUR MENTORS LIKE NASEERUDDIN SHAH FROM FILM SCHOOL, WHAT'S THE CONVERSATION LIKE?**

Nasir Saab has been a huge influence on me in everything I know today. He taught me the fundamentals, which are difficult if not taught correctly. I wonder where I would be without the workshops we had with him and his teaching. Even after so many years, I think of Nasir Saab every day of my life as an actor because what he taught me always comes to mind, whether I'm doing a scene or looking for work. I had



*“Every creative person’s journey is unique. For instance, I was told that if I kept doing smaller parts, I’d never get bigger ones. I chose not to follow that advice”*

seen him in Mumbai once, but we hadn't interacted. Then I met him after a screening of the film 'The Hungry'. He said, 'I saw you in *Manto*, and you were incredible. I hope we get an opportunity to work together.' I was stunned.

**WHAT SPARKED YOUR INTEREST IN BOLLYWOOD?**

I started enjoying many Sridevi films, thinking she was a superstar. I remember being such a

fan that I eagerly watched an ad featuring her in a blue dress walking down a staircase.

**DID YOU GET A CHANCE TO MEET HER?**

I didn't. I regret it because once I saw her at a restaurant shortly after moving to Mumbai. I was too shy to approach her.

**YOU'VE BEEN A REGULAR AT FILM FESTIVALS. YOU WENT TO CANNES WITH YOUR FILM**



“I was always so focused on work. When you’re from a small town living in a big city, you feel the need to justify your presence. I always felt that pressure to make every day count and to achieve quickly”

**MANTO. TELL US ABOUT THE IMPACT IT HAD ON YOU.**

I remember when Nandita called me at 6 AM to tell me the film had been accepted at Cannes in the Un Certain Regard section. I was overjoyed to be there with the film. A year earlier, we had gone to Cannes to promote the film, just to build some word-of-mouth, which is also crucial. I participated in a panel at the India pavilion, wearing a beautiful white saree. These are things people may not know. The main promenade at Cannes was gridlocked. And I had to walk a kilometre and a half from my apartment. The next year, Nandita and I were invited to a historic event where 82 women discussed gender disparity and discrimination in the media, organised by Agnes Varda and Cate Blanchett. Nandita graciously invited me too. Just before the experience, though, you had to get there first. The venue was packed, and Nandita said, ‘Rasika, I’ve

been to Cannes too many times. Let’s just run!’ So every time I see photos of people there, I laugh.

**WHICH OF YOUR SHOWS WAS THE TOUGHEST TO SHOOT?**

Many were tough in different ways. For instance, during the shooting of *Mirzapur* Season 1, I vividly remember Divyendu and I sitting next to each other between shots, both sighing collectively. We shot four-five scenes a day at the Tripathi house, some of them dark scenes that could be overwhelming. Honestly, as an actor, you’re always nervous about falling short of what’s required. Preparation is continuous; you can’t just raise your hands and say you’re ready. It’s desirable to feel something different than what you’d have felt if you hadn’t been shooting. One film that stayed with me for a while was *Hamid*, which I shot in Kashmir. A couple of months later, I was talking to someone

and had a strong emotional reaction to something they said. That’s when I realised I’d been carrying that film with me.

**WHAT’S THE WORST ADVICE YOU’VE RECEIVED OVER THE YEARS?**

Every creative person’s journey is unique. For instance, I was told that if I kept doing smaller parts, I’d never get bigger ones. I chose not to follow that advice. I did 14 films with blink-and-miss roles, but I got to know people, and they got to know me. Subsequently, I was appreciated for the effort I put into those smaller parts.

**ARE YOU A DEMANDING ACTOR BY NATURE, TOO SELF-CRITICAL?**

I’m very demanding about my work while shooting but not about others’ work. That’s not my domain. I always beg directors for one more take. I start begging the moment the shot ends. Nawaz (Nawazuddin Siddiqui) used to laugh at me. I invited my *Adhura* director to the screening of *Delhi Crime* because *Adhura* was in progress and *Delhi Crime* had been released. I saw them both talking animatedly about how I always ask for one more take. They called it the Rasika Take.

**MIRZAPUR IS NOW AN ESTABLISHED FRANCHISE. IS THE NERVOUSNESS AND ANTICIPATION FOR THE THIRD SEASON THE SAME AS DURING THE FIRST?**

The nervousness during shooting is less because you know your team and collaborators. The initial nervousness about collaborating with new people, making

adjustments, whether it will be a fruitful creative collaboration or not, is lifted off my shoulders. As for how it will be received, I’m not concerned. That’s out of my control.

**YOU’RE ONE OF THOSE ACTORS WHO SEEM UNAFFECTED BY THE EXTRA DEMANDS OF THE SHOWBIZ WORLD. TAKE SOCIAL MEDIA, FOR INSTANCE. HOW SERIOUSLY DO YOU TAKE IT?**

Work has been and always will be the most fundamental thing for me. Regarding the additional tasks that celebrities have to undertake on social media, because it’s part of the job, I will do it if it supports my work and enables better opportunities. I’m not suggesting I’m above social media; it has its pros and cons and can be a complete time-consumer. However, it also allows you to connect with people and receive feedback on your work. On the flip side, people can say whatever they want without filters, feeling emboldened because you’re not face-to-face. For me, it enhances the visibility of my work and thereby helps me exert greater control over the projects I undertake.”

**HAVE YOU FACED TROLLING? HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO IT?**

It depends. If I know the person, I might respond privately. I don’t read everything. I don’t think it’s healthy to do so. It also depends on the day and how much you’re prepared to take personally. What bothers me is how some people use anonymity to be disrespectful. Though I don’t confront everyone every day. ■



**“ My father has never reached out on my behalf. If I were to ask him, he would certainly help. But I feel this is the time for me to prove myself and make him proud. I don't want him to ask for work on my behalf ”**

# Truly, madly, gladly

SAIEE MANJREKAR  
CONFIDES TO  
SUMAN SHARMA  
THAT SHE'S IN LOVE  
WITH CINEMA

**Please tell us about your latest film, *Auron Mein Kahan Dum Tha*. How did this film happen?**

I remember testing for a show that Neeraj Pandey sir was going to start two years ago, but it didn't work out as they were looking for a fresh face. I was really upset because I had wanted to work with him for the longest time. About two-three months later, I received a call asking if I would come and test for this film. I immediately said yes. Then two months passed in complete silence. There were no updates on that



*Auron Mein Kahan Dum Tha*

front. Just as I was leaving for Goa for New Year's with my friends, I received a call asking me to come and meet them. I remember cancelling my flight and rushing to the office. I believe it was destiny. The first test made them consider me and the

second test secured the film for me.

**How intimidating was it meeting Ajay Devgn?**

When I first met him on the set, I was so scared. I thought I would be intimidated, but he made me feel so warm and welcome. He's a really sweet

*Saiee Manjrekar: She was so confident in *Dabangg 3* that it was difficult to believe that it was her first film. Unfortunately COVID happened after that and her career kind of stalled. She did make heads turn in the bilingual *Major* (2022), as *Advi Sesh's* love interest. Now, she's ready to woo the silver screen once more with *Auron Mein Kahan Dum Tha*, where she's essaying the role of young *Tabu*. Saiee's enthusiasm for movies remains intact and she comes across as a sorted individual who hasn't let her pedigree (father *Mahesh Manjrekar* is both an actor and a filmmaker and mother *Medha* too is an actor) for granted. She believes in taking life as it comes and one can hear the lilt of passion in her voice as she answers...*

**I am really glad that I got an opportunity to work with Ajay sir and Tabu ma'am. As a young person looking up to them, it's inspiring to see how they work and carry themselves**

person. I am really glad that I got an opportunity to work with Ajay sir and Tabu ma'am. As a young person looking up to them, it's inspiring to see how they work and carry themselves.

**Sharing screen space with Salman Khan in your first film is not easy. How was it when you got the chance to work with him?**

On the first day, I was scared. I remember shaking because I had dreamt of acting for the longest time. But I didn't expect it to happen at the age of 16-17 with *Dabangg 3*. I thought I had three-four more years to prepare. Suddenly, I had to give my all in six months. Honestly, Salman sir was a delight to work with. He ensured I was comfortable every step of the way—from getting my lines right to how I looked. I can never be grateful enough

**SAIEE  
MANJREKAR  
CAUGHT IN A  
RAPID FIRE**

- ★ *What's your rule for love and relationship?*  
**Loyalty.**
- ★ *What's a deal breaker for you in a relationship?*  
**Infidelity.**
- ★ *What's the first thing you notice in a man?*  
**Eyes.**
- ★ *Do you consider yourself a romantic?*  
**I'm a romantic who's also very practical.**
- ★ *What's your dream wedding like?*  
**My dream**
- ★ *wedding would be somewhere in Rajasthan or Spain. It would be an intimate affair.*
- ★ *What is that one thing that brings a smile to your face?*  
**Ghar ka khana, sea food.**
- ★ *What do you fear the most?*  
**Not being good enough.**
- ★ *If you were to give your younger self some advice, what would it be?*  
**Don't stress too much and don't over think.**

**00** *During Dabangg 3, I was ready to set the world on fire. But during the lockdown, it felt like even a matchstick wouldn't light. It was a bit disheartening because eight months after my debut, I had nothing* **00**

to him for giving me this opportunity.

**How much did your offscreen bond with him help while filming?**

I've known him since I was a child and have always been a Salman Khan fan. So it was a dream come true to work with him in my first film.

Yes, our offscreen bond really helped because I was initially shy around him. The first scene I shot with him required me to be shy and sweet, and it came naturally. Over time, I've opened up more as we've worked together. I am grateful to have him in my life as a mentor.

**When did you realise that you wanted to become an actress?**

Honestly, from a very young age, I wanted to do something in films. But it wasn't until the 11th grade that I fell in love with cinema again. I took up theatre and enjoyed every part of it. I knew then that acting was what I wanted to do, so

I decided to give it a try. At that point, I had already told my parents that I wanted to pursue investment banking. Then, out of the blue I told them I wanted to act. A month later, I got a call for *Dabangg 3*. I still feel like I manifested it.

**What was your parents' reaction when**

**you told them about your career choice?**

I was a good student, so my parents wanted me to complete my education. I never had the courage to talk to my dad about acting. So when I did, they were taken aback. Acting isn't something you decide to do and it happens immediately. Eventually, when they saw that I was ready to put in the work, they supported my decision. Also, being 17 when I debuted meant I still



had time to figure things out. They weren't too stressed, and neither was I.

**What kind of bond do you share with your father, Mahesh Manjrekar?**

There's mutual respect between us and we're friendly. Our relationship is a mix of both. I've struck a balance where I can talk to them about anything, even work-related

matters. Ultimately, he leaves the decisions to me, offering his opinions and advice.

**What's the best advice you've received from your dad?**

Firstly, he said to leave work outside the house and leave home's problems inside. He also advised me not to let failure or success affect me too much. Stay neutral, work

hard and be true to what I do. Everything that's meant to happen will happen.

**Did he ever recommend you for a film or did he insist that you make it on your own?**

No, my father has never reached out on my behalf. If I were to ask him, he would certainly help. But I feel this is the time for me to prove myself and make him

**00 No matter how hard you try, once someone forms an opinion about you, it's unlikely to change. It's about accepting that some people will like you, and some won't 00**

proud. I don't want him to ask for work on my behalf. When I achieve something on my own, it's the most fulfilling feeling. And my parents are equally proud to see me succeed on my own merit.

**What sort of struggle did you face in your journey so far?**

I hesitate to call it a struggle because that wouldn't be the right word, considering others have faced far greater challenges. For me, the toughest part was figuring out my direction after *Dabangg 3*. I felt lost. Just as I was gaining momentum, the lockdown hit, and everything paused. During *Dabangg 3*, I was ready to set the world on fire but during the lockdown, it felt like even a matchstick wouldn't light. It was a bit disheartening because eight months after my debut, I had nothing. However, this period made me stronger. I worked harder, explored different kinds of films and ventured into the South Indian film industry. Now I enjoy working in both industries.

**Fathers are role models for daughters. What makes your father, Mahesh Manjrekar, a hero?**

He's incredibly hardworking. I've seen him work on 2-3 films simultaneously, barely getting 3-4 hours of sleep. He never gives up and that resilience is inspiring. I aspire to approach my work with the same dedication, returning home with a smile and ready to do it all over again the next day.

**Who has been your biggest inspiration in the industry?**

From a young age, I admired Sonali Bendre and wanted to look like her. Later, Kajol ma'am, Tabu ma'am, Deepika Padukone, and many others inspired me.

**Who are your favourite actors?**

Ranbir Kapoor and Deepika Padukone, are my favourite actors. My favourite movie is *Yeh Jawani Hai Deewani*. I grew up watching it every weekend during my teenage years. Ayan Mukerjee is at the top of the list of directors I want to work with. ■

*I BELIEVE ALL HUMANS  
ARE A MIX OF GOOD  
AND BAD AND IT'S THIS  
BLEND THAT MAKES  
US TRULY HUMAN.  
WAHEEDA'S COMPLEXITY  
RESONATES DEEPLY  
WITH ME BECAUSE  
SHE REFLECTS REAL-  
LIFE EMOTIONS AND  
STRUGGLES*



# Through the looking glass

**SANJEEDA SHEIKH INFORMS SUMAN SHARMA THAT SHE DOESN'T BELIEVE IN REGRETS, AS SHE REFLECTS ON HER LIFE AND CAREER**

*What do you do when your happy world suddenly shatters? Sanjeeda Sheikh didn't let the collapse of her marriage with Aamir Ali deter her. She calmly picked up the pieces, went through the divorce, won over the custody of her daughter Ayra, and continued her growth. She's not a bitter woman raging about her ex. She doesn't live in the past, acknowledging that everything she went through was a lesson and she trusts the turns of time.*

*Destiny smiled on her in the form of Fighter, where she played a role meaningful to the narrative and Heeramandi, where her role as Waheeda, Manisha Koirala's emotionally scarred younger sister was much admired. The role took much from her but she's glad of the experience.*

*Excerpts from an engaging interview with the actress who understands that tomorrow is another day...*

**You've had quite a journey with your character, Waheeda, in Heeramandi. How did Sanjay Leela Bhansali influence your approach to portray such a complex role?**

I am deeply grateful to Sanjay Leela Bhansali for believing in me to portray a character as intricate as Waheeda. He has this incredible ability to see what actors are capable of, often recognising our strengths before we do. His faith in my abilities has been instrumental in my growth as an actor. Working with him has been a transformative experience. Under his direction, I have learnt to trust my instincts and bring authenticity to my performances. His guidance has helped me tap into emotions and nuances I didn't realise I could convey. Through this journey,

I've become more confident and skilled, and I owe a great deal of that to his mentorship.

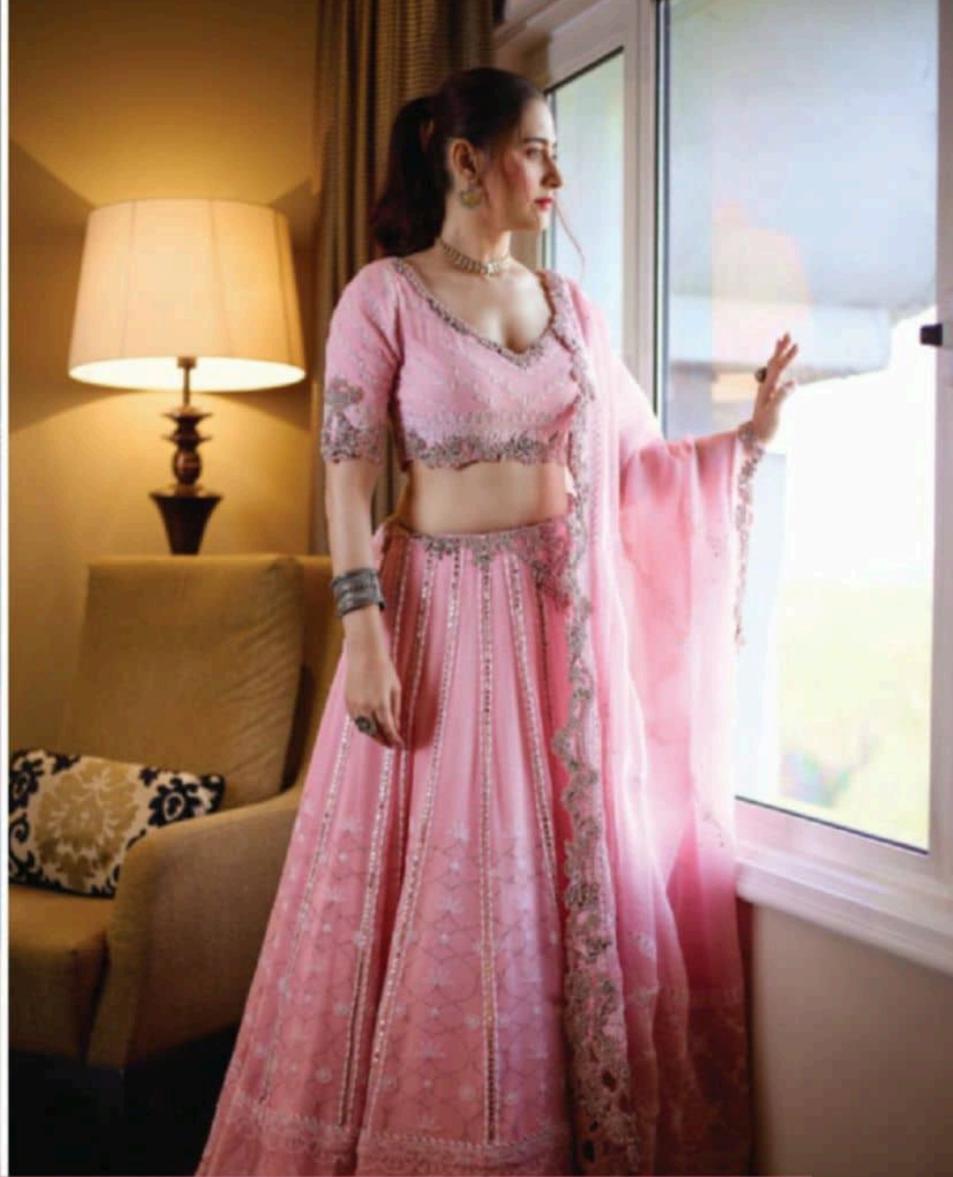
**You mentioned being an instinctive actor. How did this approach shape your performance in Heeramandi?**

For me, acting is all about living in the moment and creating magic spontaneously. The process of bringing Waheeda to life was a dynamic and evolving experience, largely shaped by Sanjay Sir's meticulous guidance. His attention to detail was extraordinary; every aspect of Waheeda, from her movements to her speech, was carefully crafted to ensure she felt authentic. On the sets, Sanjay Sir and I worked closely to refine Waheeda's character. His precise direction allowed us to explore and enhance every nuance of her

**I AM DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO SANJAY LEELA BHANSALI FOR BELIEVING IN ME TO PORTRAY A CHARACTER AS INTRICATE AS WAHEEDA. HE HAS THIS INCREDIBLE ABILITY TO SEE WHAT ACTORS ARE CAPABLE OF, OFTEN RECOGNISING OUR STRENGTHS BEFORE WE DO**

Heeramandi





**FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE EMPOWERS WOMEN TO MAKE THEIR OWN CHOICES AND PURSUE THEIR DREAMS. IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT MONEY; IT'S ABOUT MENTAL EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE. THIS BELIEF HAS BEEN CRUCIAL IN SHAPING MY CAREER AND PERSONAL JOURNEY**

personality. To fully embody Waheeda, I approached her as if she were my closest confidante. I immersed myself in her world, understanding her thoughts, emotions and motivations deeply. This intimate connection helped me portray her with sincerity and depth, making her character resonate strongly with the audience.

**Waheeda has been perceived as a complex character with shades of grey. How did you navigate portraying a negative character, who elicits varied reactions from the audience?**

I believe all humans are a mix of good and bad,

and it's this blend that makes us truly human. Waheeda's complexity resonates deeply with me because she reflects real-life emotions and struggles. Her character is not undimensional; she experiences a range of emotions, from joy, love, sorrow to anger. This multi-faceted nature makes her relatable and realistic. People's reaction to Waheeda has been fascinating because they see different facets of themselves mirrored in her journey. Some may empathise with her moments of vulnerability, while others might recognise their own strengths and weaknesses in

her actions. Her story encourages viewers to reflect on their own lives, relationships, and choices. It's this ability to evoke introspection and connection that makes her character so compelling and impactful.

**You've admired Manisha Koirala's work, how was your experience working alongside her?**

As an actor, I have always admired Manisha's work. I have always thought she is naturally beautiful, with a face untouched by artificial enhancements. I have seen all her films. *Dil Se* and *Bombay* are my all-time favourites. She is professional

and hard-working. We often see her playing soft, bubbly characters—the girl next door. For her to take on challenging roles, especially at this stage in her career, is impressive. Watching her perform teaches you a lot. Her success is a testament to her dedication and humility. The key to success is, of course, to keep working hard while staying humble.

**Moving on to *Fighter*, where you worked with superstars like Hrithik Roshan and Deepika Padukone. What has that experience been like for you?**

While I was shooting for *Heeramandi*, I was called for a meeting about *Fighter*. I found the character performance-

oriented. Though the role wasn't long, it was strong and impactful. It's exciting to work with actors like Hrithik Roshan and Deepika Padukone, who are among the biggest superstars in the country. They have a beautiful, humble quality about them. When Deepika comes on set, she brings positive energy with her smile and presence, making you forget she's a superstar. Their approach creates an atmosphere that enhances everyone's performance. For instance, there was a scene with Hrithik Roshan at a cremation ground. The scene was well-received and felt very organic and pure. We hadn't rehearsed it because Siddharth Anand, our director, advised against it, given its emotional intensity. He told us to simply go with our feelings when he called for action. And that's exactly what we did. The scene turned out beautifully. In acting, it's crucial to be in the moment and not overthink your performance. You have to live the scene rather than just act it.

**You've mentioned going through challenging phases in life. How have these experiences shaped your perspective on success and resilience?**

My family has been my pillar of strength during tough times. Their unwavering support has taught me resilience and the importance of

staying grounded. I've learnt that challenges are opportunities for growth. And I've emerged stronger from each experience.

**You've emphasised the importance of financial independence for women.**

Financial independence empowers women to make their own choices and pursue their dreams. It's not just about money; it's about mental empowerment and self-reliance.

This belief has been crucial in shaping my career and personal journey. Women should know they are strong enough to take care of themselves and others around them. Many women face pressure to marry when they want to focus on their careers, unable to make their own choices about marriage. If you find a good partner, get married. In a relationship, be understanding, supportive and appreciative but never tolerate dishonesty. Honesty is a beautiful aspect of any relationship, while dishonesty is completely unacceptable.

**Reflecting on motherhood, how has it impacted your life and career?**

Motherhood has been a transformative experience for me. It's taught me patience, strength and the ability to balance work and my personal life. My daughter, Ayra, is my biggest motivation and



**THE BIGGEST SECRET TO MY SUCCESS IS MY DAUGHTER. SHE WANTS ME TO DO GOOD WORK, AND IT'S SUCH A BEAUTIFUL FEELING. WHEN SHE SEES THE POSTER FOR HEERAMANDI OR FIGHTER, SHE PROUDLY TELLS HER FRIENDS, "THAT'S MY MOM." THAT PRIDE SHE HAS IN ME IS A HUGE ACHIEVEMENT.**

inspiration. People say it must be tough being a single mom. It's not tough. As a mother, your duties are your duties, right? Whatever you can do for your child, nobody else can. I often tell people, "Why are you making a big deal about being a single mother?" As long as you are independent nothing else matters. The biggest secret to my success is my daughter. She wants me to do good work and it's such a beautiful feeling. When she sees the poster for *Heeramandi*, or *Fighter*, she proudly tells her friends, "That's my mom." That pride she has in me is a huge achievement. When I receive an award and come home, the smile she gives me is precious. It adds immense value to the award. She also has my family around her, which is a great support system.

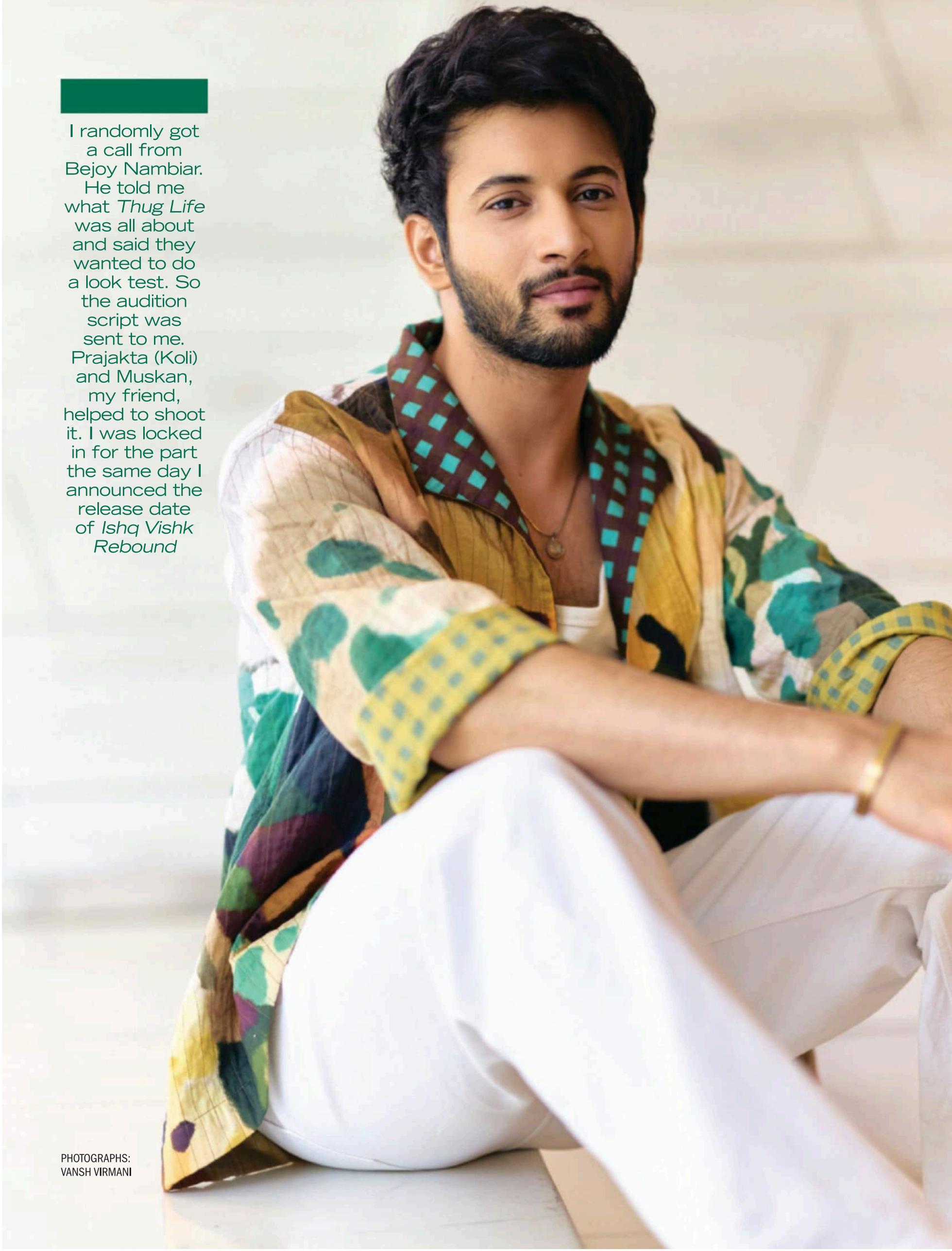
**Are you a strict or lenient mother? Do you pamper your child?**

We come from a

middle-class family. My parents worked hard for us and that's what I emphasise to Ayra. I've raised her normally. I don't buy her everything she wants; I teach her that money is hard-earned and we must plan and work for what we want. It's crucial for children to understand the value of money. I play games with Ayra to help her learn how to manage and spend money wisely. Additionally, I stress the importance of emotional bonding and expressing feelings.

**Finally, what advice would you give to aspiring actors or anyone navigating challenges in life?**

Trust your instincts, stay true to yourself, and embrace every phase of life as a learning opportunity. There are no mistakes, only learning experiences in life. As humans, we do what feels right at the time. If your mindset changes over time, it doesn't make your past actions mistakes; they were right for you then. At 20, I made decisions that suited me then. Now, at 40 I'm more mature and self-aware. What matters most is how well you know yourself. Over the years, I've come to understand myself better. After enduring many challenges, I've discovered my own strength. Success comes from perseverance and staying humble. Focus on continuous improvement and enjoy the journey. ■



I randomly got a call from Bejoy Nambiar. He told me what *Thug Life* was all about and said they wanted to do a look test. So the audition script was sent to me. Prajakta (Koli) and Muskan, my friend, helped to shoot it. I was locked in for the part the same day I announced the release date of *Ishq Vishk Rebound*

# ANY GIVEN

# Saturday

ROHIT SARAF SURE MADE TANISHA BHATTACHARYA'S WEEKEND COME ALIVE WHEN HE FINALLY SAT DOWN FOR AN INTERVIEW. EXCERPTS FROM AN ENGAGING CHAT

**R**ohit Saraf is clearly a busy man. The number of times this interview has been rescheduled bears testimony to that. I finally ensnare him on a rainy Saturday evening. He apologizes promptly for constantly rescheduling the interview. There's sincerity in his tone so everything is instantly forgiven as we ease into a heartfelt conversation. The actor is known for his roles in films like *Dear Zindagi* and *The Sky Is Pink*, and is currently riding high on the success of *Ishq Vishk Rebound*. Tell him he's arrived and he shakes his head. "I'm not trying to sound humble, but I still don't feel that I've arrived. One would think that I've done a show like *Mismatched*, where both seasons have done phenomenally well. I've been a part of some extremely successful films. *Ishq Vishk Rebound* is getting so much love from everywhere. But I'm not there yet. When I walk into a room with a lot of accomplished people, I still feel very under confident and then when I receive a lot of love I gather my confidence from that," he says candidly.

There's no taking away from the fact that his female fans find him extremely hot. Tell him that and he instantly perks up. "Oh wow, it makes me extremely happy. Initially, I was a bit unsure where all of this was coming from. I used to get a lot of love for my characters like Kiddo from *Dear Zindagi* but I think I



Alia herself was quite young when we were doing *Dear Zindagi*. She was incredibly sweet and kind. For a 19-year-old who had not been on a big set before, it mattered a lot. I'd seen her work in *Highway* and I couldn't believe how phenomenal an actor she was

started experiencing this kind of fanfare after *Mismatched*. It took me a little time to come to terms with the fact that I'm now someone who is loved by those many people. Over the years, I've started to use it as my strength, I've started to use it as something that drives me to work harder."

His penchant for diverse roles, from *The Sky Is Pink* to *Vikram Vedha*, highlights his courage to experiment early in his career. Talking about *Vikram Vedha*, he recalls that there was a huge gap between his audition and his selection for the role. He was shooting for *Mismatched Season 2* when he got to know he was selected for *Vikram Vedha*. "I remember freaking out because I'm literally in almost every scene in *Mismatched 2*, so it's not like they can shoot without me. The next day I go on to the set and my director, Akarsh Khurana, waves at me. He's on the phone and after the call he says Hrithik Roshan just called him for my dates. So Hrithik Sir pushed the entire schedule by a week so that I could be a part of it."

Shah Rukh Khan, Hrithik Roshan, to Rani Mukerji, Priyanka Chopra Jonas to Alia Bhatt, he has rubbed shoulders with the best of them in his career so far. Reflecting on his experiences with stars like Alia Bhatt and Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Saraf fondly recalls, "Alia was quite young when we were doing *Dear Zindagi*. She was incredibly sweet and kind. For a 19-year-old who had not been on

## RAPID FIRE WITH ROHIT SARAF

One celebrity you never get tired of stalking on social media

**Alia Bhatt**

An ideal romantic date with Rohit Saraf would be **A winter evening with great wine and a bonfire. And really, really, really good music.**

Have you ever had a massive heartbreak?  
**Yeah, I definitely have.**

Imagine you're getting married. Who would the following people be?

The DJ  
**Taaruk Raina, who's also there in *Mismatched*.**

The Ring Bearer  
**I think my sister, Megha Di.**

Best Man  
**Rohan, my best friend.**

Wedding Planner  
**My producer, who's also a close friend now, Jaya Taurani.**

Wife  
**Wow, that was subtle.**

Since you're a self-proclaimed *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* fan, complete the following sentence *Pyaar*

***Pyaar* ever-evolving hai.**



I've been a part of some extremely successful films. *Ishq Vishk Rebound* is getting so much love from everywhere. But I'm not there yet. When I walk into a room with a lot of accomplished people, I still feel very under confident

a big set before, it mattered a lot. I'd seen her work in *Highway* and I couldn't believe how phenomenal an actor she was." Unfortunately, Rohit didn't have many scenes with Shah Rukh Khan in *Dear Zindagi* but he distinctly recalls an unforgettable moment involving SRK at the screening of *Hichki*. Around 2:45 AM, out of the blue, Shah Rukh walked into the party, leaving Rohit utterly surprised. "I was mesmerised when I saw him walk into that party," Rohit recounts. "Even though I had met him before, seeing him that night felt like meeting him for the first time all over again. It was incredible." Driven by admiration, Rohit decided to approach Rani, seeking an introduction to Shah Rukh Khan.

"Ma'am, could you please introduce me to Shah Rukh Sir?" he asked. Rani graciously led him over and said, "This is Rohit, he's part of our film." Shah Rukh Khan remembered that he was part of *Dear Zindagi* too. "That moment," Rohit says, "When he remembered me from *Dear Zindagi*, I was taken aback. I've always admired him since *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, and having a picture with both of them together meant so much to me." Priyanka Chopra helped him overcome his stage fright when he was doing promotions for the first time ever for the film *The Sky Is Pink*. Facing a crowd of 15,000 at the Amity University left him unnerved. It was an overwhelming sight he had never encountered before. PC, who



was running late from an interview, reached out to him over the phone. Her reassuring words guided him through the nerves. ‘This will be your first solo appearance on stage,’ she told him. ‘I’ll join you later but for now, you need to engage the audience and keep their spirits high.’ He couldn’t believe the challenge before him – to entertain a roaring crowd who were eagerly awaiting her arrival. Doubt crept in but her encouragement was unwaveringly kind.

**H**e’s over the moon about the fact that he’s going to work with the acting institution called Kamal Haasan in the upcoming film *Thug Life*.

Saraf says he can’t believe he’d be sharing screen space with the master. “I was shooting for *Mismatched Season 3* in Hyderabad and I randomly got a call from Bejoy Nambiar. He told me what *Thug Life* was all about and said they wanted to do a look test. So the



*The Sky Is Pink*



*Vikram Vedha*



*Ishq Vishk Rebound*

audition script was sent to me. Prajakta (Koli) and Muskan, my friend, helped to shoot it. I was locked in for the part the same day I announced the release date of *Ishq Vishk Rebound*. It was like a double celebration.”

His next, *Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari*, features an ensemble cast, including Varun Dhawan and Janhvi Kapoor in lead roles, alongside Sanya Malhotra, Maniesh Paul and Akshay Oberoi. He reveals that he loves being part of this Dharma film and counts it as a big opportunity. “I was just telling a friend this morning that I love going to this set because I feel that no matter what, when I come out of this project, I would have learnt something. I love the feeling of being on a set where it doesn’t feel like a job. Like yesterday, even after they said to pack up, I wanted to hang on the set for another half an hour. In an earlier interview with Filmfare, I’ve said I’m a huge fan of Varun Dhawan. It’s crazy fun being part of this film,” he gushes. He’s being extra humble and sanskari to boot but maybe that’s the way he rolls. ■



# SPORTING ENCOUNTER

SHARAN SHARMA WAS IN THE NEWS RECENTLY FOR MAKING A SPORTS BASED ROMANTIC COMEDY MR. & MRS. MAHI. HE TALKS TO SRIJANI ROY CHOWDHURY ABOUT HIS JOURNEY AND MORE...



Mr. & Mrs. Mahi

**“RAJKUMMAR RAO IS A BRILLIANT ACTOR... HIS OBSERVATION SKILLS ON LIFE, ON PEOPLE AND ON UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITY OF MAHENDRA AND THE LAYERS THAT HE WAS TRYING TO FIT INTO HIS CHARACTER WERE BRILLIANT”**

**S**haran Sharma, a rising director in Bollywood, has captivated audiences with his nuanced storytelling and deep-seated narratives. As the director behind the critically-acclaimed films *Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl* and *Mr. & Mrs. Mahi*, Sharan has carved a niche for himself in portraying compelling human stories that strike a chord. His journey began as an assistant director on hits like *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* and *Yeh Jawaani*

*Hai Deewani*, where he honed his craft under mentors like Karan Johar. His affinity for women-led stories is well appreciated for their interwoven themes of aspiration, determination and familial bonds.

His latest venture, *Mr. & Mrs. Mahi*, blends a passion for cricket with the intricacies of marital dynamics. Sharan knows that for Indians, cricket is akin to religion, so making a cricket-based film was a no-brainer. He wanted to make a film on how cricket forges relationships. The

director explains, “We wanted to explore how cricket transforms two strangers into a romantic couple.” And going by the love coming his way, he seems to have succeeded. He

was bowled over by the love shown to *Mr. & Mrs. Mahi*. “I feel relaxed and happy with how the reactions are coming through for the film,” he reflects. “I was quite calm during the

release as well. I am at peace with how the audience has reacted to the film and given us positive vibes that we are holding on to.”

The title of the film was intriguing,

leading some to believe that the film showcased the romance between Mahendra Singh Dhoni and his wife Sakshi. Sharan laughs at that, “The journey of coming up with the title is something that happened naturally. He reveals. “In my head, I was thinking the title was to be *Mr. & Mrs.* something. The ‘something’ would be a common name for husband and wife. I didn’t want

about the sport,” he shares. “During her training, I had the fear that we were being too unrealistic about our expectations of wanting Janhvi to become this cricketer that I imagined in my head. But she came through.” Sharan goes on to add that Janhvi had two injuries that restricted her movements but she persisted despite them. She worked hard on her body

**J**anhvi and he share a bond, as she was the protagonist of his debut film, *Gunjan Saxena*. She was his first and only choice for the role. And he was glad she agreed to be part of his team once more. Sharan says she hasn’t changed at all during the ensuing years and remains the same bubbly person. “Janhvi had the same energy, which sat organically in

women cricketers don’t enjoy the same level of popularity as their male counterparts. He comments that he wanted to bring home the point that the dreams of women often get entangled in the hurdles of home. “When women get married, sometimes their dreams and careers take a backseat,” Sharma observes. “I wanted to show that a woman is being supported to follow

Mahendra and Mahima’s characters really set the dynamics of their relationship. The issue is whether they are fighting for each other or with each other,” He recalls. “Raj and Janhvi performed really well in that scene. I am also happy with a lot of cricket sequences in the film.” He’s all praise for Rajkumar Rao and asserts he was just the right actor to cast in the film. The director notes that Rajkumar brought much to the table. “Rajkumar Rao is a brilliant actor.” His observation skills on life, on people and on understanding the complexity of Mahendra and the layers that he was trying to fit into his character were brilliant,” says the director praising his actor.

In Indian households, being a doctor or an engineer is deemed ideal. One thing that kind of struck a wrong note was the fact that a woman who was already a doctor gave that up to pursue cricket. Sharan counters that there are people who are educated but not empowered enough to be able to make

**“JANHVI LITERALLY KNEW NOTHING ABOUT THE SPORT... DURING HER TRAINING, I HAD THE FEAR THAT WE WERE BEING TOO UNREALISTIC ABOUT OUR EXPECTATIONS OF WANTING JANHVI TO BECOME THIS CRICKETER THAT I IMAGINED IN MY HEAD. BUT SHE CAME THROUGH”**



On the sets of *Mr. & Mrs. Mahi*

to do surnames. I wanted to do first names,” he asserts. Janhvi Kapoor plays a hobbyist who turns into a national-level cricket player through the course of the film. The director is all praise for his actor and reveals that she excelled despite not knowing anything about cricket beforehand. “Janhvi literally knew nothing

language and running technique and finally got the bearings of a cricketer when it came to shooting the film. “I feel so proud that in a cricket-loving country like India, where everyone loves the sport and seems like an expert in it, we’ve only gotten love when it comes to Mahima the cricketer,” he gushes.

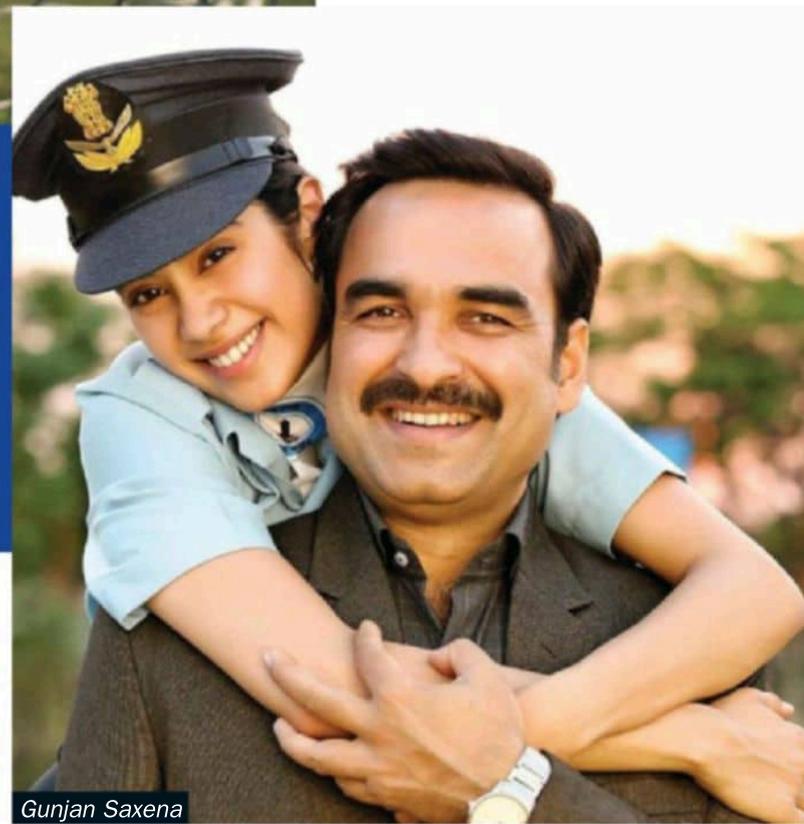
Gunjan’s character,” he reflects. “Back then, Janhvi really had the hunger to prove herself and work hard. I also liked her work ethic. This is how we really bonded on the sets of *Gunjan Saxena*,” he adds. It’s strange that he chose to make a women-centric film about cricket. It’s not a sport that lots of women take part in. Similarly, Indian

her dream and do well in her career.” Conflicts are a part of every marriage, and Sharan hasn’t shied away from showing that in his film. He knows that nothing remains hunky-dory forever. His favourite scene, in fact, is the one between Rajkumar Rao and Janhvi Kapoor, where they have a big argument. “The fight between



Karan sitting him down and asking him to develop a script of his own. “This is how I took the step towards developing *Gunjan Saxena* and *Mr. & Mrs. Mahi*,” Sharan recalls. “The journey has actually been pretty organic from 2011

**“ I NATURALLY GOT DRAWN TO STORIES LIKE MR. & MRS. MAHI AND GUNJAN SAXENA BECAUSE THEY ARE ABOUT PEOPLE AND THEIR DREAMS. THEY HIGHLIGHT INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS. I TRY TO SEE HOW WE CAN BUILD NARRATIVES AND RECONNECT THEM TO THE HUMAN SIDE OF PEOPLE ”**



*Gunjan Saxena*

their own decisions. They are happily going through the motions of life, with other people dictating the process and their path. “Mahima was that girl. She was studious and ended up becoming a doctor. But she was also someone with a deep love and passion for cricket. So, switching to cricket was meant to be an impractical and impulsive choice. It was meant to be a choice that she made and a big leap that she took because of her confidence in herself and because of her own passion and love for the sport,” he reasons.

**A**sk him what draws him to women-centric films, and he insists it wasn’t a conscious choice and that it all happened by chance. He says he was always drawn to certain stories, characters, and emotions. “I naturally got drawn to stories like *Mr. & Mrs. Mahi* and *Gunjan Saxena* because they are about people and their dreams. They highlight interpersonal dynamics. I try to see how we can build narratives and reconnect them to the human side of people,”

he explains. He reveals that he got interested in the *Gunjan Saxena* story after reading a news article about her. Upon further investigation, he decided it was a story worth sharing with the world on a larger scale. Sharan reminisces. “After reading the news item, I met her and spent some time with her father as well. I understood the human side of her story, which got me intrigued. Karan Johar also showed faith in me after *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* and encouraged me to go for the project.” To bring authenticity to the biopic, Sharan and

his team spent time with Gunjan Saxena on a regular basis, seeking her advice on everything. Sharan elaborates, “We spent a lot of time with her and her family, worked on drafts of the script and tried to get her point of view. We wanted to make it as authentic as possible.”

He reveals that Karan has been the perfect mentor for him and has encouraged him to branch out on his own. He remembers

to 2024. I took small steps and surrounded myself with supportive and positive mentors who believe in me and allow me to take my time.”

In a world where storytelling often defines the cultural zeitgeist, Sharan Sharma continues to carve his own path, driven by a passion for authentic narratives and a dedication to bringing compelling stories to life on the silver screen. ■

# CHILLS & THRILLS

*Director ADITYA SARPOTDAR is in the news for making the cult Munjya. SRIJANI ROY CHOWDHURY charts his journey*

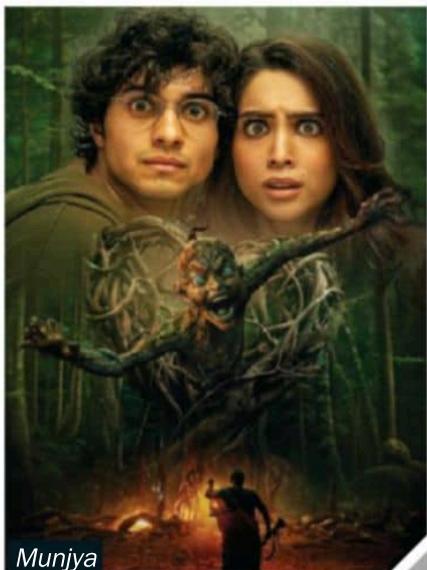
**A**ditya Sarpotdar's father Ajay Sarpotdar, was the former president of the Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Chitrapat Mahamandal, his grandfather, Vishwas Sarpotdar, was a renowned Marathi filmmaker, famous for social drama. Aditya's great grandfather, N.D. Sarpotdar, was a pioneer in Indian cinema. As we begin the interview, he waxes eloquent about growing up in a family which lives, breathes and dreams cinema. He was just 21 when he directed his first Marathi film *Uladhaal*. He followed it with thought provoking, as well as entertaining films in Marathi like *Satragi Re*, *Narbachhi Wadi*, *Classmates*, *Faster Fene*, *Mauli*, *Zombivli*, and *Unaad*. The films touched a variety of genres, ranging from drama, comedy to horror and showcased his versatility. After making a pioneering movie *The Sholay Girl* in Hindi, on stuntwomen, he segued into the horror genre with back-to-back release, *Munjya* and *Kakuda* this year. While *Munjya* is a sleeper hit and has connections to the wider *Stree* universe, *Kakuda* didn't get the same amount of appreciation. Aditya, however, feels that there's much scope for horror in India, especially in the horror-comedy subgenre. Over to him on a refreshing take on his brand of cinema.

## **MUNJYA HAS BEEN RECEIVING GREAT LOVE FROM THE AUDIENCE...**

The last two months have been crazy due to the response we've received at the box office. We have received really good feedback from the audience. It's been a whirlwind as *Munjya* is receiving so much love from all over.

## **YOU STARTED YOUR CAREER AT A YOUNG AGE. WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO ENTER THE FILM INDUSTRY?**

I started my career as an assistant director when I was 14. I am a fourth-generation filmmaker in my family. My great-grandfather, grandfather, and father have been involved in this field primarily as distributors and producers. My great-grandfather was a director but my father was mainly into production and distribution. I have grown up on film sets, locations, preps and post-productions. It's a world I have known and been



*Munjya*

**“ I have always tried to maintain a sense of adventure in most of my films. It's a genre that isn't often discussed, as people assume that the goal is to set out on an adventure to defeat the monster ”**



familiar with from a young age. We had a single-screen theatre called Alka Talkies in Pune, which was famous for releasing English movies. I used to spend a lot of time in the theatre as a kid. The culture of filmmaking, film distribution and exhibition was imprinted on me at a young age. So, when it was time to choose a career, this path was the organic and obvious choice.

**WHEN DID YOU DECIDE TO MAKE YOUR FIRST MOVIE?**

I started making my first movie, *Uladhaal*, at 21. It was in Marathi. I was 23 when I released it. My family had strong connections to the Marathi industry. Marathi cinema was experiencing a revival at that time, with many young filmmakers making films. Audiences were going to theatres to watch Marathi cinema. It was an exciting time to make my first film.

**SINCE YOUR FAMILY HAS A FILMMAKING LEGACY, WHAT ARE THE KEY LESSONS THAT YOU'VE LEARNED FROM YOUR FATHER AND YOUR GRANDFATHER?**

The key lesson was watching them work and sustain themselves for many years. They were disciplined and honest in their approach to their work. I understood that those with these qualities survived longer in the profession. I learnt to deliver on time and stand true to my word, because this is an industry with many ups and downs. My elders always put the craft before themselves, which was a big lesson for me.

**WHICH GENRE IS THE MOST CHALLENGING TO DIRECT?**

I have loved directing action thrillers, but not the dark ones. I've enjoyed making adventurous films. I have always tried to maintain a sense of adventure in most of my films. It's a genre that isn't often discussed, as people assume that the goal is to set out on an adventure to defeat the monster. I also made a detective film called *Faster Fene*, which did very well. It was based on the comic books of that character, which are popular in Maharashtra. It was a detective film, but it was also an adventure. All my movies, even *Zombivli*, were adventures. So I have always tried to maintain a sense of adventure in my films.

**IN MUNJYA, WHAT STRATEGIES DID YOU EMPLOY TO ENSURE A SEAMLESS BLEND OF COMEDY AND HORROR?**

There are a couple of tricks that you need to use when making a horror movie. The trick is that people often watch horror movies in groups. When they are scared, the immediate reaction afterward is laughter. You laugh at how scared you were. The idea of making a horror comedy is to follow comedy immediately with a moment of horror, and vice versa. This balance is crucial when writing a film like this. These films rely heavily on timing. Timing becomes essential in writing, performing, and editing. You have to ensure the timing is right; a joke doesn't land if it's too late, and a horror moment doesn't build up if it's mistimed.



With Sharvari Wagh and Abhay Verma

**“People often watch horror movies in groups. When they are very scared, the immediate reaction afterward is laughter. You laugh at how scared you were”**

**MUNJYA IS EVENTUALLY GOING TO BE RELATED TO STREE AND BHEDIYA IN YOUR HORROR UNIVERSE...**

I have given clear indications of that. The film ends with a link to Varun Dhawan and *Bhediya*. I felt that the audience came to the theatres wanting to see the connection. It's important for people to have these talking points. Yes, *Munjya* will be connected to *Bhediya*, but you have to wait and watch to see how the connection develops. It's a plan in action, and *Bhediya* definitely has a sequel planned.

**TELL US ABOUT YOUR CASTING. HOW DID YOU CHOOSE ABHAY VERMA FOR THE LEAD ROLE?**

Abhay was chosen through auditions. We wanted to cast a 20-year-old who looked and behaved his age. I was clear about this and didn't want to cast an older guy and make him look young. I feel that's where many of us go

wrong, casting a more well-known face in an age group where they don't belong. We did over a hundred auditions and found him.

**SUHAS JOSHI ALSO CAME ON BOARD...**

I always imagined her as *Ajji*. Her aura gives a certain warmth to her character. I needed someone who could connect with the audience from the moment they appear on screen. She fit the role of the sweet grandmother I envisioned. Plus, she is a terrific actor. She is immensely talented and a legend in her own right.

**WILL WE SEE ANY SPIN-OFFS OF THE SUPPORTING CHARACTERS FROM THE MOVIE IN THE FUTURE?**

I don't think so because we already have sequels planned. The main characters we've built, like *Munjya*, *Bhediya*, and *Stree*, are already interconnected in their



“The idea of making a horror comedy is to follow comedy immediately with a moment of horror and vice versa”

Yes. The most challenging part was the climax, where *Munjya* reappears from within the tree. There's nothing there when you shoot in real life. When you shoot with such an element, you have your actors reacting and fighting against a non-existent creature. You imagine attacks and dodge them. It required alignment among the entire action, VFX, camera, art and other teams involved in the film to achieve the envisioned outcome. It was tricky but we had good preparation, so it fit perfectly.

**MUNJYA AND YOUR RECENT DIRECTORIAL, KAKUDA, ARE TWO HORROR-BASED PROJECTS. ARE YOU LOOKING TO ESTABLISH YOURSELF AS A HORROR DIRECTOR NOW?**

(Laughs) No, I am not. *Kakuda* is a spoofy horror comedy. It jokes about the world of horror comedies. Our creature is also comedic. The intention was never to focus only on horror comedies. I've been fortunate to get good ideas and scripts. I'm getting to tell some really good stories through these horror comedies. We are also working on another horror comedy.

**ANY MEMORABLE MOMENTS FROM KAKUDA'S SHOOT WITH THE CAST?**

We shot the movie during the pandemic in Gujarat. I had really talented people onboard for the movie, like Sonakshi Sinha, Riteish Deshmukh, Saquib Saleem and Aasif Khan, who were extremely fun to work with. They are amazing actors and very professional. ■

narratives. You may see one of these characters enter another's world. You will see a progression of all these liked characters from *Munjya* in the sequels that follow in this universe. I wouldn't say just *Munjya*, but in the universe that follows after *Munjya*.

**HOW CHALLENGING WAS IT TO WORK WITH CGI?**

It was a challenging

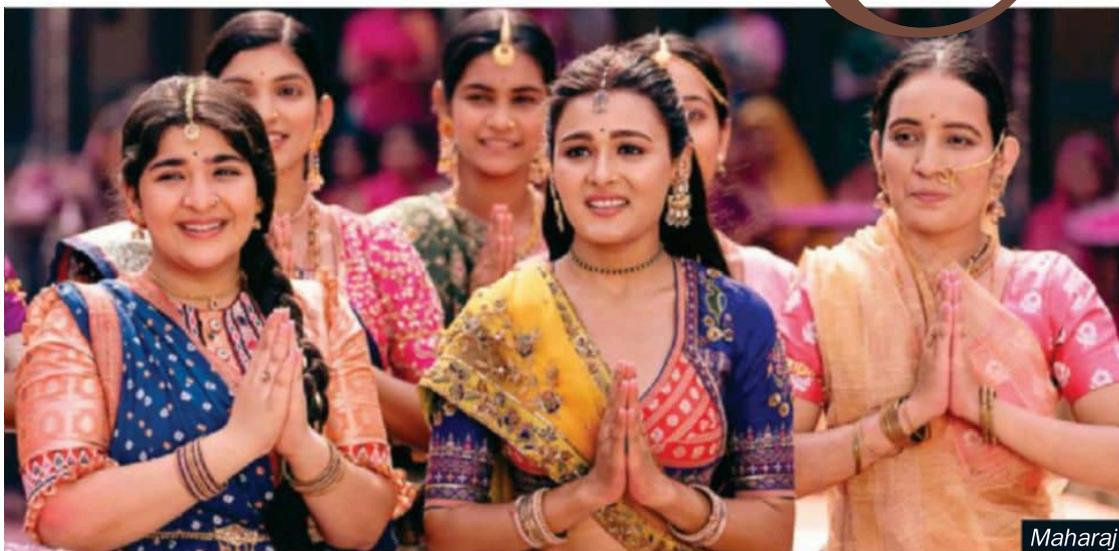
process. We didn't have any precedents or references in India to follow, as no one had done a CGI character with emotions, dialogues, and as a full-fledged protagonist in a film. We had to make him believable. The main challenge was to make him look aggressive yet sweet and a little mysterious. We brought in one of the best VFX supervisors from

LA, who had worked on films like *Justice League* and *Aquaman*. He came to India and was involved throughout the process. We collaborated with companies to bring our vision to life. We had a large team of animators, composers, and 3D artists who were passionately working on the film.

**WERE THERE SCENES THAT WERE DIFFICULT TO SHOOT?**

# Who's that girl?

SHALINI PANDEY INSISTS SHE ISN'T AS GULLIBLE AS THE CHARACTERS SHE HAS PLAYED ON-SCREEN. TANZIM PARDIWALLA NOTES DOWN HER VIEWS ON LIFE AND CAREER



**I don't Google myself. It has made my life so easy because I can only concentrate and see what I can do better**

Sneha Desai, who's the writer of this film, is incredible, and I know her work. It's an important story. Since it's a YRF film and I'm an in-house talent, I was more comfortable. It felt like they believed in me, and I believed in the character.

**Shalini Pandey** has had quite a journey. From doing drama in Jabalpur, where she hails from, to being the toast of the Telugu industry after the success of *Arjun Reddy* (2017), she has seen some incredible highs in her life. She has an pan-Indian face, which has helped her land both South and Bollywood films. In her recently released OTT film *Maharaj*, she plays a bubbly Gujarati girl who blindly trusts a religious guru and ends up losing her life. It was a layered role but she got the *sur* of it right. The film marked the debut of Aamir Khan's son Junaid Khan. Shalini calls him the sweetest co-star she's ever worked with and says he's sans any starry airs. She held her own against Jaideep Ahlawat in the film. They had an extremely difficult intimate scene in the film but Shalini pulled that off with aplomb. Her excitement seeps through the airwaves as she sassily answers my questions on the phone. Excerpts:

**WHAT KIND OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR CHARACTERS FROM ARJUN REDDY AND MAHARAJ?**

For Preeti, I would say, meet other men. He's not the only guy, okay? I've seen what girls like Preeti are like; they completely fall for a guy like that. This is what I tell my sister before meeting one guy - don't get stuck to the one love you have seen in school or college. You feel that's the only thing, but when you grow older, you realise your values. She needs to grow as a woman on her own. Kishori is a very blindsided

woman. I just wish she wouldn't commit suicide. One shouldn't have to take their life for something like that. And for both these women - please don't centre your world around men. Men are amazing, but please get to know yourself first.

**WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION WHEN MAHARAJ CAME TO YOU?**  
Soon after *Jayeshbhai Jordaar*, I had a chat with Aditya Chopra, and he told me this is something they were looking for and thought I would be amazing in the role. I heard the narration and read the script.

**WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST INTERACTIONS WITH JUNAID KHAN?**

My first meeting with Junaid was when we started the dance preparation. I don't exactly remember what we spoke about, but we got along really well on the very first day. He's an extremely chill guy. We got so much time with each other between dance preparation and readings that we were already friends by the time we started shooting. While he's a debutant, I'm also fairly new to Bollywood. So I was also excited to just make a good film.

**IS HE A PERFECTIONIST LIKE HIS FATHER, AAMIR KHAN?**



I don't think about all these things. When I go on a set, and it might sound pretentious, but I genuinely just want to be an actor at that moment. Now, anything to add to it is a bonus. I didn't want to have any preconceived notions about anyone. Even if I've heard certain things or have a certain image of someone, I like to believe that I will have my own journey with that person. It's all about the vibe we create. And he isn't a perfectionist. He's somebody who really works hard. Sometimes he would go overboard, and I would tell him, "Dude, you're doing it too much. Can you just rest?" And because we had become such good friends, we could talk like that. There were no airs. In fact, he gets really awkward. Junaid doesn't like all the noise around him. If you did not know that he was Aamir Khan's son, you wouldn't know he comes from a film family. He's the sweetest human being and co-actor that I've worked with, to be honest.

**WHAT GOES INTO CREATING CHEMISTRY WITH A CO-STAR?**

Sometimes you don't know how to approach certain things. Sometimes it comes down to your luck. If you vibe well with that person, then

**Junaid (Khan) doesn't like all the noise around him. If you did not know that he was Aamir Khan's son, you wouldn't know he comes from a film family. He's the sweetest human being and co-actor that I've worked with**

that chemistry is amazing. Then you don't have to work on it too much.

**WHAT DID IT TAKE TO UNDERSTAND A CHARACTER LIKE KISHORI?**

I don't have one answer to it. But the kind of roles that I've played in my life, be it Kishori in *Maharaj*, *Jayeshbhai Jordaar*, or *Arjun Reddy*, they've

always been shades of women who are a little gullible, sweet, and sensitive, and I'm nothing like that. Kishori was more challenging because the other two still had some similarities. She is somebody who's blindly believing something. So how do you enact someone like her where your belief

playing, and that's about it.

**WHAT WENT INTO FILMING THAT DISTURBING SEX SCENE WITH JAIDEEP AHLAWAT?**

When I read it, I sat with my director, and he said I wouldn't be uncomfortable. But when you do it, you realise it's complicated. It's not a lovemaking

because I've not done something like this before. I've done kissing scenes. But this was extremely different. As Shalini, I know that he's taking advantage of her. But as Kishori, I have to believe that this is something she's doing without understanding what she's doing. I told my co-actors that I'm not feeling too good. And they were very understanding.

**DID YOU TALK TO JAIDEEP BEFORE FILMING?**

I don't know why, but we didn't talk before shooting that scene. He saw that I was getting a little nervous. I did that scene, and I got so anxious that I just sat down with him. And that's about it. He understood. We all understand each other when you're working in a community. You don't need to say certain things. After that, not once did he make it weird for us to have a conversation. We just somehow got through it, like how we would have approached any other scene.

**HOW HARD IS IT TO ENGAGE WITH MATERIAL THAT IS ESSENTIALLY QUITE TRIGGERING?**

I feel that I switch on, switch off. There will be scenes, of course, that you're unsure of.

But sometimes it does affect you, but I have not been that person from the beginning of my career. Even *Arjun Reddy* has triggering scenes. Back then, I would sit with myself and tell myself, this is your character. This is not you. This is absolutely not you. Not everybody has the same perspective, and that's great. We need to have different perspectives. Why someone is doing something is intriguing. When I am doing a character and something is triggering me, I do question my directors. Sometimes you have to do something that you don't want to do. Your director says you have to do this. This is what's in the script, and I'm not going to change it. So you forget everything else and just become your character because you're a professional, and you're being paid to enact a character.

**WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH RANVEER SINGH IN JAYESHBHAI JORDAAR?**

It was my first film with a banner like YRF. So I was extremely curious and excited. I had a thousand questions, and I would irritate them. They were very sweet and loving people who patiently answered my queries. Ranveer understands technicalities so well, and seeing his passion for film craft



Jayeshbhai Jordaar

**Ranveer (Singh) understands technicalities so well, and seeing his passion for film craft helped me grow as an actor. Every day was a learning experience not just as an actor but also as a human being**



Arjun Reddy

system is completely opposite? But I didn't think about it too much. I've grown up in a small town, so maybe subconsciously, I have also observed a lot of people around me who were like that. Of course, not to that level, but people who are blind when it comes to religion. My mum is super religious, so there are certain things that are picked from her. You have to just believe that it's the character you're

scene or an intimacy scene between lovers. When I did that scene, there were no intimacy coordinators, but my team was just so lovely and amazing. DOP Rajiv Ravi sir, for that matter, is a genius. So he placed me in a certain way where I didn't feel uncomfortable. After I did the scene, I just wanted to breathe because I was getting anxious. I was not feeling okay. And I haven't felt that in any of my work before, maybe

The kind of roles that I've played in my life, be it Kishori in *Maharaj*, *Jayeshbhai Jordaar*, or *Arjun Reddy*, they've always been shades of women who are a little gullible, sweet, and sensitive, and I'm nothing like that

helped me grow as an actor. Every day was a learning experience not just as an actor but also as a human being. With an actor like Ranveer, of his calibre, just observing how he approaches something was pretty amazing for me at that point.

**HOW DO YOU TAKE APPRECIATION AND CRITICISM? DO YOU READ HEADLINES ABOUT YOURSELF?**

Had you asked me this question three years ago, I would have answered you completely differently. Now, it's such a boring answer, and it is the most honest answer I can give you. I don't Google myself. It has made my life so easy because I can only concentrate and see what I can do better. Of course, I'll take criticism from people who matter. Someone recently told me this - If your film works, that's an accident. And if it doesn't, don't take it seriously because that was an accident too. ■



# A SON REMEMBERS

*AMIT KUMAR reviews his long innings and revisits memories of his legendary father, Kishore Kumar. FARHANA FAROOK enjoys the musical soiree*

**H**e's the son of musically gifted parents, Ruma Guha Thakurta and the legendary Kishore Kumar. That perhaps made the endeavour doubly tough and the encore even more rewarding for singer Amit Kumar. Having survived five decades and his songs enjoying tremendous recall value—*Bade acche lagte hain* being the toast of serials and shows—he's now enjoying his stint on YouTube. Launched in 2011, the Amit Kumar official channel is making more and more music. "Right now, I have 229,803 subscribers," he beams as he checks the statistics. "People now want independent music. I am also doing cover versions of my hits like *Love Story*." While his individual path has been terrific, the resonance of his legendary father is palpable in his memories and music. "Baba was like a huge banyan tree, a one-man industry. I was going against the wind. I'm fortunate to have been able to carve out my own career. I didn't suffer from any complex," says the unstoppable Amit Kumar as he talks about Kishore Kumar, a voice that continues to be heard every second in some part of the world. In Amit Kumar's own words:

## CLASSICAL MUSIC WAS A BOUNCER

In the early '70s, I began training in classical music with Ghulam Mustafa Khan *Saab*. But it all was a 'bouncer' for me. I gave up. I started learning light classical from Satyanarayan Mishraji from the Benares gharana in 1987. He made me

practise 10 *thaat* (scale), which I do even now.

## MUSIC ENTERED MY LIFE AROUND 1969-1970

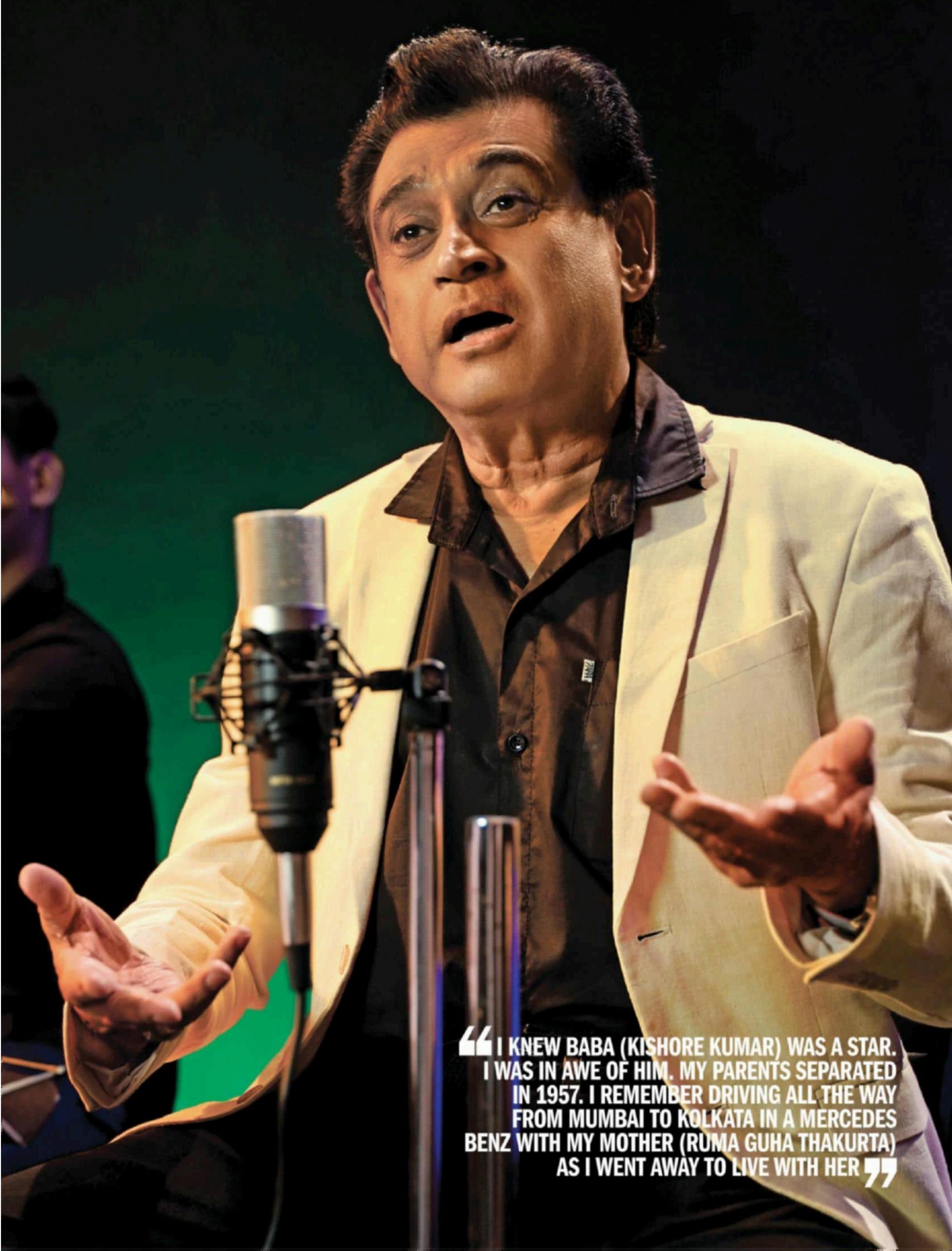
I first sang at Durga Pooja functions in Kolkata. Then I began doing street shows and singing Baba's songs. I was paid Rs 500 to Rs 1000 for that. Mom (who founded the Calcutta



with father Kishore Kumar



Kishore Kumar and Ruma Guha Thakurta



“ I KNEW BABA (KISHORE KUMAR) WAS A STAR. I WAS IN AWE OF HIM. MY PARENTS SEPARATED IN 1957. I REMEMBER DRIVING ALL THE WAY FROM MUMBAI TO KOLKATA IN A MERCEDES BENZ WITH MY MOTHER (RUMA GUHA THAKURTA) AS I WENT AWAY TO LIVE WITH HER ”

Youth Choir in 1958) was annoyed. She wanted me to study medicine. She called up Baba, saying, “Your son’s failed twice. The third time, he will be rusticated. He has now begun singing on the streets.” Baba said, “Very good. I like it!” He flew down to Kolkata and watched my performance at Ravindra Sadan, sitting backstage. He then asked Mom to send me to Mumbai. I was around 18. As a father, Baba did whatever he could for me. He made *Door Gagan Ki Chhaon Mein* (1964), sang *Aa chal ke tujhe, main leke chalon*, to an 11-year-old me. Being a comedian, he was advised not to make a serious film. But the film was critically appreciated and celebrated silver jubilee. *Aa chal ke tujhe* was actually written by Baba, with Shailendraji tweaking it.

**I FACED THE MICROPHONE FOR THE FIRST TIME FOR DOOR KA RAAHI (1971) WHEN I WAS 13**

Baba made me sit under the mango tree in this very garden and sing the song *Main ek panchhi matwala*, written by him. Though he cut it out in the edit, it’s still on record. Baba wrote *Khushi do ghadi* for the same film in the car while driving from Colaba to Juhu. When he went to Bombay Lab to record it, recordist BL Sharma asked, “Where are the musicians?” Baba replied, “*Main hoon aur rabab hai.*”

Soon, I began accompanying Baba to stage shows. I played the *tabla* and *dholak* and sang duets with him during shows in Holland, Canada, England, America



and East Africa in the early '70s. It gave me confidence. In 1974, he introduced me as a singer at Shanmukhananda Hall. The shows were titled *Daddy Kishore Sunny Amit* and went on for four years. He provided the platform to follow my dreams. But yes, he was critical of me. If I sang well, ‘Hmmm...’ was all he would say. If I went out of tune, he’d catch me. Mom’s advice was, “Remember, you’re alone in front of the microphone. Feel the song and sing it.”

**I WAS IN AWE OF BABA**

Mom was a singer and an actress. She trained at Uday Shankar’s Academy of Creative Dance and learned classical music from Ustad Abdul Rehman Khan Sahab. She acted and sang in several films in the '50s. She was introduced to Baba at Bombay Talkies. They got married in 1951. Mom’s mother, Sati, was

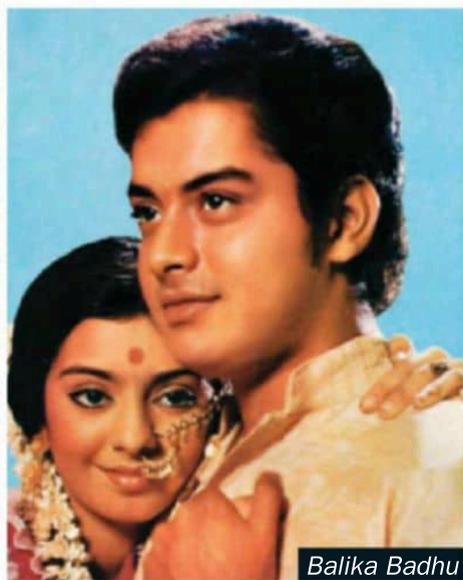
**“BABA’S FIRST CAR WAS A MORRIS MINOR, WHICH HE BOUGHT FOR RS 6000 WHEN HE GOT MARRIED TO MOM. HE WAS SO MELODRAMATIC THAT AFTER THEY DIVORCED, HE BURIED THE CAR IN THIS BUNGALOW ITSELF”**

the elder sister of Bijoya Ray, wife of Satyajit Ray. The Gangulys and the Rays were closely knit together. As a child, I wasn’t inclined towards music. Though I enjoyed listening to Baba’s records, one was *Piya piya mera jiya pukare* from *Baap Re Baap* (1955). I knew Baba was a star. I was in awe of him. My parents separated in 1957. I remember driving all the way from Mumbai to Kolkata in a Mercedes Benz with my mother as I went away to live with her. But my heart remained in our bungalow, Gouri Kunj, in Juhu, Mumbai. Those days, this bungalow had a slope that took you to the ground floor. Baba

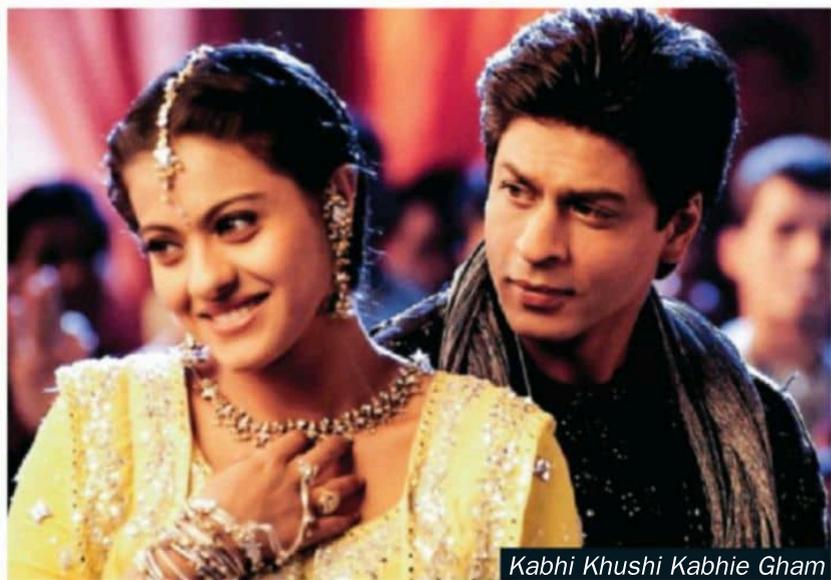
had a study there, which he’d beautifully designed. There were garages, too. His first car was a Morris Minor, which he bought for Rs 6,000 when he got married to Mom (1951). He was so melodramatic that after they divorced (1958), he buried the car in this bungalow itself. later seen in *Shararat* (1959), *Jhumroo* (1961) and *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* (1958). I’d come down from Kolkata every vacation. I’d delay going back and thus miss school. Mom and Baba would have arguments over that. I used to take the 5 a.m. flight from Mumbai to Kolkata. For that, I had to wake up early. When I’d put on the



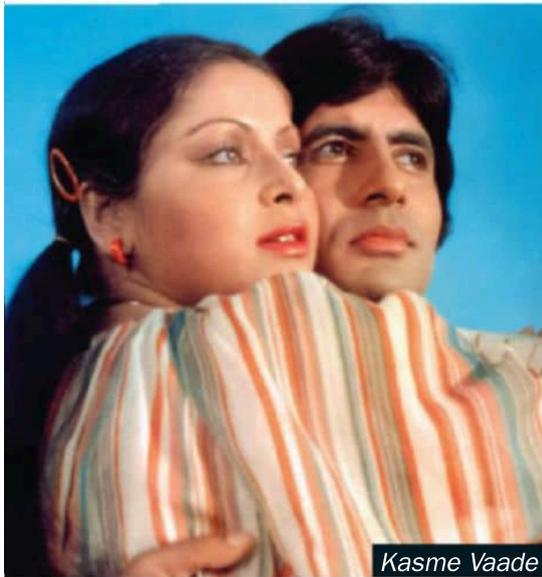
Tridev



Balika Badhu



Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham



Kasma Vaade

## “BADE ACHCHE LAGTE HAI (BALIKA BADHU 1976) BROUGHT ME FAME. IT’S THE CHERRY ON MY CAREER, MY SIGNATURE SONG, MY BREAD AND BUTTER SONG...”

jubilees between 1956 and 1959, including Bimal Roy’s *Naukri* (1954) and Satyen Bose’s *Bandi* (1957). Actually, as an actor, he was meant for Hollywood. After *Aradhana* (1969), he remained the No. 1 singer for 19 years.

### BABA LIVED LIFE KING-SIZE

People called him *Kanjoos*, but it’s all nonsense. Baba lived life king size. He’d say, “*Duniya mujhko kehti hai paagal, main duniya ko kehta hoon paagal.*” He had a unique sense of humour. Once, he didn’t want to attend the premiere of a film. His secretary, Anup Sharma, said, “You’ll have to for your career.” Baba said, “I’ll go on one condition. I’ll wear a towel to the premiere.” He sat in his open Chevrolet car in a towel. The secretary thought he was joking and would turn the car after a point. Seeing that Baba was in no mood to turn back, the secretary

pleaded, “*Main aapke pair padhta hoon.* Let’s go back. *Meri beizzati mat karwayee!*” Baba retorted, “Next time, don’t force me to do anything.”

### I BEAT BABA BY WINNING THE FILMFARE AWARD FOR LOVE STORY

My first playback number was Sapan Jagmohan’s *Hosh mein hum kahan* for *Darwaza* (1978) in the ’70s. But it was *Bade achche lagte hai* (*Balika Badhu*, 1976) for Sachin, which brought me fame. It’s the cherry on top of my career, my signature song, my bread and butter song. It grew in popularity gradually. Today, it’s a household song. *Aati rahengi baharein* in *Kasma Vaade* (1978) was another well-liked song. My voice matched Kumar Gaurav’s. *Yaad aa rahi hai* (*Love Story*, 1981) won me my first and last Filmfare Award. Though Panchamda (RD Burman) joked, it sounded like

a *bhajan*. That year, (1982), Baba was also nominated (*Humein tumse pyaar kitna* for *Kudrat* (1981) and *Choo kar mere mann* for *Yaarana*, 1981). But I beat him and won the award. The year 1981 brought fame and also Baba’s first heart attack. I was to get married. It was an arranged alliance but it was called off because the lady was already married. Baba got emotionally disturbed. He cried like a child. I was happy to be a bachelor, though. That’s when he suffered an attack.

### THROUGH THE ’80S, I GAVE SEVERAL HITS

My hits in the ’80s included *Laila o Laila* (*Qurbani*, 1980), *Tu rootha* (*Jawaani*, 1984), *Dushman na kare* (*Akhir Kyon?*, 1985), *Roz roz ankhon tale* (*Jeeva*, 1986)... Baba passed away in 1987. Call it the sympathy wave; all composers, including Panchamda, Laxmikant-Pyarelalji, etc., said, ‘We are with you’. Panchamda would say, “Whenever I compose, I think of Kishore. You come closest to him.” LP advised, “Never imitate your father. Be yourself,

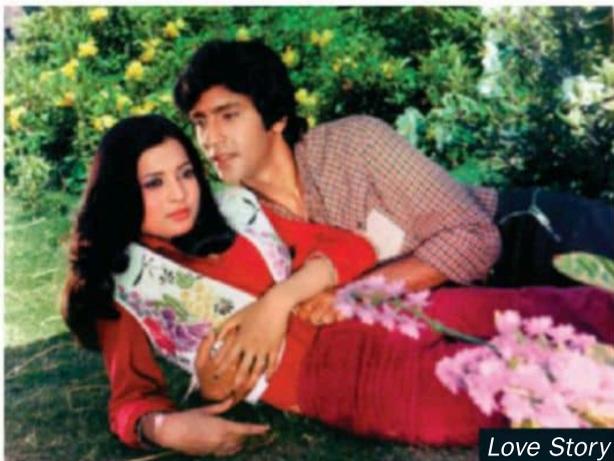
light to get ready, Baba, who’d be sleeping in the same room with me, would say, “*Light nahi jalane ka!*” He’d be crying, and he didn’t want me to see his tears.

### BABA NEVER REHEARSED; HE WAS NATURALLY GIFTED

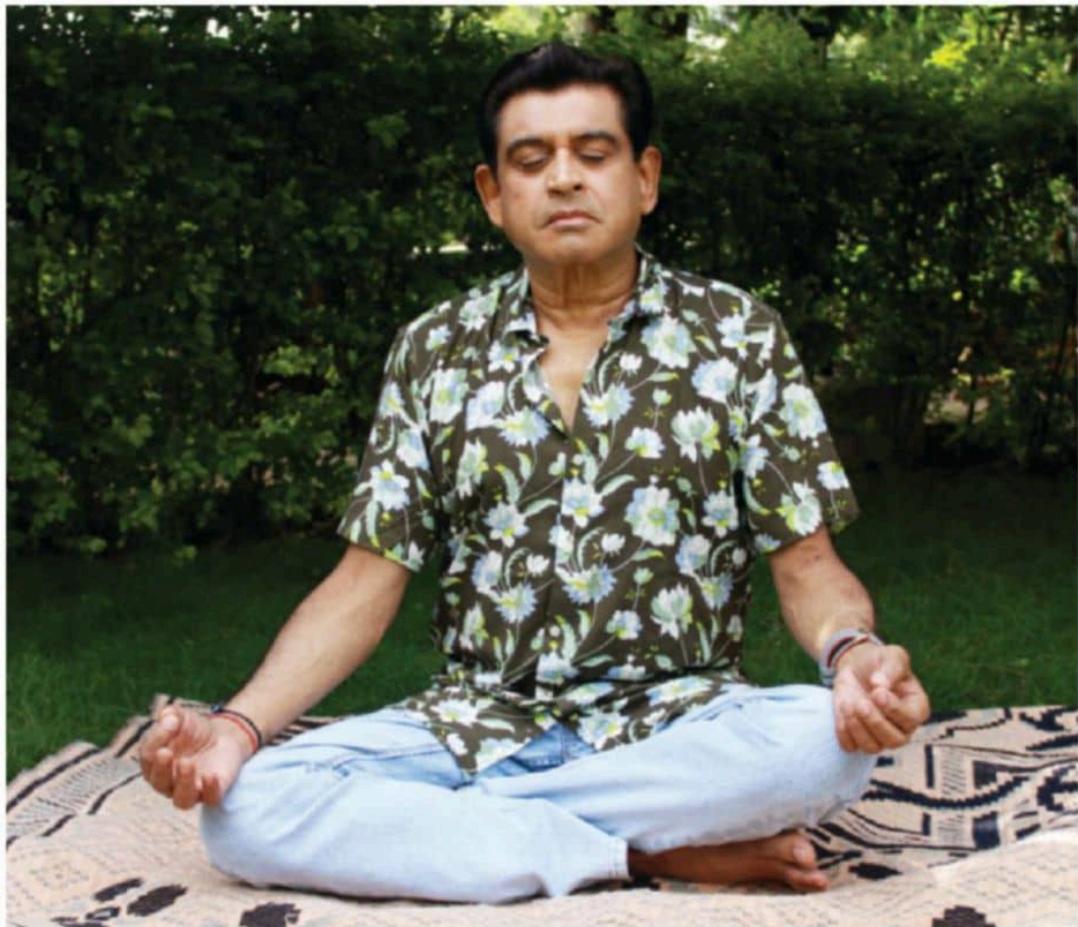
He was down to earth as a person. Baba was the most misunderstood man. Even by my mother. Though I love them both. He was a good human being. He believed in Jesus Christ. He would collect artefacts and curiosities about Shiva and Christ. Professionally too, he went through turmoil and trauma, highs and lows. He was a top actor in the ’50s, the second highest-paid actor after Dilip Kumar. He gave several



Imaandar



Love Story



Amit Kumar. Retain your individuality.” I sang around 175 songs for Panchamda, but later he went through a bad time. For Anil Kapoor, I sang *Kehdo ke tum ho meri varna* and *Ek do teen* (*Tezaab*, 1988), *Oye oye* for Naseeruddin Shah (*Tridev*, 1989), *Kaisa lagta hai* for Salman Khan (*Baaghi*, 1990), *Deewana dil deewana*, and *Sachhi yeh kahani hai* for Shah Rukh Khan (*Kabhi Haan Kabhi Naa*, 1993). *Bole Chudiyaa* in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) was another popular number. I slowed down in the late '90s. Baba had said, “This is a topsy-turvy line. One day you’re on top, the next day you can be kicked out.” I’ve seen both the rise and the ebb. For five years, between 1987 and 1993, I was at the top. Then many clones came in. I thought I should quit now. Had I been diplomatic, I would

**“ I’VE SEEN BOTH THE RISE AND THE EBB. BETWEEN 1987-1993, I WAS AT THE TOP. THEN MANY CLONES CAME IN. I THOUGHT I SHOULD QUIT NOW... I DON’T BLAME ANYONE. I WAS NEVER IN THE RAT RACE ”**

have lasted maybe a few more years. But I don’t blame anyone. I was never in the rat race. I have no regrets. In the following years, I released music albums, including *MAD*, *Dam Dama Dam*, *Jaanam* and *Baba Mere*. I launched the Amit Kumar official channel on YouTube in 2011. Organically, I’ve reached 229,803 subscribers. The analytics reveal my compositions are doing well. I’m so proud of it. It’s connected me to my audience. I enjoy this pastime, which is bringing me rich dividends. People now want independent music. I am doing cover versions of my hits, like *Love Story*.

**WE ALL WILL PERISH; BABA WILL REMAIN**

Looking back, my father was a man of many facets, both emotional and funny. My great-grandfather had a Chrysler Champion car. He’d drive down from Khandwa in it. The car is featured in *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi* (1958). All generations have travelled in it. Baba was sentimental about it. After Baba’s death, it had turned irreparable. So I had to discard it. Baba was as emotional about his hometown, Khandwa. The government has created a beautiful *samadhi* there. We want to build a museum there. On his birth anniversary, we have a show in

Baba’s honour. Sudesh Bhosle, Bela Shende, all of us sing. I chose to sing Baba’s uncommon songs. Like this *ghazal Husn bhi hai udaas udaas* from *Fareb* (1951). I was advised against it. But I received a standing ovation. Even the musicians were surprised. It proves people are craving good poetry and melody.

There’s an interesting story behind the *Fareb ghazal*. During the rehearsal, Rafi *saab*, Latabai (Mangeshkar), Talat Mehmoodji, Manna Deyji, etc. were all present. When Baba wasn’t getting it right, composer Anil Biswas told him, “Go home; you can’t get the *murki*. Manna will sing.” Baba felt insulted. He went home, rehearsed it, and got it right the next time. Baba had once said, “I will not be found again. People will remember me forever.” That’s so true. We will all perish. But Baba will remain.’

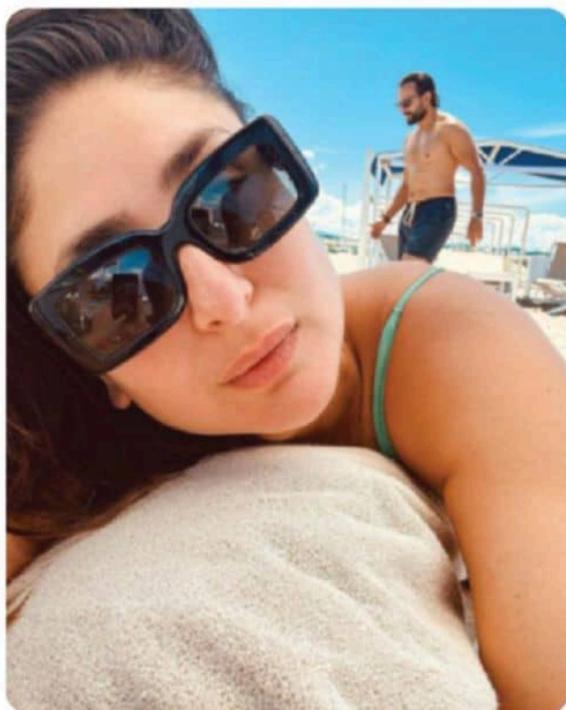
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reader's reviews, box-office, celebrity column & more

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### Medley of moments

Check out what your favourites are upto on Instagram...



@kareenakapoorkhan: for me it's the one with the photobomber  
*Saif Ali Khan photobombing Kareena Kapoor Khan's selfie is the most couple thing ever.*



@khushi05k: Desperately waiting for sweater weather  
*Khushi Kapoor sure wants us to invest in a sweater.*



@vickykaushal09: Making memories with you is my favourite part of life. Happy Birthday my love! 🍷❤️🍷  
*Vicky Kaushal and Katrina Kaif sure have eyes only for each other.*

@dishapatani: Roxie ❤️ #kalki2898ad thank you for all the love 🙏grateful  
*Disha Patani and Prabhas's goofy moment is sure to bring a smile on your face.*



@ananyapanday: yup  
*This photo of Ananya Panday with her furry friend sure is cuteness overload.*

Readers write in their rants and raves pg 118  
Shatrughan Sinha's racy rejoinders pg 120



# IN THE MAIL

READERS WRITE AND BITE BACK... WITH LOVE AND AFFECTION

**1<sup>st</sup> Prize**  
**₹1500**

## BHUMI'S THE BEST

Bhumi Pednekar's cover story in your last issue (July) was a delightful read. I enjoyed learning about her journey in the film industry and how she navigates through challenges with confidence. Her dedication to quality roles over commercial success is inspiring. It's refreshing to see her commitment to diverse characters and her fearless spirit to break stereotypes.

Arshiya Saxena, Gurgaon



Bhumi Pednekar

## BRILLIANT BHUMI

Bhumi Pednekar's cover story in your last issue (July) was simply brilliant. I love how fashionable she is, but your conversation made me realise that she is quite down-to-earth as well. I was totally in love with her screen presence. Now, I love her for her thoughts and ideas as well.

Nigar Hussain, Dibrugarh

## PERSONAL GLIMPSES

In her interview carried in your last issue (July), Bhumi Pednekar's perspective on body positivity and her passion for fashion added depth to the conversation. Overall, her positivity and determination shone through, making me appreciate her as both an actor and a person.

Deepa Nair, Chennai

**2<sup>nd</sup> Prize**  
**₹1000**

## SUPER SONA

I loved reading Sonakshi Sinha's interview in your last issue (July). She comes across as not just a talented actor, but also a grounded and thoughtful individual. Her interview left me with a deeper appreciation for her work and the values she stands for in both her professional and personal life. I would like to send across my good wishes towards her wedding to Zaheer Iqbal. They really look made for each other.

Arvind Tyagi, Aligarh

## CANDID TALKS

Loved reading Sonakshi Sinha's interview in your last issue (July). I really liked the way she candidly spoke about her on screen characters, especially Fareedan. It seems that she really admires Sanjay Leela Bhansali's vision as a director.

Kashish Sheikh, Nashik



Alaya F

## SORTED ACTRESS

I really enjoyed reading about Alaya F in your last issue (July). She seems to be such a fun-spirited actress. Also, the way she spoke about being inspired by Srikanth's journey was good to read. I also liked that she was clear about the kind of roles she wants to take up in the future.

Prachi Desai, Ahmedabad

## RESILIENT ACTOR

I loved Jimmy Shergill's interview in your last issue (July). What struck me the most was his dedication to exploring diverse roles, whether it's in mainstream films or in web series like *Choon* and *Ranneeti*. His willingness to take on challenging characters reflects not just his passion for acting but also his commitment to artistic growth. It's evident that his journey has been filled with calculated risks and a deep love for storytelling.

Suparna Chakraborty, Kolkata

## HONEST OPINION

In his interview published in your last issue (July), Jimmy Shergill's comments about not yet reaching his career peak are both humble and ambitious. It's clear he's not resting but is continually striving for more. His perspective on the transformative power of cinema is refreshing.

Priyanka Joshi, Pune



Sonakshi Sinha



Jimmy Shergill



Shilpa Rao

### TEAMWORK ROCKS

In his interview in your last issue (July), what stands out is Divyenndu's appreciation for the collaborative nature of filmmaking and his respect for each role he takes on. Whether navigating comedy or drama, his commitment to authenticity and depth shines through, making each portrayal memorable.

Darshana Baidya, Bhopal

### CHOICES, CHOICES

In your last issue (July), I really enjoyed reading Divyenndu's interview. I missed him in *Mirzapur* this time but your interview made me respect him as an actor even more. Reading about his approach to acting and his love for theatre made me realise how strong-footed he is as an actor. I wish to see him in more roles.

Shreyas Varma, Hyderabad



Divyenndu

### TALKING SENSE

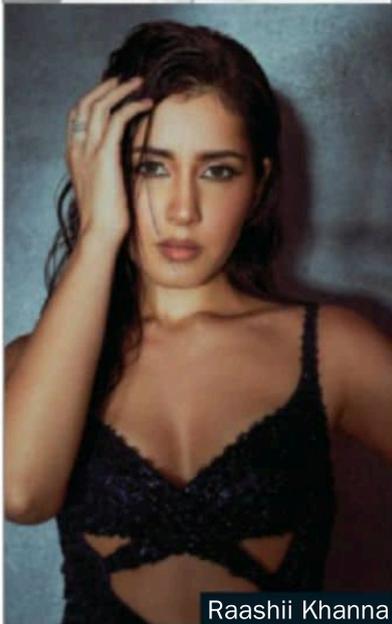
In Lara Dutta's interview in your last issue (July), the way she describes her career at present is truly inspiring. Her enthusiasm for the diverse roles and stories she's involved in reflects her passion for her craft. It's evident that she's in a phase where each project challenges her to new heights and she embraces these opportunities with zest and dedication.

Roshani Khanna, New Delhi

### INTERESTING JOURNEY

Lara Dutta's interview in your last issue (July) issue is a testament to her evolution as an actor and her enduring passion for storytelling. I think her journey—from navigating criticism to embracing diverse roles—serves as an inspiration to aspiring actors and fans alike.

Alka Yadav, Lucknow



Raashii Khanna

### WOMAN POWER

Your last issue (July) had a very special interview with Raashii Khanna. Its headline, *Women Are Not Props*, resonated with me deeply. I also loved reading about her fondness for the South cinema. I think Raashii has all the qualities of being a superstar.

Meera Iyer, Palakkad



Richa Chadha

### LOVELY RICHA

I loved reading about Richa Chadha in your last issue (July). I have been in awe of her political activism. Moreover, her perfect relationship with Ali Fazal is so heartwarming.

After reading your interview, I could understand that he is her biggest cheerleader. Congratulations to her for becoming a mother. Hope she continues to act after a break.

Kriti Dutta, Kalimpong

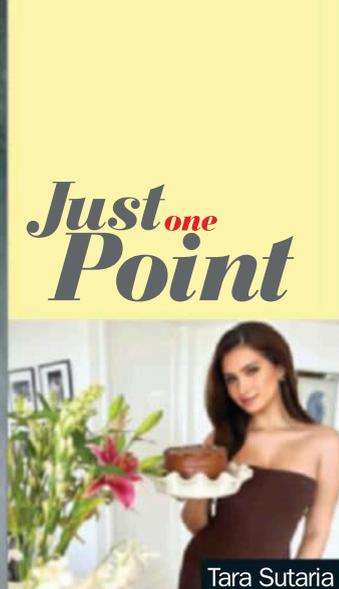


Chhaya Kadam

### GEM OF AN ACTOR

I loved Chhaya Kadam's interview in your last issue (July) issue. Her role as Manju Mai in *Laapata Ladies* resonates deeply with me. Her candidness about challenges and triumphs, from her entry into acting after a personal tragedy to her diverse roles in acclaimed films speaks volumes about her resilience and passion for her craft.

Arvind Dhunnarkar, Dhule



Tara Sutaria

## Just one Point

I loved knowing that Tara Sutaria is a foodie. She seems like a fun person to speak to as well. Her knowledge about food and cooking really resonated with me.

Maya Sharma, Gaya

Taha Shah's interview in your last issue was fun to read.

I liked how he opened up about standing up to bullies. He is already a superhero in my eyes.

Anushka Nambiar, Chandigarh

Shankar Mahadevan's interview in your last issue (July) issue was a fine read.. I really loved reading about his collaboration with Zakir Hussain.

Swapnil Awasthi, Raipur

Eddie Murphy is my favourite actor. His interview in your last issue was amazing. I loved how he acknowledged Shah Rukh Khan as the biggest star.

Gauri Dixit, Rajkot

Prosenjit and Rituparna are my favourites. I have watched almost all their movies.

Their interview in your last issue (July) gave me a great insight into their off-screen camaraderie.

Shubhra Goswami, Kolkata

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PHOTOGRAPH: MEETESH TANEJA

# Shatrughan Sinha's Rapid fire



**Tears of joy:** Poonam Sinha and Shatrughan Sinha get emotional at the wedding of their daughter Sonakshi with Zaheer Iqbal

**How can we identify a good friend?**

R Geetha, Aluva

A friend in need is indeed a friend. You may find it easy to identify a good friend by his deeds.

**What is the importance of forgiveness and mercy?**

C R Hariharan, Aluva

The importance of forgiveness and mercy comes in the category of prayashchit and is a sign of large-heartedness. Forgiveness and mercy must be accepted then and there only as a sign of divinity and kindness.

**By 2100, India's population**

**will be over twice that of China, highlighting the huge demographic dividend available to the country, according to estimates released by the United Nations. What's your take on that?**

Rakesh Haith, Mohanpur

Not good at all. We're burdening the earth by a whole lot. We need to be sensitive to this issue. And work towards this alarming situation soon—the sooner the better—without any further delay.

**Which is more praiseworthy—the super skill of Modi in giving long speeches or the extraordinary patience of people who listen to him till the end?**

M S Suresh, Secunderabad

I would say God bless the people who have the courage to listen to him till the end. It's praiseworthy in its own way, as it requires patience and endurance.

**What message do you have for people who still consider our country a land of snake charmers and an impoverished milieu?**

Rakesh Haith, Mohanpur

I can hardly believe that. It's not true anymore. In America, especially, every fifth doctor is of Indian origin. Give them a list of our Indian CEOs in various countries. The people who consider us a country of snake charmers seem to be very ignorant. We're the ninth-largest GDP country. Most of the successful people in the world today are Indians. No offence to the snake charmers. I would like to see these people charm a snake. They don't have that talent.

**How do you feel about the role of money in politics?**

C R Hariharan, Aluva

Money makes the world go around. Money is definitely needed in today's politics. The question is how much goes into real campaigning and how much goes into corrupt politics. After all, always remember what politics is all about: money power, manpower, gun power, goon power, and ultimately, the ultimate power.

**I am the father of a daughter studying at the university. I have seen that during the vidaai of a daughter after her marriage, her father gets emotional and. I used to be astonished when a father got emotional after her marriage, although the daughter studied in a hostel since her school days and later worked in another city for six years. Now that my turn will also be within a few years, I am sure that I may also face the same situation.**

Bipradip Bandyopadhyay, Durgapur

I appreciate and understand your feelings. However, you may understand and appreciate my response to your question: You have absolutely forgotten to ask me any question. However, a father is a father is a father. It may vary in degree, but it happens to everyone.



**Bollywood and cricket:** Shah Rukh Khan with the KKR team

**Young men from powerful or wealthy families who are drunk and driving high-powered cars and causing fatal accidents have become common of late. What do you feel about this sad situation?**

**R Ramakrishnan, Dombivli**

Sad indeed. That's how I feel. Situations like this should never happen. It needs to be corrected and dealt with. Stricter laws, stricter implementation, and no corruption are the needs of the hour.

**Bollywood and cricket are intimately connected to each other; do you agree?**

**Amit Jain, New Delhi**

Yes. I definitely agree.

It's nothing to do with art. It's all about commerce. Money, glamour, ambition, and being celebrities in the true sense, connects people. It's everything to do with adoration, admiration, and pampering. And don't forget – the people of India love movies and cricket. That says it all.

**Who among the Indian politicians is the GOAT (Greatest of All Time)?**

**Dr C Janardhan Singh, Hyderabad**

There could be a few from the past, but currently I would say undoubtedly the Bengal tigress, the woman of substance,

## 1st Prize

**Will Bollywood ever improve standards in the fields of acting, story, and direction and make their product world-class?**

**Asif Kamruudin, on email**

Are you joking?

## 2nd Prize

**Which real-life role is more challenging—that of a father-in-law or that of a father?**

**Sujatha Sagdeo, Wayanad**

Let's not forget that a father is a father-in-law and a father-in-law too is a father to somebody. Roles where emotions are challenging and tough to deal with are very sensitive and delicate.

the most powerful lady in the country, Bengal's CM Mamta Banerjee, besides the hero of both Bharat Jodo Yatra and Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, one and only one, the most talked-about man of the hour and of all seasons, Rahul Gandhi.

**Every monsoon, rains fall and roofs leak. This monsoon, roofs fell and papers leaked. Will you call it Climate Change?**

**J P Singh Kaka, Bhopal**

I do believe in science. I definitely think that it's due to global warming that our climate is

changing drastically. The other kind of roof will always leak, thanks to corruption.

**Self-styled godman, satsang, subsequent stampede, and thereafter a routine blame game. What is your opinion on this recent tragic incident at Hathras, UP?**

**R Ramakrishnan, Dombivli**

Strong awareness programmes are the need of the hour. People have to learn that not all so-called godmen are genuine. Most of the illiterate godmen whom the masses believe in are the root cause of this tragic incident.

(Feature co-ordinated by **DEVESH SHARMA**)

Please note: The column doesn't reflect Shatrughan Sinha's political or personal views. His answers are given in jest and humour.

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YOUR QUESTIONS WILL BE FORWARDED TO: Shatrughan Sinha, who insists his answers do not reflect his political and social views.

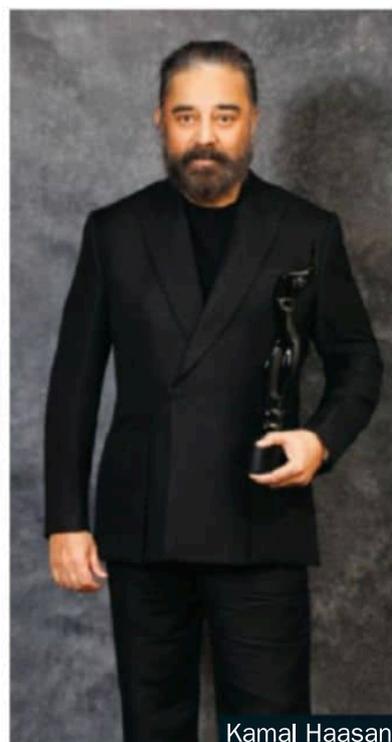
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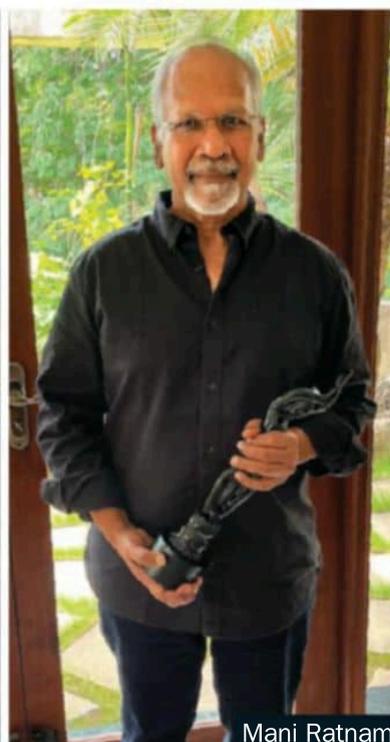
# THE KINGS AND I

One of the perks of being the editor of an entertainment magazine is that you get to hobnob with the legends sometimes. Our South Awards are round the corner as we speak. Since we weren't able to hold the South edition last year, as a gesture of goodwill, I travelled to Chennai to honour Kamal Haasan, Mani Ratnam and AR Rahman and hand over the trophies. Thanks to Mumbai's erratic monsoon, reaching Chennai was proving to be an adventure. I was worried about the flight getting delayed or cancelled. Thankfully, we reached there more or less on time, to much relief.

While Kamal sir got the Best Actor In A Leading Role (Male) trophy for *Vikram*, Mani Ratnam took home the Black Lady in the Best Director category for *Ponniyin Selvan* and AR Rahman got it for composing the music for the same film. I've always looked up to their seminal work and meeting them after so long, put a new vigour to my steps. Despite their numerous achievements, all three are totally



Kamal Haasan



Mani Ratnam



AR Rahman

grounded individuals who still possess an enormous passion for cinema.

I got a chance to spend quality time with them. It was lovely to see Kamalji go down memory lane and reminisce about his first award for the Malayalam film *Kanyakumari* and now I think his 21st Best Actor Award for *Vikram*. The row of Filmfare trophies on his mantelpiece bear silent testimony towards his longevity and relevance as an actor. Mani Ratnam sir recalled his first Filmfare Awards for *Mouna Ragam*. In my view, a better film than this one man-woman relationship, especially

love after marriage, is yet to be made. How I wish he should take some time off and maybe remake it in Hindi with perhaps Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor. Fingers crossed. Another great thing was that despite being a South Indian he shot Delhi so beautifully.

Rahman sir bashfully accepted his 33rd Filmfare Trophy. Given his mastery, I feel he needs a trophy room dedicated to just Filmfare Awards he has won over the years. He has no plans for slowing down and despite scoring more for Hollywood these days and concentrating on live concerts, he still

has the ability to churn out gems. He's arguably the best when he infuses folk elements in his tunes, as evident in *Ponniyin Selvan*. How soothing his music sounds compared to the Punjabified Hindi film music. South composers have retained a sense of milieu in the compositions, something that their Hindi film counterparts have forgotten.

As said earlier, it was refreshing to meet these greats and I'm looking forward to seeing them again and meeting some more, come the awards.

[jitesh.pillai@wfm.co.in](mailto:jitesh.pillai@wfm.co.in)  
Twitter: @jiteshpillai

# AJILIYAA

**Ajita Italiya,**  
founder of Surat's premier  
multi-designer store Ajiliyaa, is a  
US-certified image professional  
who embodies versatility and  
entrepreneurial spirit.

*Beyond her role in fashion, she  
excels as a vocalist, cyclist, and  
writer. Her journey, marked by  
creativity and success, inspires  
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*By Ajita Italiya*

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