

ALL NEW

February - March 2025 ₹ 100

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**ANANYA
PANDAY**
INDIA'S
SWEETHEART

**FARDEEN
KHAN'S**
TRIUMPHANT
RETURN

A MAN FOR
ALL SEASONS,
**JACKIE
SHROFF**



SHOWCASING
THE PROMISING
DEBUTANTS
OF 2025

BOLLYWOOD'S
**NEWEST
OBSESSION**

**VEER
PAHARIYA**
DRAWS ALL THE
STARES



Letter from the Editor

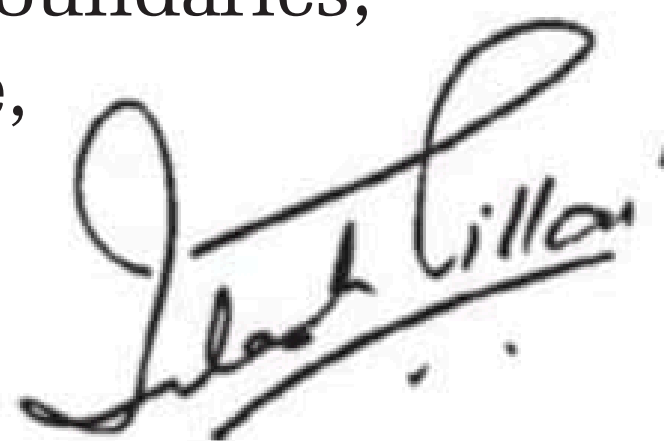
Pushing the envelope

In 2024, Hindi cinema continued its tradition of diverse storytelling, offering a compelling mix of genres, themes and directorial visions. Filmmakers pushed creative boundaries, delivering narratives that were both thought-provoking and entertaining. Here's a closer look at some of the standout films and their directorial approaches:

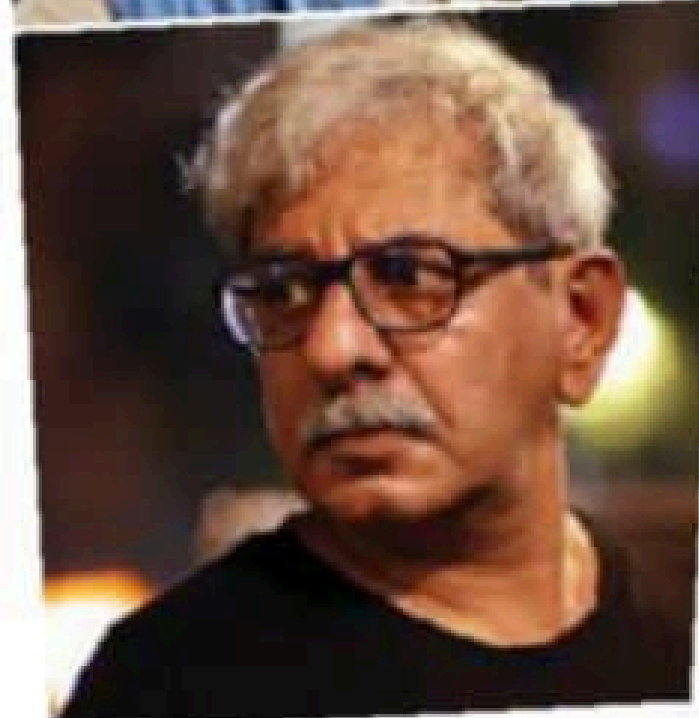
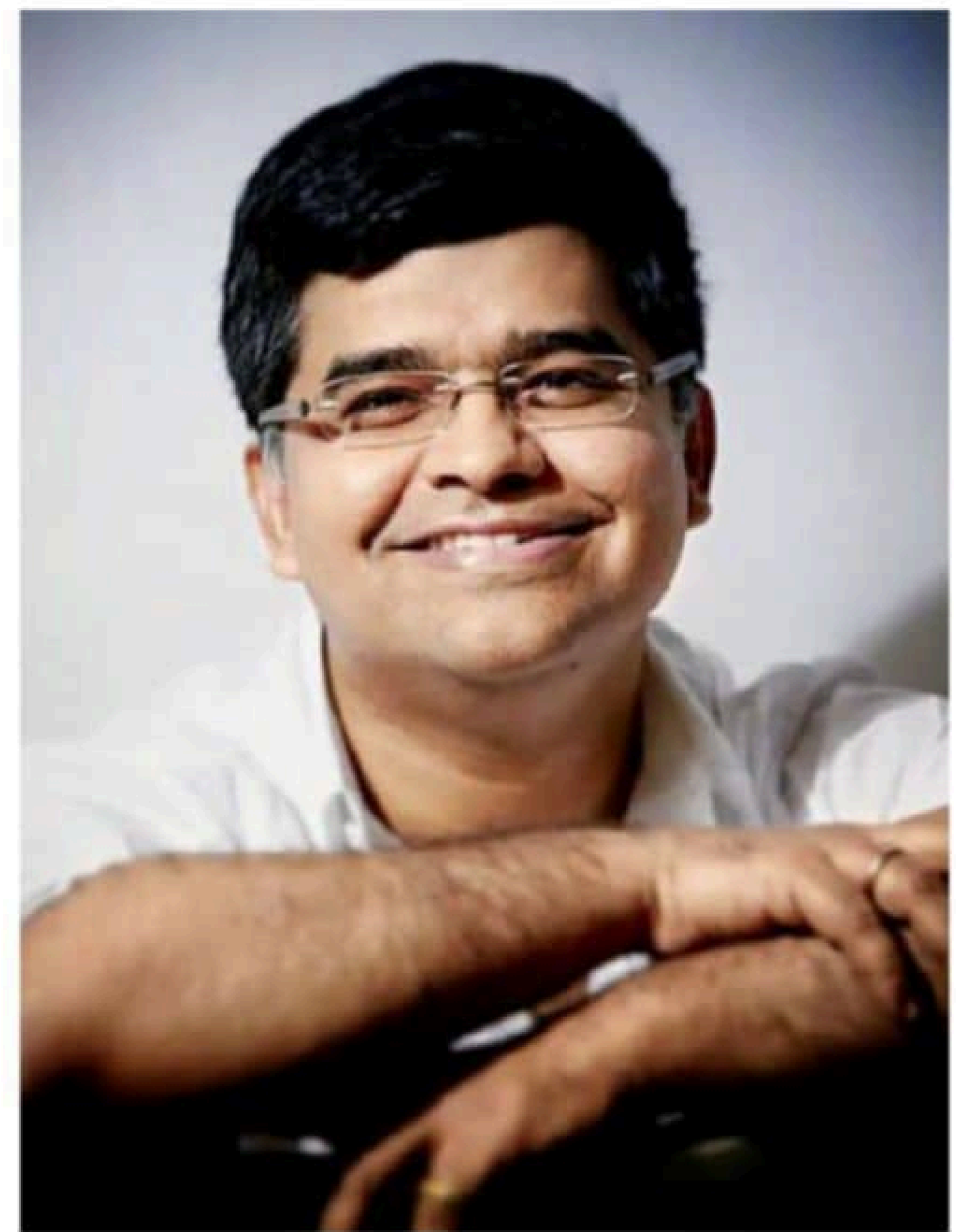
Renowned for his ability to weave deep human emotions with socio-political undercurrents, Shoojit Sircar once again proved his mettle in 2024 with *I Want To Talk*, starring Abhishek Bachchan as a cancer survivor. His latest work reflected his signature blend of realism and poignancy, resonating deeply with audiences. Whether exploring personal struggles or broader societal concerns, his storytelling remained intimate yet universally relevant. Kiran Rao's *Laapata Ladies* was a delightful yet meaningful take on life in rural India. Seamlessly blending humour with social commentary, the film shed light on the strength and resilience of women in small-town settings. With her keen eye for detail and character-driven storytelling, Rao crafted a narrative that was as heartwarming as it was socially relevant. A filmmaker known for his fearless approach, Dibakar Banerjee returned with *Love Sex Aur Dhokha 2*, an unflinching look at modern relationships, digital voyeurism and societal hypocrisies. With his signature raw and realistic style, Banerjee once again dissected contemporary taboos, pushing the boundaries of cinematic storytelling in a way only he can.

Sriram Raghavan, the master of neo-noir thrillers, delivered yet another gripping tale with *Merry Christmas*. Known for his intricate narratives and unpredictable storytelling, he kept audiences on the edge of their seats. The film combined elements of suspense, romance, and psychological intrigue, reaffirming Raghavan's position as one of India's finest thriller filmmakers. Amit Sharma's *Maidaan* brought to life the golden era of Indian football, celebrating the journey of coach Syed Abdul Rahim and his impact on the sport. The film blended rousing sports sequences with a deeply emotional narrative, powered by strong performances and meticulous period detailing. It was not just a tribute to Indian football but also an inspiring story of perseverance and leadership.

Tushar Hiranandani, known for his knack for character-driven stories, helmed *Srikanth*, a compelling biopic on blind entrepreneur Srikanth Bolla. The film explored the life of a remarkable individual, balancing emotion, ambition and personal struggles. With a well-researched narrative and engaging storytelling, *Srikanth*, added another powerful biopic to Bollywood's growing list of inspiring real-life stories. Hansal Mehta, known for his realistic and socially aware narratives, took on a gripping murder mystery with *The Buckingham Murders*. While the film operated within the crime thriller genre, it also explored themes of cultural identity, grief, and emotional turmoil. With Mehta's signature realism and attention to character depth, the film stood out as more than just a whodunit. With directors continuing to push artistic and thematic boundaries, Hindi cinema remained in a dynamic and evolving space, reflecting the ever-changing pulse of society.



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contents

Volume 74 # February-March 2025 / ISSN NUMBER 0971-7277



PHOTOGRAPHS: KUNAL GUPTA
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HAIR STYLIST: HAKIM AALIM
MAKE-UP: PENAZ MITHUJI
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VIANGE VINTANGE & HERMES

Ed Space

08 The ed talks about directors who are taking cinema forward with their narratives

124 Women power in Hindi films

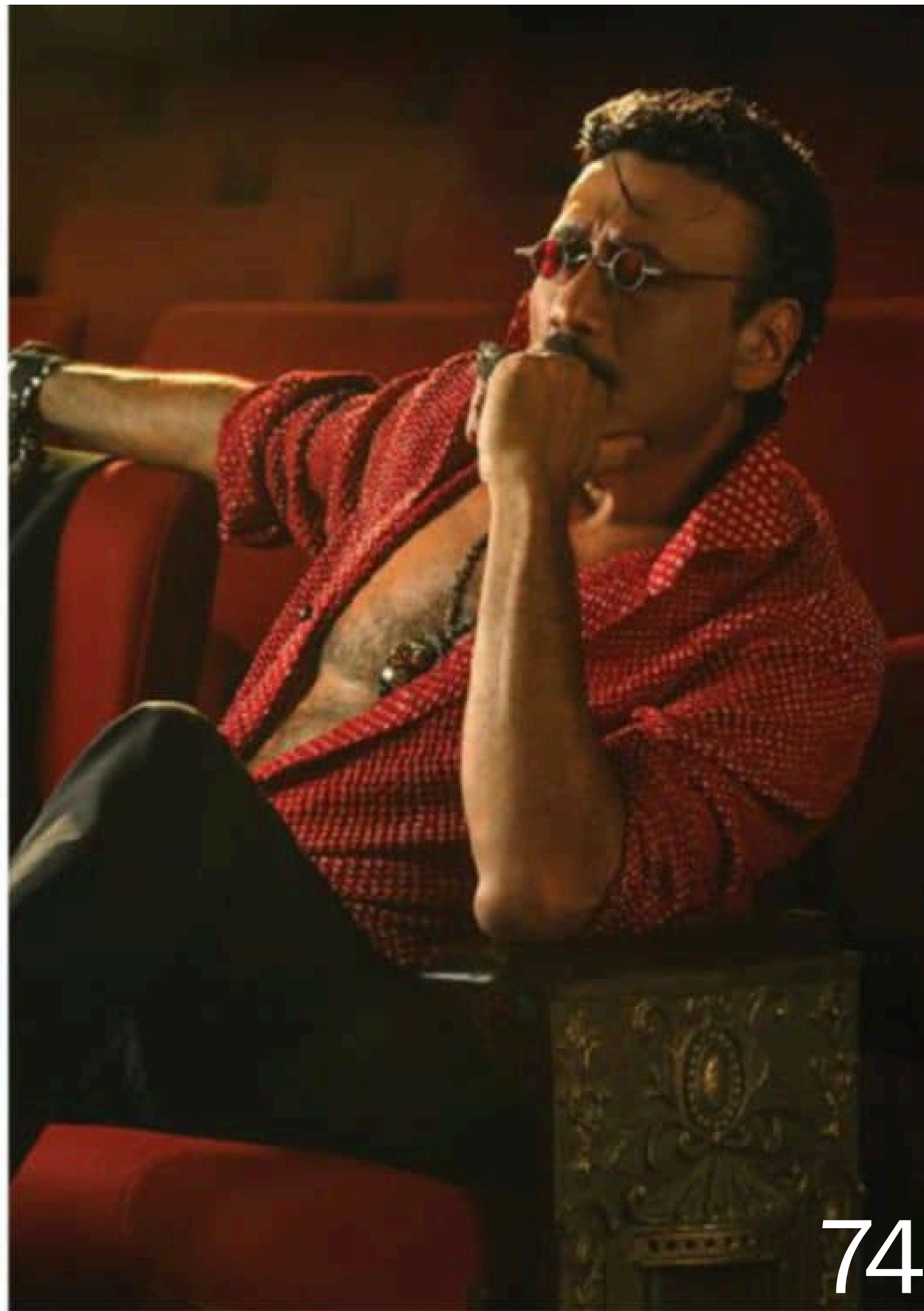
Masala Fix

14 Ranbir Kapoor's Major Transformation for *Dhoom 4*, Will Vicky Kaushal and Ananya





68



74



62



34



82



78

- 98 Get to know the mind behind Bengali director Arjunn Dutta
- 102 Anees Bazmee opens up about coming up the hard way
- 106 Step into the extraordinary career of rhythm vocalist Loire Cotler
- 110 Journey through the sweet, soulful world of Preeti Sagar
- 114 Farida Jalal narrates her career highs and lows in her own words

Your Say

- 120 Readers write in their raves and rants
- 122 Shatrughan Sinha's wacky witticisms



122

Panday star in *Gully Boy* sequel, Triptii Dimri locked for Parveen Babi biopic and other grist from the rumour mill

Preview

- 24 Mihir Ahuja and Akshay Roy tell us about their dreams and desires

Glamfare and Lifestyle

- 34 Saiyami Kher's Australian vacation

- 38 Pratibha Ranta is fond of Himachal's culinary delights

- 44 A double dose of all things fab in food and fashion

Exclusives

- 62 Ananya Pandey like never before – fresh, fun, and fabulous
- 68 Fardeen Khan spills the beans on his career, life, and everything in between
- 74 Get a glimpse into the legendary Jackie

- 78 Shroff's timeless career and style
- 82 Catch up with the evergreen Bhagyashree, the beauty who stole our hearts
- 86 Ishwak Singh talks about making it big
- 86 Gulshan Devaiah answers 50 rapidfire questions, no holds barred
- 90 Sunny Kaushal captured looking his dapper best in our photoplay
- 94 Debutants to look out for in 2025

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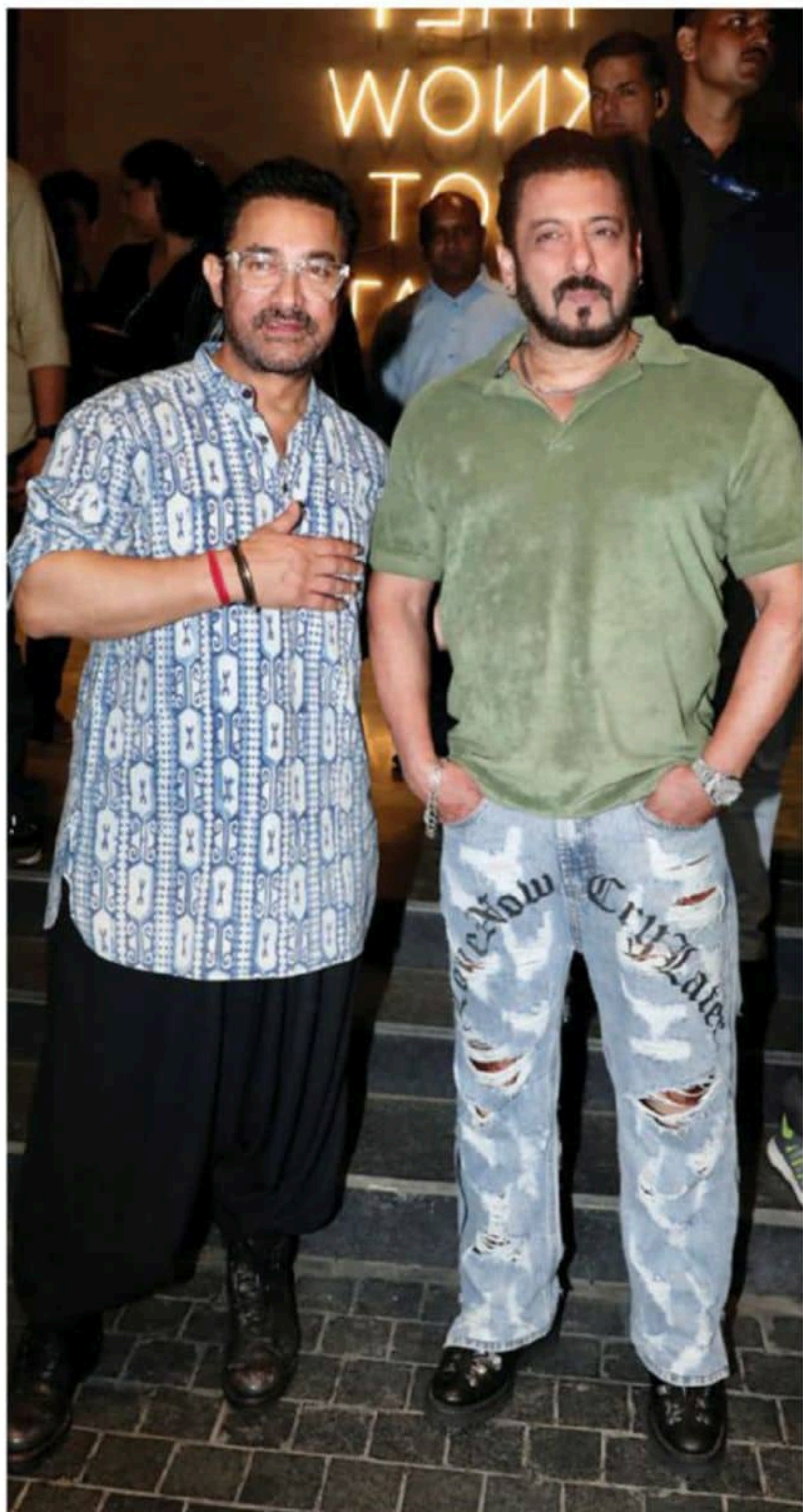
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a bird's-eye view of show town's happenings

masala fix



TROIKA!

Bollywood fans have long dreamt of seeing the three Khans—**Shah Rukh, Salman, and Aamir**, share the silver screen together. Aamir himself has openly admitted that he's all for the idea but he's holding out for the perfect script to make it happen. While the wait for their on-screen collaboration continues, fans recently got a delightful surprise when the trio reunited at the screening of *Loveyapa*, starring **Junaid Khan** and **Khushi Kapoor**. The moment Shah Rukh Khan arrived, Aamir rushed to his car to welcome him with open arms. The two shared a heartfelt hug. SRK even planted a gentle kiss on Aamir's cheeks, a moment that melted hearts everywhere. SRK didn't stop there; he warmly interacted with Aamir's children, Junaid and **Ira**, giving them hugs too. Salman Khan too later joined in the fun, striking a pose with Aamir as soon as he arrived. This star-studded reunion was nothing short of a treat for fans, leaving them grinning from ear to ear.



Saif Ali Khan stabbed in a heroic attempt to protect his family
pg 14

Deepika Padukone turns showstopper for Sabyasachi
pg 16

PHOTOGRAPH: MANAV MANGLANI

Rumours & More

SAIF ALI KHAN STABBED IN A HEROIC ATTEMPT TO PROTECT HIS FAMILY

On January 16, **Saif Ali Khan** was brutally stabbed in an attempt to defend his family from an intruder at his Bandra residence. The actor, known for his calm demeanour, was left with six stab wounds, one of which was particularly serious. He was rushed to Lilavati Hospital, where he underwent immediate surgery. The courageous move to protect his loved ones was met with admiration from fans and the media alike. Saif was discharged five days later, recovering from the traumatic event but in good health.

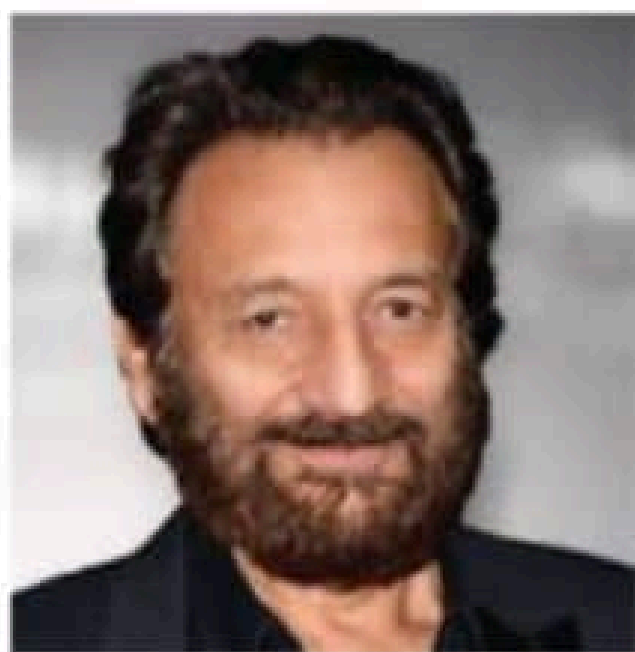


SHAH RUKH KHAN REACTS TO COLDPLAY’S TRIBUTE



During Coldplay’s much-anticipated concert in India, lead singer **Chris Martin** paid a heartwarming tribute to **Shah Rukh Khan**, acknowledging him as one of the greatest icons of Indian cinema. Shah Rukh, never one to shy away from his love for music, took to Twitter to express his gratitude, sharing a beautiful message: “Look at the stars... look how they shine for you... and everything you do! My brother Chris Martin, you make me feel special... like your songs!! Love you and a big hug to your team. You are one in a billion, my friend. India loves you, @coldplay!!!” The shoutout quickly went viral, as fans of both Coldplay and Shah Rukh Khan joined in celebrating the deep connection between the two legends.

SHEKHAR KAPUR, AJITH KUMAR HONoured WITH PADMA BHUSHAN



The 2025 Padma Awards has several legendary names from the entertainment world. The prestigious Padma Bhushan honour was bestowed upon **Shekhar Kapur**, known for *Mr. India* and *Bandit Queen*, and **Ajith Kumar**, one of Tamil cinema’s most iconic stars. Other honourees included **Nandamuri Balakrishna**, **Shobana Chandrakumar**, **Pankaj Udhas** (posthumous), and **Anant Nag**. Meanwhile, the Padma Shri award, which recognises distinguished service in various fields, went to music icon **Arijit Singh**, composer **Ricky Kej**, choreographer **Mamata Shankar** and actor **Ashok Saraf**. The Padma Vibhushan, the second-highest civilian award in India, was posthumously awarded to literary giant **MT Vasudevan Nair** and folk singer **Sharda Sinha**.

ARE ABHAY VERMA AND SHANAYA KAPOOR THE NEW ON-SCREEN PAIR?

The chemistry between actors **Abhay Verma** and **Shanaya Kapoor** is about to light up the screen, according to exclusive reports. The pair is in talks to star together in a new film under the direction of **Shujaat Saudagar**. Though neither actor has officially signed on the dotted line, the film is already creating a buzz for its fresh pairing.



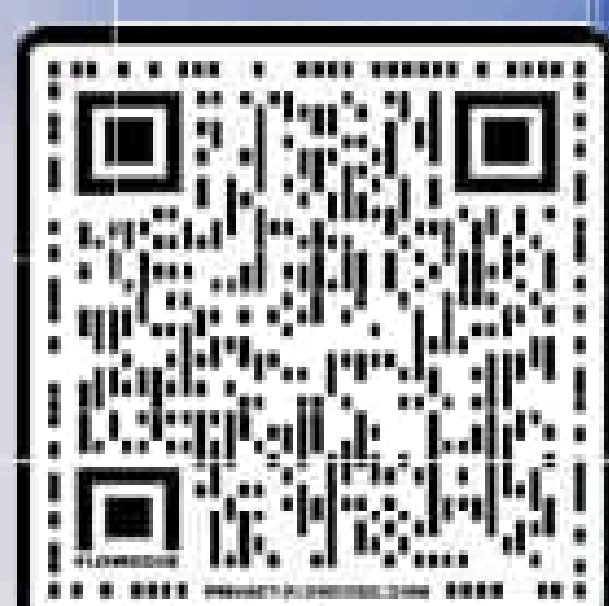
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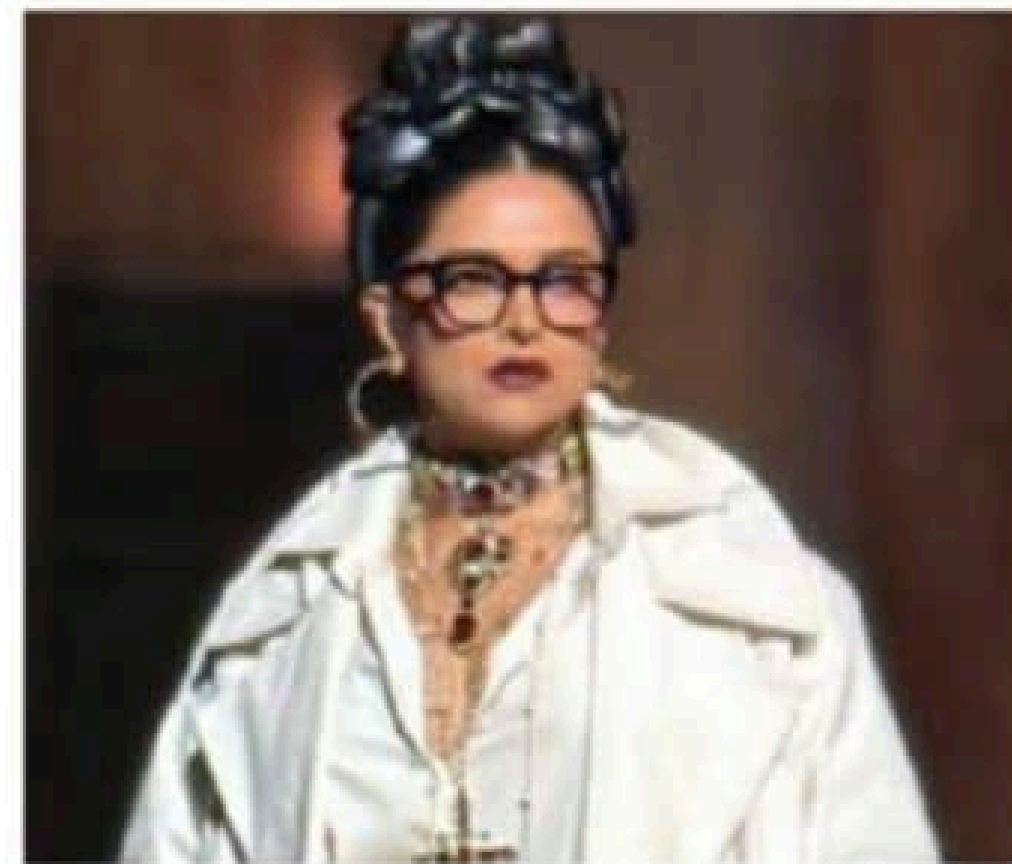


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TWO ACES: Akshay Kumar and Veer twinning in formals. We like.

DEEPIKA PADUKONE TURNS SHOWSTOPPER FOR SABYASACHI



After a brief hiatus to focus on motherhood, **Deepika Padukone** made a dazzling return to the limelight, walking the ramp as the showstopper for **Sabyasachi Mukherjee's** grand show celebrating 25 years of his eponymous brand. The actress, known for her impeccable fashion sense, wore a stunning all-white ensemble, consisting of a flowing white shirt, matching pants, and an oversized coat. Her serene presence on the ramp added to the elegance of the show. Her return to the stage after the birth of her daughter, **Dua** was a heartwarming moment for her fans.



PRIYANKA CHOPRA IN HYDERABAD FOR SS RAJAMOULI'S FILM?

Priyanka Chopra Jonas has been spotted in Hyderabad recently, fuelling rumours of a monumental collaboration with director **SS Rajamouli** for his next project.

Known for his global success with *Baahubali* and *RRR*, Rajamouli is a cinematic legend and a partnership with Priyanka will be majorly exciting. Sources suggest that Priyanka is in talks to star opposite **Mahesh Babu** in this potential project, though no official confirmation has been made yet. The actress has been keeping a low profile recently. But this rumoured collaboration could mark her return to Indian cinema in a massive way.



Khushi Kapoor: No Competition with Sister Janhvi Kapoor

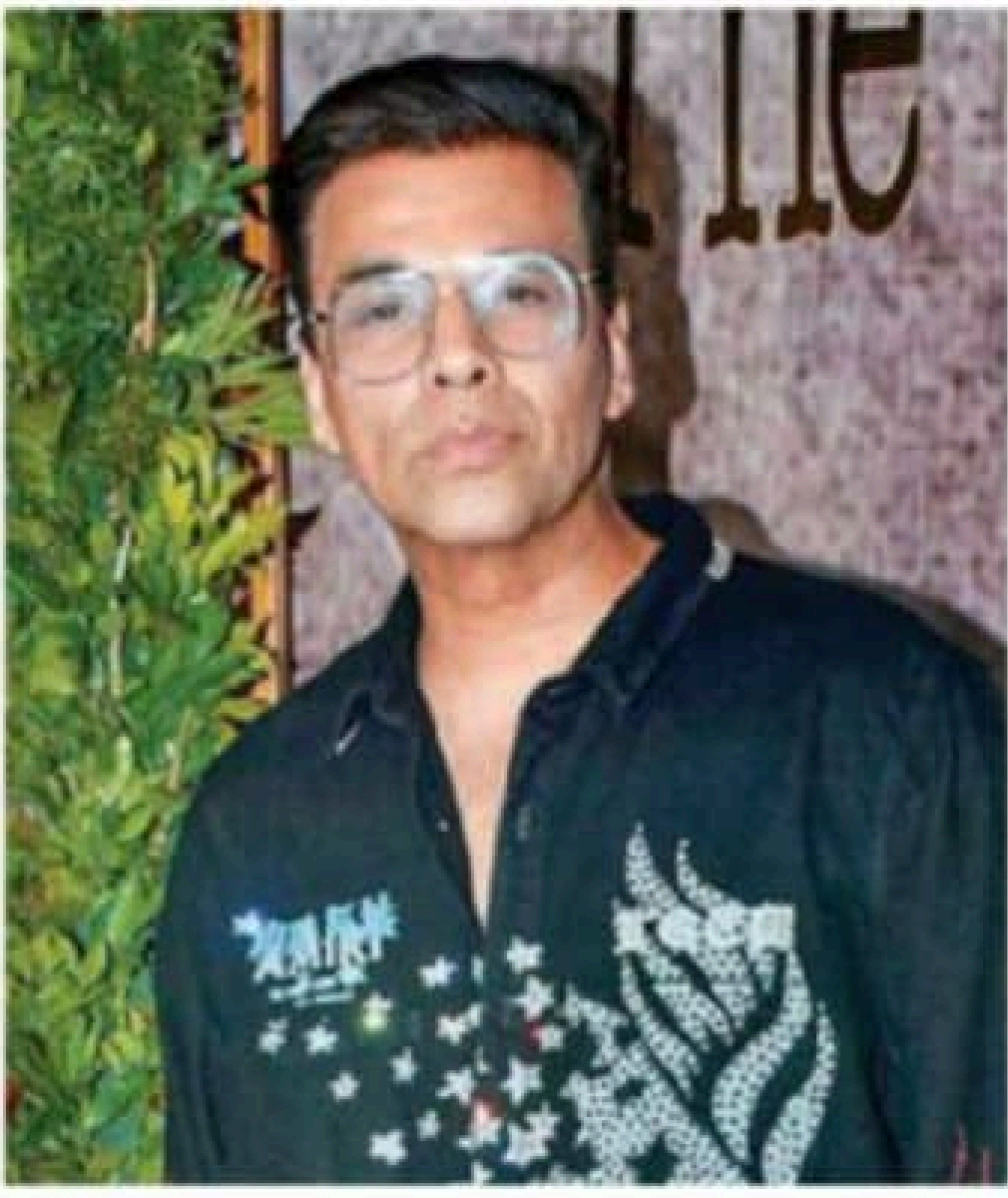


Khushi Kapoor is currently making waves in the entertainment industry, with exciting projects *Loveyapa* and *Nadaaniyan*. Despite the obvious comparisons to her sister **Janhvi Kapoor**, who has already made a name for herself in Bollywood, Khushi firmly believes there's no rivalry between them. In a candid interview, she said. "That thought is so foreign to both of us. I think it's so strange to think that we could be competing at all. Even if we were to be up for the same project and if she were to get it over me, it would be a win for me, and vice versa. I don't think there would ever be any other way to look at it."

RANBIR KAPOOR'S MAJOR TRANSFORMATION FOR *DHOOM 4*

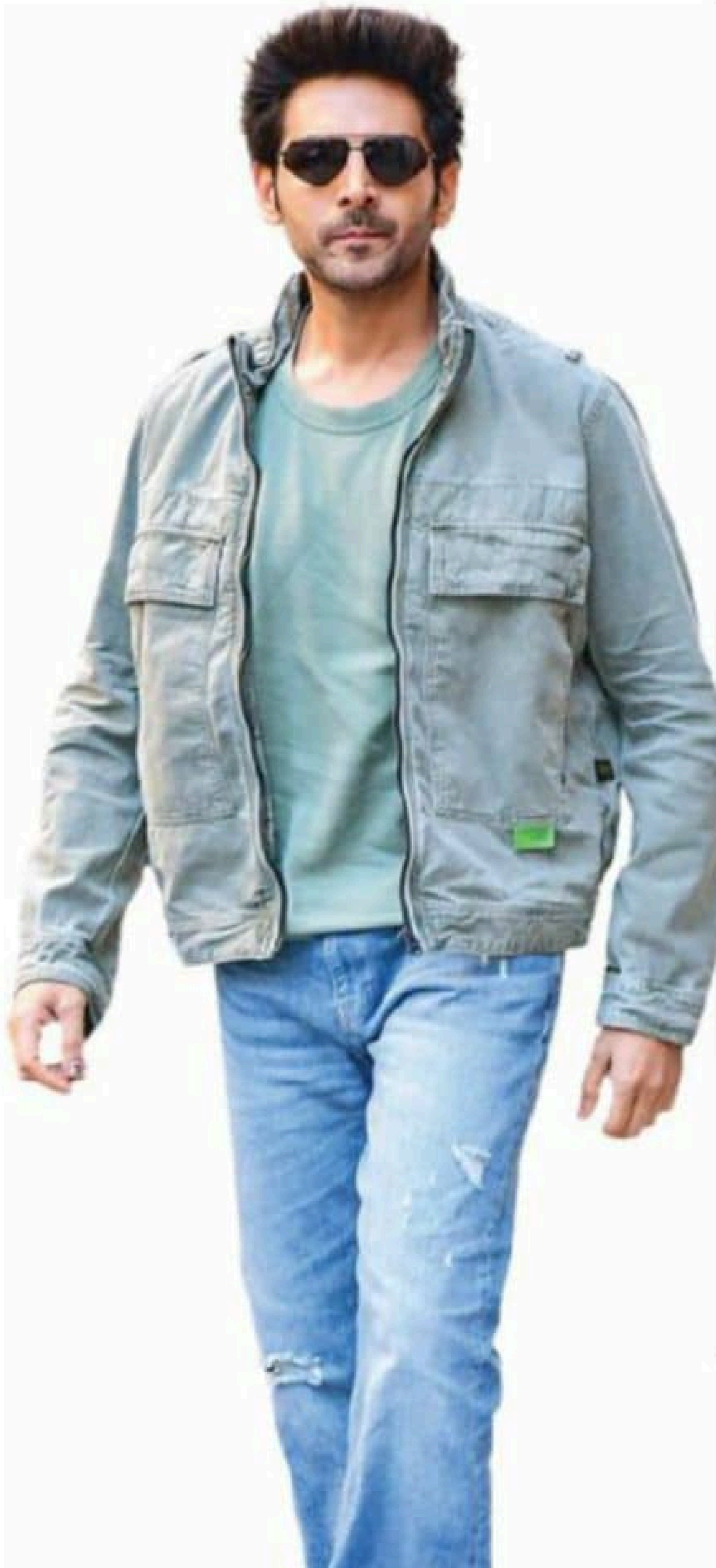
Get ready to see **Ranbir Kapoor** like never before! The actor is set to undergo a jaw-dropping transformation for *Dhoom 4*, which is slated to begin filming in April 2026. Known for his dedication to roles, Kapoor is expected to have four distinct looks in this high-octane action film.





Kartik Aaryan Opens Up About His “Love-Hate” Relationship with Karan Johar

Kartik Aaryan and **Karan Johar** might be collaborating again, but it’s not without a bit of playful tension. Speaking about a hilarious photo of the two, Kartik described their relationship as “love and hate,” reflecting on their past drama with *Dostana*. He joked, “I think Karan already knew, so he took the picture beforehand.”



WHITE KNIGHT: Vicky Kaushal engages with a live audience at *Chhaava*’s trailer launch.



KARTIK AARYAN’S RUGGED LOOK FOR ANURAG BASU’S NEXT

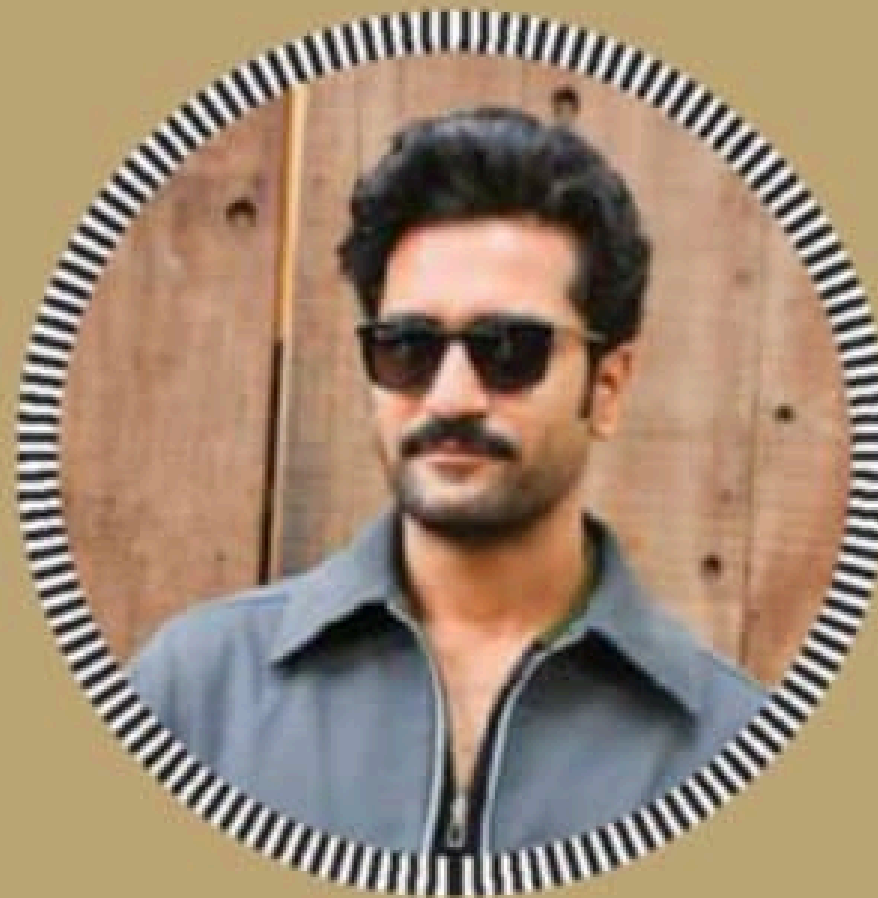
Kartik Aaryan has been sporting a rugged new look, which had fans guessing if it was for *Aashiqui 3*, a much-anticipated project in which he was previously rumoured to be involved. However, the actor recently cleared up the confusion in an exclusive interview, revealing that the look is actually for his upcoming film with **Anurag Basu**. While details about the film remain under wraps, the collaboration with Basu, a director known for his unique storytelling and powerful visuals, has got everyone talking.

VEDANG RAINA AND ANANYA PANDAY IN TALKS FOR IMTIAZ ALI’S NEXT?

Could **Vedang Raina** and **Ananya Panday** become the next iconic on-screen couple in an **Imtiaz Ali** romance? While nothing is set in stone, insiders say the two actors have auditioned and done look tests for a forthcoming romantic drama helmed by the master of love stories himself. Both Vedang and Ananya have been rising stars in their own right, and this film could very well mark a significant step in their careers.



WILL VICKY KAUSHAL AND ANANYA PANDAY STAR IN GULLY BOY SEQUEL?



It’s been almost six years since *Gully Boy* took the country by storm. Fans might get the sequel they’ve been waiting for. Sources reveal that **Vicky Kaushal** and **Ananya Panday** are in talks for the project, though nothing is confirmed yet. Stay tuned.

PRIYADARSHAN RETURNS TO THE *HERA PHERI* FRANCHISE



Fans of the *Hera Pheri* series were in for a birthday treat when filmmaker **Priyadarshan** announced that he would be returning to direct the third instalment of the beloved comedy franchise. Priyadarshan, who helmed the first two films

in the series, shared the exciting news via a social media post. The announcement was made even more special when **Akshay Kumar**, who played one of the iconic roles in the franchise, wished Priyadarshan on his birthday, prompting the director to respond, “Thank you so much for your wishes, Akshay. In return, I would like to give you a gift – I’m willing to do *Hera Pheri* 3. Are you ready?”

IBRAHIM ALI KHAN DEDICATES ACTING DEBUT TO HIS DAD

Ibrahim Ali Khan, the son of **Saif Ali Khan** and **Amrita Singh**, is set to make his much-awaited acting debut in the film *Nadaaniyan* alongside **Khushi Kapoor**. The young actor shared an emotional post on social media, dedicating his debut to his father, Saif, with the caption: “2025, I’m coming for you... slowly but surely, you’re mine. For dad.” This sweet tribute shows the deep bond between father and son, with Ibrahim following in Saif’s footsteps as he enters the industry. His striking resemblance to his father has only fuelled anticipation for his debut. Fans can’t wait to see how Ibrahim carves his own path in Bollywood.



THREE MAESTROS: Dharmendra, Rekha and Aamir Khan make for a rare sight. We would pay good money to see them cast together in a film.

Triptii Dimri Drops More Hints About Her Relationship with Sam Merchant

Triptii Dimri, known for her roles in *Laila Majnu* and *Bulbbul*, has been keeping her relationship with **Sam Merchant** largely private. She recently dropped a not-so-subtle hint on social media. She posted a heartfelt birthday message for Sam, which included a few photos of the two together. The two have been spotted together on multiple occasions, and netizens have long speculated about their relationship. While Triptii has always kept her personal life low-key, this latest post seems to confirm what fans have been hoping for.



TRIPTII DIMRI LOCKED FOR PARVEEN BABI BIOPIC

Triptii Dimri is set to star in an exciting new biopic about the legendary actress **Parveen Babi**. Directed by **Shonali Bose**, the series will dive into the iconic actress’s life and tragic end. Sources confirm that Triptii’s dates have been locked and production is expected to kick off soon.

KAMAR FILM FACTORY: A LEGACY OF INNOVATION IN ENTERTAINMENT

KAMAR FILM FACTORY IS ALL ABOUT CONSISTENCY, GOOD CINEMA AND PROFITABILITY



Nestled in the vibrant heart of Bangalore, Kamar Film Factory (KFF) has been a trailblazer in South India's entertainment industry for over five decades. What began as a family-led venture in film distribution, exhibition, and production has evolved into a dynamic powerhouse, shaping narratives across Kannada, Hindi, and other South Indian languages.

Now, under the visionary leadership of Kamar, a dynamic entrepreneur with a bold vision for the future, KFF is pushing boundaries and redefining entertainment. In recent years, Kamar's collaboration with Filmfare to execute the prestigious Filmfare Awards South (2022-2024) has further cemented KFF's reputation for excellence in large-scale event execution.

But KFF's ambitions extend far beyond traditional cinema. With an eye on the future, the company is pioneering innovative entertainment ventures, including the highly anticipated Box Ten League and Indian Bowling League (IBL), set to revolutionise the intersection of sports and entertainment.

In the digital sphere, KFF is making strategic moves with Kanisam, an immersive event experience, and Future TV, its upcoming OTT platform, accompanied by plans for a dedicated satellite network.

On the cinematic front, KFF is expanding its footprint with two promising Kannada films, one starring Diganth and Tarun Chandra, and another featuring Harshika Pocha. As the Kannada film industry commemorates 90 illustrious years, KFF is also venturing into Tamil cinema, launching an exciting project led by the acclaimed Vijay Sethupathi.

As a brand deeply rooted in storytelling, Kamar Film Factory continues to blend tradition with innovation, bringing compelling narratives to life while forging new frontiers in entertainment. The journey ahead is bold, dynamic, and undeniably cinematic.

SALMAN KHAN TALKS ABOUT FAMILY AND FORGIVENESS

In a podcast with his nephew **Arhaan Khan**, **Salman Khan** candidly opened up about family and forgiveness. He told his nephew that one should be there for their loved ones. “You just need to be there for friends and family. The effort that you have to keep on putting in,” he advises. He also shares a personal insight, revealing, “If I give you advice, the advice I give to myself, the way I speak to myself... you will hate me. Because I speak to myself rather harshly.” As the conversation progressed, Salman Khan also talked about forgiveness. “You can forgive a person once, twice, third time... *chalo khalaas*.”



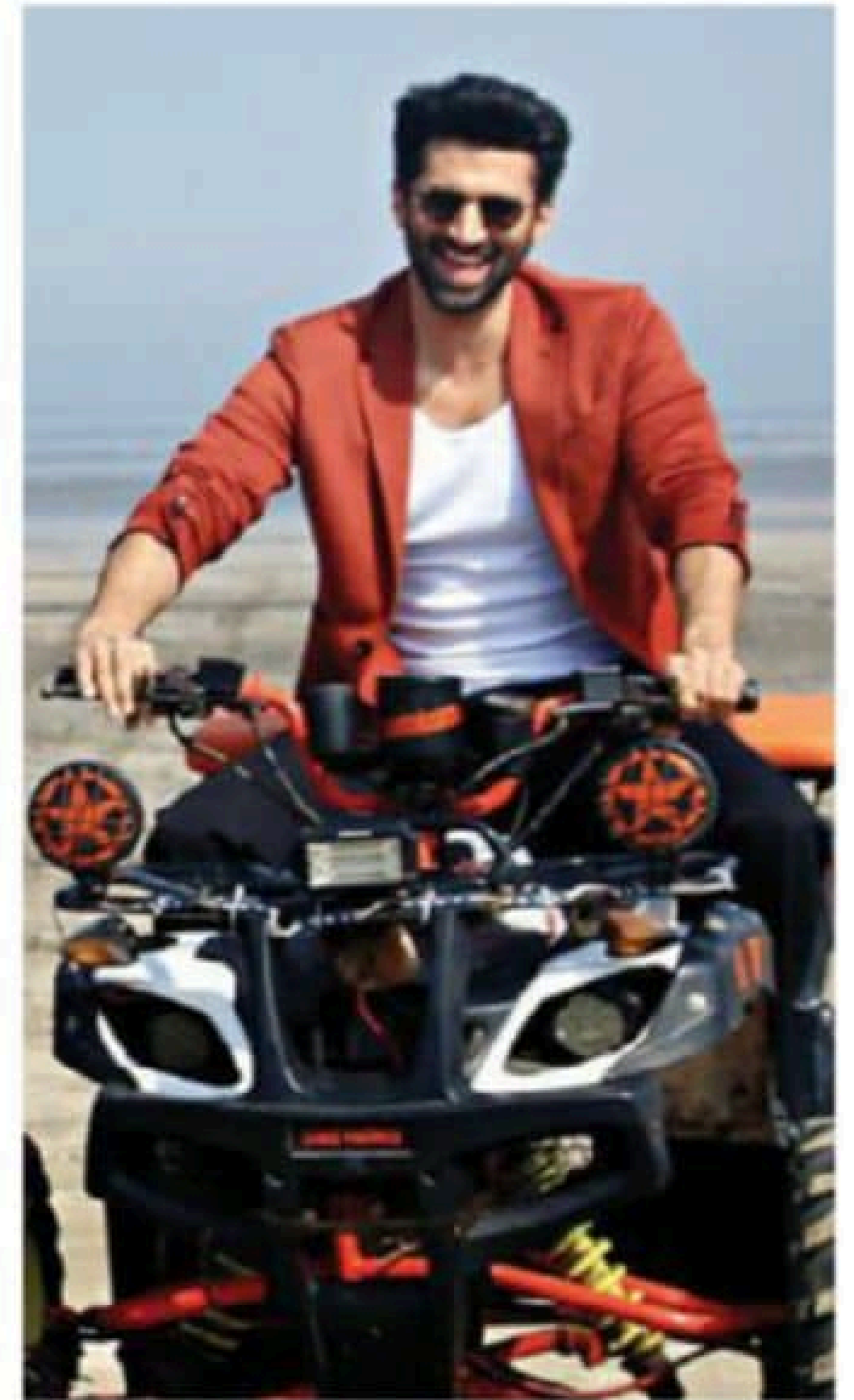
BEJEWELLED BEAUTY: Priyanka Chopra Jonas stuns at her brother Siddharth's *mehendi* ceremony

SALMAN KHAN OPENS UP ABOUT HIS TIME IN JAIL

In a candid conversation with his nephew **Salman Khan** reflected on his time in jail. Salman emphasised the importance of perseverance and hard work, urging others to push through challenges no matter how exhausted they feel. “Don’t say, ‘I am tired.’ No, get up. No matter how tired you are. ‘I don’t get sleep.’ Don’t sleep. Do something; you’ll automatically go to sleep. So, I don’t understand these things,” he said. The actor revealed that averages just an hour and a half to two hours a night of sleep. The conversation took a more personal turn when Salman recalled his time in jail. “In places where I cannot do anything, like when I was in jail, I slept. I couldn’t do anything about it,” he shared. “When it comes to your work or family, the effort that you have to keep on putting in... you just need to be there for friends and family and work,” he said, underscoring his dedication to his loved ones and his career.



ADITYA ROY KAPOOR RETURNS TO THE ACTION IN *RAKT BRAHMAND*



Rakt Brahmand, with **Raj** and **DK** as showrunners and directed by *Tumbaad* fame **Rahi Anil Barve**, promises an intriguing mix of intense action sequences and stunning visuals, creating a world unlike any other. The series will see **Aditya Roy Kapur** doing hardcore action. Speaking about the training, the actor stated that despite being intense, the preparation is enjoyable. “The prep has been intense. But one of the most enjoyable perks of being an actor is to be able to pick up new skills, and this show has me doing that in spades, with everything from sword fighting to archery and horse riding.”



Nushratt Bharuccha and Anurag Kashyap Team Up

In an exciting new development, actress **Nushratt Bharuccha** has teamed up with filmmaker **Anurag Kashyap** and producer **Vishal Rana** for an untitled thriller that promises to keep the audience on the edge of their seats. Kashyap, known for his gritty and intense filmmaking, will serve as the creative producer for the project, which will be produced under the banner of Rana's Echelon Productions.

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

preview



AKANKSHA SHARMA

**X FACTOR: WORKING
ACROSS GENRES AND
LANGUAGES**

EARLY LIFE: Akanksha's blend of beauty, talent and a strong lineup of films positions her as a promising newcomer. Her 2025 debut across diverse genres and industries is set to leave a lasting impression

FIRST FILM: Romance titled *Tera Yaar Hoon Main*. She co-stars with Aman Indra Kumar in this Milap Zaveri directorial.

PERIOD DRAMA *KESARI VEER*: Akanksha plays a pivotal role alongside Suniel Shetty, Vivek Oberoi and Sooraj Pancholi in it. It's said to be a gripping tale of valour and sacrifice.

TELUGU DEBUT WITH *LAILA*: A romantic drama with a captivating storyline and chart-topping music. Vishwak Sen is her co-star in it.

Newbies Mihir Ahuja and Akshay Roy acquaint us of their dreams and desires *pg 24*



CHASING BLUE SKIES

MIHIR AHUJA SHARES HIS JOURNEY WITH **SRIJANI ROY CHOWDHURY**

Mihir Ahuja wasn't always the star we see today. No, like every other middle-class kid, he once dreamt of a MBA degree and other 'normal' things. A life that fits in the neatly packed box of expectations. But somewhere along the way, in the very heart of his B.Com routine, something changed. He realised that he didn't want to follow the crowd. His ambition, as real as it was, felt like it had no clear direction at first. "I was always drawn to the performing arts. I loved being on stage, I loved entertaining people but I never really knew how I'd get there. I had no background in films, no connections, just a dream and a lot of hard work," he reflects. And yet, despite the waves of doubt that threatened to drown him, he kept swimming. And finally, there it was: his big audition for *The Archies*.

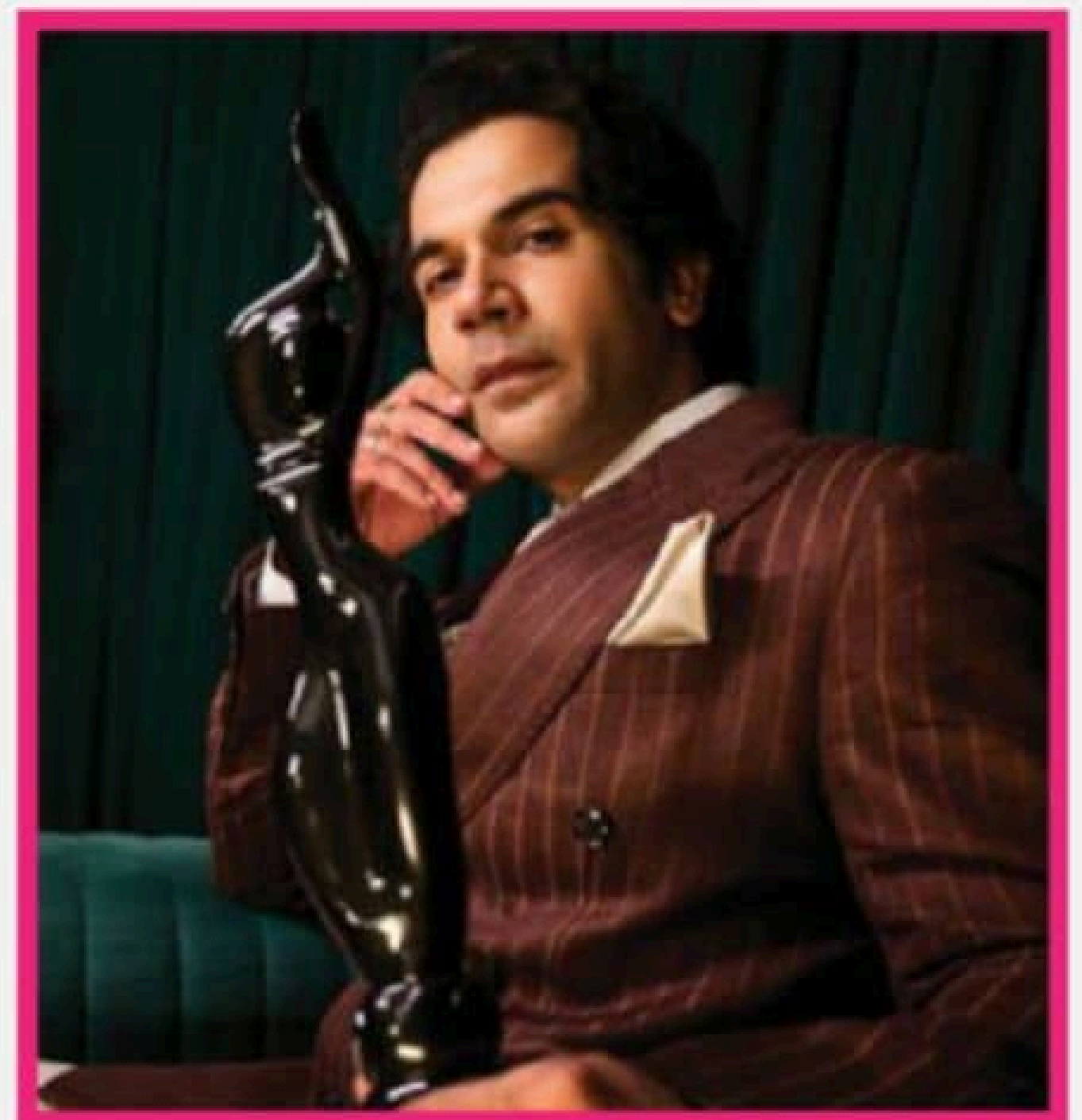
He wasn't offered just any role. It was Jughead Jones. A character millions had grown up with, a



Vijay 69

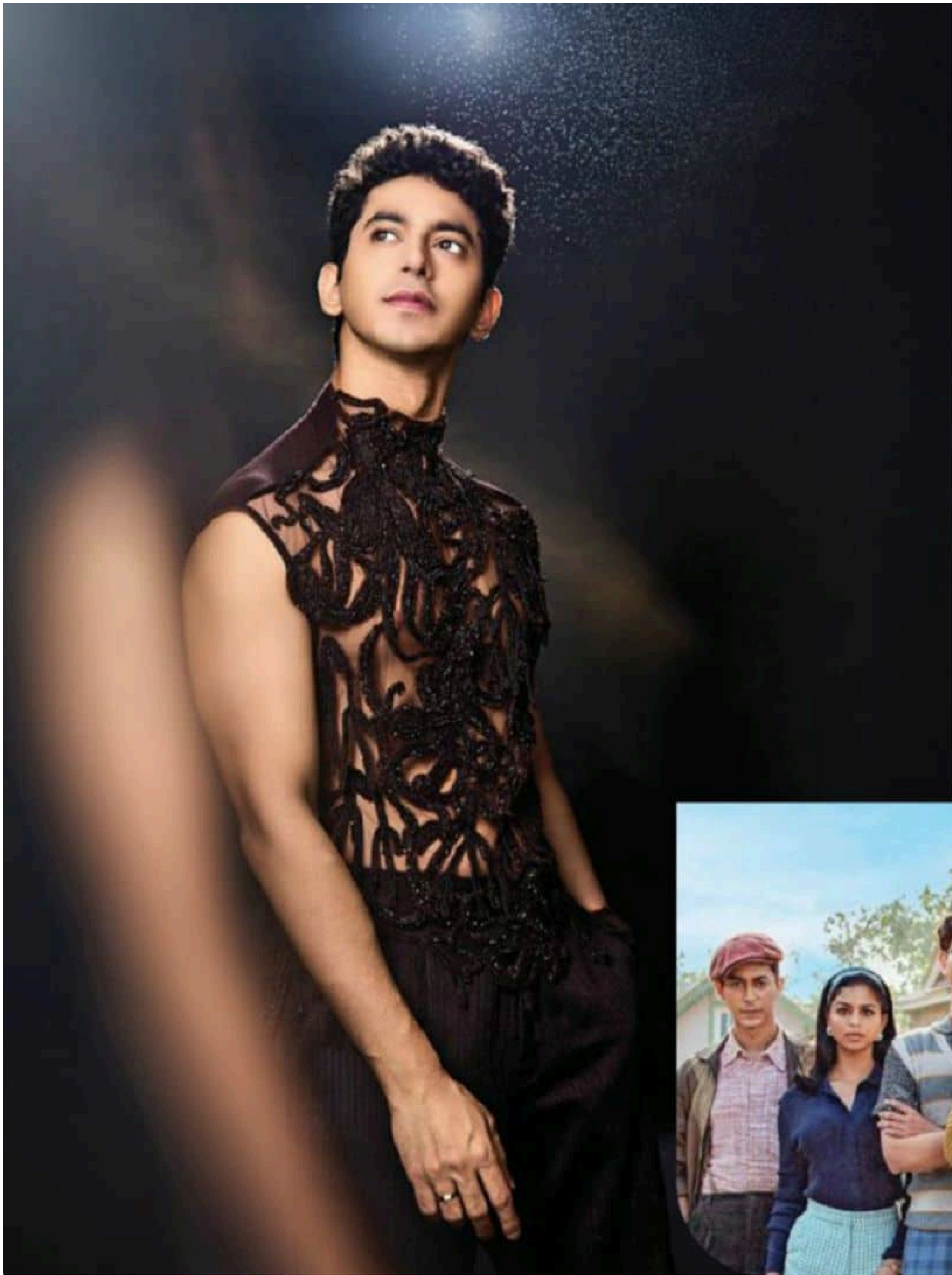
“ I WAS ALWAYS DRAWN TO THE PERFORMING ARTS. I LOVED BEING ON STAGE, I LOVED ENTERTAINING PEOPLE BUT I NEVER REALLY KNEW HOW I'D GET THERE ”

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proud, was madness, yes, but it was the kind of madness displayed by someone who truly loves his craft. “You have to have the correct body posture so that the wind resistance does not bog you down. There’s physics involved in that,” states the actor, his passion evident.

But even amidst all the training and the demanding roles, Mihir’s heart always beats for

To gain experience, you need to audition as much as possible. I was stuck in that,” he recalls, that frustration clearly still etched on his face. Did he want to give up? “Yes, many times,” he confesses. His first advertisement with Virat Kohli proved to be like the proverbial candle that dealt a death blow to the darkness surrounding him. After that, there was no stopping him.

And now, projects, both familiar and unknown, beckon him. There’s a musical drama on the horizon with Neena Gupta, and an Indo-Australian co-production that explores the delicate threads of intergenerational language barriers. But ask Mihir about the future and you’ll see that mischievous grin spread across his face.

“There are a few things in the pipeline, some really exciting stuff but I can’t talk about it just yet.” He talks about people whose work has defined his love for the craft. Rajkumar Rao, whom he admires for his drive to be better with each outing and Ranbir Kapoor for the sheer star charisma and for making acting look so easy. Shoojit Sircar, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Anurag Kashyap, these names are more than just directors. They’re dreams waiting to be realised.

Mihir Ahuja’s journey so far is a testament that no matter how many rejections come your way, all it takes is that one moment. That one “yes” that opens the door to everything you’ve ever wanted. It has only just begun and we’re sure he’s destined to go a long, long way. ■



The Archies

symbol of teenage rebellion, of having an insatiable appetite for hotdogs and well... the ever-present beanie. “I knew I had to do justice to that while also bringing my own interpretation to the character,” Mihir shares. It wasn’t just about playing a role, it was about stepping into a legacy. To be Jughead. To live him. And boy, did he. From the effortless slouch to the quirky charm, Mihir became the very soul of the character.

The world of *The Archies* was only the first chapter of Mihir’s saga. The real journey was just getting started. His next project, *Vijay 69*, gave Mihir a chance to share the screen with the legendary Anupam Kher. “Working with Anupam sir was a

“TO AUDITION MORE, YOU NEED EXPERIENCE. TO GAIN EXPERIENCE, YOU NEED TO AUDITION AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. I WAS STUCK IN THAT”

masterclass in acting,” he recalls, his voice filled with admiration for the veteran. “His discipline, his dedication and his ability to bring authenticity to every scene was incredible. I learnt so much by watching him,” he admits. The experience taught him about finding discipline in every line, every glance, and bringing authenticity to every moment.

To play the character of Aditya Jaiswal in *Vijay 69*, an 18 year old training for a triathlon, Mihir didn’t just act, he became the athlete. The gruelling training at 5:30 AM, cycling for hours just to perfect a posture that would make triathletes

one thing, the connection with the audience. The raw, human bond. “At the end of the day, it’s all about connecting with people, making them feel something, making them believe in the characters you play.” To him, that’s the true reward, the feeling that somewhere out there is watching and believing. And that belief becomes everything. It wasn’t always this easy. Before the fame, before the recognition, Mihir was told he wasn’t “fit” enough to make it. He remembers those words mocking him as he spent days in an endless cycle of auditions. “To audition more, you need experience.

CONSTELLATION 2025 SHINES BRIGHT

JAI HIND COLLEGE'S MEDIA CONCLAVE WAS
AN ILLUMINATING EVENT



(*Call Me Bae*), and a Musician's Panel with industry stalwarts like Shivansh Jindal, Clinton Cerejo, and Bianca Gomes. These sessions offered students a deep dive into filmmaking and music production.

Interactive sub-events added to the excitement, with *Filmfare* hosting a Bollywood Trivia session and *Femina* organising a Best Dressed Challenge, infusing glamour into the conclave.

Day two opened with a captivating session by legendary filmmaker Vikramaditya Motwane and photographer Ishika Motwane, who shared behind-the-scenes stories of their celebrated projects. A reunion panel featuring the cast and crew of *What Are The Odds*, including Yashaswini Dayama,

Karanvir Malhotra, and Megha Ramaswamy, provided a delightful glimpse into the film's making. Panchami Ghavri, casting director for hits like *Kapoor & Sons* and *Gehraiyaan*, offered insights into the world of casting.

The conclave concluded on a light-hearted note with content creators Dhruv Shah and Shyam Sharma, who shared their journey to digital fame. Fun challenges like "Hook Step" and "Guess the Actor from the Dialogue," organised by *Filmfare* and *Femina*, kept the energy high, with attendees winning delightful gifts.

Constellation 2025 struck a perfect balance between learning and entertainment, leaving students with invaluable industry insights and unforgettable memories. The event reinforced Jai Hind College's commitment to bridging academia and the media industry, solidifying its reputation as a premier platform for aspiring media professionals.

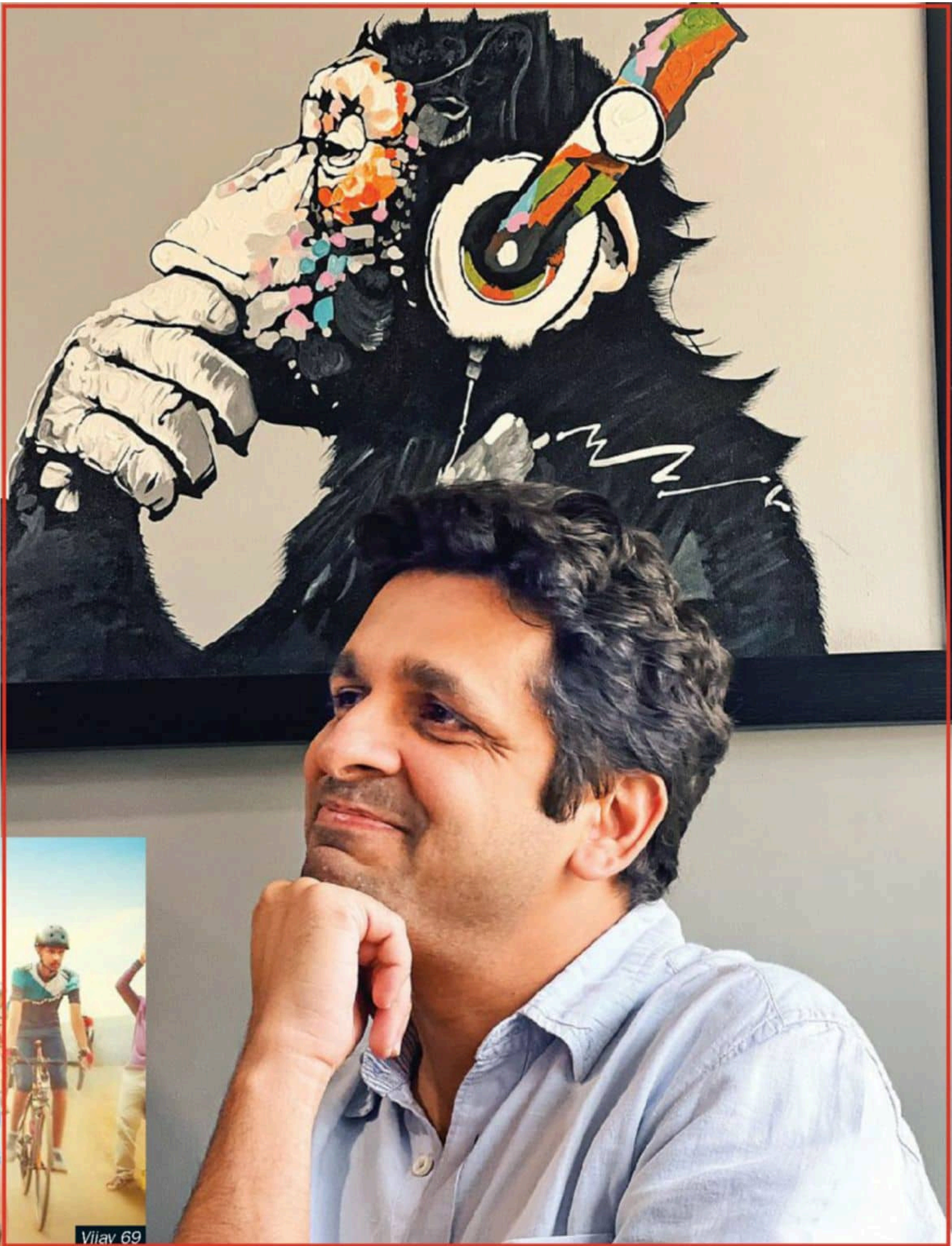
The Department of Mass Media at Jai Hind College hosted its annual media conclave, Constellation, on January 23 and 24, 2025. The two-day event, supported by media giants *Filmfare* and *Femina*, brought together students, professionals, and media enthusiasts for a vibrant mix of education, creativity, and entertainment.

Day one kicked off with an electrifying session by Yashraj, a rising star in India's hip-hop scene, whose storytelling and artistry energised the audience. This was followed by insightful panels, including a Director's Panel featuring acclaimed filmmakers Arjun Varain Singh (*Kho Gaye Hum Kahan*) and Collin D'Cunha



RACING AHEAD

DIRECTOR AKSHAY ROY OF VIJAY 69 FAME SHARES HIS LOVE FOR CINEMA WITH SRIJANI ROY CHOWDHURY



Akshay Roy discovered his love for storytelling back in college. A Mumbai-born boy who spent part of his childhood in Nigeria before transitioning to a boarding school in Ajmer, Akshay's path has been anything but conventional. His storytelling journey began during his time at St. Stephen's College in Delhi. His passion for writing and directing deepened at Jamia Millia Islamia, where filmmaking

ANUPAM (KHER) DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO SWIM, BUT HE TOOK IT UP WHOLEHEARTEDLY. HE ALSO TRAINED EXTENSIVELY ON THE SET, WHETHER IT WAS RUNNING OR CYCLING. HE WAS REALLY COMMITTED AND PUSHED HIMSELF ON THE SET EVERY

became his calling.

After graduation, Akshay dabbled in short films while navigating the highs and the lows of Mumbai. He also gained experience assisting the likes of Farhan Akhtar on *Lakshya*, Deepa Mehta on *Water* and Mira Nair on *The Namesake*, which helped him hone his craft. His early work in advertising and independent filmmaking laid the groundwork for

his feature film debut.

"I made several short films before *Meri Pyaari Bindu*. With each project, I've learnt to stay true to my characters and find humour in everyday moments," he shares.

Akshay also opens up about being inspired by directors who have carried the torch of filmmaking before him. "I loved Hrishikesh Mukherjee. *Anand* is one of my favourite films. I love Mani

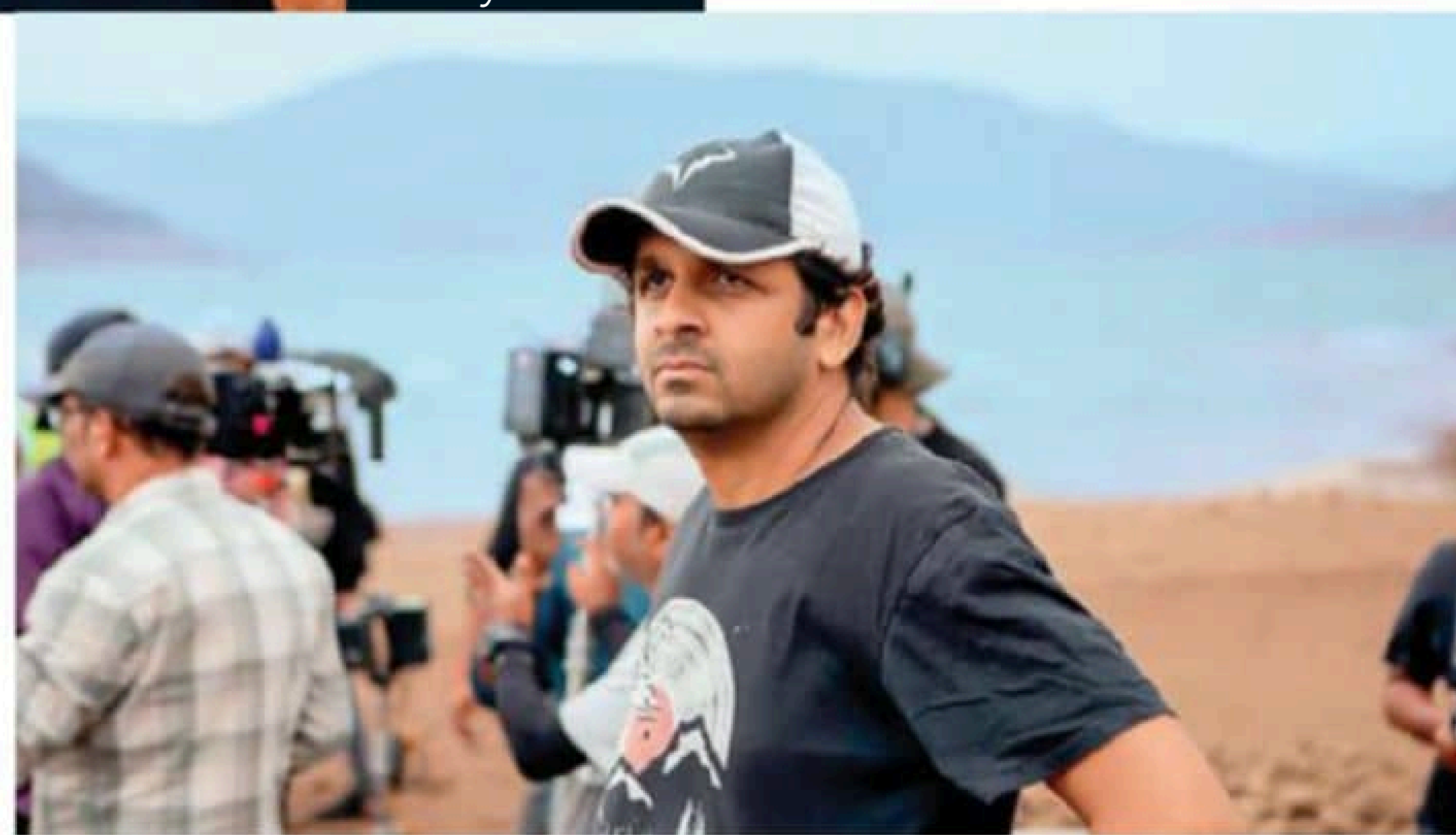


Meri Pyaari Bindu

Ratnam's work as well. I'm a fan of Zoya Akhtar, Shoojit Sircar, Shakun Batra and Sanjay Leela Bhansali," he says.

Following his first release, *Meri Pyaari Bindu*, Akshay quickly became known for his ability to weave relatable and heartfelt stories. His latest release, *Vijay 69*, cements his position as a filmmaker who not only tells compelling stories but also connects deeply with his audience.

The Anupam Kher and Chunky Pandey starrer has been termed an emotional journey for viewers. It has been receiving immense love as it beautifully combines the themes of dreams, resilience, and the joy of sports. Talking about the inspiration behind the movie, Akshay shares, "*Vijay 69* is a story I wrote myself about three to four years ago. It started as a blend of my love for sports and a deeper thought about life — '*Humne kya socha tha hum banenge, aur hum sach mein kya ban gaye?*' That line is central to the film, and I wrote the script in one go."



I LOVED HRISHIKESH MUKHERJEE. ANAND IS ONE OF MY FAVOURITE FILMS. I LOVE MANI RATNAM'S WORK AS WELL. I'M A FAN OF ZOYA AKHTAR, SHOOJIT SIRCAR, SHAKUN BATRA, AND SANJAY LEELA BHANSALI

The project gained momentum when Akshay shared it with producer Maneesh Sharma, who also produced his debut film *Meri Pyaari Bindu*. "Maneesh loved it and took it to Aditya Chopra. Soon, we were on track. Of course, the pandemic slowed us down but we eventually picked it back up."

Anupam Kher, who plays the titular role, wasn't the immediate choice but it's now impossible to imagine anyone else in the role. "We discussed a few names initially but once Mr. Kher

came on board, it was clear he was our Vijay. He gave the role his heart and soul," Akshay says.

The dedication Kher showed was extraordinary. At 68, he learnt to swim for the role, as Vijay is a former bronze medal-winning swimmer. "Anupam didn't know how to swim but he took it up wholeheartedly. He also trained extensively on the set, whether it was running or cycling. He was really committed and

pushed himself on the set every day," the director reveals.

Chunky Pandey, known for his comic timing, surprised everyone with his portrayal of Vijay's best friend. "Maneesh and I discussed a bunch of names. We thought that Chunky would be an interesting casting. He'd never done something like this. Chunky himself says that he's never done something more in the 'real' space before. He is playing a Parsi character. He had to look Parsi, so he got a Parsi dialect coach to nail the dialogue. He

worked hard and was a joy to have on the set. I would say 'cut', but he would keep going for more takes. He is a giving actor," the director says.

The movie wasn't just about Vijay but the world around him. "It takes a village," Akshay quips. "Vijay's relationships with the people in his life, be it his neighbours, his coach, or even the memory of his wife, add depth to his story. We wanted to create a relatable world that feels like it could belong to anyone," he says.

This film has struck a chord with the audiences. "I've been hearing people say, 'There's a Vijay in every family,' which is so heartwarming. I wanted to build a world and an ecosystem around the character. I would say this is a story of any middle-class Indian man," he says. Is Akshay willing to continue Vijay's story? The director says that Vijay's story is complete for now, "He has found his place in the world and found his peace with himself. So, I think we leave him with that," he notes. He isn't averse to the idea of directing a mass-market movie? "Never say never. I love watching all kinds of films. I grew up watching commercial films. I think it has to come to me organically." Akshay Roy's journey from *Meri Pyaari Bindu* to *Vijay 69* highlights his knack for storytelling that feels both personal and universal. His films remind us that even in the darkest times, there's space for humour, hope and a good story. We can't wait to see what he does next. ■

Lifestyle

fashion, fitness, food, beauty & travel

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



THE RIGHT & BRIGHT CHOICES

The stars take us
through their food
and fashion fads



TRAVEL: Saiyami Kher shares her take on the best places to visit in Australia. *pg 34*



FOOD: Pratibha Ranta talks about her food fundas. *pg 38*

COMPILED BY: VEDANSHI PATHAK, SUMAN SHARMA
AND SRIJANI ROY CHOWDHURY

Lost in Oz

SAIYAMI KHER RECOUNTS HER AUSTRALIAN ADVENTURE
TO **SRIJANI ROY CHOWDHURY**

Imagine a journey that perfectly combines your passions, whether it's the thrill of watching a live cricket, the adrenaline of adventure sports or savouring world class culinary delights. Saiyami Kher's recent trip to Australia was exactly that, a dream come true. From diving into the Great Barrier Reef to experiencing the Boxing Day Test at the MCG, her trip to the land down under was more than just a vacation. Australia's landscapes, cities and vibe left her awestruck at every turn. She recounts moments that made her trip unforgettable, shares the travel hacks she lives by and adds a few new destinations to her evergrowing bucket list. Read on.



AUSTRALIA CALLING

I chose Australia as my year-end destination because I was keen on exploring the country. My film *Ghoomer* premiered there, so I had a soft spot for the place. Our world premiere had happened in Australia. At that time, I'd gone only for one day. I remember it being a super long flight. I also came back within a day. But the trip was special. Then, I was invited

by Tourism Australia in January last year. They offered me the opportunity to watch the Australian Open. Everyone knows I love sports, so they had called me to watch the match. I spent time only in Melbourne last year. This year, they called me back again to watch the Australia-India cricket match. On boxing day i.e. December 26 They curated a fantastic itinerary for me as well. I was in the country





from December 11 to December 28, 2024, around 17 to 18 days. I love Australia because of all the adventure and outdoor activities you get to do there.

CRICKET MANIA

Interestingly, it was a solo trip this time. But during my visit to Brisbane, I was with a group to see the India vs Australia cricket match. There was Sara Tendulkar, Ishaan Khatter, Mini Mathur, Kabir Khan and Prachi Desai at The Gabba. We were together only for that one day of the match. Otherwise, I was travelling solo. Everyone knows that I am a huge cricket lover. I was supposed to watch only one day of the match but I extended and stayed back. I watched the Test



WHAT SHOULD YOU PACK WHILE VISITING AUSTRALIA?

- ★ Lightweight clothing
- ★ Sun hat
- ★ Comfortable walking shoes
- ★ Light jacket for cooler evenings
- ★ Sunscreen with high SPF
- ★ Insect repellent
- ★ Travel towel
- ★ Universal travel adapter



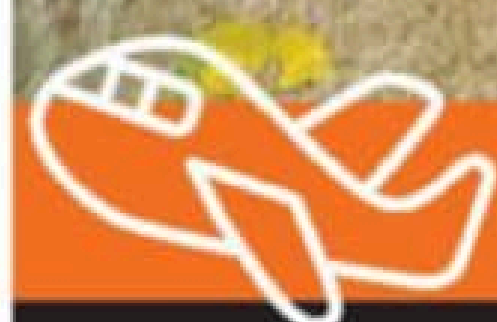
match for three more days. The vibe in the stadium was super-friendly. Due to tourism opportunities, India's relationship with Australia is booming right now. You see so many Indians there; you don't even feel like you're out of India. During my visit to Melbourne, I went to the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) for the Boxing Day test match. There were many Indians there because of cricket and Christmas. For cricket lovers the boxing day test match is the biggest day in the calendar. There were 90,000 people watching the game. I was really excited about that. R Balki sir was also there. He had bought tickets long ago. Unfortunately, the match didn't go India's way. However, it was like a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

I CHOSE AUSTRALIA AS MY YEAR-END DESTINATION BECAUSE I WAS KEEN ON EXPLORING THE COUNTRY. MY FILM GHOOMER PREMIERED THERE, SO I HAD A SOFT SPOT FOR THE PLACE

Another memorable event was spending time with Australian cricketers, David Warner, Adam Gilchrist and Michael Vaughan. I sat and discussed the game with them. A pinch-me moment for sure.

WILD AT HEART

Besides the matches, the whole trip was filled with adventure. I was rock climbing, kayaking, surfing and ziplining. I also went deep sea diving. It was great fun to see the city from the water while kayaking. For rock climbing, you get to see the city and the scenic beauty from a height. I loved that. I also went to the Gold Coast to surf. Surfing is a water sport I have wanted to learn for a long time. I practised for two days at surf classes and picked it up pretty quickly. The Great Barrier Reef is like a tick mark for every diver. I went down to Cairns to see it. There was a terrible storm but I didn't back off. I was diving for three days in the long stretch but I did it up North in Cairns. It's something that words can't describe because what you see underwater is something you can't explain. The colours are perfect. You don't see those colours on land. You can't explain life underwater. The first day was rough because we were in the ocean for two hours. The storm was on. The dive that day wasn't the best but I dived for two days after that. It's completely worth the hype that people make around the Great Barrier Reef. If given a choice, I would have done that for 15 days. But I had to do other things as well. I'll definitely go back again. I went ziplining into the rainforest, which was fun. It's simple, you go into the rainforest and zipline through it. In Mahabari, there was an animal sanctuary with kangaroos and koalas. They're just walking around in the wild and you're walking around with them. If you ever go vacationing with me, you'll realise that I never relax on any of my holidays. I have a jam-packed schedule all the time. I also went to an animal sanctuary where I held a snake. There was an activity called "crocodile feeding", which



MUST-VISIT PLACES IN AUSTRALIA

- ★ Cairns and Great Barrier Reef Region
- ★ Sydney
- ★ Uluru
- ★ Melbourne
- ★ Perth and Margaret River
- ★ Kangaroo Island
- ★ Kakadu
- ★ Hobart
- ★ Gold Coast
- ★ Byron Bay



THE GREAT BARRIER REEF IS LIKE A TICK MARK FOR EVERY DIVER. I WENT DOWN TO CAIRNS TO SEE IT. THERE WAS A TERRIBLE STORM, BUT I DIDN'T BACK OFF



I did. The animal sanctuary felt so natural. They keep it so real and well-maintained. It was a pleasurable experience.

PLEASING THE PALATE

I am also someone who loves trying local dishes whenever I am on vacation. You get to learn about new



DURING MY VISIT TO MELBOURNE, I WENT TO MCG FOR THE TEST MATCH. FOR CRICKET LOVERS, THAT'S LIKE THE BIGGEST DAY IN THE CALENDAR. THERE WERE 90,000 PEOPLE WATCHING THE GAME

cultures, especially about new food. I always eat local food. The food is also good in Australia. Melbourne is known to be the food capital of Australia. It's got some delicious food. So, all the diets go out of the window when you're on holiday. As Melbourne is a multicultural hub when it comes to food, I mostly had Japanese food. I also ate at a nice Mediterranean place. Also, hot chocolates and croissants are a must try in Melbourne. I had those from certain places.

BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE

The best part about being an actor is how much I get to travel. I absolutely love that about my job. I just got back from Mangalore where I was shooting, and now I'm heading to Hyderabad. During my debut film, we spent a lot of time in Ladakh. I also did a show that took me to Turkey, Georgia, Baku and rest of Azerbaijan. Because of all the travel, work never feels like work. It's more like a holiday for me. But I also make it a point to take at least

AS MELBOURNE IS A MULTICULTURAL HUB WHEN IT COMES TO FOOD, I MOSTLY HAD JAPANESE FOOD. I ALSO ATE AT A NICE MEDITERRANEAN PLACE. ALSO, HOT CHOCOLATES AND CROISSANTS ARE A MUST

one trip with my parents every year, usually around Diwali. I also try to plan a trip with my school friends and one solo trip. So, three trips a year are a must for me.

TIPS AND TRICKS

When it comes to my trips, there are definitely some non-negotiables. I can't just stay in a hotel room all the time. It really irritates me. I need to get out, explore and do things when I visit a place. It's non-negotiable. Also, I'm a light traveler. I don't like being around people who carry too much stuff. I just pack the essentials. I'm also a fan of backpacking trips. About seven years ago, I went to Hawaii with just a backpack. Traveling light makes it so much easier to enjoy doing touristy things. I'm not someone who feels the need to document everything for social media. In fact, half the things I experience don't even make it onto Instagram. I prefer to just enjoy the experience and have some time off. If I had to give some travel tips, I'd say, for Australia, don't try to cram everything into one schedule. It's a huge country, and it's better to really explore and enjoy one area at a time. If you're going to Queensland, for example, focus on discovering everything Queensland has to offer. Don't just rush off to Melbourne or Sydney because you won't get to fully experience what Queensland is about. And definitely try to enjoy the local things. That's the essence of visiting an outdoorsy country like Australia. As for dream destinations, my list is long. I'd love to spend time in Spiti Valley, learn how to ski in Japan, see the Northern Lights and cycle around Switzerland, just to name a few. ■



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**SIDDU ISN'T JUST FOOD;
IT'S AN EXPERIENCE YOU CAN
ONLY FULLY APPRECIATE IN
THE CRISP CHILL OF THE HILLS.
TRY EATING IT IN MUMBAI,
AND YOU'LL SEE, IT JUST
DOESN'T WORK**
’

flavour of the hills

PRATIBHA RANTA IS TRULY, MADLY AND GLADLY DEVOTED TO HIMACHALI CUISINE. SHE TRIES TO MAKE A CONVERT OUT OF SUMAN SHARMA

I'm madly in love with *Himachali* food, and I wear that love on my sleeve. The flavours of the hills are not just tastes, they're emotions, memories and a connection to my roots. Born and raised in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, food for me has always been a way to nurture the body and soul. Unlike most people, I never saw food as something indulgent, it was sustenance, energy and tradition woven together. But when it comes to Himachali food, oh, it's so much more than survival, it's pure magic.

THE ESSENCE OF *Himachali* Cuisine

Himachali food is warmth personified. The chilly mountain air makes every dish feel like a warm hug. Take our chutneys, for instance, we make them from dry fruit. Another dish we make is by blending jaggery and flour into a hearty dough called *Baadi*. Before eating, we drizzle *ghee* over it, turning it into a melt-in-your-mouth delight. Our meals are brimming with *halwa*, *saag*, buttery milk and other wholesome dishes. But my ultimate love? *Siddu*. Imagine biting into a steamed, stuffed dough, topped generously with *ghee*. That feeling, so comforting, so rich, transports me back to winter mornings in Shimla. *Siddu* isn't just food; it's an experience you can only fully appreciate in the crisp chill of the hills. Try eating it in Mumbai but you'll see, it just doesn't work.



**HIMACHALI
FOOD
IS WARMTH
PERSONIFIED.
THE CHILLY
MOUNTAIN AIR
MAKES EVERY
DISH FEEL LIKE
A WARM HUG**

HIMACHALI DHAM: A Sacred Feast

Another culinary treasure is *Himachali Dham*, our version of a traditional *thali*. It's not just a meal; it's a celebration, a ritual. Think rajma, mixed dal and rice, served as a divine offering during festivals like Shivratri. I can still taste the smoky *pahadi* potatoes roasted over an open flame and mashed with simplicity and love. This food fuels the soul, especially for a lifestyle that involves endless walking, working and trekking across our breathtaking hills.

GROWING UP IN SHIMLA: A Foodie's Paradise

Food in Shimla was never about restaurants or take outs, it was about homemade meals and community picnics. I grew up savoring piping hot *rotis* cooked on a traditional *chulha*, paired with my mother's unforgettable *phool gobhi ki sabzi* and *kadhi*. We have our own farm, where we grow vibrant greens like *palak*, *methi* and more exotic varieties of *saag*. And let me tell you, there's nothing like drinking fresh milk straight from our family cow. It's health and nostalgia in a glass. Even our fast food had a unique charm. I didn't even know what pizzas, burgers and pastas were as a child. My school memories are full of *pani puris* sold by an uncle outside the gate and buttery pastries from Trishul Bakers. Indian Coffee House and Wake and Bake were our special hangouts, where food came with a side of laughter and camaraderie.

MUMBAI VS. SHIMLA: A Tale of Two Kitchens

Moving to Mumbai was like entering a different culinary universe. While I adore trying new things, from *vada pav* with its fiery red chutney to tangy *thecha*, nothing compares to the simplicity of home-cooked *Himachali* meals. The milk here gave me acne and the spices felt foreign to my palate. But I learnt to adapt, even embrace Maharashtrian *varan bhat* (rice) cooked by a local *didi* who now helps in my kitchen. But, I miss the warmth of food cooked with love back



DURING THE SHOOT OF LAAPATA LADIES IN JAIPUR, I FELL IN LOVE WITH RAJASTHANI THALIS COMPRISING DAL BAATI, CHURMA AND GATTE KI SABZI. IN LADAKH, I DEVoured THUKPA AND MOMOS

home. My mom's perfectly soft *rotis*, the earthy taste of *saag* and the aroma of dishes cooked over a *chulha* remain irreplaceable.

FOOD ADVENTURES on the Go

Every place I visit, I seek out its local flavours. During the shoot of *Laapata Ladies* in Jaipur, I fell in love with *Rajasthani thalis* comprising *dal baati*, *churma* and *gatte ki sabzi*. In Ladakh, I devoured *thukpa* and momos. And in Poland, mashed potatoes brought an unexpected wave of nostalgia. Wherever I go, food becomes a

bridge connecting me back to my *pahadi* roots. I like the *thali* served at Maharaja Bhog a lot as it reminds me of my Jaipur sojourn.

MY KITCHEN Experiments

Cooking is not my forte but I can whip up a decent *aloo paratha* or salad. My simple salad recipe-paneer, boiled broccoli, mushrooms and corn sautéed in *ghee* with black salt and pepper, is my go-to comfort food when I'm too tired to cook. I'm also a fan of experimenting, like making fried rice inspired by YouTube tutorials.

Sets appeal

I prefer the food served on the sets. Sometimes, I ask the chef to prepare *chilla* for me. We were shooting for *Laapata Ladies* in Seoni, near Bhopal. There, I had *chilla* with onions and tomatoes added to it.

Rapid Fire

WHAT DO YOU ORDER EVERY TIME YOU GO TO YOUR FAVOURITE RESTAURANT?

Chinese: noodles, momos. I tried triple Schezwan fried rice after coming to Mumbai, and I liked it immensely. I absolutely love Schezwan chutney.

WHAT'S YOUR IDEA FOR A ROMANTIC DATE?

If someone wants to please me, they should not feed me food from a 5-star hotel, but *Pahadi* food — and that too after taking me to the

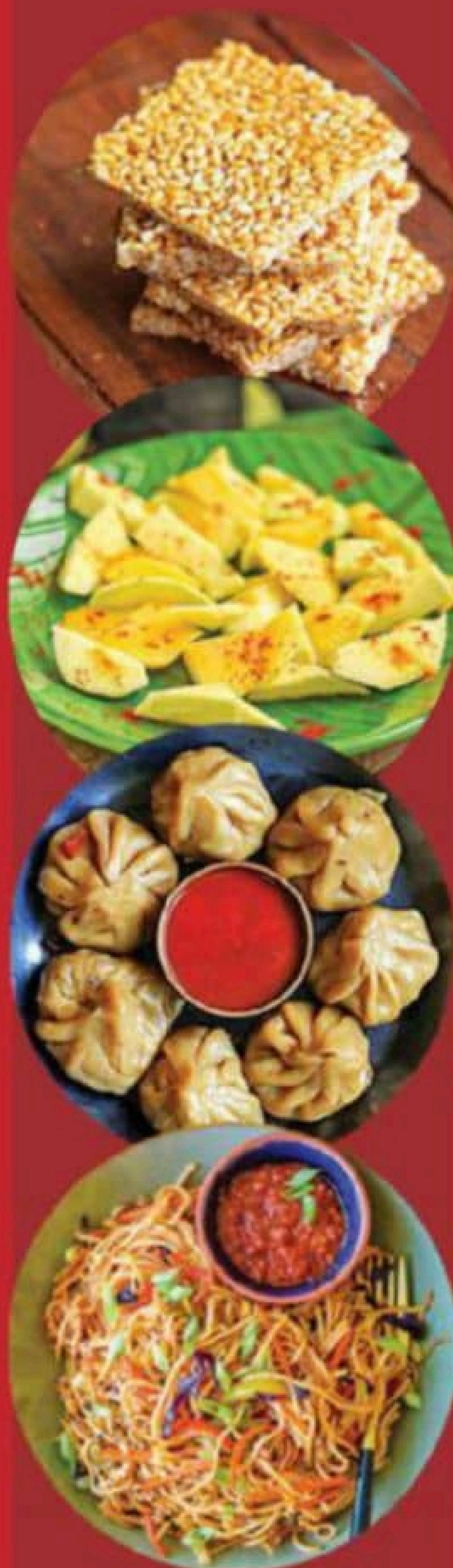
mountains. There is so much noise in the city. There can be nothing more romantic than being in the mountains.

HAVE YOU COOKED ANYTHING SPECIAL?

I don't know how to express love through food. I've realised that I cannot make anyone happy by cooking food. I wish I could meet someone who will cook delicious food for me.

DO YOU HAVE A SWEET TOOTH?

No, I have a sour tooth. I love sour food. I love



pani puri and raw mango. In fact, once I went to Poland with my friends and gave raw mango to taste to some foreigners. In terms of sweets, I love *gajak*.

ARE YOU A MIDNIGHT SNACKER?

No. I don't prefer eating after 7 pm. But if I am hungry, I eat fruit.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT FOR YOU, AMBIENCE OR SERVICE?

Ambience. If the ambience is good, even bad service is tolerable.

WHICH ONE DISH CAN YOU EAT EVERY SINGLE DAY?

Dal chawal.

FAVOURITE FOOD DESTINATION IN MUMBAI?

The *pani puri* shop in Lokhandwala.

WHAT'S THE WORST FOOD YOU'VE EVER EATEN?

Once, I went to a restaurant in Goa with my friends. I had ordered peri-peri fries which didn't turn out to be good.

A BOWL OF DAL CHAWAL, A PLATE OF MOMOS OR A SIMPLE PANI PURI FROM A STREET VENDOR CAN MEAN MORE TO ME THAN THE MOST EXTRAVAGANT MEAL IN A FIVE-STAR HOTEL

restaurants. Take me to the mountains, serve me authentic *pahadi* food and let the tranquility of nature do the rest. A bowl of *dal chawal*, a plate of momos, or a simple *pani puri* from a street vendor can mean more to me than the most extravagant meal in a five-star hotel. I visit restaurants that are associated with nature. There should be greenery. There is a restaurant in Mumbai, in Versova, called Backyard Brew. I love going there. It has an open space and there are many plants around, which gives a good feel. When friends are together, every place feels good. I don't check the price of food in restaurants; whatever I like, I order. Why bother about the price? When I first came to Mumbai, I blew my parents' money in one week. Now, I prefer only to have home-cooked meals.

At the end of the day, food is more than flavours or calories. It's about heritage, love and the stories it tells. And for me, *Himachali* food is the most beautiful story of them all.



I had the chilla with my choice of vegetables and pickles. The flavour of the food there was something else. During the shoot of *Heeramandi*, the evening snacks would come from the house of Sanjay Leela Bhansali sir. Since he is a Gujarati, his tiffin would have *thepla* and *dhokla*. We all used to have it at 4 PM. That was some amazing-tasting food.

MY LOVE LANGUAGE: Food

If you want to win my heart, forget fancy



QUICK BYTES

KARTIK AARYAN, VEDANG RAINA, LAKSHYA, SPARSH SHRIVASTAVA, JIBRAAN KHAN, PREETI PANIGRAHI AND VARUN SOOD REVEAL DETAILS ABOUT THEIR FOOD AND FASHION CHOICES TO VEDANSHI PATHAK

You start your day with?
Black coffee

Your favourite cuisine?
Indian

Your favourite home-cooked dish?
Rajma Chawal

One thing you cook the best?
Rice, dal and bhindi ki sabzi.

Favourite restaurant in Mumbai?
I love street food joints and they are usually *benam*.

Favourite dessert?
Chocolate ice cream and red velvet cake

One thing which is healthy as well as tasty?
It's a myth. Healthy things are not tasty.

FOOD

Kartik Aaryan

Jeans or Shorts?
Jeans

Shirt or T-shirt?
Shirt

Sneakers or boots?
Sneakers

Prints or monotone?
Monotone

Neutral or bright?
Neutral

One piece of clothing you can spend the rest of your life in?
Hoodie and joggers.

Your go-to look for a red carpet event?
A classic black suit.

Your go-to look for a date night?
Black shirt and black pants.

Your go-to look for a night in?
T-shirt and shorts.

FASHION



Life's too short to overthink your choices. The new generation of stars are up on the take and know how to sort their lives. They know what rules their world and aren't shy about naming their choices. Their machine gun replies to our questions made it a fun banter. Excerpts:

You start your day with?
Nimbu paani

Your favourite cuisine?
Kashmiri

Your favourite home-cooked dish?
The chicken curry made at my home is fantastic.

One thing you cook the best.
I can't cook. I even struggle to make Maggi.

Your favourite restaurant in Mumbai?
As a kid it used to be Mahesh Lunch Home, you get amazing fish there.

What's your favourite dessert?
Choco-lava cake with vanilla ice cream

One thing which is healthy as well as tasty?
Oats and Whey protein. They're tasty and healthy.

F
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D

Vedang Raina

Jeans or Shorts?
Jeans

Shirt or T-shirt?
Shirts

Sneakers or loafers?
Loafers

Prints or monotone.
Monotone

Neutral or bright?
Neutral

One piece of clothing you can spend the rest of your life in.
Pyjamas

Your go-to look for a red-carpet event?
A sharp suit

Your go-to look for a date night?
Shirt, trousers and boots.

Your go-to look for a night in?
Pyjamas

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Lakshya

You start your
day with?
Black coffee

Your favourite cuisine?
Indian

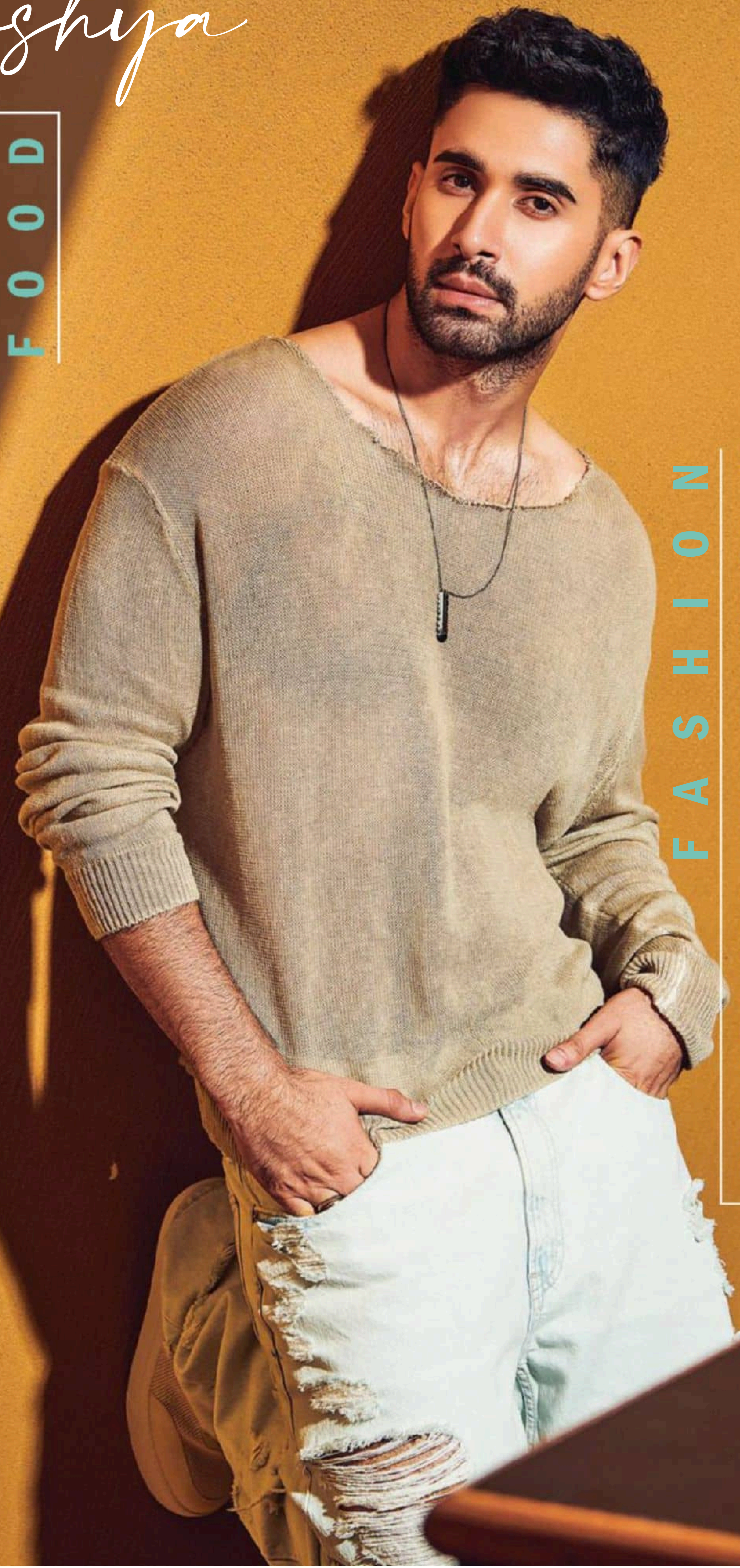
Your favourite home-
cooked dish?
**My father cooks
really good mutton.**

One thing you cook
the best.
**I used to cook really
tasty chicken back in
the day. But I have
forgotten it now. I am
sure I can make it
again if I try.**

Your favourite
restaurant in Mumbai?
Pratap Da Dhaba

What's your favourite
dessert?
Rasmalai

One thing which
is healthy as well
as tasty?
**Healthy and tasty
don't go well
together. Maybe
homemade sugar
free chocolate
cake.**



Jeans or Shorts?
Jeans

Shirt or T-shirt?
T-shirt

Sneakers or loafers?
Sneakers

Prints or monotone.
Monotone

Neutral or bright?
Neutral

One piece of clothing
you can spend the
rest of your life in.
Boxers

Your go-to look for
a red-carpet event?
A black suit

Your go-to look for
a date night?
Again, a black suit

Your go-to look for
a night in?
Probably boxers

F A S H I O N

You start your day with?
Green Tea

Your favourite cuisine?
Chinese

Your favourite home-cooked dish?
Aloo paratha

One thing you cook the best.
Main chu** *bahut*
acha banata hun**

Your favourite restaurant in Mumbai?
Desi Vibes in Thane

What's your favourite dessert?
Gajar halwa

One thing which is healthy as well as tasty?
Salads with curd dressing.

F O O D

Sparsh
Shrivastav

Jeans or Shorts?
Shorts

Shirt or T-shirt?
Shirts

Sneakers or loafers?
Loafers

Prints or monotone.
Monotone

Neutral or bright?
Bright

One piece of clothing you can spend the rest of your life in.
A comfortable pair of boxers and a bandy.

Your go-to look for a red-carpet event?
I wish I could be in a pair of boxers and bandy.

Your go-to look for a date night?
Boxers and bandy

Your go-to look for a night in?
Same!

F A S H I O N

How do you start
your day?
**With a lot of eggs
and coffee.**

Your favourite cuisine?
Mughlai

Your favourite home-
cooked dish?
**Mutton biryani made
by my mother.**

One thing you cook
the best?
Nando's roast chicken

Favourite restaurant
in Mumbai?
**Jai Jawan – they
serve amazing
prawns and fish.**

Favourite dessert?
Tiramisu

F O O D

Gibran Khan

Jeans or Shorts?
Jeans

Shirt or T-shirt?
Shirts

Sneakers or boots?
Boots

Prints or monotone?
Monotone

Neutral or bright?
Bright

One piece of clothing
you could spend the
rest of your life in?
Blue jeans

Your go-to look for a
red carpet event?
Suits

Your go-to look for
a date night?
**Blue denim and
a black T-shirt**

Your go-to look for
a night in?
Pyjamas

F A S H I O N



You start your day with?
**I skip my breakfast.
But, coconut water.**

Your favourite cuisine?
**Always cooked by
my mom.**

Your favourite home-
cooked dish?
**Odia dish called *Pakhala
Bhata*, I really love it.**

One thing you cook
the best?
**Hands down *Pakhala
Bhata* and Omelette. No
one can beat me at it.**

Favourite restaurant
in Mumbai?
**Shiv Sagar and
Amar Juice Centre
for Pav Bhaji**

Favourite dessert?
***Rasgulla* that is
made in Odisha.**

One thing which is
healthy as well as tasty?
Coconut

FOOD

Preeti Panigrahi

Jeans or Shorts?
Jeans

Shirt or T-shirt?
T-shirts

Sneakers or heels?
Sneakers

Prints or monotone?
Monotone

Neutral or bright?
Bright

One piece of clothing
you can spend the
rest of your life in?
My night suit.

Your go-to look for a
red carpet event?
**I haven't attended
any. So, I am waiting
for that.**

Your go-to look for
a date night?
A kurti.

Your go-to look for
a night in?
Night Suit

An actor/actress whose
sense of style you like?
Alia Bhatt

FASHION

You start your
day with?
Eggs and oats.

Your favourite cuisine?
American

Your favourite home-
cooked dish?
Grilled chicken

One thing you
cook the best?
Nothing

Favourite restaurant
in Mumbai?
Bombay Canteen

Favourite dessert?
Mysore Pak

One thing which
is healthy as well
as tasty?
**Healthy things are
not tasty, period.**

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*Varun
Dhoo*

Jeans or Shorts?
Shorts

Shirt or T-shirt?
Nothing

Sneakers or boots?
Heels

Prints or monotone ?
Monotone

Neutral or bright?
Neutral

One piece of clothing
you can spend the
rest of your life in?
Boxers

Your go-to look for
a red carpet event?
Anything black.

Your go-to look for
a date night?
Pyjamas

Your go-to look for
a night in?
Pyjamas

An actor/actress
whose sense of style
you like?
Ranbir Kapoor

**F
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N**



exclusives

what's on their mind?

NEVER STOP DREAMING!

“Convincing my parents that I wanted to pursue a career in the arts was a challenge. After a lot of back and forth, we reached a compromise: I would earn a degree in finance and management to make them happy. Then I could pursue my dream of acting”

Our cover star Veer Pahariya has always believed in doing things his own way.

PHOTOGRAPHS: KUNAL GUPTA

BEYOND FAMILIAR KILLS

VEER PAHARIYA IS HERE
TO STAY. HE MAKES HIS
INTENTIONS CLEAR TO
VEDANSHI PATHAK

PHOTOGRAPHS: KUNAL GUPTA

STYLIST: ANISHA JAIN

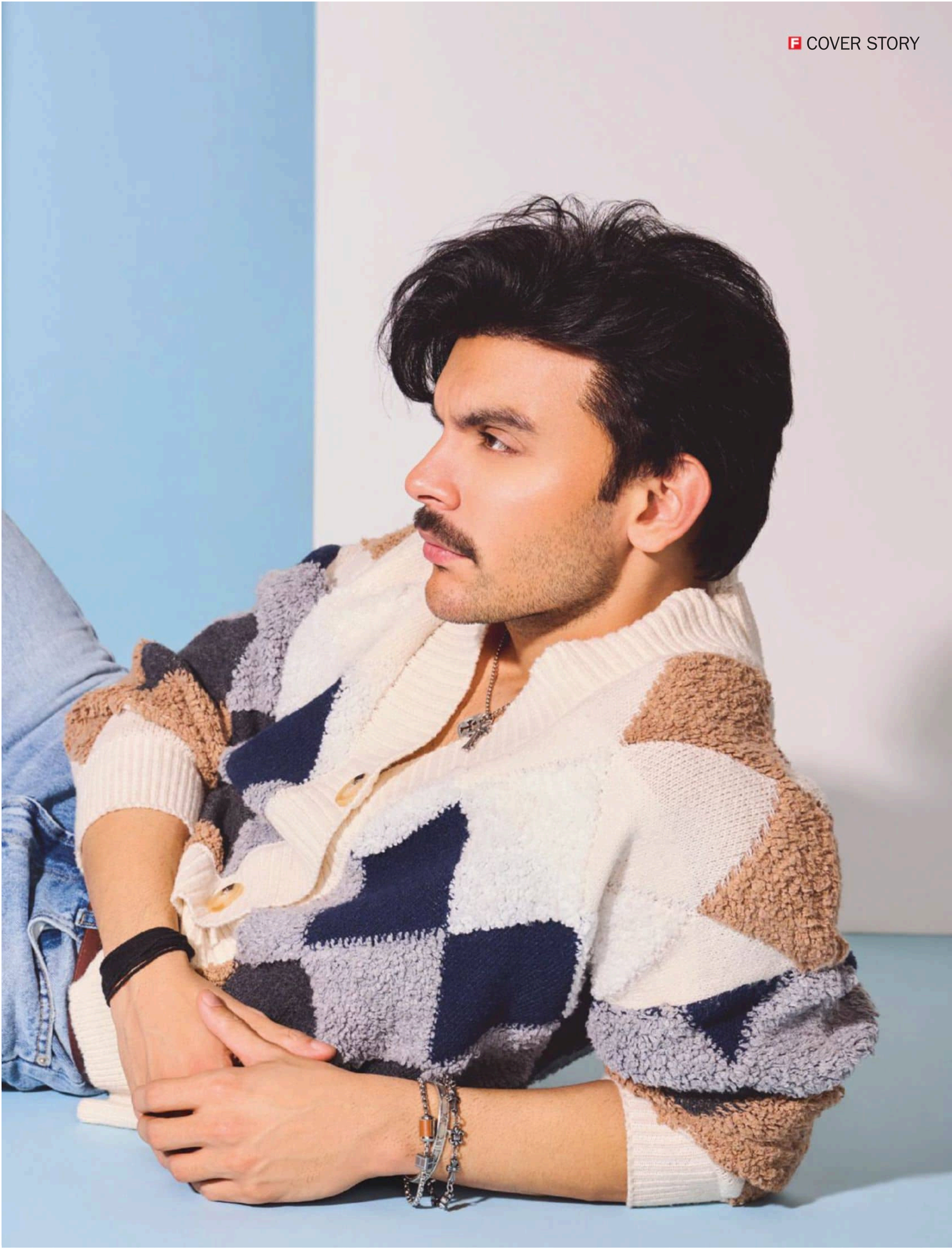
HAIR STYLIST: HAKIM AALIM

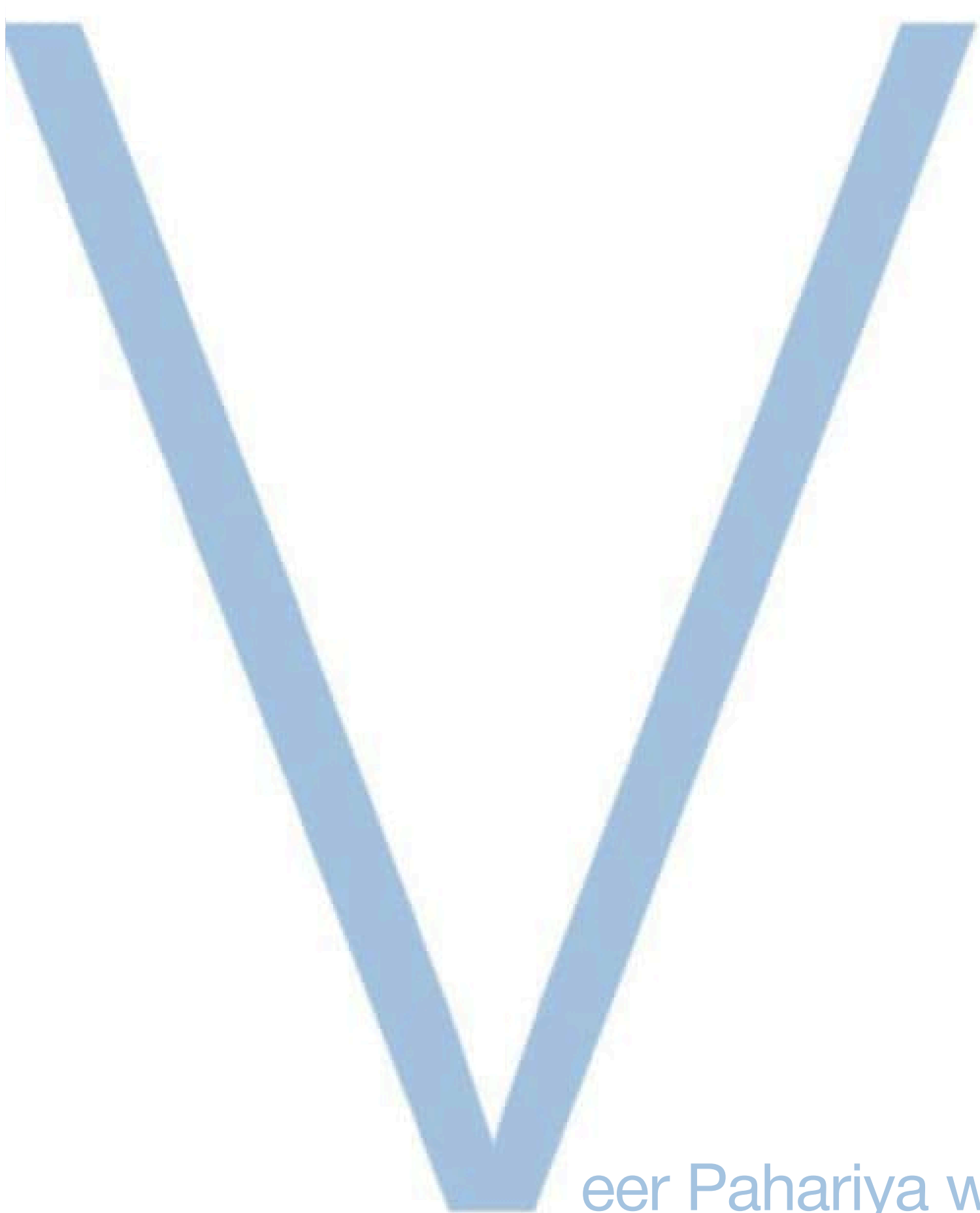
MAKE-UP: PENAZ MITHUJI

BOOTS: SHUTIQ

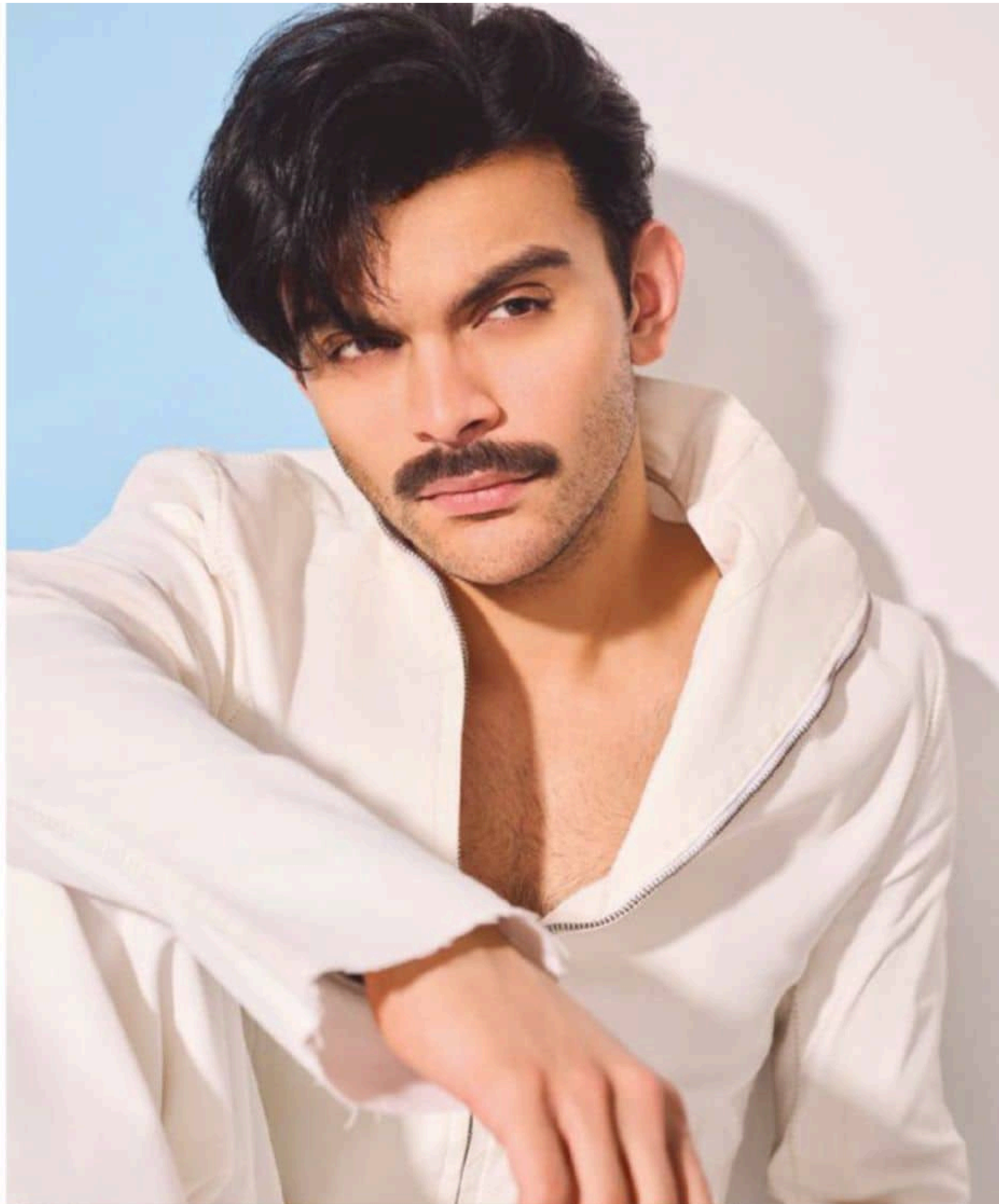
HANDSTACK: VIANGE VINTANGE & HERMES

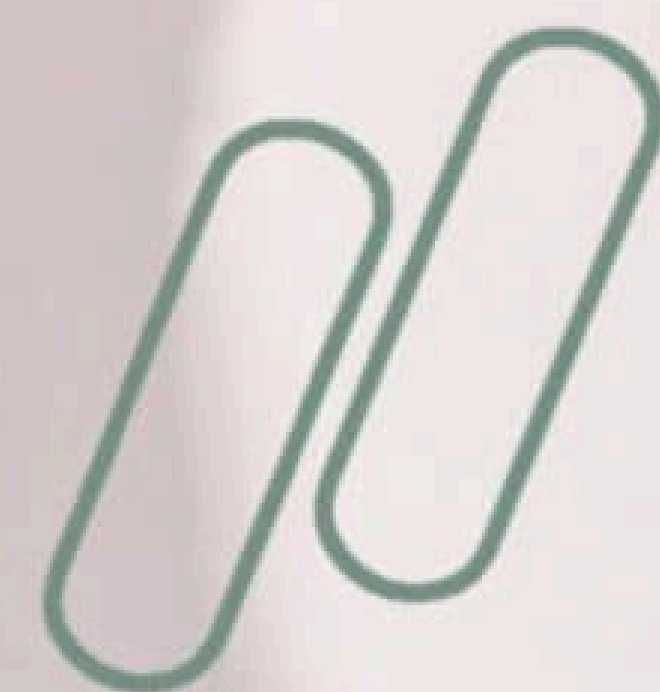
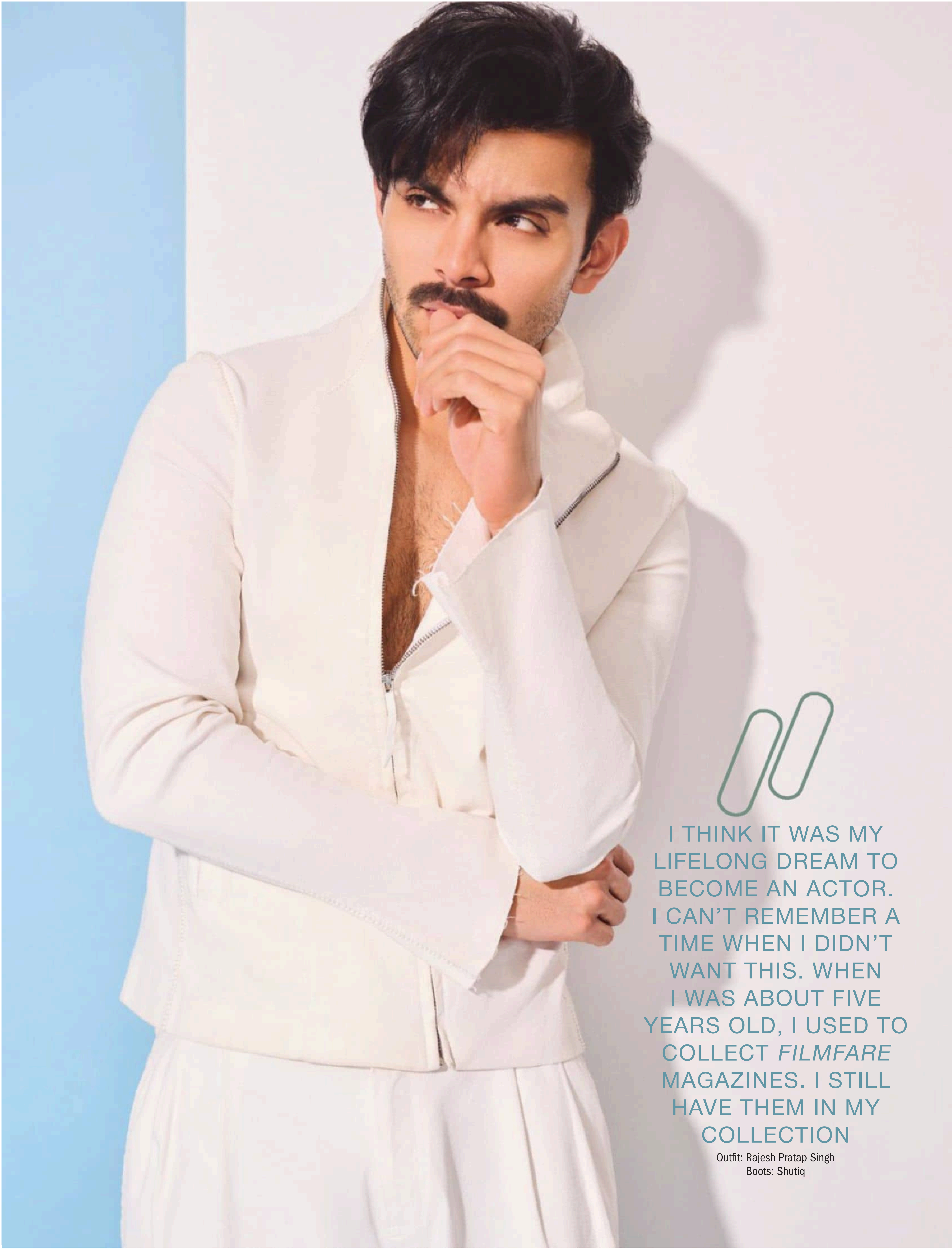






eer Pahariya was born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth. Grandson to politician Sushil Kumar Shinde, he had the world at his feet. He could have asked for the sun, the moon and the earth and got it. But Veer had different aspirations. He dreamt big, he dreamt cinema... that he had no film connection, didn't faze him. After studying management abroad, he decided to gamble on his creative side. And once the young star stepped onto a film set for the first time, there was no turning back. He was instantly spellbound by the cinematic universe, like a moth to a gloriously glamorous flame. From adorning his childhood room with *Filmfare* covers featuring the likes of Shah Rukh Khan and Hrithik Roshan, to gracing one himself, Veer is on the verge of a major breakthrough. His highly anticipated Bollywood debut in *Sky Force*, alongside heavyweights like Akshay Kumar, Sara Ali Khan and Nimrat Kaur, has already won hearts and captured attention. The actor caught up with *Filmfare* to chat about his journey. From embracing his reality as a newcomer without a film background to his undying love for an underdog story makes for an interesting tale. And trust us, this is just the beginning...





I THINK IT WAS MY
LIFELONG DREAM TO
BECOME AN ACTOR.
I CAN'T REMEMBER A
TIME WHEN I DIDN'T
WANT THIS. WHEN
I WAS ABOUT FIVE
YEARS OLD, I USED TO
COLLECT *FILMFARE*
MAGAZINES. I STILL
HAVE THEM IN MY
COLLECTION

Outfit: Rajesh Pratap Singh
Boots: Shutiq

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO BECOME AN ACTOR?

It was my lifelong dream to become an actor. I can't remember a time when I didn't want this. When I was about five years old, I used to collect *Filmfare* magazines. I still have them in my collection, which I used during a recent Q&A session for a shoot. One cover featured Shah Rukh Khan and another had Hrithik Roshan with the headline "Hrithik Roshan Phenomenon". These were my early memories. Then, I visited a film set and something just clicked within me. I made it my goal to turn this into my lifelong passion.

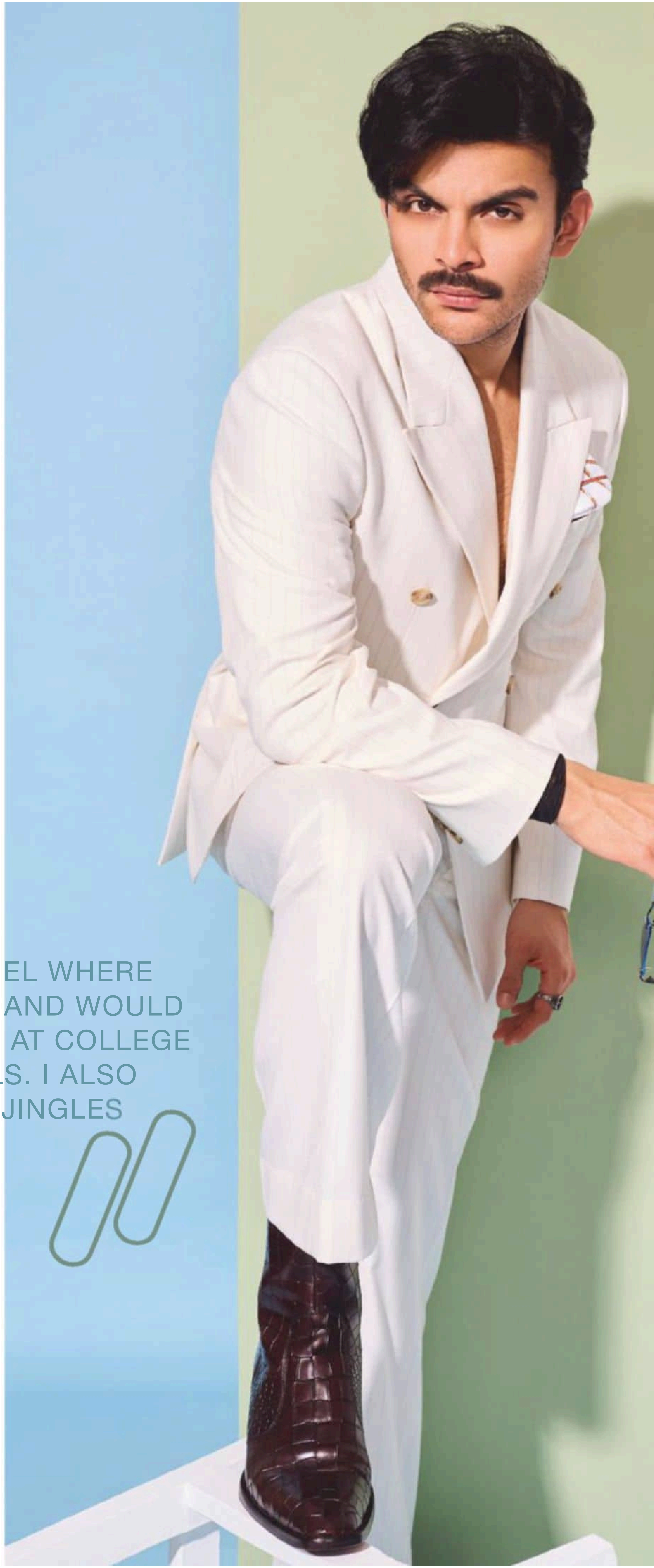
HOW DID YOU GET SELECTED FOR *SKY FORCE*? DO YOU REMEMBER THE DAY YOU SIGNED THE FILM?

It wasn't just one moment; it took several months. After auditioning for a while, I finally landed an audition for another project by Maddock Films, which didn't work out. On the day of the look test for *Sky Force*, I had long hair and a beard, they transformed me completely. I had no idea what the film was about at that point. They cut my hair short, gave me a military-style moustache and put me in overalls. I had no idea what I was getting into. Months later, I heard the narration and it was an easy decision. At that point, I was ready to take on anything. I think it was my intense features that landed me the role. Most of my acting in the film is done through my eyes, as I wear a mask and a headgear that restricts my facial expressions. What I initially saw as a weakness ended up becoming my strength.

I HAD A YOUTUBE CHANNEL WHERE I BUILT A SMALL AUDIENCE AND WOULD GET PAID FOR PERFORMING AT COLLEGE FESTIVALS AND SCHOOLS. I ALSO WORKED ON A FEW AD JINGLES

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BOND WITH *SKY FORCE* CO-STARS AKSHAY KUMAR, SARA ALI KHAN, AND NIMRAT KAUR.

Working with Akshay sir was overwhelming at first because he's someone we've all grown up watching. But when I went on the set, he was so welcoming and comforting that he immediately broke the ice with me. With Sara and Nimrat ma'am, they were both very easy going and not at all intimidating, despite knowing that I was a newcomer. They eased me into the process. Over time, we realised that we all wanted to do our best, so we would work on



WHAT'S YOUR TAKE ON:

NEPOTISM

In every field

DIP IN THEATRE- GOERS

A new era is going
to begin

DATING ACTORS

Yes, I am alright with it

FILM REVIEWS

Very good if
the feedback is
constructive.

BEING RELEVANT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Important in today's
day and age.

Outfit: Asuka Couture
Shoes: Brune & Bareskin
Rings: Esme

scenes and try them in different ways. That's how the chemistry in the film developed.

WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST FEAR BEFORE *SKY FORCE* RELEASED?

I didn't have any fear at all. I was just grateful for the opportunity to live my dream. Every day on earth is a good day.

HOW DO YOU FEEL POST-RELEASE, NOW THAT *SKY FORCE* HAS BEEN RECEIVED WELL?

I'm just happy to be accepted. I know I don't c wlook like a typical hero. But I'm aware of my strengths and weaknesses. I'm here to bring something new to the table. I'm aiming to break barriers and change the game.

WHEN WAS THE FIRST TIME YOUR FAMILY SAW *SKY FORCE*, AND WHAT WAS THEIR REACTION?

They saw it at the screening the night before the release. They were happy and proud. They were quite emotional during the climax.



DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR BROTHER'S AND MOTHER'S OPINIONS WHEN CHOOSING A FILM?

For *Sky Force*, I didn't really have a choice in selecting the film. I had been selected a few months ago. For a few weeks after that, I didn't tell anyone in my family. I had been rejected a few times before, so I became a bit superstitious and chose to keep it to myself. God has been kind. And now, with the love the film has received, I feel blessed. Going forward, I will certainly seek advice from my family. But I feel the decision should come from a place of clarity and sincerity in my heart.

WOULD YOU CALL YOURSELF A DIRECTOR'S ACTOR?

I believe a film is primarily a director's medium. However, I'm open to collaboration. I'm happy to

provide whatever is needed from me,.

I love acting and if the director wants me to bring something specific to the table, I'll do it. I'm also comfortable improvising if the situation calls for it. Ultimately, I feel it's the director's vision that guides the film.

WHAT KIND OF ROLES INTEREST YOU?

Like any other young adult, I love casual clothes and never imagined I'd play a war hero or an Air Force officer. But the audience seemed to enjoy my performance precisely because they didn't expect it. I want to continue taking on roles that surprise people and step outside the typical mould. Hopefully, in my next film, I can change my look again and surprise everyone once more.

WHAT KIND OF PROJECTS DID YOU WORK ON BEFORE *SKY FORCE*?

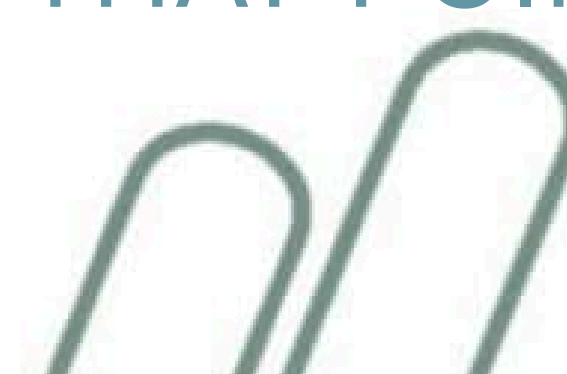
I worked on a project called *Alone*. After that, I did a film called *Bazaar*, followed by *Satyamev Jayate*. During that time, I was also making music. I had a YouTube channel where I built a small audience and would get paid for performing at college festivals and schools. I also worked on a few ad jingles. It was surreal to hear stars like Arjun Kapoor lip-sync to my voice when I was 19 or 20, back in 2014-2015. Spending a lot of time on the set gave me exposure to various departments—whether it was direction, lighting, costumes or production design. I also worked as a body double for Varun Dhawan in *Bhediya* and assisted on the film. After that, I did another project and then *Sky Force* came along.

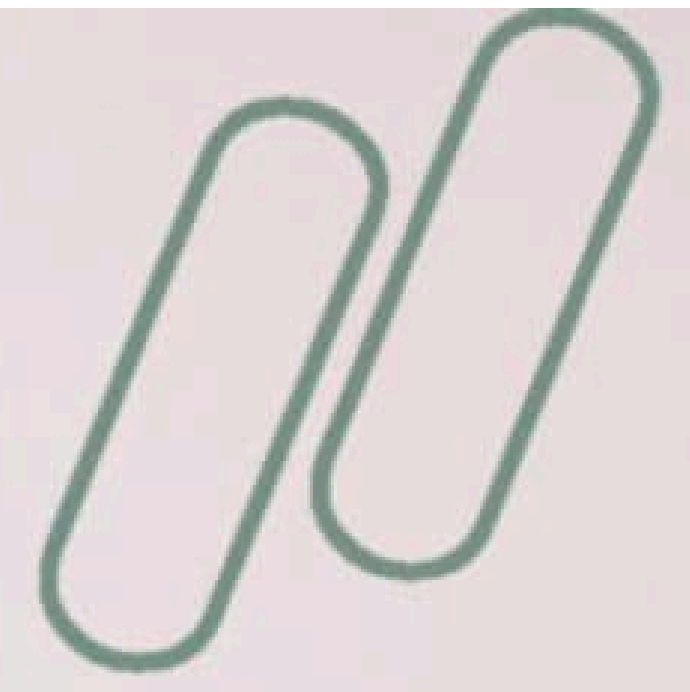
WE'VE SEEN YOU HAVE A LOT OF FRIENDS IN THE FILM INDUSTRY. DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF AN INSIDER OR AN OUTSIDER?

I've always been an outsider. I didn't make friends before joining the industry; I wasn't related to anyone in films. No one in my family had any ties to the creative world. I'm the first artiste in my family. So, my association with the industry is purely based on the work I've done. Anyone who comes to Mumbai gets associated with people from the film industry, simply because it's a small world. My friends in the

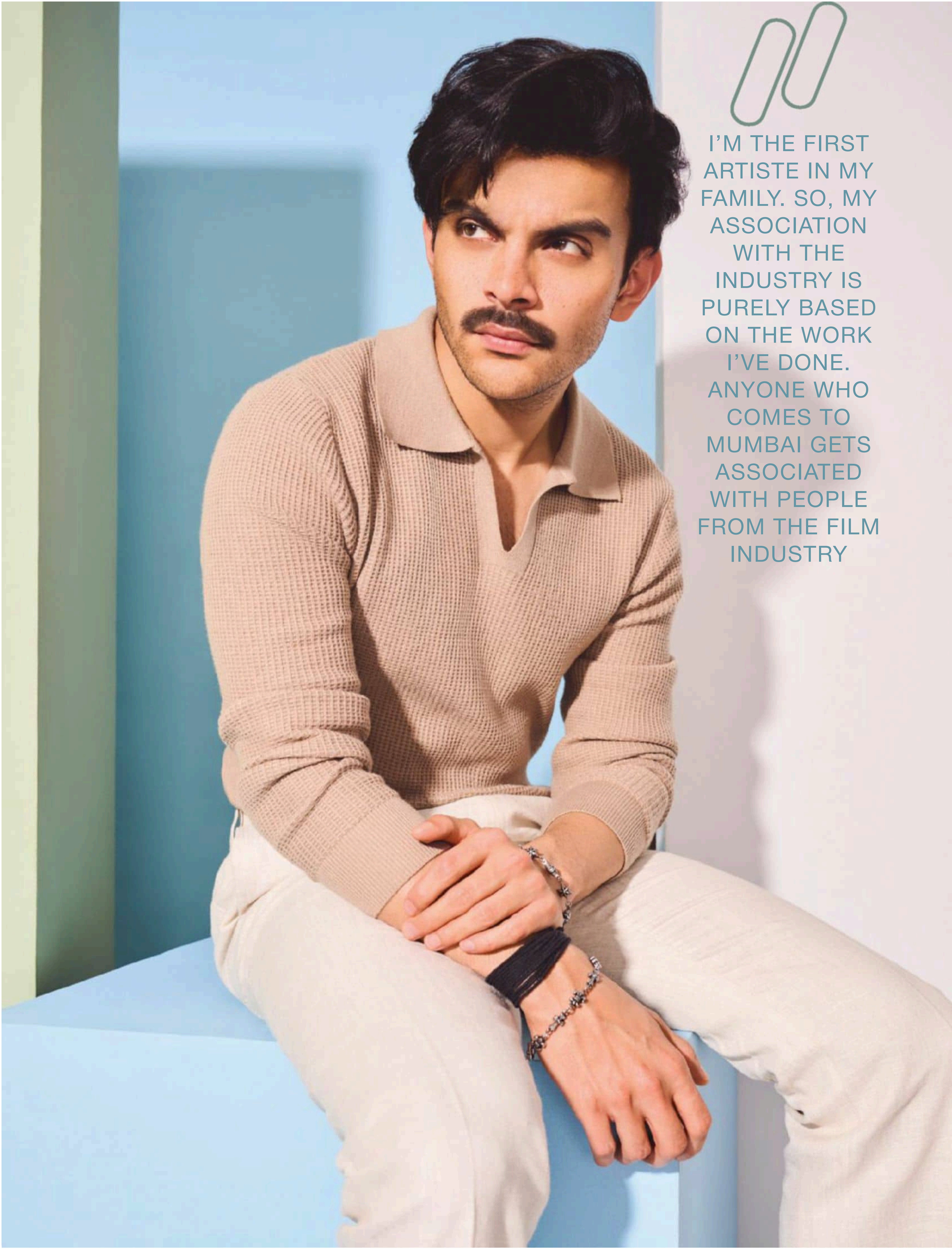
ON THE DAY OF THE LOOK TEST FOR *SKY FORCE*, I HAD LONG HAIR AND A BEARD, AND THEY TRANSFORMED ME COMPLETELY. I HAD NO IDEA WHAT THE FILM WAS ABOUT AT THAT POINT

Pants: NM Design Studio
Shoes: Tod's



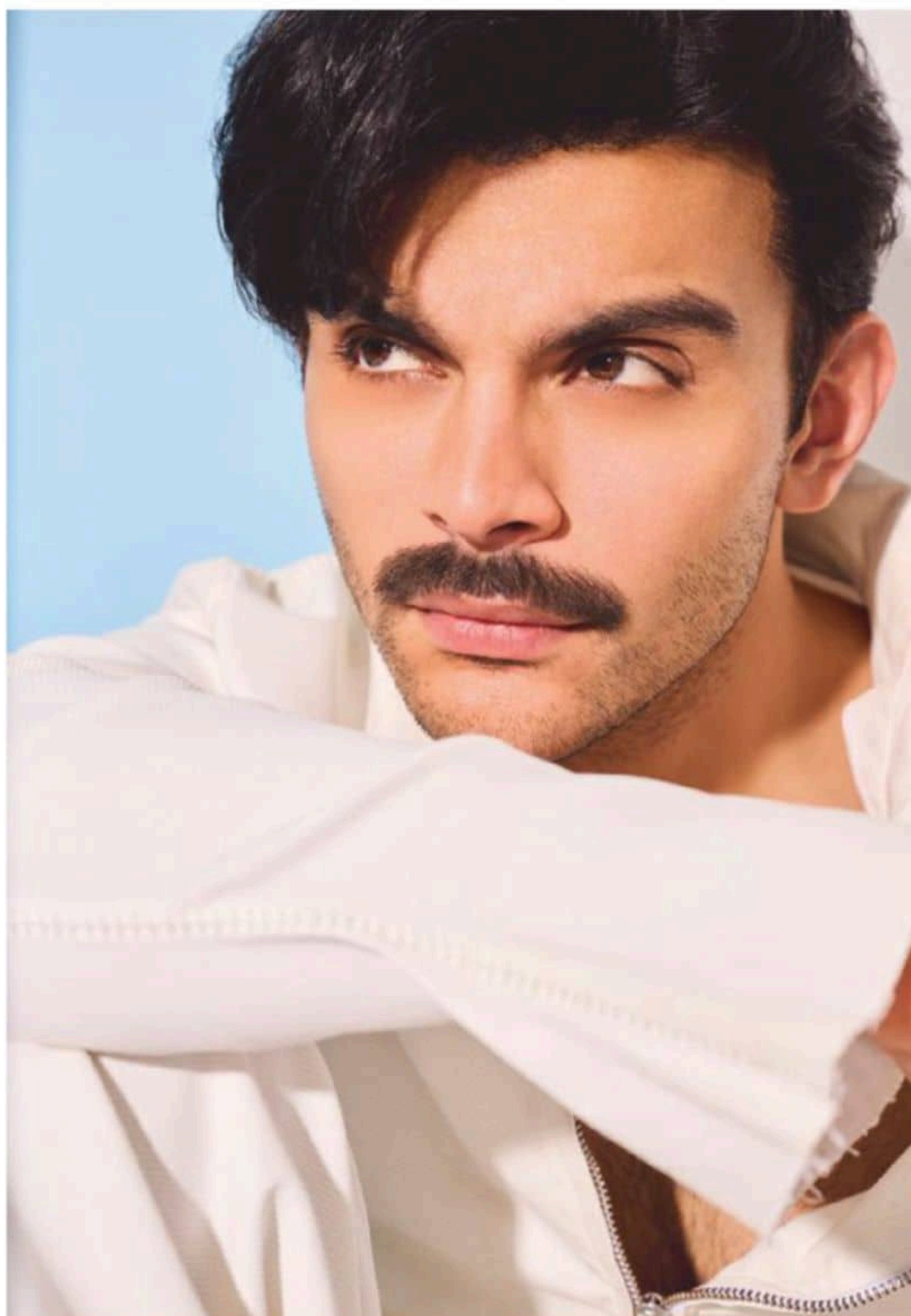


I'M THE FIRST
ARTISTE IN MY
FAMILY. SO, MY
ASSOCIATION
WITH THE
INDUSTRY IS
PURELY BASED
ON THE WORK
I'VE DONE.
ANYONE WHO
COMES TO
MUMBAI GETS
ASSOCIATED
WITH PEOPLE
FROM THE FILM
INDUSTRY



VEER'S DREAM DIRECTORS

- ★ AMAR KAUSHIK
- ★ SANJAY LEELA BHANSALI
- ★ PRASHANT NEEL
- ★ SUKUMAR
- ★ SS RAJAMOULI
- ★ SANDEEP REDDY VANGA



WORKING WITH AKSHAY SIR WAS OVERWHELMING AT FIRST BECAUSE HE'S SOMEONE WE'VE ALL GROWN UP WATCHING. BUT WHEN I WENT ON THE SET, HE WAS SO WELCOMING AND COMFORTING THAT HE IMMEDIATELY BROKE THE ICE WITH ME

industry are kind and gracious. But that doesn't guarantee work.

WHICH ACTORS HAVE INSPIRED YOU OVER THE YEARS?

As I mentioned earlier, Shah Rukh Khan and Hrithik Roshan were my early inspirations. I also really admire Sushant Singh Rajput's choice of roles; he had such an original voice. I love underdog stories, so these are the actors I look up to. I also admire Ranveer Singh for his bold and diverse choices. All these actors were initially dismissed when they entered the industry. But they proved themselves. And that's a journey I really resonate with.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY.

It was a good childhood, although I was quite an introvert. I spent a lot of time watching movies. I would often connect with the characters in them, as they became my friends. That was my world back then. Now my family is proud of the success of *Sky Force*.

TAKE US THROUGH YOUR SCHOOL AND COLLEGE LIFE. HOW WAS THAT?

I moved around quite a lot as a child, attending several schools, because I travelled with my mother. I lived in Mumbai, Delhi and later went to a boarding school in Haryana. Convincing my parents that I wanted to pursue a career in the arts was a challenge. After a lot of back and forth, we reached a compromise: I would earn a degree in finance and management to make them happy. Then I could pursue my dream of acting. So, while studying, I also began auditioning and working on film sets. I started interning at the age of 17. It's been over a decade since I first began working in the industry.

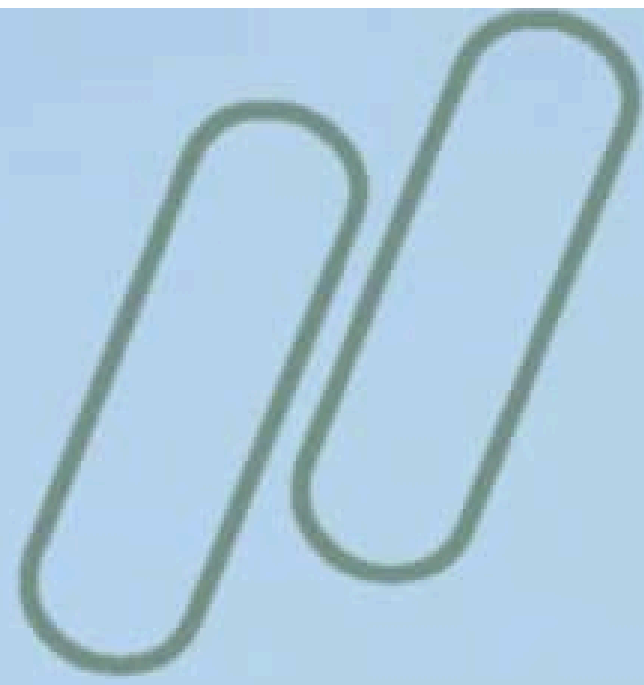
OUT OF NEW-AGE ACTORS LIKE VEDANG RAINA, LAKSHYA, ISHAAN KHATTER, SIDDHANT CHATURVEDI AND JUNAID KHAN, WHOSE WORK DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST?

I love all of their work. They all put in a lot of effort and hard work to get where they are, so I wouldn't pick one over the others.

YOU'RE ACTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA. DOES CREATING CONTENT ONLINE ADD PRESSURE TO YOU AS AN ACTOR?

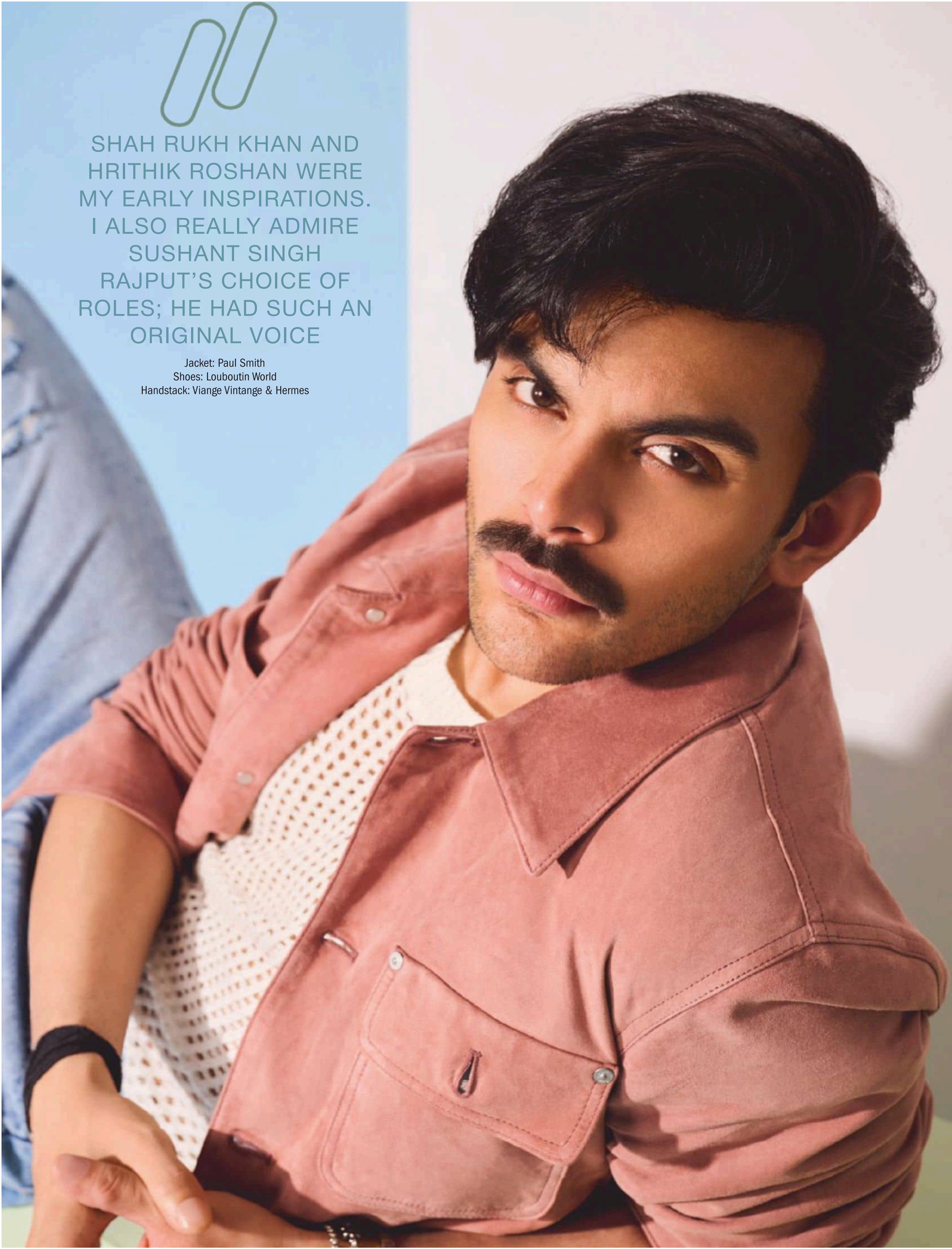
Not at all. I view it as a positive. In 2025, social media is essential. I've realised that people today are more likely to follow their favourite stars on their phones or through digital platforms than they are to go to the theatre. It's a great way to connect with fans. ■





SHAH RUKH KHAN AND
HRITHIK ROSHAN WERE
MY EARLY INSPIRATIONS.
I ALSO REALLY ADMIRE
SUSHANT SINGH
RAJPUT'S CHOICE OF
ROLES; HE HAD SUCH AN
ORIGINAL VOICE

Jacket: Paul Smith
Shoes: Louboutin World
Handstack: Viange Vintange & Hermes



BOMBAYE HIGH!

ANANYA PANDAY IS BOTH A WISE WOMAN AND A CHILD

LOST AT THE MOVIES, FINDS JITESH PILLAI



You saw a different side to Ananya Panday in films like *CTRL*, *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan* and shows like *Call Me Bae*. There was a different energy to her, a certain maturity, or more specifically, a gravitas which was missing earlier. She has an online image which is totally in contrast with the actor, with the person she's turning into now. Sitting besides her for an interview, I don't see her pulling any starry airs. She loves to talk and I love to listen to her. Our off the record conversation is much more interesting. Alas! I cannot share it with you. She has no qualms about admitting to her failures and listing her insecurities because she's secure in the belief that she has moved past them. She's only interested in the future, in becoming a better, more involved actor. She knows an actor is a product of her choices and she has her fingers crossed towards not only choosing the best but creating some on her own too. Excerpts from an engaging interview with the actor.



BEFORE *GEHRAIYAAN*, MY DREAM WAS SIMPLE: TO BE ON THE BIG SCREEN, DANCING, SINGING, WEARING CHIFFON SAREES AND STARRING IN KARAN JOHAR FILMS...BUT SHAKUN BATRA PUSHED ME TO THINK DIFFERENTLY

PHOTOGRAPHS: TARAS TARAPORVALA / FEMINA

How have you processed this year?

It's been a truly life-changing year, both personally and professionally. Everything I've worked towards over the past few years has finally come to fruition. It's also the year I feel most connected to the audience. Anchal, who does my hair, told me about her daughter's elocution competition. A child came on stage and said, "I am Bae, I'm here to slay" as their official entry. That, for me, is the biggest win as an actor. My dad always says that when people imitate you, it means you've made your mark.

You faced trolling and the usual nepotism debate. How have you managed to silence those voices?

I've handled it differently at various stages of life. When things are going well, like now, the voices don't affect me much. But on bad days, even the smallest comment can feel amplified. After *Liger* released and underperformed, there was a lot of chatter. I had to start shooting for *Dream Girl 2* just two days later. I remember thinking, "I can't do this." For the first time, I felt nervous and fumbled my lines on the set. Over time, I've learnt to manage it.

With *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan*, it felt like we were seeing an entirely new version of you.

Honestly, the shift happened with *Gehraiyaan*. As an actor, that film changed everything for me. Before *Gehraiyaan*, my dream was simple: to be on the big screen, dancing, singing, wearing chiffon sarees and starring in Karan Johar films. I wasn't a thinking actor; I just followed instructions. But Shakun Batra pushed me to think differently. He told me, "Not everyone is going to look out for you. You need to take responsibility—do your homework and build your character independently." That advice changed my perspective.

During your teenage phase, people reportedly called you "chicken legs" or said you had a hunchback.

At that age, you're just beginning to understand yourself, your body, your personality. You start experimenting with how you dress, maybe develop crushes. Everything feels heightened during your teenage years. So, when someone comments on your appearance or body, it can leave a lasting scar.

Did those experiences erode your personality in any way?

AS A CHILD, I WAS VERY CONFIDENT. I'D LEAD DANCES,
NAIL ALL THE STEPS, AND WAS CHEERFUL, JUST LIKE I AM NOW.
BUT DURING MY TEENAGE YEARS, WHEN PEOPLE
STARTED COMMENTING ON MY LOOKS AND PERSONALITY,
IT MADE ME SELF-CONSCIOUS

Not erode but they definitely affected my confidence. Even though I always dreamt of becoming an actor, in school, I wasn't as confident about putting myself out there.

But you seem confident now...

I was very confident as a child. I'd lead dances, nail all the steps and was cheerful, just like I am now. But during my teenage years, when people started commenting on my looks and personality, it made me self-conscious. I stopped volunteering for performances. I avoided school plays and stayed with my friends instead of stepping into the spotlight. If there was a dance performance, I'd stand at the back.

When did you start taking yourself seriously as an actor?

Honestly, I've always taken myself seriously. Even in school, I was studious, a first-bencher, determined not to make mistakes. I was the teacher's pet. If my friends cut classes, I'd complain to the teacher.

So you were that kid?

Yes I was! I'd even write their names on the board if caught students talking in class. That was me, always serious about things. There's a misconception that glamorous or commercial films don't require acting, which is completely untrue. That style of acting is just as challenging, if not harder. Lip-syncing, dancing, emoting simultaneously, it's a whole different skill set. When I was shooting *Liger*, it was a glamorous, commercial project. I had so much fun because everyone, Charmi, Puri Sir, Vijay Deverakonda, was so welcoming and took such great care of me.

Did you feel fully satisfied with your performance in *Liger*?

Honestly, no. I think I could have given more to that film. At the time, I thought, "It's a fun, light movie, so it'll be easy." But looking back, I regret not putting in my all. If I'd given everything to *Liger*, even if I'd been trolled later, at least I'd know I did my best. I've realised that everything on screen is permanent. This conversation we're having now, in some form, will last forever.

That's a powerful realisation.
It really is. When



you're acting, the audience doesn't see the behind-the-scenes struggles, whether you have a fever, feel unwell, or are dealing with personal challenges. All they see is what you deliver on the screen. That's why I now treat every day on the set like it's my last.

What kind of conversations do you have with your parents?

My dad always says I'm too honest for my own good. I can't keep secrets, especially from people close to me. I just don't have a filter.

Did that honesty carry over into your relationships too?

Oh, absolutely. I remember my first boyfriend in school. When he asked me to be his girlfriend, I paused and said, "Wait, I need to ask my mom." I literally called her and said, "Mom, I like this boy. Can I date him?" Back then, dating just meant holding hands and texting. It wasn't anything serious.

That's hard to believe.

No, really. I've always been upfront with my parents.

Which boyfriends have they approved of?

They don't outright disapprove of anyone, they believe I'll figure it out myself. I can tell

from their mood or body language if they're not fond of someone. And yes, they've been right a few times.

What kind of girlfriend are you?

Over time, I've become more comfortable with who I am, and that's had an impact on my relationships. I used to mould myself into whoever I was dating. I'd spend less time with my friends and change things in my life, even without them asking.

That sounds exhausting.

It was. Now, I've found a balance. I don't change myself to fit someone else's expectations anymore. If someone doesn't want to be with me for who I am, I'd rather be with myself. I've realised

that relationships only work when both people can be themselves without losing their individuality.

How do you handle long-distance relationships?

I think it's quite healthy to have some space.

How often do you meet in a month?

I think 45 days without meeting

is fine. That space really does make the heart grow fonder.

It's said you gave 100 missed calls to someone because they weren't answering?

I was exaggerating a bit but people tend to latch onto certain things. A lot of comments were like, "We've all done that before."

So, you're mildly stalker-ish?

No, I don't think so. But people can bring out certain sides of you.

Have you stalked your



CTRL

all out. I can handle that.

So, those calls were just about figuring things out?

Yes, I'd rather address it right away than leave it for another day.

Have you been in a situationship?

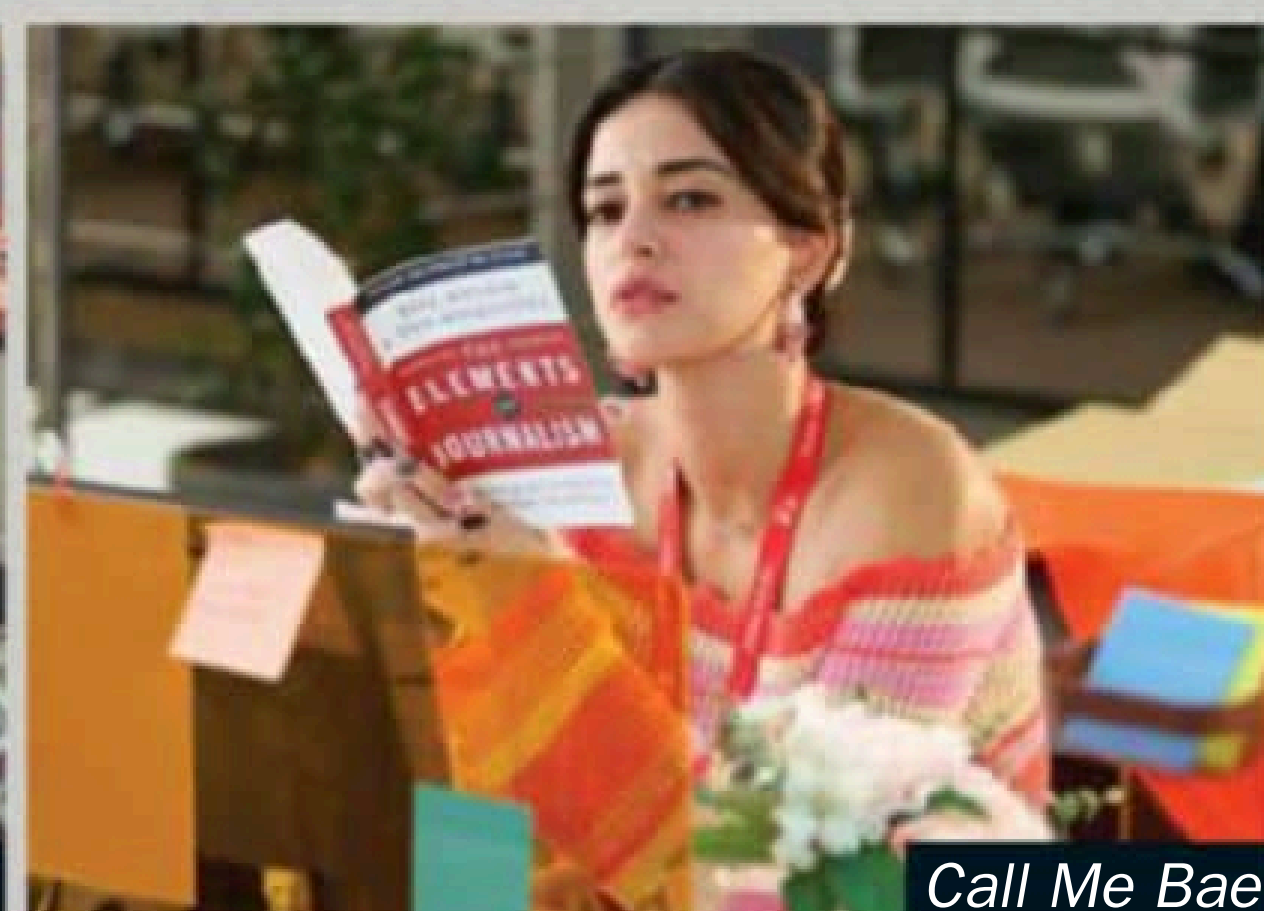
No, I can't do that.

What about breadcrumbing?

Breadcrumbing? What's that?

It's when someone leads you on with small hints of affection.

Oh, no. I'd like to think I'm cool



Call Me Bae

school. Of course, I was angry. But it was school, so you get over it eventually.

What are the red flags in a relationship for you?

Dishonesty. I'm honest, so if you ask me something, I'll tell you exactly what it is. I expect the same from the other person.

What else?

Disrespect. You know when you're with someone, and they're kind to you at home. But when you're out with others, their behaviour changes?

GROWING UP, SEEING SRK NOT JUST AS THIS HUGE STAR BUT ALSO SITTING DOWN TO HELP HIS KIDS WITH THEIR HOMEWORK AND ASSIGNMENTS, IT MADE ME REALISE THAT YOU CAN BE SUCCESSFUL AT WORK AND STILL FULLY PRESENT AT HOME

boyfriend's Instagram?

Everyone does that. That doesn't make you a stalker.

You don't like leaving things unresolved?

Exactly. I don't believe in taking a break and then coming back to talk things through later. I need to express how I feel immediately. Even if my partner is emotional or angry, I'd rather they get it

enough to handle that but I'm not. I'm a full-on love person. In one week, I'm in love and dreaming of a family..

Have you ever been cheated on?

Yeah, I have.

And you were okay with it?

It happened when I was much younger, in my first few relationships, like in

That's a red flag for me. Also, someone who can't support your victories is a big red flag. People might not openly show it but you can tell when they're not as happy for you as you are for them.

Is it easier to date an actor or someone from another profession?

It depends. The thing with actors is that they understand your

profession better. They understand when you need to spend time with other actors for work.

So, dating someone from the same industry has its benefits.

Yes, because they get everything, even the fame and constant pictures. But sometimes, being with someone outside the industry can be refreshing. They don't know who you are or what you do, and that's a clean slate. It's nice when someone likes you for who you are, not just because of your position.

Does social media impact your life?

100 per cent. When I was younger, I used to go down to play with friends in our building's compound. Then Instagram came when I was about 14 or 15. Since then, it's been a huge part of everyone's life. It affects work, relationships and how you feel about yourself.

How do you deal with social media?

I turned off my Instagram notifications and that made a huge difference. The constant notifications can be overwhelming. I don't scroll through my feed as much now. I used to feel the need to catch

up on every post but now I don't do that. Going on holiday helped me break that habit. I've also muted a lot of accounts on Instagram. It's actually helped my mental health.

How do you deal with drama, especially being an actor?

Honestly, there's no drama in my life. And I'm okay with some drama. Right now, everything is calm.

What usually makes you cry?



Kho Gaye Hum Kahan

IN MY FIRST YEAR, SHORTLY AFTER MY FILM'S RELEASE, SOMEONE CREATED A FAKE PROFILE CLAIMING TO KNOW ME FROM SCHOOL. THEY ACCUSED ME OF BULLYING AND SPREAD RUMOURS. SOME EVEN QUESTIONED MY EDUCATION

Big things don't make me cry but the smallest things do. If I don't eat on time, if something is late, or if I'm frustrated, I'll cry. But big events? No, they don't faze me as much.

How do you process deeper emotions or baggage from the past?

I let it all out. I'm the kind of person who needs to release it at the moment. If I'm

having a bad day on the set, I let people see that side of me. I saw that quality in Deepika (Padukone) as well. She's human, and she lets people around her see that. It's a beautiful thing. People forget that actors feel things too. Showing that human side can be a huge advantage. If I'm not okay, I cry, I vent, I talk to someone, or go to therapy. Eventually, I get over it.

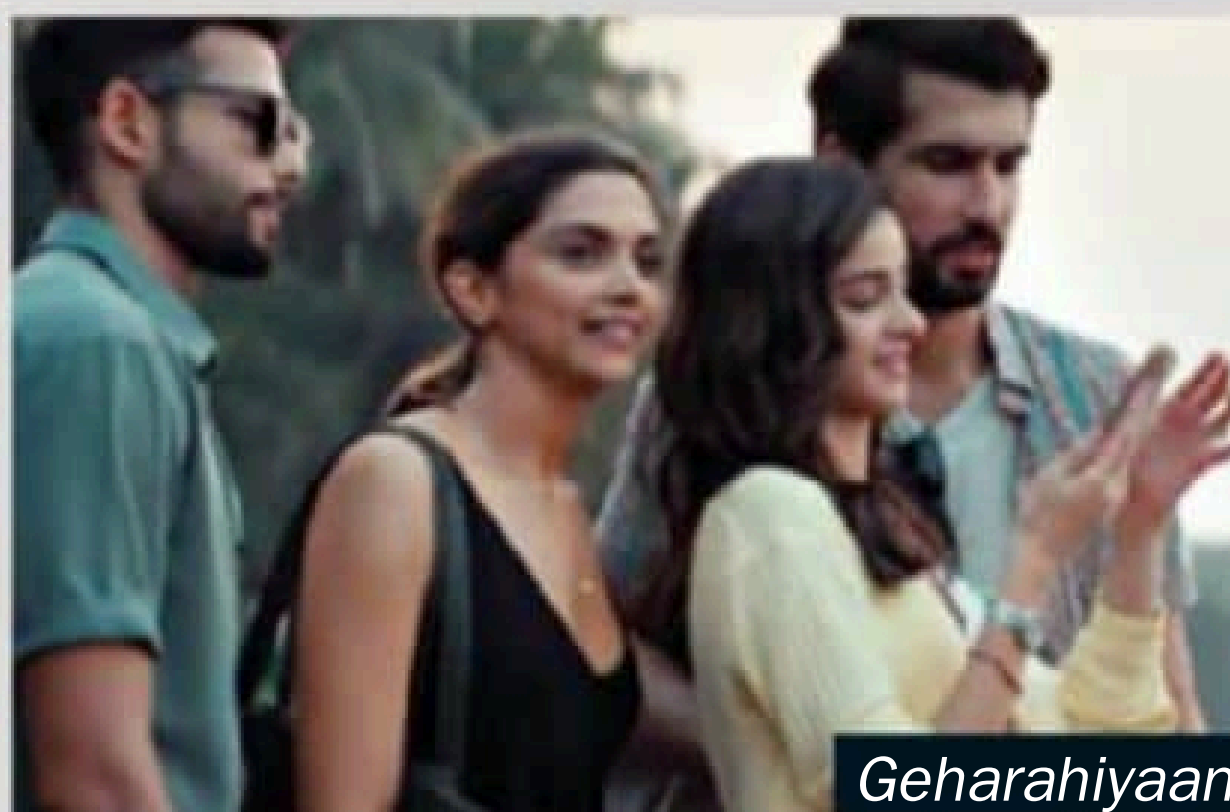
Did you start therapy recently?

I started therapy

those insecurities. I stopped therapy when I didn't need it anymore. But during COVID, I started feeling anxious, like many people did, so I went back to it. In my family, therapy isn't taboo, my *dadi*, mom and sister have all done it. My dad may have tried it too.

It's great that it's so normal for your family. Exactly. That's why I talk about it openly as an actor. I don't want it to remain a taboo.

What were your therapy



Geharahiyaan

sessions like?

Therapy has been incredibly helpful. For instance, in my first year, shortly after my film's release, someone created a fake profile claiming to know me from school. They accused me of bullying and spread rumours. Some even questioned my education, claiming I hadn't actually gotten into college.

Over time, I've stopped caring about what others think. You can't control it.

What kind of conversations do you have with your parents, especially about your dad's career?

My dad's stardom and career highs happened before I was born. When I was growing up, he wasn't on the sets much. But I didn't know any different. To me, he was always working, whether it was restaurants, properties or something else. All my friends' dads worked, so it felt normal.

Did you understand the shifts in his career later?

Only when I got older. When *Housefull* happened, I was much more aware. When people asked me about his films, I started understanding what he had achieved. At home, it wasn't discussed much. His friendships never felt affected by anyone's career ups and downs. Friends like Shah Rukh sir treated him the same, regardless of his career stages.

Is there something that Shah Rukh has said, some kind of advice that has stayed with you?

Everything he says is like advice or something you can take away. His presence and the way he conducts himself has been the biggest lesson. For example, the way he's been with his kids, how present he's been

as a father, really reinforced that work-life balance for me. Growing up, seeing him not just as this huge star but also seeing him sitting down to help his kids with their homework and assignments, it made me realise that you can be successful at work and still be fully present at home.

Suhana Khan and Shanaya Kapoor have faced their fair share of trolling. What kind of conversations do you have with them during these times?

We talk about everything. I used to sleep on Maheep's belly when she was pregnant with

Shanaya. So, they're more like family to me at this point. We don't really need to say much; we understand one another without having to explain things. I never give unsolicited advice. But in case they want to talk about something, I'm always here to listen.

Do you have people who keep you grounded?

I have my Suhana, Shanaya and Navya group, who are all from film families. But I also have my school friends, who have nothing to do with the film industry. I have a solid group of about six girls and we've been best

friends since I was four. They know me inside out. If they don't like my movie, they'll just say, "Yeah, nice," but I can tell from their demeanour that they weren't impressed. My parents are always honest with me. Even my team always tells me the truth, which

I really appreciate.

What's the worst and best piece of advice you've gotten?

The worst advice was anyone suggesting that I change my body in any way. People told me I should put on weight to get certain

roles or suggested I change my face.

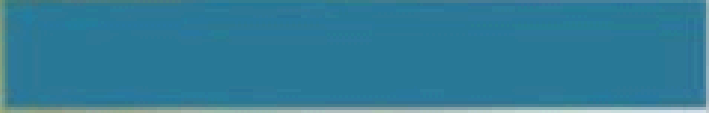
So many of your colleagues and contemporaries are constantly altering their looks. Do you feel that pressure?

I don't feel the pressure. I'm more of a "to each their own" person. If that's what works for them and they're happy with it, fine. I don't believe anyone should tell someone else how to look or what to do with their body. All kinds of beauty and body types are thriving on the screen, so it feels unfair to say that to someone. ■

WHEN YOU'RE ACTING, THE AUDIENCE DOESN'T SEE THE BEHIND-THE-SCENES STRUGGLES, WHETHER YOU HAVE A FEVER, FEEL UNWELL, OR ARE DEALING WITH PERSONAL CHALLENGES. ALL THEY SEE IS WHAT YOU DELIVER ON THE SCREEN



THE FIRST FILM PREMIERE
I ATTENDED WAS FOR
QURBANI IN DELHI. IT WAS
CHAOTIC. *QURBANI* WAS THE
BIGGEST HIT OF THE YEAR.
THAT WAS WHEN MY
FATHER'S LIFE CHANGED
AND HE BECAME A
SUPERSTAR



THE PRODIGAL RETURNS

FARDEEN KHAN HAS HAD QUITE A COMEBACK THANKS TO
KHEL KHEL MEIN AND *HEERAMANDI*. JITESH PILLAAI SOUNDS HIM OUT

I've had numerous conversations with Fardeen Khan ever since he started out with *Prem Aggan* (1998). And I've teased him about his accent, which hasn't changed in all these years. There's an old school charm about him which is appealing. He has seen several ups and downs in life but talking to him now, I realise he has taken everything on the chin like a man and not let that get to him. There's a quiet dignity to him, the grace of a man who has learnt from life and has managed to put the bitterness behind him. He moved to London for a while, and in due course got a grip on himself. He's back to his best-looking self and his acting sure has matured with years. He's raring to go as I question:

**I'M NO LONGER
THE QUINTESSENTIAL
PARTY BOY;
I'VE LEFT THAT
BEHIND ME. I'M A
FATHER NOW, WITH
TWO BEAUTIFUL
CHILDREN. AND, FOR
ALL PRACTICAL
PURPOSES, I'M
AGAIN A NEWCOMER
IN THE INDUSTRY**

**WHAT HAS CHANGED
IN YOUR SECOND
INNINGS, ACCORDING
TO YOU?**

What hasn't changed? A lot changes in 12 years. You can start with me. I've changed.

**WHAT ARE THE
GOOD AND THE BAD
CHANGES?**

You could call me wiser or less foolish. Life, if you choose to learn from it, teaches you a lot. I have more life experience now and

I understand myself on a much deeper level. I'm no longer the quintessential party boy; I've left that behind me. I'm a father now, with two beautiful children. And for all practical purposes, I'm still a newcomer in the industry. That's the mindset with which I came back after 12 years. So yes, a lot has changed. But I'm fortunate that some of the relationships I built, particularly with friends in the

industry. have remained strong. These friendships have lasted.

LIKE WHOM? GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE OF SOMEONE, THEN AND NOW.

Someone I've stayed in touch with consistently is Ritesh Deshmukh. He's someone who became really close to me, even though I was away. That's one example of a lasting friendship. I've also kept in touch with Ramesh Taurani and Sajid Nadiadwala over the years. Even though I was travelling a lot, particularly in London, the fondness and respect for them remained. Sajid Khan is someone else I've stayed connected with. Currently, I'm working on a project where three actors I've worked with before are involved. And of course, there's *Housefull 5*. There's Akshay (Kumar), with whom I've done one film. I've just finished another movie with him, *Khel Khel Mein*. There's also Abhishek (Bachchan), who I worked with on *Om Jai Jagdish* and now we're doing *Housefull 5* together. We share a few years between us. I'm older, of course. We grew up together,

IT WAS A CONSCIOUS DECISION ON THE PART OF MY PARENTS TO SHIELD US AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. NO FILM MAGAZINES WERE ALLOWED IN THE HOUSE. WE WERE IN BED BY EIGHT, WE WERE NEVER ALLOWED TO STAY UP LATE





Heeramandi

WHEN I DECIDED TO MARRY, I WAS FEELING A HUGE VOID. I WAS SEEKING COMPANIONSHIP. BEING FAMOUS MADE ME QUESTION WHETHER PEOPLE WERE ATTRACTED TO ME OR JUST TO THE IMAGE OF ME



Khel Khel Mein

and we connected during *Om Jai Jagdish*. Over time, life took us in different directions. He got married, settled down and we both got busy. But reconnecting now is wonderful. I'm extremely fond of him and it's great to reconnect. I'm really enjoying this experience.

LET'S TAKE YOU BACK TO YOUR CHILDHOOD. YOU WERE BORN INTO AN EXTREMELY FLAMBOYANT, NOTORIOUS KHAN FAMILY.

To be honest, it was a conscious decision on the part of my parents to shield us as much as possible. No film magazines were allowed in the house. We were in bed by eight, we

were never allowed to stay up late. God knows what they were up to, what was happening, all the drama... which we only heard about much later. We'd meet a few close friends of theirs when they came over early, of course. But we were always packed off after introductions. My parents were conscious of wanting us to have as normal an upbringing as possible. Being born into a family where one parent is famous, people tend to feel entitled to the privileges that come with it. My parents were protective of us, especially me and my sister. They made sure it was as normal as possible.

I FIND IT HARD TO BUY INTO THAT 'PRETTY NORMAL' RHETORIC. FEROZ KHAN'S SON LIFESTYLE CANNOT BE NORMAL.

My father's lifestyle wasn't normal. But he had a tough upbringing himself. He lost his father at the age of 13 and was the eldest of five brothers and one sister. His mother ran a taxi in the 1940s to make ends meet. He started earning money by hustling as a snooker player. He was ranked in the top five in the Karnataka championship. His dream was always to become an actor. He came to Mumbai at a young age. After years of struggle, he was eventually able to bring his family down to the city, including his mother. They lived in a rented flat. He helped his brothers get their first jobs. Abbas Chacha and Sanjay Uncle got their first jobs through him. He got his brother Shah Rukh settled and even sent him to Canada for an MBA, which was a big deal at the time. He'd seen both the best and the worst of life. Whatever he did, he earned it. My father understood the value of sacrifice and hard work. He made sure we

understood that too. He was a no-nonsense dad. He wouldn't indulge us. We sometimes had to clean our plates and put them back in the kitchen. We had tasks and responsibilities around the house.

SO YOU DIDN'T GROW UP ENTITLED OR PRIVILEGED LIKE MANY STAR KIDS?

There is an inherent entitlement and privilege just by virtue of being born into such a family. But we were never made to feel that we were entitled to anything. We were never given privileges, none at all. We went to a normal school, our friends were mostly from outside the film industry. We were consciously shielded from that world. So when I say normal, I mean absolutely normal. Once a year, we'd have birthday parties, and our family holiday would be a trip to Srinagar, where my father's sister lived. That was it. Back then, you went on holiday with your parents. And when he was filming, we'd accompany him if we had holidays. That's when you got a sense of what it meant to be famous.

YOU NEVER SAW YOUR FATHER DO A ROMANTIC SCENE?

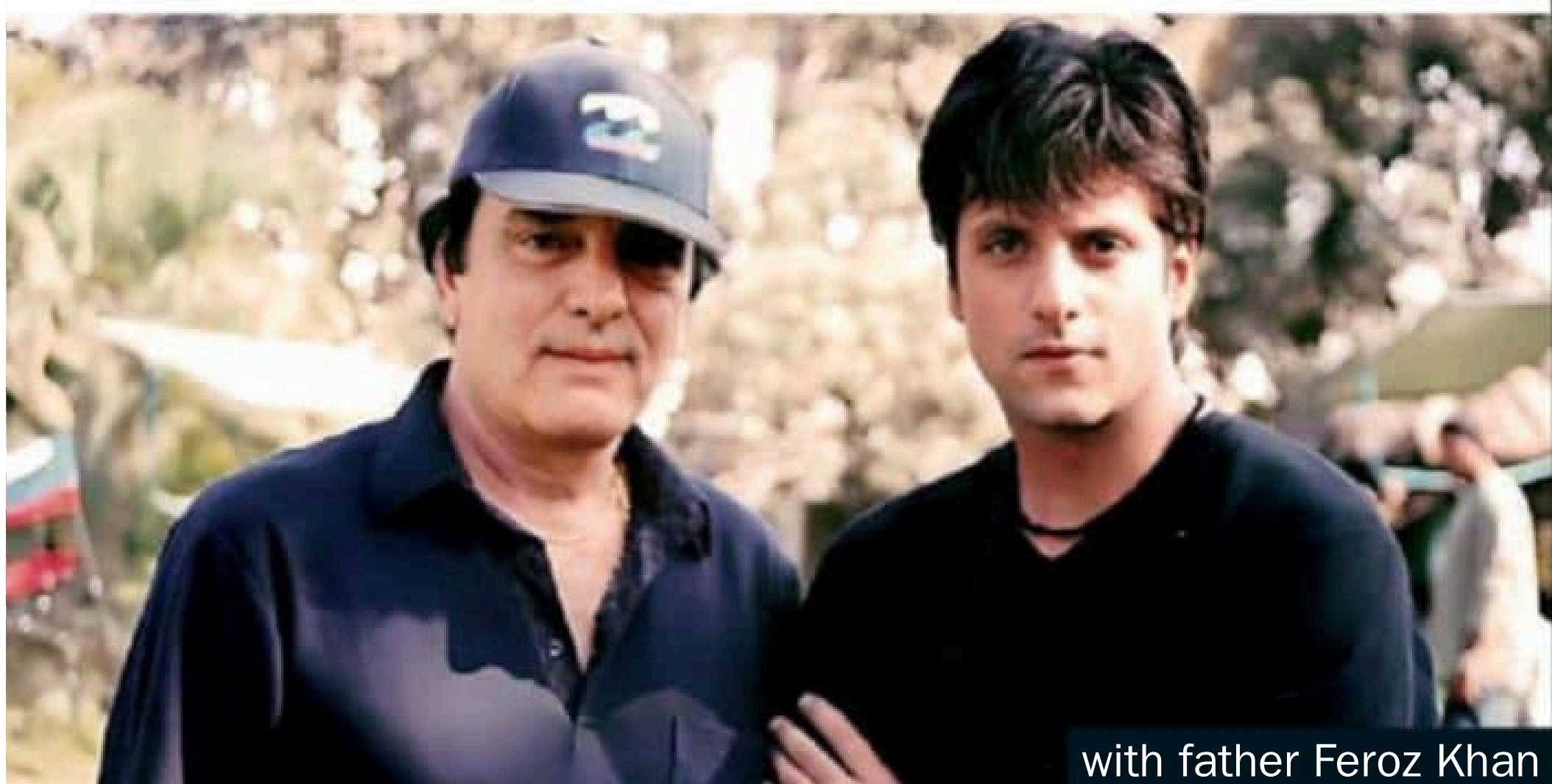
In those days, what

was a 'romantic scene'? It was usually a song. My first memory of a song was *Laila o Laila*. It was my birthday and my father couldn't make it home for the celebration. After the party, I took a cake to the set, where he cut it with me. That's my first memory of a film song. I saw him giving Zeenat Khan these looks and I thought, "What's going on here?" She was so stunning. I remember thinking, "She's beautiful." But of course, I was young. Still, you

who looked after her parents and worked hard during Air India's glory days, when it was run by JRD Tata. She was part of that era. My father, on the other hand, was a formidable personality. He brought that energy home. He was a man who'd seen life for what it was, and he was tough. He showed love in his own way.

WAS THAT A GOOD THING FOR A CHILD?

My father was protective but he wasn't expressive. Once in a while, on



with father Feroz Khan

couldn't help but be in awe of beauty, whether it's human or otherwise. It was an interesting experience, orienting myself to the profession and everything that came with it.

WHAT WAS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MOTHER LIKE? SHE WAS A FLIGHT ATTENDANT, RIGHT?

She flew with Air India for eight years. She was an independent woman

my birthday, there'd be moments. He had his own way of showing affection. But in everyday life, there was a certain formality. I always felt quite intimidated by him. I don't know anyone who wasn't. In a family, you see both the best and the worst of people. And it's a different kind of relationship. You don't just see what the world sees. That's true for all of us. I was



HE'D SEEN BOTH THE BEST AND THE WORST OF LIFE. WHATEVER HE DID, HE EARNED IT. MY FATHER UNDERSTOOD THE VALUE OF SACRIFICE AND HARD WORK. HE MADE SURE WE UNDERSTOOD THAT TOO. HE WAS A NO-NONSENSE DAD

a mama's boy. She was my foundation. I was also very close to my nanny, who was like my second mother. My mother, of course, was very close to my dad. I was a quiet, sensitive and introverted child. I didn't express

myself much. I knew where I needed to go to feel safe, it was a comfort thing. It was important to me, the dynamic between my father and me.

THE STORY I'VE HEARD IS THAT ONE DAY YOUR FATHER

TURNED UP AT SCHOOL ON A HORSE.

No, that was me. My father loved horses. He had one named Rizal, which was stabled a few kilometres from the house. On weekends, the horse would come to our place and he would ride

it on the beach. Horse riding was big back then. My father started riding on the beach and wanted me to learn riding too. I was a bit big for the horse, also I was scared of it. I still remember riding it but I was terrified. He'd take the horse down the stairs to the beach. He wouldn't walk it down; he'd ride it down with me on it. It was quite a sight, the horse and I both freaking out. One day, my father said, "Today, we're going

were all excited. For them, it was a big deal. But I was embarrassed. They cheered. It was quite a moment for them.

YOU BLOSSOMED INTO THIS BEAUTIFUL YOUNG MAN AND DECIDED TO GO TO UNIVERSITY.

It was important to my father to send me to university. He felt insecure about not having a formal education. So he wanted me to complete my degree. He was self-taught, a well-read man with

and discover myself. After partying in places like LA and New York, I ended up at the University of Massachusetts, where I did a business degree. It wasn't my first choice but it was his. Looking back, those were some of the best years of my life.

DID YOU REALISE YOUR FATHER WAS SUCH A SIGNIFICANT FILMMAKER IN THE '70S, WHETHER IT WAS *DHARMATMA* (1975) OR *QURBANI*

premiere were overwhelming, and I was scared. People were reaching out to touch him. I have a picture of him holding onto me, looking scared too. After *Qurbani*, I began to understand his significance in the industry. I'd visited him on the sets before but it was after that film that I truly appreciated his contribution to cinema. I started to understand how much respect he received for his work. I was around six or seven and that was when I began to realise his place in the world of filmmaking.

THAT'S HOW YOU DECIDED TO BECOME AN ACTOR AFTER SEEING THE HUGE PREMIERE?

I didn't decide to become an actor immediately. In the '80s and the '90s, acting wasn't exactly considered 'cool'. People would mock our films, English films were deemed much cooler. Hindi films just didn't have that 'cool factor'. But after I returned from university, there was a buzz around me. Bobby (Deol) had just become a big star, I was the next one in line. People kept saying, "What are you doing, Khan *saab*? You should be a hero!" And that's how it all began

— people saw an opportunity for me.

WHEN YOU MARRIED NATASHA MADHWANI, WAS THAT REAL LOVE? WHEN DID YOU REALISE YOU LIKED HER?

I grew up in a dysfunctional home and didn't really believe in marriage. I always thought the only reason to marry was to have a child. For me, it's about responsibility, backed by law, with both parents equally involved. When I decided to marry, I was feeling a huge void. I was seeking companionship. Being famous made me question whether people were attracted to me or just to the image of me. It was never easy to meet someone beyond the person I was married to.

DID THE FAILURE OF YOUR FILMS AND YOUR CAREER IMPACT YOU?

When I look back, I realise I didn't give the respect my opportunities deserved. I didn't fully utilise them. While I had plenty of opportunities, I wasn't invested in them. I have to take responsibility for that. I didn't approach my work with the seriousness it required. The films felt superficial and I didn't take them seriously. ■

WHILE I HAD PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES, I WASN'T INVESTED IN THEM. I HAVE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THAT. I DIDN'T APPROACH MY WORK WITH THE SERIOUSNESS IT REQUIRED



to school on the horse." I thought it was ridiculous but I did it. The school and our house were owned by the same man, so there was a gate connecting the two. When I arrived at school, the other kids saw me on the horse and they

a curious mind. His friends were industrialists and he had a passion for philosophy and poetry. He believed education was crucial for being a thinking man. He was keen for me to go abroad, to find my independence

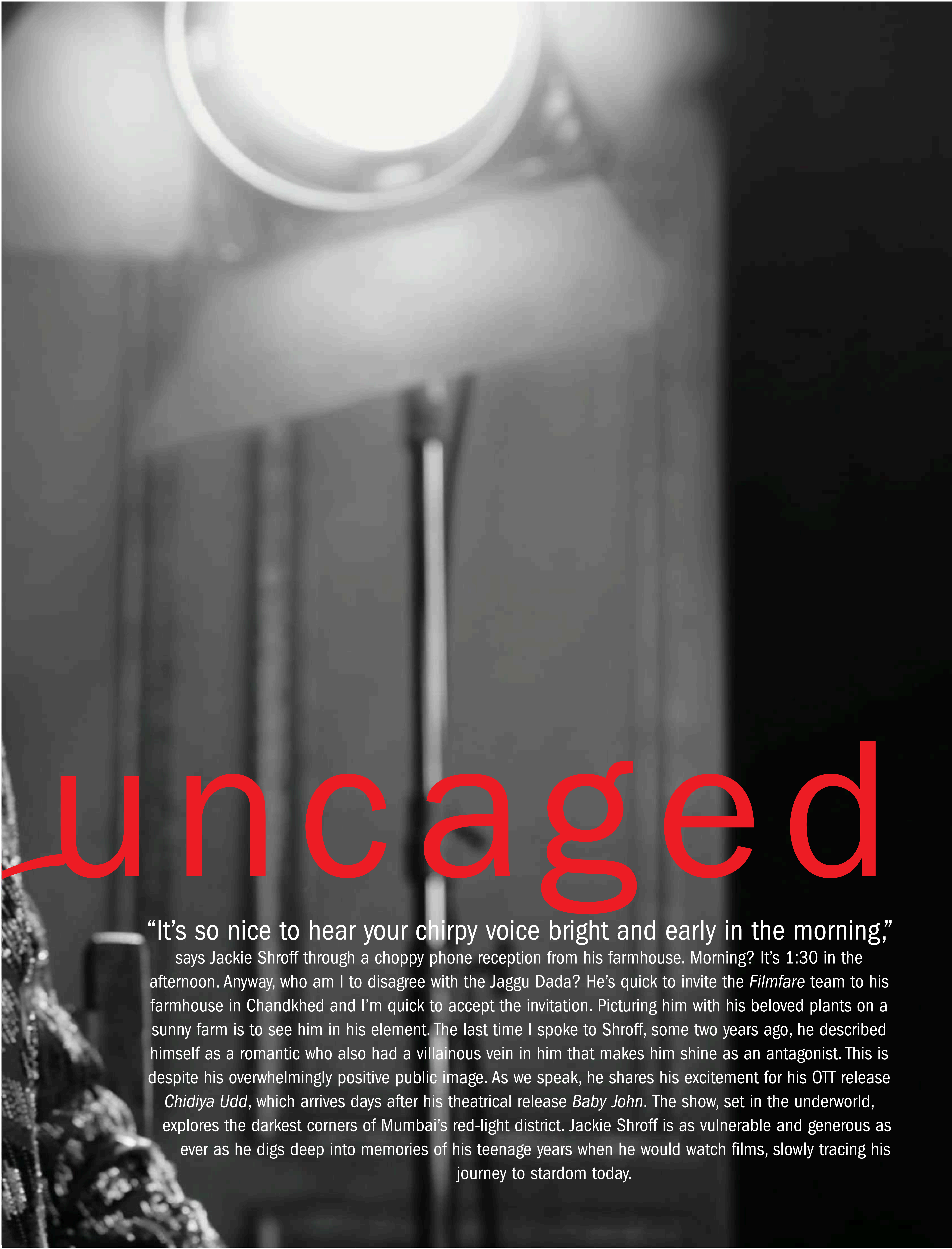
(1980)?

The first film premiere I attended was for *Qurbani* in Delhi. It was chaotic. *Qurbani* was the biggest hit of the year. That was when my father's life changed and he became a superstar. The crowds at the

Swag

**JACKIE SHROFF OOZES SWAG LIKE
OTHER PEOPLE OOZE SWEAT. HE OPENS
UP ABOUT HIS STATE OF MIND TO
TANZIM PARDIWALLA**

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHARUDUTT CHITRAK / FEMINA



uncaged

“It’s so nice to hear your chirpy voice bright and early in the morning,” says Jackie Shroff through a choppy phone reception from his farmhouse. Morning? It’s 1:30 in the afternoon. Anyway, who am I to disagree with the Jaggu Dada? He’s quick to invite the *Filmfare* team to his farmhouse in Chandkhed and I’m quick to accept the invitation. Picturing him with his beloved plants on a sunny farm is to see him in his element. The last time I spoke to Shroff, some two years ago, he described himself as a romantic who also had a villainous vein in him that makes him shine as an antagonist. This is despite his overwhelmingly positive public image. As we speak, he shares his excitement for his OTT release *Chidiya Udd*, which arrives days after his theatrical release *Baby John*. The show, set in the underworld, explores the darkest corners of Mumbai’s red-light district. Jackie Shroff is as vulnerable and generous as ever as he digs deep into memories of his teenage years when he would watch films, slowly tracing his journey to stardom today.

What was your initial reaction to the story and character in *Chidiya Udd*?

I liked my director's name, Ravi Jadhav. He's done *Natarang*, *Balak Palak* and many other beautiful films. Then I saw Amazon and my producers. I felt they were strong people who would take it forward. Regarding the story, I've seen such things happen in old Mumbai, central Bombay back then. That area still exists. There were 28 cinema halls in the red-light district. We used to go there to watch films, walking past the lanes to get home. I've seen the cages closely as a teenager. Growing up, you start understanding the whole thing. In *Chidiya Udd*, my character runs a big brothel and tries to pacify his child. I thought, I should do this; I want to feel what it's like to own a place like this in Kamathipura. What kind of mindset does such a person have? He's calm and easygoing but absolutely devilish. By Jove, I would like to be him.

What was it like witnessing the red-light district as a teenager? How do you reflect on that phase of your life?

It makes you think: What's happening here? Where have

these people come from? You see different faces, all in full makeup, they're sex workers. Then I thought, if they weren't here, what would happen to the city? They serve so many people through their work. If they weren't here, what would happen to Mumbai or any other big city? I still think about it. What is their mindset? What do they feel? What's the person running such a business like? What's happening in their own family? There's so much to it. For me, portraying this role was easier because I've seen that area and grown up around it. As I read and got deeper into the character, I realised I could connect with someone like this. I felt I'd seen such a person before and could portray them.

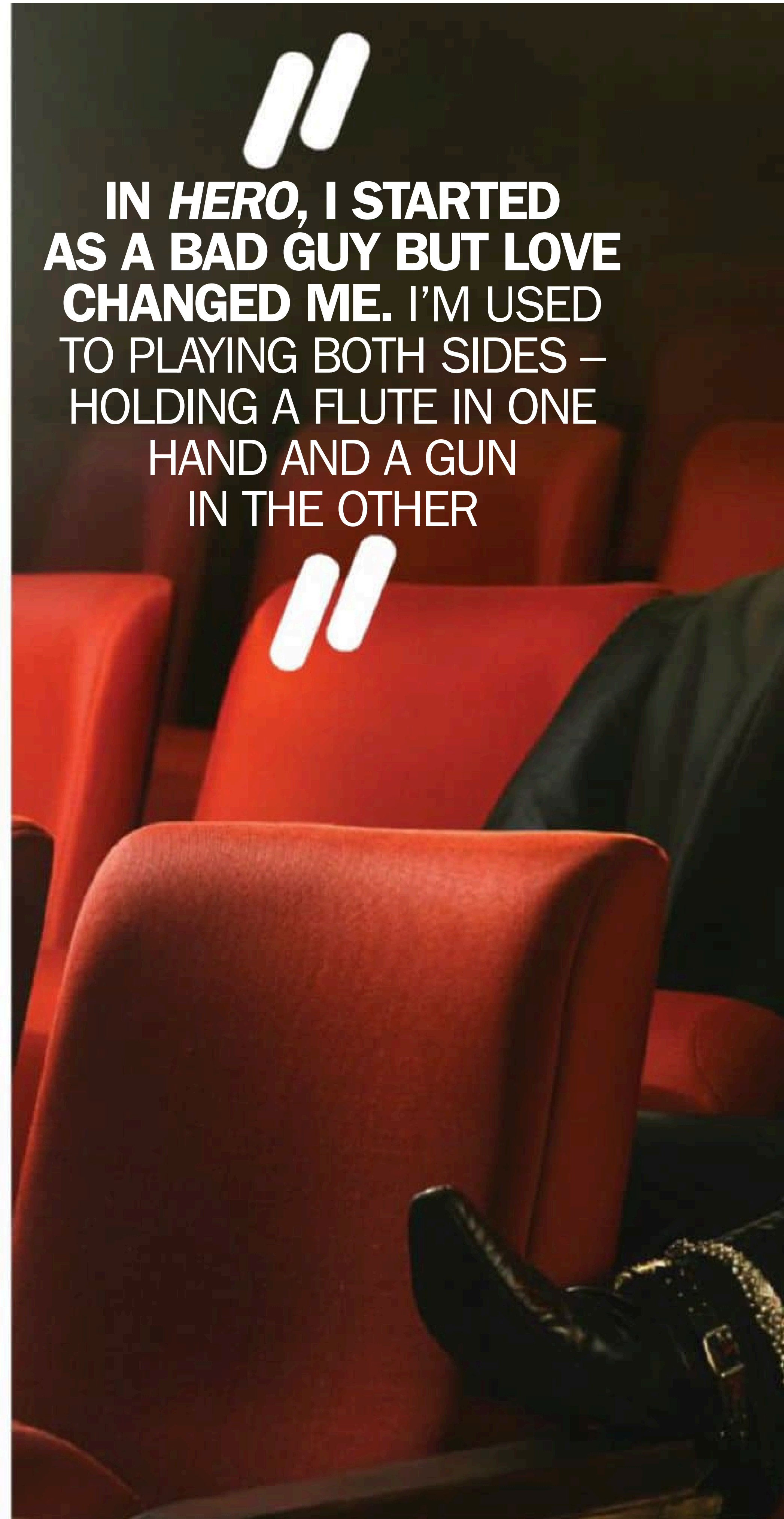
The industry has experimented with you a lot. What kind of roles are you looking for at this stage of your career?

Any kind of role. It doesn't matter. It could be a negative role or something like *Mast Mein Rehne Ka*, where I'm playing a 75-year-old man or something like *Baby John*, where I'm playing a devil. In this film, I'm an underworld guy. Everyone

tries to bring out something new in me, which makes me so happy. I didn't know there were so many things hidden inside me. The more they dig into me, the more they find.

You bring this natural swag to all your characters. Where does it come from?

I don't know. People say, "Jaggu, you have swag." But I've been like this all my life. I was born in South Bombay and this is normal. (Laughs) What I am is normal. Many people might think I'm abnormal. But that's just who I am. I don't pretend to be something I'm not. I keep myself close to nature, enjoy time with friends and give my energy to them. What is swag, though? Bloody hell, I still don't fully understand the word. But people say, "Kya swag hai! Bhaari dikhta hai!" I still feel clumsy but at ease, totally relaxed. I try to keep my mind calm though it's not always possible. Sometimes I feel like a pressure cooker. Thank God for films, where I can let off steam. I also have close ones who let me vent without feeling hurt, though that's difficult. You need a pressure cooker not to cook in, but as a place to release and then return to calm.



IN *HERO*, I STARTED AS A BAD GUY BUT LOVE CHANGED ME. I'M USED TO PLAYING BOTH SIDES – HOLDING A FLUTE IN ONE HAND AND A GUN IN THE OTHER

You are one of the sweetest actors in the industry. How do you tap into the dark side to play negative characters?

Anything that comes to me and if I feel the makers trust me, I do it. I believe in my technicians more than in myself. Once I connect with them and they start handling me, I get into the role. You don't have to be bad to play a bad guy. You don't actually die in a death sequence.

Some people get too serious. *Itna serious nahi hone ka*. In *Hero*, I started as a bad guy but love changed me. I'm used to playing both sides, holding a flute in one hand and a gun in the other.

Many actors hesitate to take on negative or supporting roles but you don't...

In *Devdas*, noone wanted me to do Chunni Babu. But I did it because I loved the role. It didn't bother me that



IN *CHIDIYA UDD*, MY CHARACTER RUNS A BIG BROTHEL AND TRIES TO PACIFY HIS CHILD. I THOUGHT, **I SHOULD DO THIS; I WANT TO FEEL WHAT IT'S LIKE TO OWN A PLACE LIKE THIS IN KAMATHIPURA**



Shah Rukh Khan was playing the title role. For me, a chair has four legs. Take one away and it will fall. It's that simple. In *Mission Kashmir*, I played a really bad man and enjoyed it. I've also played tough, hot-blooded cops. *Woh karne mein mazaa aata hai*. You can't eat *dal chawal* every day. You have to add some spice, a pickle and lemon. When casting directors trust me for a role and see me as the

only fit, I flow with them.

At the Filmfare OTT Awards, we saw you cheering for all the winners. What excites you about this space?

OTT has created so many opportunities. Actors, technicians and writers now have steady work. It's a boom. Television brought opportunities and now OTT is doing the same. People are watching eight episodes of 40 minutes each, which

brings new writers, stories and subjects. There's an audience for everything, including theatre plays at Prithvi and street plays. Film *matlab bada parda*, watching on a big screen, while OTT is like a handkerchief, something you watch on your phone. OTT also reflects life more closely. *Thoda gaali nikal jaata hai*, and hidden aspects are shown. There's more freedom than in films.

We dug into Filmfare's archives and found a video of you on stage with baby Tiger Shroff. Take us back to that moment...

Yes, that was for *Parinda*. Oh my God, he was tiny! He was hungry, so my wife went backstage to feed him. Then she put him in my arms. (Laughs) I wasn't expecting an award but when they called my name, my

wife told me to go up on

stage. So I went with my baby in my arms. He was so sweet. He was asleep the whole time, completely passed out. The iconic Rekhaji presented me with the award. It was such a blessing for my son and for me. To take my son onto the *Filmfare* stage, the biggest stage, was surreal. *Filmfare* has been around for as long as one can remember. ■

Still stealing hearts...

BHAGYASHREE'S SUMAN AVATAR FROM MAINE PYAR KIYA HAS REMAINED ETCHED IN OUR MEMORY SINCE 1989. SHE TAKES FARHANA FAROOK DOWN MEMORY LANE ON THE FILM'S 35TH ANNIVERSARY.

Bhagyashree and Suman. Even 35 years later the real and the reel remain entwined. As the sanskari Suman in Sooraj Barjatya's epic *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989) Bhagyashree symbolises the perfect Indian girl: respectful yet resolute, demure yet determined and a rebel in love. Uncannily, a similar screenplay of obsession vs opposition was being played out in her personal domain. The 'princess' of Sangli had fallen in love with schoolmate Himalaya Dassani and even got married to him during the filming of *MPK* much to the chagrin of her parents, Raja Vijay Singhrao Madhavrao Patwardhan and Rajlaxmi Patwardhan. Eventually easing out from films, the overnight sensation then dedicated herself to domesticity leaving fans and the fraternity distraught. But Bhagyashree never left the public consciousness. Her appearances on television shows, OTT and in films – more recently a cameo in Salman Khan's *Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan* – find its share of cheerleaders. Given her flair for fitness and fashion along with culinary verve, hers is a charismatic presence on social media. "Bhagyashree means 'fortunate'. I started manifesting the meaning. I've enjoyed every phase of my life – doing films, marrying the man I loved, nurturing a family... My children, Abhimanyu and Avantika, are the wind beneath my wings. They now urge me to go out and conquer the world," she beams. Excerpts from a free wheeling interview. Read on:



***Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989) was re-released last year on its 35th anniversary. What made the film special?**

I count my blessings every time I meet people, who tell me *Maine Pyar Kiya* impacted their lives. What resonated with people is perhaps the simplicity of the characters; they're identifiable and close to life. They were not over the top. Also, the team was fresh. It was Soorajji's (Barjatya) first film just as

it was mine. It was Salman Khan's first as lead. The belief that Soorajji had in us made us believe in ourselves. Above all, we had Lady Luck on our side.

It's difficult to separate the protagonist Suman from you. What's the similarity you share with her?

It's been 35 years and people still see me as Suman. The respect that Suman has for all the relationships in her life, towards elders



“
*It's been 35 years
and people
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life , towards elders
and youngsters,
is one similarity
I share with the
character*
”

F INTERVIEW

and youngsters, is one similarity I share with the character. Whether it's the household help, her friend or her father... Suman holds them all in regard.

The frenzy post the release of *Maine Pyar Kiya* was immense. Can you share some experiences?

I could write a book on that. The staircase outside our house would be lined up with Santa Claus-like sacks, full of fan mail. People even wrote in blood. Reportedly, some people fell off the theatre balconies while dancing and throwing coins as the song *Kabutar ja ja ja...* played on screen. For a long time, I couldn't step out of my house. Finally, I developed courage and went to a high-end showroom in Breach Candy to shop for my baby. But within a few minutes I was mobbed. People broke the glass windows to enter. The storekeeper ushered me out from the backdoor. He requested, 'Whatever you wish to purchase will be sent home. Please don't visit the store. We can't handle so much loss.'

Belonging to a conservative family, you refused to do certain romantic scenes in *MPK*?

I was brought up in a traditional home. I was shy. It was the first time I was being filmed in close proximity with the opposite sex. When asked to do certain scenes I'd say, *Yeh nahi ho payega*. Salman and Soorajji were extremely supportive. They'd try to make me understand the necessity of the scene or suggest alterations. We worked as a team with mutual respect. For instance, I said why should I pull up my skirt

to show my 'hurt' knee, when we can show the ankle being hurt instead? In retrospect, all that I refused to do ended up turning into iconic scenes. Like when I refused to wear the off-shoulder dress during the *Mere rang mein* song, Soorajji suggested that I spread a golden drape over the outfit. This way, Prem (Salman) can see Suman in the modern dress, while the audience can't. That heightened the sense of romance.

What was Salman Khan like in those days?

Salman was mischievous and a lot of fun. He's also a solid guy. He made me feel safe. If someone ever

tried to misbehave with me he'd cut it short. He was extremely protective of me. When I decided to get married to Himalaya, Salman was among the first few to know. We had an impromptu reception after the wedding. Salman stayed till the end. He's someone who'll stand by you no matter what. Post marriage whenever we met he'd ask, 'Is everything okay? Do you need me to come over and talk about anything?' He was like an elder brother with a *main hoon* vibe.

Belonging to a royal family in Sangli, how did your father react when he saw you on the screen?

When I joined college my

father categorically stated 'no more skirts'. I remember during the trial of *Maine Pyar Kiya*, when Dad saw me in jeans in a scene; he turned around and gave me a questioning look. That psyches you. But now times have changed. Today, when I'm at a beach resort I wear shorts. It's also important to respect every situation. Like during a family function, if you walk around in a short dress, it would be disrespecting the elders.

Despite your conservative background, you chose to have a love marriage in 1989. How difficult was it to go against your parents' wishes?

It was traumatic and heartbreaking. But every change requires a revolt.



When people ask me how I felt after the success of Maine Pyar Kiya, I was barely aware. I had this beautiful baby with me. That's all I could see



Your conviction can help you cross mountains and oceans. I chose love over fame, money, career and a traditional wedding where I'd have been expected to marry royalty. I belong to a Maharashtrian family. Himalayaji is a Marwari Rajput from Rajasthan. When I married Himalayaji, he wasn't that well off. But what mattered was the belief that this is the person with whom I want to spend the rest of my life. I'm ready to fight tooth and nail for my priorities. Often in life you find yourself at crossroads. Once you've made a decision, you stand by it and make it work.

Was it tough adjusting given

you were a star?

Himalayaji and I got married in January 1989. I shot for the film's posters and the patchwork of the film after I got married. The film released in December 1989. At that point I was pregnant. I delivered Abhimanyu in February 1990. When people ask me how I felt after the success of *Maine Pyar Kiya*, I was barely aware. I had this beautiful baby with me. That's all I could see. Life's not a bed of roses. It would be boring if it were. If life was like a fairytale, I wouldn't have come to know the mettle, the strength I'm made of. I'm a far better person today than what I was at that point of

time. Challenges help you grow. I'm perhaps an old soul.

What was Himalaya's role in helping you deal with the new life?

I had a serious temperament. I was attracted to Himalayaji because he made me laugh. He made light of a situation that would have otherwise bogged me down. I didn't share my worries with him. I doubt if that would have helped. But yes, he helped me see circumstances in a different perspective. Nevertheless, he was also young and in his 20s then. He was not only a husband but had also turned father. We stayed in Vile Parle those days. His friends would come underneath our building and shout out saying 'let's go for a drive'. Himalayaji would say, 'Hey guys, you have forgotten I'm married now and have a wife.'

Yash Chopra apparently called you 'a stupid girl' for opting out of films...

From the professional perspective the only two regrets I have is not working with Manmohan Desaiji and Yash Chopra uncle. For the longest time both kept saying *ek baar haan bol do* and we will start the film. Regretfully, I didn't.

Did Himalaya feel possessive of his dream girl?

Obviously, anyone would feel so. He wanted to cocoon me and keep me all for himself. I believe that hasn't changed even now.

What's the secret of a healthy relationship?

Respect comes first. It's important to respect each other not as monozygotic beings but as distinct

individuals. People want their spouses to be their replicas. And when that happens they can't handle it. Secondly, it's important to be friends. *Dosti mein pyaar ho jaata hai* but in the course of time you tend to forget you were friends first. In friendship you fight and make up. You don't hold grudges. You accept each other.

During the shooting of the TV series *Laut Aao Trisha* (2014), you couldn't move your right hand and were advised surgery. How did you overcome that crisis?

Those days 'depression' was not an easily used term. There was less awareness. Maybe, I was going through it. I kept to myself. I was not in the best space emotionally, mentally and physically. I'd lost belief in myself. One day I stood in front of the mirror and asked myself whether I wanted to befriend this 'under-confident' and 'recluse' of a person. The answer was no. I had become like those, who blamed others for things going wrong in their lives. I decided to change things. I educated myself about the illness.

How did that help?

I enrolled for virtual nutrition and fitness courses from Stanford University and University of Pennsylvania. Learning opened my vision. Each day I set small goals to conquer. Every time I took an exam online and surpassed myself, it increased my confidence. My health improved. I began sharing my knowledge with others. When you help people, the blessings are immeasurable. ■

From Berlin WITH LOVE

ISHWAK SINGH MADE HIS MARK PLAYING A MUTE 'SECRET AGENT' IN THE NEO NOIR DRAMA *BERLIN*. **SUMAN SHARMA** SOUNDS OUT THE RETICENT ACTOR

Ishwak Singh is a recluse. He's naturally shy in real life and hence takes time to open up in an interview. But when he starts speaking, it's like a dam has opened up. Once he has warmed up to you, the conversation flows freely. His role of a mute person in the spy drama *Berlin* has won him accolades all around. The Delhi boy beams when you mention that. I'm beyond thrilled with the appreciation for *Berlin*," he says, his voice brimming with enthusiasm. "This role is unlike anything I've done before. Playing a deaf and mute character who's also a terror suspect and a spy was a once-in-a-lifetime chance. The complexity of portraying such a dark, multifaceted figure was both a huge challenge and an incredible opportunity to push my limits as an actor."

He pauses, reflecting on the preparation required for this role. "When I first got the offer, I was juggling several other projects. So whenever I had a free moment, I'd

attend classes, work with a trainer. Honestly, it became my stress buster. I had a lot of faith in the director, Atul Sabharwal. He's an acclaimed writer and director. Also, the script was one of the best I've ever read. That gave me the confidence to dive in."

Looking back at his career, Ishwak identifies several milestones, but none more significant than *Paatal Lok*. "It was the game-changer. We thought it would be a niche show, but we didn't anticipate the mass appeal it would receive. The audience really connected with it. And now Season 2 has helped me solidify my place in the industry." His character's death midway through the *Paatal Lok Season 2* came as a shock to the viewers. Talking about it, the actor gets emotional. "Ansari's death felt like a personal loss. He was a very special character. I was heartbroken. When I watched the second season, it hit me like a real punch in the gut. Hathiram's world came crashing down,



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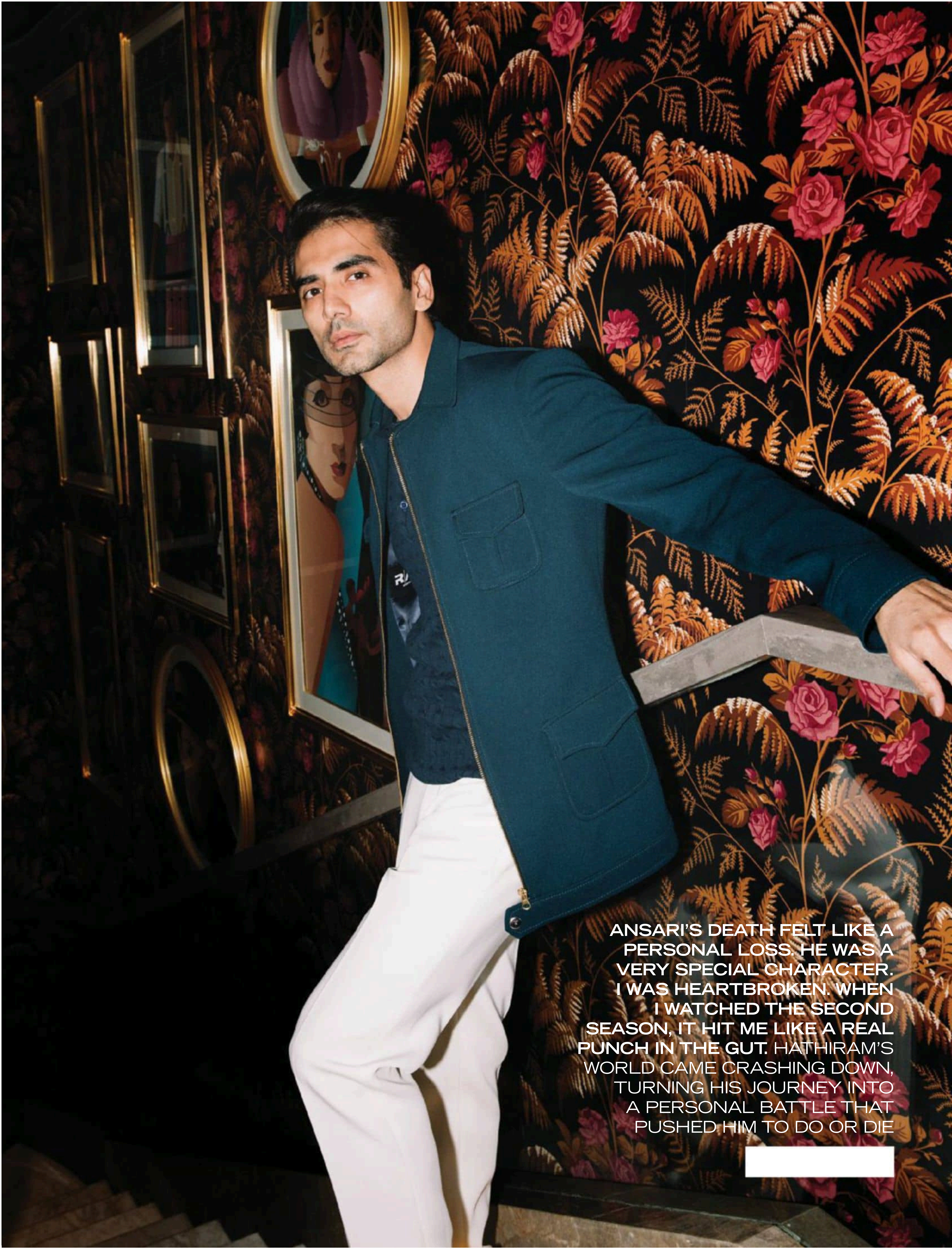
turning his journey into a personal battle that pushed him to do or die."

After *Paatal Lok* came *Rocket Boys* which further cemented his place in the industry. The actor has seen many ups and downs. Though he isn't bitter about his struggle and is

rather stoic about it. He has learnt to take rejection in his stride. "Rejection is just part of the game," he admits, his tone steady and matter-of-fact. "This industry is extremely competitive and patience is the most important thing you need. I started doing theatre in Delhi back in 2010 while also working as an architect. I did that for years, from 2010 to 2017, before making the move to Mumbai in 2018."

He smiles, recalling how his break into movies came somewhat by accident.

"*Raanjhanaa* was an incidental thing. Aanand L Rai came to our theatre group to help Sonam Kapoor understand street theatre for her character. That's when he spotted me. But it was from 2015 onwards that I started doing proper films. It wasn't easy, though. You



ANSARI'S DEATH FELT LIKE A PERSONAL LOSS. HE WAS A VERY SPECIAL CHARACTER. I WAS HEARTBROKEN. WHEN I WATCHED THE SECOND SEASON, IT HIT ME LIKE A REAL PUNCH IN THE GUT. HATHIRAM'S WORLD CAME CRASHING DOWN, TURNING HIS JOURNEY INTO A PERSONAL BATTLE THAT PUSHED HIM TO DO OR DIE

know you're making progress, but people around you only see the numbers. The box office returns, the commercial success, counts a lot. From *Raanjhanaa* to *Paatal Lok*, I went from secondary roles to leading characters. You can say that's been my graph so far." The conversation turns to the early years, before *Paatal Lok* transformed his career. "I started theatre in 2010. I took that leap of faith with the support of my family and friends. But my parents were worried. I had a good academic background, I was a successful student and a budding architect.

spending time with friends or even just relaxing. Over time, I've been living away from my family. It's like being displaced, especially in a city like Mumbai." He pauses, his expression softening. "Mumbai is not an easy city to navigate. It's tough, and sometimes, you need that family support, but you're just... alone. When I'm down, the only thing that keeps me going is my parents. Seeing the pride in their eyes, that's the most motivating thing."

He can now afford to look fondly on his salad days and even laugh at some of the incidents

things I hadn't considered before. I've learnt new things about myself, the deaf community, and even the art of storytelling. It's been such an educational experience. It's the kind of role that forces you to learn. The love for acting itself is what got me through the tough times."

Ask him about his influences and mentors and Ishwak is quick to mention several key figures who have shaped his career. "Arvind Gaur is my mentor. I've worked with him for over eight

in general."

He is a voracious reader and says reading has helped him become a better actor. You can find him engrossed in a book when he's not working. "I think reading is essential, not just for acting but for being a well-rounded person," Ishwak comments. "It's not just about your craft or voice work. It's about understanding techniques, reading plays, diving into literature. The more you read, the more you grow." He's grateful for having

I EAT A LOT OF SWEETS AND CHOCOLATES—THAT'S MY DOPAMINE. ON A SERIOUS NOTE, THOUGH, SURROUNDING MYSELF WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS REALLY HELPS

They couldn't understand why I was venturing into such a competitive and uncertain industry. I was alone in Mumbai, without any connections. It took years for me to gather the courage to pursue this full-time." He nods thoughtfully. "Those years were tough. But the love and support from my family kept me going. And then came *Paatal Lok*. That was the turning point. That was when I knew I had made the right choice."

When asked about the sacrifices he's made, Ishwak reflects on the personal costs of pursuing a career in acting. "For years, I cut myself off from socialising. I didn't have time for it. I missed out on so many things, like

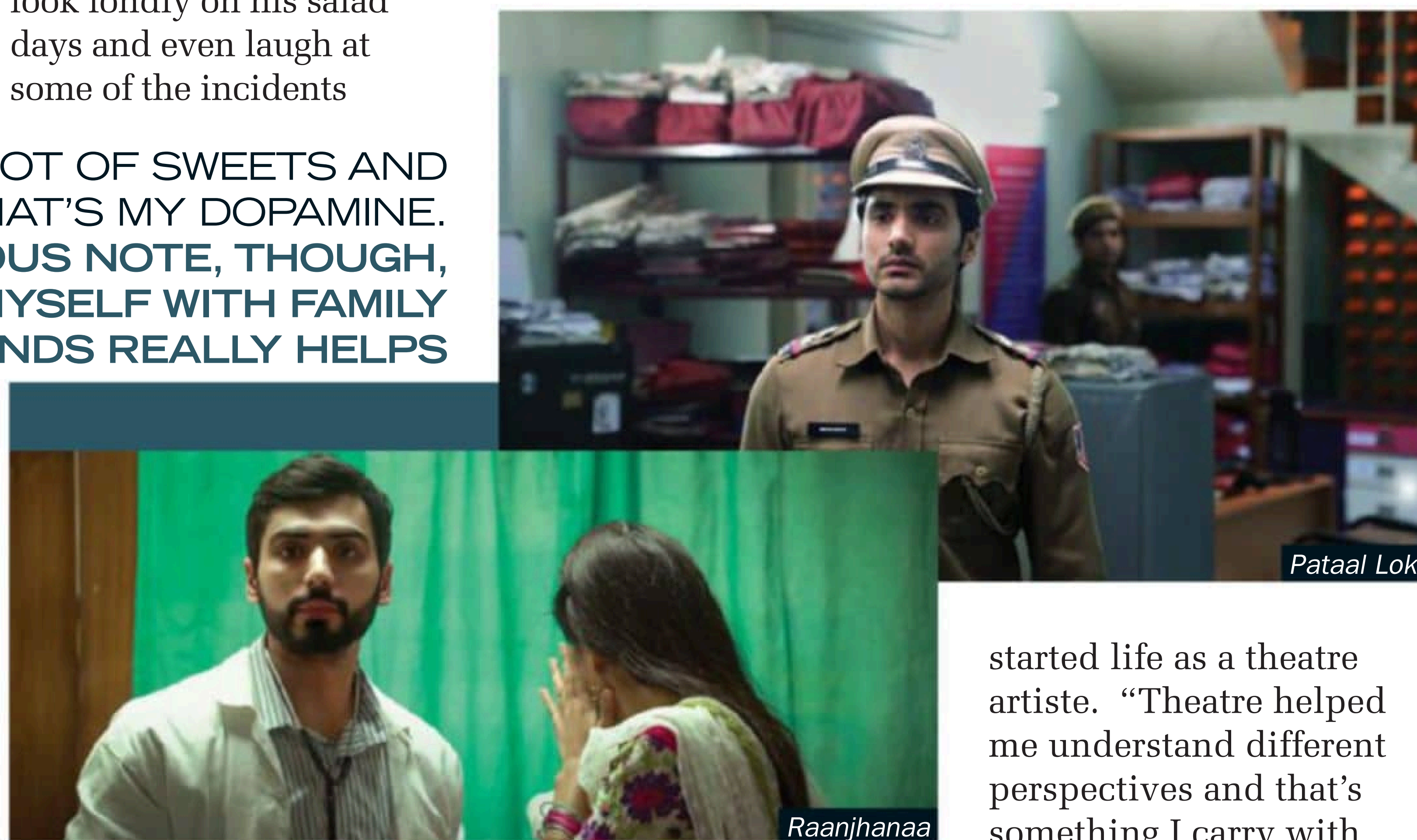
from his past. He says what got him through was his determination and commitment. "I was always passionate," Ishwak says, a slight smile playing on his lips. "I remind myself of those low days because they keep me grounded. It was the love for the craft that kept me going. Acting isn't just a job; it's a way of life for me. If I didn't do it, I would've lost my mind." He continues, "*Berlin* has opened so many doors for me, and it's made me aware of

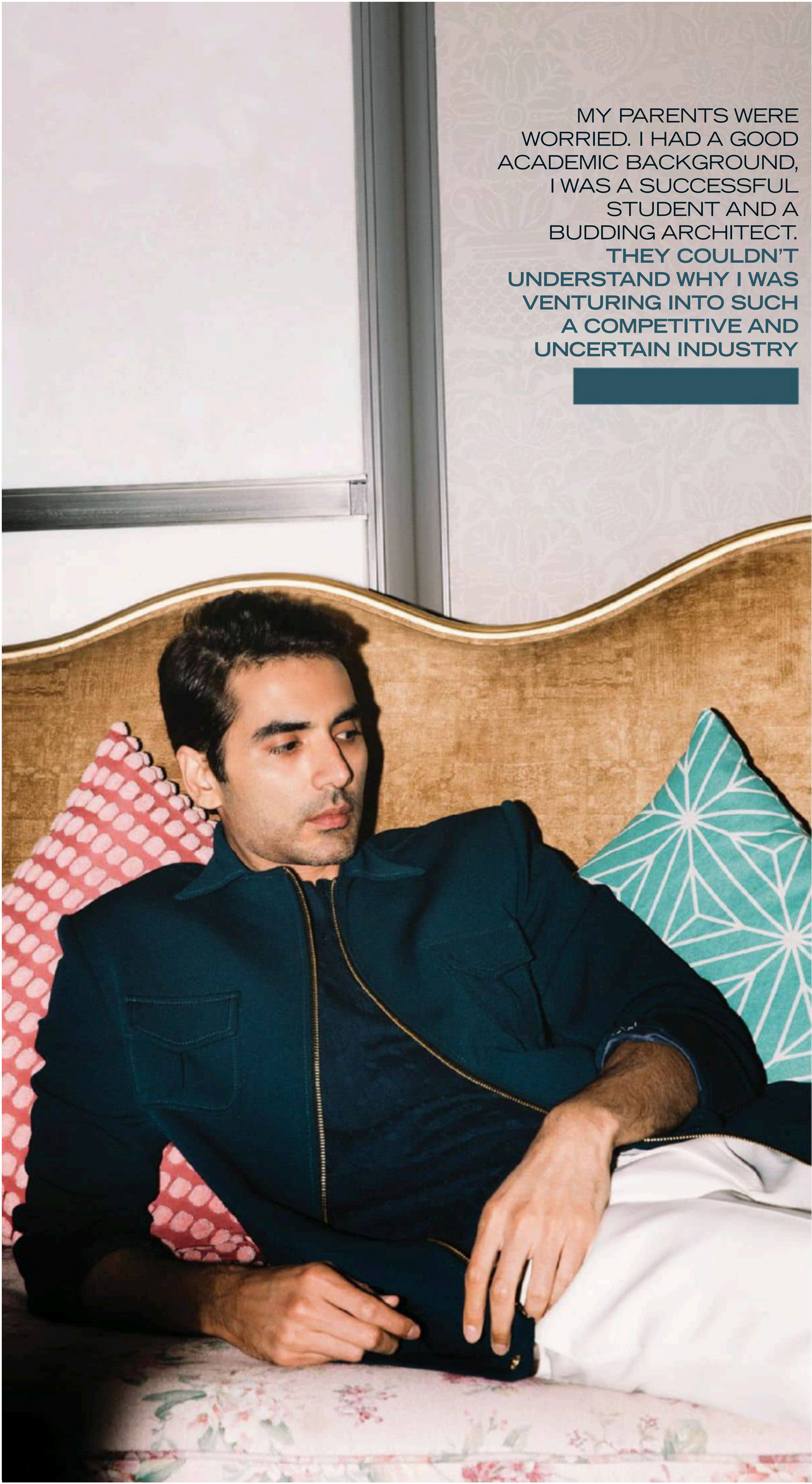
years and he's been a huge influence. Apart from him, I've worked with incredible filmmakers like Hansal Mehta, Imtiaz Ali, Anubhav Sinha, and of course, Atul Sabharwal, who's a dear friend." Like every other actor striving to make his mark, Ishwak too has his idols. He adds, "At the top of my list are Irrfan Khan, Naseeruddin Shah, Manoj Bajpayee, and Mr Bachchan. They've all taught me so much about the craft and about life

started life as a theatre artiste. "Theatre helped me understand different perspectives and that's something I carry with me today."

His theatre background has clearly shaped his approach to acting. "The Asmita Theatre Group helped me learn to collaborate with directors and understand their vision," he explains. "Every role demands a unique process. It's spontaneous and being open to the director's input is key. I always let the script guide me."

We have heard that actors have a hard time maintaining their mental health but Ishwak says





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that's not been the case with him. He laughs as he admits, "I eat a lot of sweets and chocolates. That's my dopamine. On a serious note, though, surrounding myself with family and friends really helps. Over the years, I've realised that this is just work and you can't let the pressure weigh you down. There are challenges but you have to leave them behind when you walk off the set. It's all part of the journey."

As the interview nears its end, talk turns to his personal life. "I'm single and happy for now," he says with a playful smile. "I think love is a beautiful thing, and I'm hopeful it'll come when it's meant to." His definition of love is a little more elusive. "I don't have the perfect definition. For me, it's not about external things. It's about a feeling, a wavelength. In today's world, everyone's chasing their ambitions and in doing so, they miss the opportunities for love. It's a tragedy of our times."

As our conversation wraps up, Ishwak leaves us with a thought that perfectly encapsulates his drive and determination. "I'm not someone who feels creatively satisfied. If I were, I'd stop pushing myself. There's always more to achieve, more to explore. I want to continue doing different kinds of roles, and hopefully, one day, I'll look back and say I gave it my all."

Clearly, the future holds endless possibilities for Ishwak Singh. And the best is yet to come. ■

SHOOTING FROM THE LIPS

*Gulshan Devaiah is a font
of deadpan humour, finds
Suman Sharma*

Gulshan Devaiah has always been prompt and enthusiastic when it comes to giving interviews, making him a delight to engage with. Known for his sharp wit and humor, which often shines through his social media posts, Gulshan brought the same energy to our conversation. He was more than willing to break away from the norm and dive into something unconventional. His readiness to embrace the quirky and his ability to craft clever, offbeat responses made the interaction truly memorable. Excerpts:

1 WHICH IS THE ONE MOVIE YOU WISH YOU COULD HAVE BEEN A PART OF?

There's more than one... I'll choose *Andhadhun*.

2. IS THERE A ROLE FOR WHICH YOU'D GIVE UP ANYTHING?

Nope... Nothing in life should be that important.

3. ONE BOLLYWOOD STAR YOU ARE DYING TO WORK WITH.

Manoj Bajpayee and Sai Pallavi (she's technically not Bollywood as yet).

4. WHICH WAS THE LAST FILM THAT MADE YOU CRY? ANY SPECIFIC SCENES?

Sonic 3. I saw the Greek dubbed version in Athens. There's a scene when they

show the night sky... I cried. It made me remember someone very dear.

5. A FILM YOU SAW RECENTLY THAT YOU THOUGHT IS OVERRATED...

Not recent but *Joker*, the first one. The movie was average, in my opinion. But Joaquin's performance made it seem like a genius film.

6 IF YOUR LIFE WAS A MOVIE, WHICH ONE WOULD IT BE?

No film can depict my life or for that matter, anybody's life as a whole.

7. A GREY MALE ONSCREEN CHARACTER THAT YOU WISH YOU WERE IN REAL LIFE...

Noone in particular. We're

all grey for that matter.

8. WHAT'S THE FUNNIEST THING THAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU ON A FILM SET?

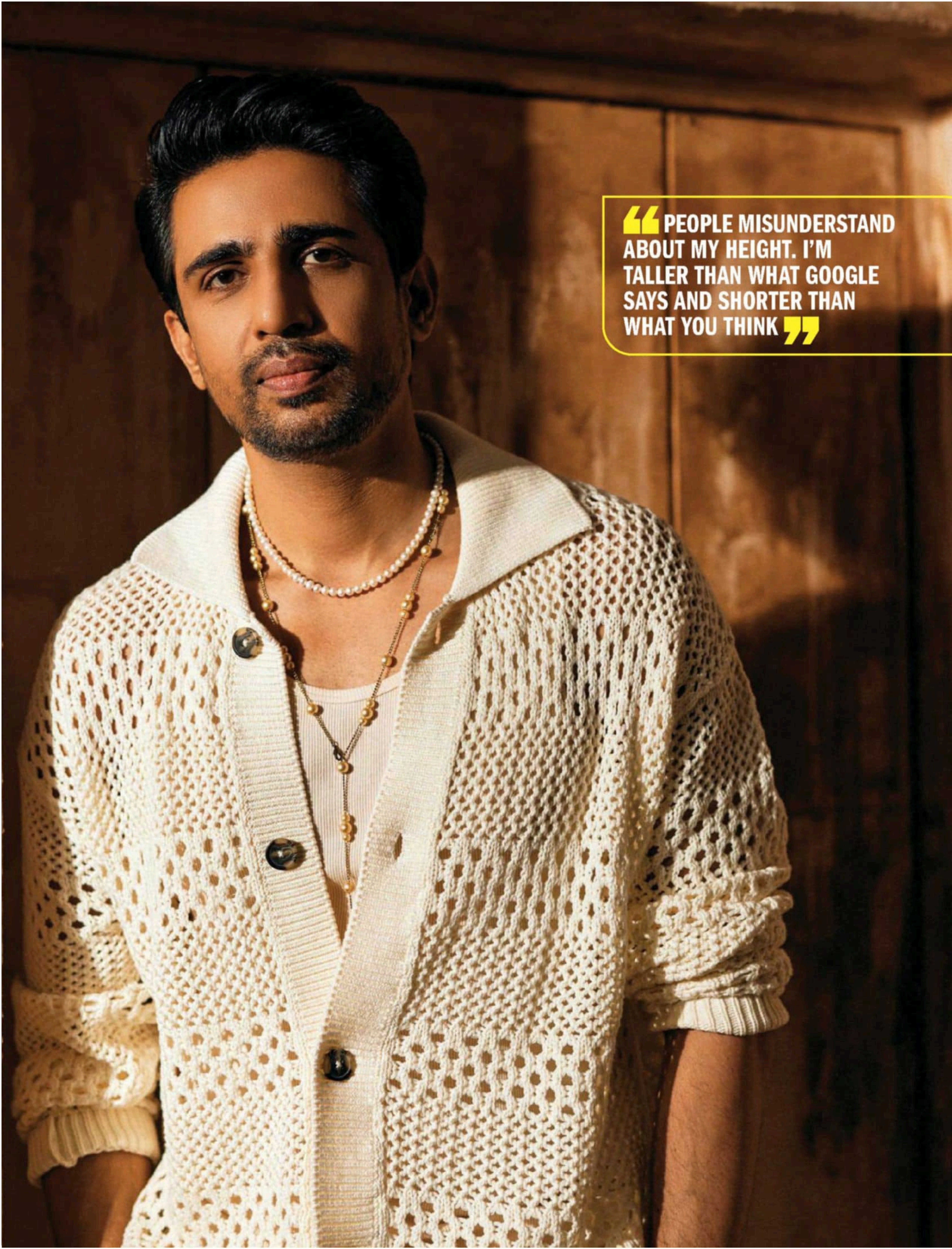
I showed up on the set one day and was ushered into the dressing room. After wondering for a while, I realised I was on the wrong set. It was a cooking show set... I wouldn't have minded being there if I didn't have to be somewhere else.

9. PROFESSIONAL MISTAKES THAT YOU WILL NEVER MAKE...

Be a reality show participant.

10. THREE THINGS YOU DO ON THE SET...

1. Show up on time.
2. Nap in the afternoon.
3. Hum songs.



**“PEOPLE MISUNDERSTAND
ABOUT MY HEIGHT. I’M
TALLER THAN WHAT GOOGLE
SAYS AND SHORTER THAN
WHAT YOU THINK”**

11 IF YOU HAD TO ROMANCE A MAN ON SCREEN, WHO WOULD IT BE?

Maybe Irrfan... if that's possible somehow.

12. ONE ACTRESS YOU WANT TO ROMANCE ON SCREEN

Maybe Smita Patil... if that's possible somehow.

13. THE STAR KID YOU ENVY THE MOST...

Taimur... why is he so cute?

14. THE BOLLYWOOD CELEB YOU'D WANT AS A NEIGHBOUR?

Johnny Lever, of course.

15. HAVE YOU EVER HAD A CRUSH ON A CO-STAR BUT NEVER TOLD HER?

I used to have a crush on Sagarika Ghatge during her *Chak De*. I think I told her that when I worked with her in *Foot Fairy*.

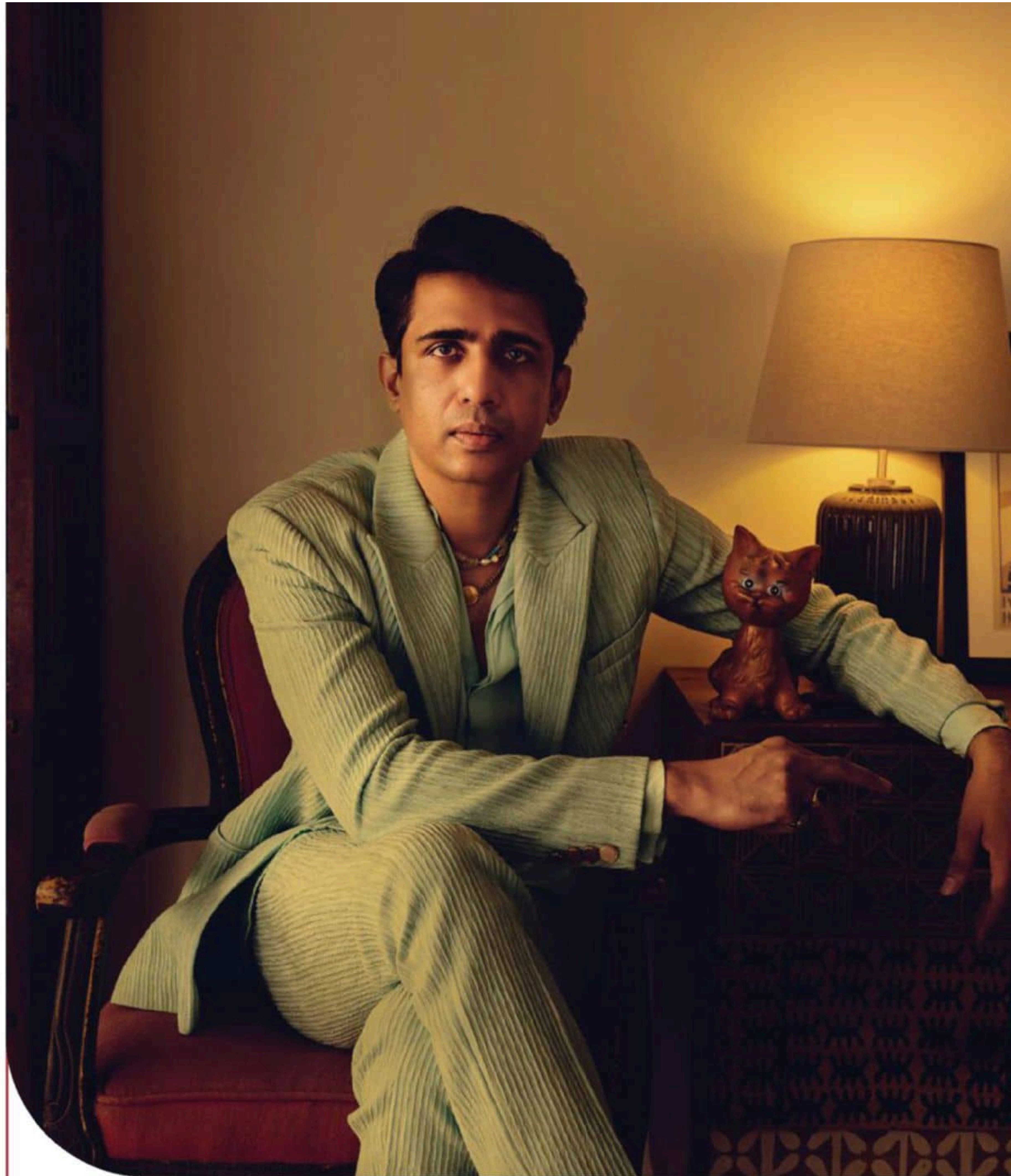
16. IF YOU WERE A JOURNALIST, WHAT IS THE ONE THING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ASK SHAH RUKH KHAN, AKSHAY KUMAR, SALMAN KHAN AND AJAY DEVGN

I'd ask them to give me money. I don't have a specific amount yet but whatever it is, it's going to be back pocket change for them. The compounding interest on the money they'll give me will empower me and my ambition of a simple life in Monaco.

17. WHO'S THE FIRST ACTOR YOU WOULD LIKE TO INTERVIEW? AND WHY

Myself, of course. Who can be more interesting to me than myself? No one.

18. IF YOU WERE TO LOSE YOUR MEMORY, WHAT IS THE ONE THING OR ONE PERSON YOU WILL HAPPILY FORGET?



“
I SAW A GOOGLE SUGGESTION ON MY BROWSER: “GULSHAN DEVAIAH NET WORTH.” I CLICKED ON IT AND ENJOYED READING THE PROPAGANDA LIES
”

Myself. like a proper “Method Actor”

19. IF YOU COULD DO ONE CRIME WITHOUT BEING CAUGHT WHAT WOULD IT BE

If I tell you then I'm stupidly leaving behind a clue.

20 WHAT DO YOU THINK PEOPLE MISUNDERSTAND ABOUT YOU?

My height. I'm taller than what Google says and shorter than what you think.

21. ONE THING YOU WOULD LOVE TO CHANGE ABOUT YOURSELF...

My height

22. ONE FLAW ABOUT YOURSELF THAT MAKES YOU AN IMPERFECTLY PERFECT MAN?

My oddly bent right elbow, perhaps.

23. ONE HABIT YOU HAVE BEEN TRYING TO BREAK FOR A LONG TIME?

Being humble... damn it's the hardest thing for me to quit. I've almost given up

24. HOW DO YOU WANT LOVED



“WHAT PEOPLE REMEMBER ME FOR AFTER MY DEATH IS NONE OF MY CONCERN. WHAT THEY REMEMBER ME AS WHILE I’M ALIVE IS BEYOND MY CONTROL”

ONES TO REMEMBER YOU?

It’s totally up to them. What people remember me for after my death is none of my concern. What they remember me as while I’m alive is beyond my control.

25. WHAT IS THE ONE THING YOU KNOW NOW THAT YOU WISH YOU KNEW WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER?

Merit in the arts is a subjective opinion.

26. IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY TO YOUR TEENAGE SELF?

I’d just observe him from a distance.. I’m telling him nothing.. he’ll have to figure it out himself.

27 YOUR FAVOURITE CHILDHOOD MEMORY WOULD BE...

Wearing my new Hawai *chappals* called Trot from Bata. I must’ve been 4-5 years old. I can remember running up and down with them.

28. WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR WORST DATE?

This one time I can remember is that I was trying too hard. I was low on confidence and none of my jokes landed. She said no. I don’t blame her... and I don’t blame myself either. It was a bit embarrassing, but we all have bad days.

29. IF YOU COULD HOST A PARTY WITH THREE PEOPLE, DEAD OR ALIVE, WHO WOULD YOU INVITE?

Just my darling cat, who passed away in 2024... I don’t want to invite anyone else. Just me and her.

30. IF YOU COULD TALK IN YOUR SLEEP, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Talk? No, I’d sing songs from the ’50s and the ’60s.

31. WHAT’S THE WEIRDEST THING YOU’VE EVER GOOGLED?

To my surprise, I saw a Google suggestion on my browser: “Gulshan Devaiah Net Worth.” I clicked on it and enjoyed reading the propaganda lies.

32. IF YOU WERE GIVEN A CHANCE TO DO ANYTHING YOU CAN FOR A DAY, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Take a nice, uninterrupted nap. What else can be better than a nice nap? Nothing.

32. WHAT DOES YOUR CAR NUMBER SAY ABOUT YOU?

It’s about a great loss.

33. HAVE YOU EVER BROKEN TRAFFIC RULES?

What sort of a question is this... Of course. I’m from India. It’s part of our collective culture.

34. WHAT’S THE MOST USELESS TALENT YOU HAVE?

Nothing that’s worth calling a talent is useless.

35. WHO HAS FULL CONTROL OF GULSHAN DEVAIAH?

Maybe my cats, Ginger Singh and Einstein.

36. IF YOU COULD SWAP LIVES WITH ANY CARTOON CHARACTER, WHO WOULD IT BE AND WHY?

Genie from *Aladdin*... because I’ll be a freaking Genie.

37. IF YOU COULD TALK TO PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI, WHAT WOULD YOU TALK ABOUT?

I’d just like to observe and listen to whatever he has to say.

38 WHAT’S YOUR ONE ANNOYING HABIT?

I think... damn it’s very annoying.

39. WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST FEAR?

Of getting duped/scammed both online and offline

40. IF YOU COULD BE TRANSFORMED INTO ONE ANIMAL, WHICH ONE WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Myxozoa.

41. ONE MISTAKE YOU WOULD NEVER REPEAT IN A RELATIONSHIP?

Lack of patience.

42. ONE EMBARRASSING MOMENT IN YOUR LIFE THAT

STILL MAKES YOU CRINGE...

Nothing really because I’m working on getting over such things. I suffer in my imagination, unnecessarily. I don’t want to.

43. WHAT’S THE MOST EMBARRASSING THING YOU’VE DONE IN PUBLIC?

Peed in my *chaddis* in middle school.. or was it primary school.

44. IF YOU HAD A WARNING LABEL, WHAT WOULD IT SAY?

Warning: He’s a winding mountain road and will take his time to make the point but also often gets lost in his dreams.

45 WHAT IF A PERSON OF THE SAME SEX HITS ON YOU?

It’s not a problem. I’m straight and I’ll always find a way to let them know.

46. WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT FOR YOU - MONEY OR FAME? AND WHY?

I need time to think. I’ll get my IT cell to forward my answer on WhatsApp when I figure it out. Great question.

47. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU BOUGHT VEGETABLES FOR YOUR HOUSE?

Every day. And fruit too.

48. ONE THING YOU BELIEVE ONLY MEN CAN DO

Have XY chromosomes.

49. ONE REGRET YOU DON’T WANT TO HAVE WHEN YOU GROW OLDER?

That I’m older.

50. IF YOU WERE TO WRITE A BOOK, WHAT WOULD IT BE ABOUT?

Recipes that I’ve completely made up in my kitchen.

TRES
UNTAMED:
HE LOVES TO
WALK ON THE
WILD SIDE

NATURAL BORN SLAYER

SUNNY KAUSHAL CLICKED IN HIS STYLISH
BEST IN OUR PHOTOPLAY

PHOTOGRAPHER: MANASI SAWANT | STYLIST: ANISHA JAIN | HAIR: DARSHAN YEWALEKAR | MAKEUP: SAJID KHAN
Costume: Peter England | Jewellery: Tichu



ATLAS
COMPLEX...
HE'LL HOLD
UP THE WORLD
FOR YOU



URBAN
HUNTER:
THE GAME'S
ALWAYS
AFOOOT

FRESH OFF

2025 IS SET TO WITNESS A HOST OF NEW FACES BOTH IN FRONT AND BEHIND THE CAMERA, REPORTS SRIJITA SEN

The entertainment industry is constantly evolving, and the OTT space is seemingly giving traditional theatre tough competition. With changing times and trends, audiences are also looking forward to seeing fresh faces on screen and behind the camera, bringing newer perspectives. From the children of Bollywood icons to completely new faces entering the spotlight, this year will introduce a host of promising individuals. Whether it is acting or direction, these young talents are set to bring their unique stories to the screen. For example, Aryan Khan, Shah Rukh Khan's son, has chosen to take up direction and will be helming a show providing insight into the film industry. Among the actors, we have Raveena Tandon's daughter, Rasha Thadani, and Ajay Devgn's nephew, Aaman Devgan. Here's a closer look at the actors and filmmakers who will be making their foray into the limelight in 2025.

A C T O R S

IBRAHIM ALI KHAN

The trend of Karan Johar launching new faces continues with Saif Ali Khan's son, Ibrahim Ali Khan. The filmmaker officially announced that the star kid will be debuting with Dharma Productions' *Nadaaniyan*. The film is helmed by debutant director Shauna Gautam. Ibrahim was seen briefly in Saif and Kareena Kapoor Khan's 2008 film *Tashan* and also worked as an assistant director on Johar's *Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani*. He will also be stepping into the spotlight with a thriller set in Kashmir called *Sarzameen*. The film also stars Kajol and Prithviraj in key roles. The release dates of these projects have not been announced.



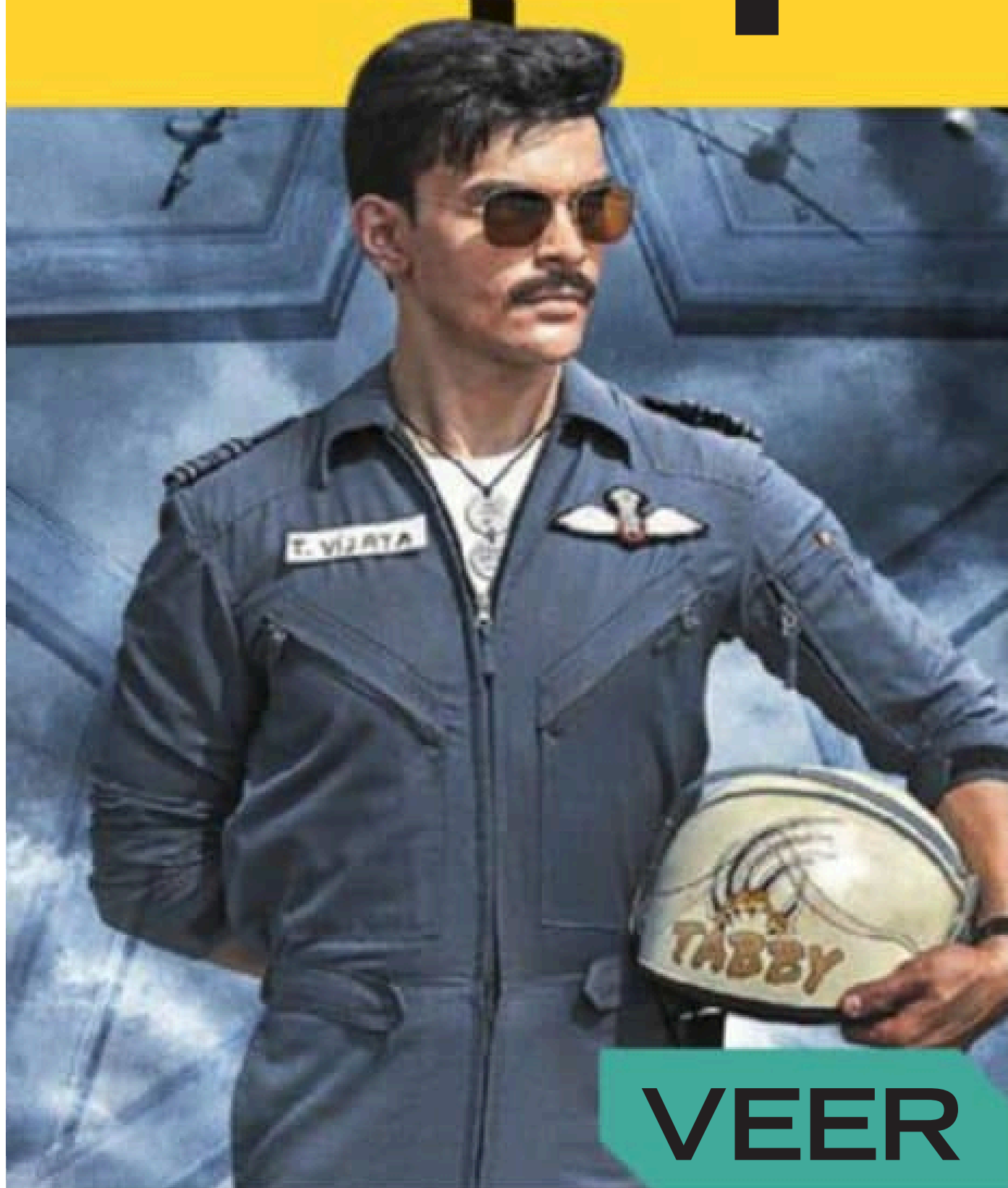
SHANAYA KAPOOR

Shanaya Kapoor's debut has been on the cards for a long time. Karan Johar's *Bedhadak* was supposed to launch her. But it was shelved for reasons unknown. Things slowed down for Sanjay Kapoor's daughter when this Dharma film did not work out. But the star kid has finally found her launchpad, *Aankhon Ki Gustaakhiyaan*, alongside Vikrant Massey. According to the makers, the Santosh Singh directorial is a "contemporary take on romance and ghosting." The newcomer wrapped shooting for it at the end of January this year. She also has Mohanlal's pan-India film *Vrushabha* in the pipeline.



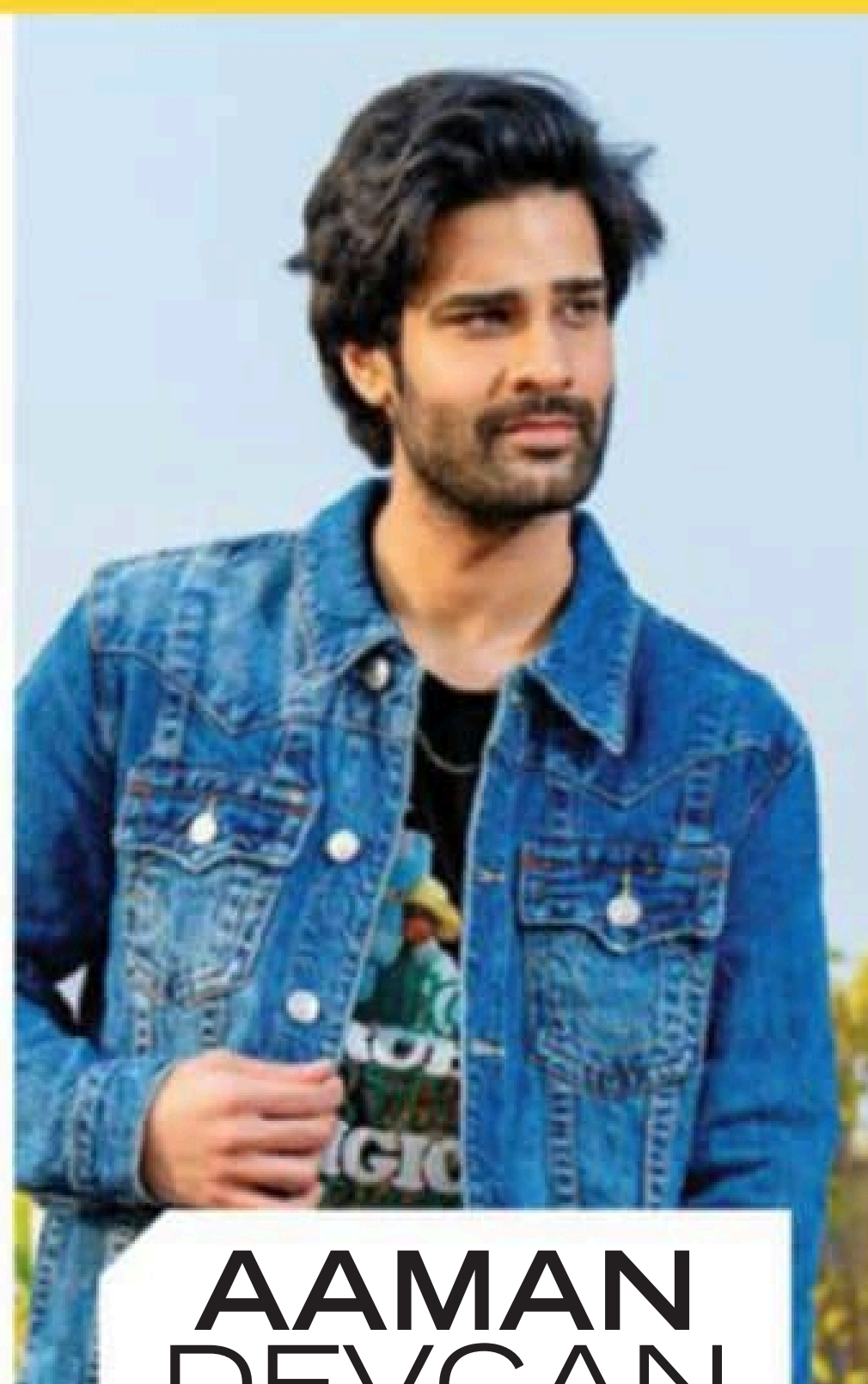
**Bollywood
Actors
Making Their
South
Debut**

THE BOAT



VEER

Sky Force, another patriotic film from Akshay Kumar's repertoire, has launched a fresh face, Veer. If you are not living under a rock, you have already seen several trending Instagram reels featuring him. The young actor is the maternal grandson of former Maharashtra Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde. Veer worked as an assistant director on Amar Kaushik's *Bhediya*. He also served as Varun Dhawan's body double. *Sky Force* is directed by debutant directors Sandeep Kewlani and Abhishek Anil Kapur and is bankrolled by Dinesh Vijan's Maddock Films.

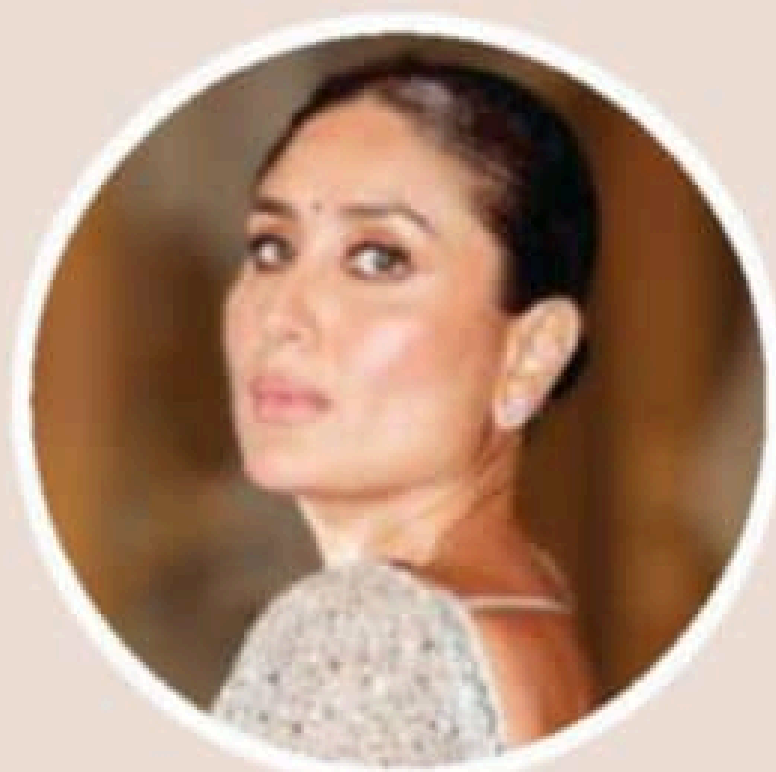


AAMAN DEVGAN

Alongside Rasha Thadani, Aaman Devgan made his theatrical debut with *Azaad*. Aaman is the son of Ajay Devgn's sister, Neelam Devgan Gandhi. He comes from a family deeply rooted in the film industry. Before the release of the film, Devgn praised his nephew and his dedication to his craft, saying, "He is a very hardworking boy." *Azaad* turned out to be a significant launchpad for both Aaman and Rasha.

RASHA THADANI

The year 2025 marked the debut of Rasha Thadani, the daughter of actress Raveena Tandon and Anil Thadani. At the young age of 20, Rasha shone on screen and impressed everyone with her charm, not to forget, her expressions, which many say the youngster has inherited from her skilful mother. Rasha was seen in the period drama *Azaad* alongside Ajay Devgn's nephew, Aaman Devgan. The Abhishek Kapoor directorial released in January this year.



KAREENA KAPOOR KHAN

FILM: UNTITLED

Kareena Kapoor Khan will be stepping into the South industry this year. However, details about the project are under wraps.



SOHAIL KHAN

FILM: NKR21

Sohail Khan will make his Telugu debut in Nandamuri Kalyan Ram's upcoming action-thriller *NKR21*. He will play a negative role in the film.



ALI FAZAL

FILM: THUG LIFE

Ali Fazal will be seen in Kamal Haasan's *Thug Life*, which is being helmed by the legendary filmmaker Mani Ratnam.



AKSHAY OBEROI

FILM: TOXIC

Akshay Oberoi is set to make his Kannada debut with Yash's *Toxic*. The film also stars Kiara Advani, Nayanthara and Huma Qureshi.



SHANAYA KAPOOR

FILM: VRUSHABHA

Shanaya Kapoor will also make her South debut with Mohanlal's *Vrushabha*. It is a high-budget Telugu-Malayalam bilingual, directed by Nanda Kishore.

ARYAN KHAN

Not just actors, 2025 will also see the entry of new directors in the industry who will presumably bring a fresh perspective. Shah Rukh Khan confirmed the long-anticipated debut of his son, Aryan Khan, in November. Unlike his father, the youngster will not be seen in front of the camera. Instead, he will be seen wielding the baton. His debut project is called *Ba***ds Of Bollywood* and it will offer an insight into the lives of people in showbiz, a world the star kid has closely observed while growing up. Lakshya, Sahher Bambba and Mona Singh are said to be playing key roles in the series, amid star-studded cameos by Shah Rukh Khan, Ranbir Kapoor and Bobby Deol among others.



SHAUNA GAUTAM

Shauna Gautam, who has worked as an assistant director on *Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani*, is set to make her directorial debut with *Naadaniyaan*. Starring Khushi Kapoor and debutant Ibrahim Ali Khan, it is touted to be a rom-com. Shauna's portfolio includes working as a trainee assistant director on Devika Bhagat's *One By Two* and Rajkumar Hirani's *Sanju*. Her work experience in these films has equipped her with storytelling skills. The young filmmaker is expected to bring forward a fresh perspective that will resonate with audiences.



SANDEEP KEWLANI

Sandeep Kewlani has been associated with *Runway 34* and *Bholaa* and has co-helmed Akshay Kumar's *Sky Force* along with Abhishek Anil Kapur. The film also stars Veer, Nimrat Kaur and Sara Ali Khan. It received rave reviews for its balanced portrayal of nationalism and patriotism, bringing forward a story from the pages of India's history that was not widely known. He also runs the production house GoodKarma Films.

DIRECTORS

South Actors Making Their **Bollywood Debuts**

SAI PALLAVI
FILMS: RAMAYANA, EK DIN



Sai Pallavi will make her Bollywood debut with Junaid Khan in the film *Ek Din*. She also has another highly anticipated Bollywood film in her kitty, Nitesh Tiwari's *Ramayana* co-starring Ranbir Kapoor.



SHEENA CHOHAN
FILM: SANT TUKARAM

Sheena Chohan, known for films such as *The Train*, *Ant Story* and *The Fame Game*, will play the lead in her Bollywood debut film *Sant Tukaram* directed by Aditya Om.

SREELEELA
FILM: UNTITLED



Kisik song fame Sreeleela will be foraying into Bollywood this year, as she confirmed on the Rana Daggubati Show. However, details about the project have not been revealed yet.



ABHISHEK ANIL KAPUR

Abhishek Anil Kapur co-directed *Sky Force* with Sandeep Kewlani. After the success of the film, the debutant director expressed his gratitude, saying, "I'm immensely grateful to Akshay Kumar, who trusted me, and to Dinesh Vijan, Amar Kaushik, and Jio Studios for believing in my vision." Kapur started his career in 2010 as an assistant director on *Shor In The City* and was also a part of films such as *Dangal*, *Kai Po Che* and *Go Goa Gone*.



KARAN SINGH TYAGI

Akshay Kumar will be sharing the screen for the first time with Ananya Panday in director Karan Singh Tyagi's debut film reportedly titled *Kesari Chapter 2*. It is a biopic of lawyer C. Sankaran Nair and also stars R Madhavan. The biopic is set against the backdrop of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and is adapted from the book *The Case That Shook The Empire*. Karan Johar's Dharma Productions is bankrolling this project as well. The film will see Akshay Kumar's character facing the British government in the aftermath of the 1919 massacre.



VIVEK DASCHAUDHARY

Rajkummar Rao and Patralekhaa are set to make their debut as producers, and their first film titled *Toaster* is helmed by Vivek Daschaudhary, who is making his directorial debut. He worked as an assistant director on the web series *Guns & Gulaabs*. The film is expected to go on floors soon and will be an OTT project.

KAYOZE IRANI

While Boman Irani's son, Kayoze Irani, previously directed a segment in the anthology *Ajeeb Dastaans*, he is now set to make his debut as a feature film director with a film reportedly titled *Sarzameen*.

It supposedly revolves around an army officer who will go to any extent to free Kashmir from terrorism. It stars Kajol and Prithviraj, along with debutant actor Ibrahim Ali Khan. Kayoze, who has appeared in front of the camera in films like *Student Of The Year*, *Bombay Talkies*, *Youngistann* and *The Legend Of Michael Mishra* is now taking the leap behind the lens. It will be interesting to see his transition from being an actor to director.



A JOURNEY THROUGH STORIES

BENGALI DIRECTOR **ARJUNN DUTTA** DOESN'T BELIEVE IN SUGARCOATING LIFE. **SRIJANI ROY CHOWDHURY** GETS TO KNOW HIS PHILOSOPHY

Arjunn Dutta is indeed a filmmaker to watch, as he continues to carve out his unique cinematic legacy, blending heartfelt storytelling with a passion for exploring the nuances of human connections. He's a complete outsider who started his journey without a mentor. His passion for cinema has been his guiding force. He always had an eye for the unusual and found himself gravitating to stories which had drama and yet were rooted in life. As a broad perspective, his films are stories where the underdog gets prominence and yet his flaws aren't neglected. Dutta doesn't believe in glorified characters but in flawed ones. His debut film *Abyakto* (2018) speaks of an unease that lies between a mother and a son. *Guldasta* (2020)



was a tale of three women going through different things in life and how they coped with life's curveballs, while *Shrimati* (2022) pointed out that being a housewife too is a choice and shouldn't be looked down upon. His upcoming film *Deep Fridge* (2025) is a sympathetic examination of a broken marriage. We're meeting at a popular cafe in Kolkata. He promptly finishes his first cup of coffee as I question...

“ I’VE ALWAYS LOVED TELLING STORIES... AND FROM A YOUNG AGE, I WOULD MAKE UP STORIES. I WOULD NARRATE FANTASIES AND CLOSELY OBSERVE MY MOTHER’S AND GRANDMOTHER’S REACTIONS ”

What has always been the driving force behind your work?

I've always loved telling stories. I was born in Kolkata, a city known for its rich art and culture. From a young age, I would make up stories. I would narrate fantasies and closely observe my mother's and grandmother's reactions. I've always felt a deep connection to storytelling, it came naturally to me. Even as a child, I devoured books and was completely hooked on '90s Bollywood movies. It was clear to me that filmmaking was the world I wanted to be a part of.

Your journey in filmmaking started with short films. Can you tell us a little about how it all began?

Yes, it was a bumpy road initially but I knew from



“WE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH GROWING UP, BUT CINEMA OFFERED AN ESCAPE, A DIFFERENT WORLD TO IMMERSE MYSELF IN. MY FIRST BIG PROJECT WAS *ABYAKTO* (2018), AND I ENDED UP WINNING THE FILMFARE AWARD FOR BEST ORIGINAL STORY”

the start that I wanted to make films. I made my first short film, *The 6th Element* in 2016. I was a huge Bollywood lover and it had a massive influence on my work and my life. We didn't have much growing up, but cinema offered an escape, a different world to immerse myself in. My first big project was *Abyakto* (2018), and I ended up winning the Filmfare Award for Best Original Story. Since then, I've been quietly making my mark in the film industry, telling stories that connect with people.

What made *Abyakto* so special for you?

Abyakto is special for many reasons. It's the film that put me on the map as a serious filmmaker. My friend Sudip, who is no longer with us, connected me with the producers. We shot it in just 10 days. It didn't have a big budget but the energy on the set was electric. It was a young team and we were all working with passion. I didn't make it strategically; I made it from my heart. I think that's what made it connect with people.

The relationship between the mother and son in *Abyakto* seemed to be personal.

Can you elaborate on that?

Absolutely. I lost my mother last year. We were close. The relationship in *Abyakto* reminded me of my bond with my mom and my grandmother. In many ways, the film was a tribute to them. It's a personal story for me.



Shrimati

“ THE RELATIONSHIP IN *ABYAKTO* REMINDED ME OF MY BOND WITH MY MOM AND MY GRANDMOTHER. IN MANY WAYS, THE FILM WAS A TRIBUTE TO THEM. IT'S A VERY PERSONAL STORY FOR ME ”

Let's talk about your latest film, *Deep Fridge*. What inspired you to tell the story of unhappy couples?

Deep Fridge is quite different from other films. I've seen unhappy couples around me, couples who sleep in the same bed but don't face each other, they face the wall. That idea was the starting point. Divorce rates are still low in India. But it's something people are talking about more now.

Divorce isn't something we're comfortable talking about. But it's a real phenomenon. The film doesn't aim to stigmatise divorce; if two people are unhappy, why not part ways and live a happier life? That was the idea behind it.

In an era where action-packed films dominate, how do you manage to focus on human connection in your stories?

The more human a story is, the better it connects with the audience. People are drawn to stories that touch them emotionally. I'm a Cancerian, so an emotional person. I'm sensitive to things, and I observe people closely. My family, especially the two strong maternal figures I had growing up, have had a significant

influence on my work. It's that upbringing and the way I've been raised that shapes my perspective and how I tell stories.

Your films often feature strong female characters. What makes you choose such empowering roles?

I believe the female characters in my films are strong in their own unique ways. Arpita Chatterjee's character in *Abyakto*, for instance, is a resolute woman. Swastika Mukherjee's portrayal of Shrimati in the film of the same name is that of a lovable, dedicated housewife. In *Deep Fridge*, Tanusree's character is uncompromising and determined. When it comes to choosing actors, I always try to match



The 6th Element



Biryani



Deep Fridge

the actor to the role I've envisioned. For example, for Arpita's character, I needed someone who could portray a woman in her mid-30s and mid-50s, as the story follows a time jump. Arpita was perfect for the role because she has this strong, beautiful personality that fit the character perfectly.

It seems you believe that no character should be glorified.

Yes, I believe every character is flawed. No one is perfect and that's what makes them human. Over time, these characters learn from their mistakes and grow. That's the beauty of storytelling,

watching characters evolve and learn. Life isn't about perfection; it's about navigating flaws and learning from them.

You've worked with some remarkable actresses like Swastika Mukherjee and Tanusree. What do you look for when working with them?

Swastika and Tanusree are both incredibly talented. Swastika was my first choice for *Shrimati* because I knew she could bring depth to a role that was so different from the glamorous characters she had played before. Tanusree is an underrated actress, but her performance in *Deep*

“DIVORCE ISN'T SOMETHING WE'RE COMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT, BUT IT'S A REAL PHENOMENON. THE FILM (DEEP FRIDGE) DOESN'T AIM TO STIGMATISE DIVORCE; IF TWO PEOPLE ARE UNHAPPY, WHY NOT PART WAYS AND LIVE A HAPPIER LIFE?”

Fridge takes the character to a whole new level. After this film, I believe people will see her in a different light.

Abir Chatterjee plays the male lead in *Deep Fridge*. What was the casting process like for him?

Abir was the last one to confirm for the role. I had to chase him for two to three months before he finally signed on. But once he did, I knew he was perfect for the role. He's so different in this film. Even if people have mixed opinions about his character, they'll ultimately want a husband like his character, Swarnava.

How important are the awards to you, especially your Filmfare win for *Abyakto*?

Filmfare is a huge deal for me. Growing up, I watched the Filmfare Awards with so much excitement. To win one, especially for *Abyakto*, was a surreal experience. My family was more excited about the *Filmfare* win than anything else. It was a moment I'll never forget. I remember zoning out when they announced my name. It took a while for it to sink in.

Looking ahead, what can we expect from you next?

Deep Fridge, in my opinion, is my most mature work to date. It deals with intimate emotions that aren't easy to talk about. I wanted the audience to really think about the ending. I'm always working on new projects that push boundaries. I'm currently involved in a theatre production and also planning a comedy-thriller. I'm excited about my Hindi short film, *Biryani*, which explores thrilling themes around food. My goal with each project is to break taboos and start conversations. In *Abyakto*, we explored LGBTQIA issues, in *Deep Fridge*, mutual divorce, and in *Shrimati*, the taboo of an older woman in a marriage. I hope my films continue to resonate with people. In *Bibi Payra*, I'm talking about women empowerment. I'm grateful to Swastika Mukherjee and Paoli Dam for being part of this journey. They are coming together in film after a decade. ■

BUZZING THROUGH LIFE

ANEES BAZMEE OPENS UP TO SUMAN SHARMA ABOUT HIS JOURNEY, PASSION FOR FILMMAKING AND THE ART OF STORYTELLING

I had been eagerly following up for an interview with Anees Bazmee for quite some time. *Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3*'s phenomenal success has made Anees incredibly busy, leading to multiple rescheduling of our interview. Finally, two months after the film's release, we meet at his Jogeshwari office. The place is bustling with visitors, some with scripts in hand, others seeking work and a few newcomers hoping to make an impression. Anees is already deeply engrossed in his next project, a testament to his energiser bunny attitude towards work and perhaps the secret to his success. His spacious cabin is adorned with photographs showcasing his journey from his early works to his latest hits. Our conversation begins over sips of coffee. The writer-director looks within and waxes eloquent as I ask...



AFTER THE MASSIVE SUCCESS OF *BHOO! BHULAIYAA 3*, HOW HAS LIFE BEEN?

Life has been busy. After the film's release, the schedule has been nonstop. There were constant interviews, meetings and discussions. Even today people come with scripts, seeking work and looking for opportunities. I've immersed myself into my next project already. Maybe that's why I'm where I am today.

WERE YOU CONFIDENT ABOUT THE SUCCESS OF *BHOO! BHULAIYAA 2*

WHEN IT WAS RELEASED DURING THE PANDEMIC?

To be honest, I was scared. That year every film was failing but I had hope. I believe the magic of watching a film on the big screen will never fade. *Bhool Bhulaiyaa* was originally a psychological thriller. But with part 2, we created a horror-comedy world that resonated with the audiences. Success lies in the correct "mathematics and science" of a film, whether it was casting Vidya Balan or Madhuri Dixit, everything needs to

fit perfectly. That's what this film achieved. And the audience loved it.

HAVE YOU COME TO UNDERSTAND THE AUDIENCE'S PULSE?

No director can claim to fully understand the audience. It comes with experience. There's no shortcut to it. The audience is smart; you cannot fool them. For a film to work, it starts with the story, then the director's vision, followed by the actors and their performances. I put myself in the audience's shoes when making

films. And their reactions in theatres are the best reviews I can get.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR STRUGGLING DAYS.

My father, Abdul Hameed 'Nerang' Bazmee, was a famous Urdu poet. I grew up writing his *shayari* and *ghazals*. I had a tough childhood. I started working at 13 to support my family. I've been a spot boy, a clap boy and even a child actor in films like *Kitaab* and *Naseeb*. Acting wasn't my passion; it was a necessity. But I always



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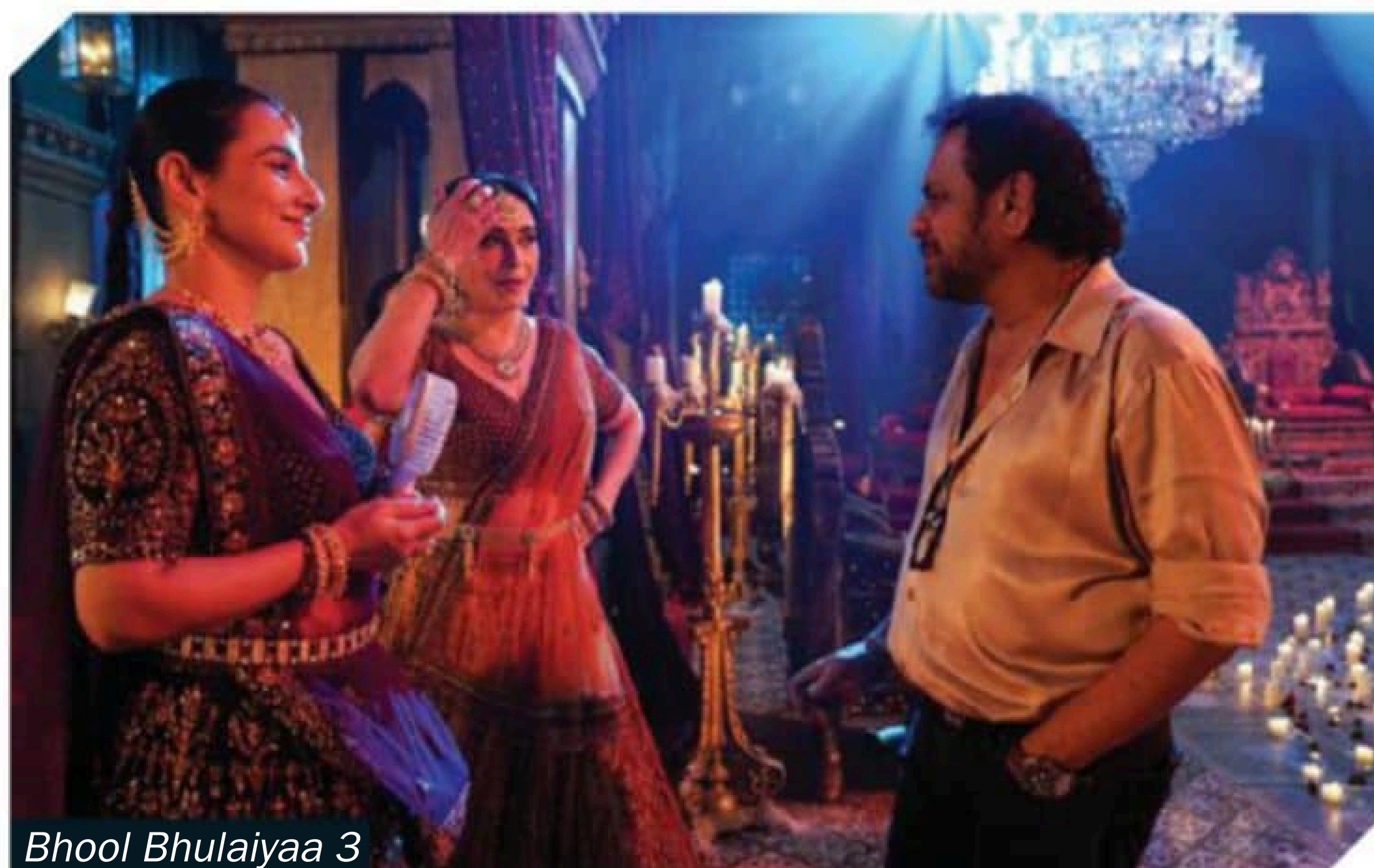
F INTERVIEW

believed in my hard work and honesty. I knew I would succeed one day because of my dedication.

HOW DID YOU BECOME A WRITER? WAS IT ALWAYS YOUR DREAM?

Writing happened by chance. I knew I had the talent but I didn't set out to become a writer. Initially, I ghost wrote around 30 films and they became hits. Though I didn't get credit for them. My first independent writing credit was for David Dhawan's *Swarg*. *Usme bhi mujhe credit nahi mila toh maine film ke posters jo shahar mein lage the un par apna credit de diya* (I went around town writing my name on the posters). One magazine wrote an entire column about me and titled it, "The writer has arrived." I got recognition after that film. Ten years of my experience had gone into writing *Swarg*. After this I worked a lot with David Dhawan and all the films were hits – *Pratibandh*, *Shola Aur Shabnam*, *Aankhen*, *Bol Radha Bol*, when all these films became hits, the industry realised that Anees is a good writer. When South films were remade into Hindi, the first name that would crop up would be mine. At that time, I would spend 15 days in Mumbai and 15 days in Hyderabad doing the rewrites. Slowly, the industry recognised me as a reliable writer. I was writing five to six films at a time. The success of *No Entry* (2005) and *Welcome* (2007), which I both wrote and directed, changed my life for the better.

WHAT ABOUT DIRECTING? WAS THAT ALWAYS THE GOAL?



Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3



Welcome

Yes, I always wanted to be a director. But I knew I had to learn and prepare before working with big actors. I wrote 35-40 films before finally directing one. I wanted to earn the respect of my actors. I knew hard work was the only way.

YOU'RE KNOWN FOR COMEDIES, BUT HAVE YOU EXPLORED OTHER GENRES?

Absolutely. My first film as a director, *Pyaar To Houna Hi Tha* (1998) was a romantic film. Then I made *Deewangi* (2002), a thriller. Over the years, I've explored multiple genres but comedy is closest to my heart. Life has been tough and I believe in spreading joy. Even on my sets, I ensure everyone has fun while working.

YOU NEVER TOOK SHORTCUTS TO SUCCESS. HOW DID YOU

STAY MOTIVATED?

Success takes time and I was never in a hurry. I learnt everything on the job, how to write screenplays, how to make audiences laugh or cry. There was no film school or mentor for me. But I was determined. Money was never my priority; passion was.

RAJ KAPOOR IS SAID TO HAVE INFLUENCED YOUR WORK. CAN YOU SHARE AN ANECDOTE ABOUT THE SHOWMAN?

I used to be Raj Kapoor's sixth or seventh assistant and used to give claps in his films. No one can be as passionate about movies the way he was. I imbibed the passion from him. Rajji used to have a den in R K Studio. Once when we were shooting for *Prem Rog*, he was sleeping in his den. I entered the room for some work and I heard him

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blabber in his sleep. When I came closer, I could hear him saying, "*maile kuchle phool, aur na jaane kya kya.*" *Doosre din jab hum set par gaye toh unhon jo script haath mei di usme wohi dialogue tha, "Maile Kuchle phool devta ke charno mei nahi chadhaye jaate."* (You don't offer stale flowers to the Gods) The same dialogue were in the next day's script. *Ye tha unka junoon, sote hue bhi wo apni filmon ke baare mei hi soch rahe hote the* (Such was his passion that he used to think about his films even in his sleep). I used to be scared of him. I would never come in



front of him. I used to observe him from far and learn. I respected him.

WHO ARE THE DIRECTORS AND WRITERS YOU ADMIRE?

I admire Feroz Khan for his style and Vijay Anand for his storytelling. I love Gulzar *saab's* and Bimal Roy's simplicity and Salim-Javed's powerful dialogue. I've always tried to imbibe their qualities in my work. The following lines about Mumbai, attributed to Gulzar: "*Ye shahar aisa hai jo phal dene se pehle paise maang leta hai* (This city asks for money first before shelling out anything), This Gulzar dialogue about Mumbai being an unforgiving

city has stayed with me because I can relate to it. Salim-Javed have also said a similar thing. "*Agar iss duniya mei jeena hai toh uska mol toh dena hoga.*" (If you wish to survive here then you have to pay the cost). I have tried to mix the emotions contained in Salim-Javed dialogue and have added the innocence and simplicity of Gulzar *bhai's* words. I have seen them work from close quarters and analysed them.

HOW HAS FILMMAKING CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

“I STARTED WORKING AT 13 TO SUPPORT MY FAMILY. I’VE BEEN A SPOT BOY, A CLAP BOY AND EVEN A CHILD ACTOR IN FILMS LIKE KITAAB AND NASEEB. ACTING WASN’T MY PASSION, IT WAS A NECESSITY”

Earlier, films were made over two-three years. The team bonded like a family. Now, everything is faster and more organised, with bound scripts ready before shooting. While I miss the old days, I adapt to changes and move forward. I have a good bond with almost everyone. I know Anilji (Kapoor) and Boneyji (Kapoor) from when I used to give clap in their films. Nana Patekar became a close friend after *Welcome* (2007). Ajay Devgn, Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar, Sunil Shetty, Sanjay Dutt, Jackie Shroff... we've all known one another for years. I never faced an ego clash even while working in multi-starrers.

HOW IS YOUR EQUATION WITH TODAY’S GENERATION OF ACTORS?

Today's actors are extremely hardworking. Someone like Kartik Aaryan is dedicated and enthusiastic, ready to shoot at 5 am. Akshay Kumar is always punctual and actors like Salman and Ajay still have that magic. It's easy to work with them when they trust the director.

IS THERE ANYONE YOU'RE EAGER TO WORK WITH?

I'd love to work with Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan, Hrithik Roshan, Rajkummar Rao and Ayushmann Khurrana. I believe I can present them in a unique way.

LASTLY, WHAT KEEPS YOU GOING?

Passion. I don't take breaks. I work day and night, writing scripts at odd hours. I believe in constantly moving forward. Life is about believing in yourself and not giving up. Keep walking and success will follow. ■

THE VOICE

Rhythm vocalist **Loire Cotler**, whose haunting vocals in the *Dune* franchise made her a household name, talks to **Tanzim Pardiwalla** about her Indian connection and more...

“I’m so pleased to meet you,” I tell Loire Cotler. But I’m looking at a blank screen. The American rhythm vocalist is somewhere in Dubai and informs me she doesn’t have a video set-up for our early morning call. In a way, it feels fitting. The musician may not be the most famous face out there but her voice sparks instant recognition. She is, after all, the voice of the *Dune Suite*. When her iconic chant fills the soundscape of Denis Villeneuve’s acclaimed films, it’s impossible not to feel the goosebumps. Loire seems unaware of the effect she has on millions of moviegoers. She isn’t on social media and makes a concerted effort to drown out the noise when she’s at work, most of which involves jamming with stalwarts like Hans Zimmer. It’s particularly interesting that she has made her Bollywood debut with Sonu Sood’s *Fateh*, a cyber-crime thriller. Over the next half an hour, Cotler takes me through her process, what rhythm means to her and her fondness for the late Zakir Hussain. Excerpts:

Tell us about your connection with Indian music...

I have to mention something that’s happened recently. I don’t want to get too sad but because I’m a rhythmist and rhythm vocalist who has been studying Konnakol, the art of vocal percussion from South India, specifically the Carnatic tradition, this is something that resonates deeply with me. Zakir Hussain passed away recently. I knew him. It’s an especially moving moment for the global musical community. I just want to take a moment

to honour him and celebrate his soul journey. He inspired all of us. Throughout my journey, I’ve been following him. I’ve had the great privilege of knowing him. Having had that presence in my life felt like a portal into much of the Indian music community. I wouldn’t even know where to begin, as I’ve been so immersed in the musical side of things. But I did want to mention this. As for Bollywood, I’ve had very little exposure. *Fateh* is my debut. It’s something I’ve always wanted to explore. I’ve had close encounters



I BELIEVE THAT
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IMAGINATION**

with AR Rahman, of course, because of my musician colleagues who've collaborated with him. I haven't had the chance to collaborate with him directly. But I've certainly been following his scores. The list would be too long if I started listing all the brilliant musicians I've worked with from India.

You're the iconic voice from the *Dune* movies. How does it feel knowing that fans worldwide know your chant?

It's such an honour and privilege to have even

been part of such a monumental work of art, with Hans Zimmer and everyone involved in Denis Villeneuve's film. It is so magnificent and wild. When I heard that people were grasping the meaning behind my expressions, I just felt so uplifted and proud. Not just because it has to do with my voice but more so because of the intention behind everything I do in music. I believe that music is an unbroken line of connection, positively raising frequencies through passion and love. Even though we have these characters we play in Hollywood or Bollywood, we are exploring and shape-shifting to support a character or a story. When I imagine people singing or having fun with some of the chants from *Dune*, like when people send me little video clips of people in parking lots, for example, singing the *Dune* chant, it means that it's transcended. It's a sacred expression that was meant to support the story and Hans' music. But then you see people having fun with it and laughing, which is the most important thing: joy and uplifting the spirit. That's the main concern for me and the reason I do what I do.

What's a musical philosophy you've picked up from working with Hans Zimmer?

The thing that just popped into my soul is, first of all, the spirit of play. It's something he talks about all the time. He encourages his musicians and collaborators that when we're creating and

collaborating on ideas, the spirit of play is so critical to expressing and finding the sound, or, in my case, the unique character sound, for the score. So, I would say that the spirit of play is an unbroken line to never, ever run out of inspiration, just like a child who can keep playing for hours with a toy or their imagination. We are simply capturing the openness and unbounded space that happens when you're in that space of play. It's hard to describe but I follow that energy into my musical expressions.

Your collaboration with Sonu Sood in *Fateh* is a crossover we didn't see coming...

It was simple and beautiful. Sonu reached out to me, and we scheduled a video chat. There was an instant feeling of creative synergy. He started explaining the storyline of the movie and it clicked right away. I didn't even think twice about jumping on board. It was just his energy. I could feel that I was in the presence of someone brilliant who was also looking at the craft from all angles. I felt an unspoken connection that we could do something here, even though this was our first collaboration. Hopefully, there'll be many more projects we can continue to grow and utilise what I have to offer. Things move quickly in our world, and it certainly helps when you're on the same wavelength. There's that feeling in art or music, or that kind of cross-collaboration between music and film, where it

starts to paint itself and you go into the zone. There's that bit of back and forth of, "Do you think this works as a colour or the textures of the music?" And then the rest is history.

***Fateh* is Sonu's directorial debut. What are some of the cues you got from him?**

What I loved about



Fateh

SONU (SOOD) REACHED OUT TO ME, AND WE SCHEDULED A VIDEO CHAT. THERE WAS AN INSTANT FEELING OF CREATIVE SYNERGY. HE STARTED EXPLAINING THE STORYLINE OF THE MOVIE, AND IT CLICKED RIGHT AWAY

working with Sonu is that, as a director, he led me into the emotion, the atmosphere, the pulse and the rhythm of the film or of an action-packed sequence. Often, in my work in Hollywood, the less I see, the more powerful it is for me to create something that never existed before. But Sonu's creative genius was in guiding me there. That brings it into a much richer, emotional



MAKING MUSIC IS LIKE MAKING CONTACT WITH A LANGUAGE THAT IS IN A HIGHER FORM BECAUSE IT TRANSCENDS ALL BOUNDARIES OF CULTURE

and subliminal space. In movies, that's what engages the audience. They're seeing one thing but they're also feeling layers of a story that might be happening in the subplots. Of course, there are other moments in action films and that's fine. But in this case, when you compose and use your voice, you become part of a character's inner world—what's going on in their thoughts or emotions. The story is being told beyond words. That's the power of music to bridge dimensions.

How different is your approach to making music or scoring when it's for a completely

different industry?

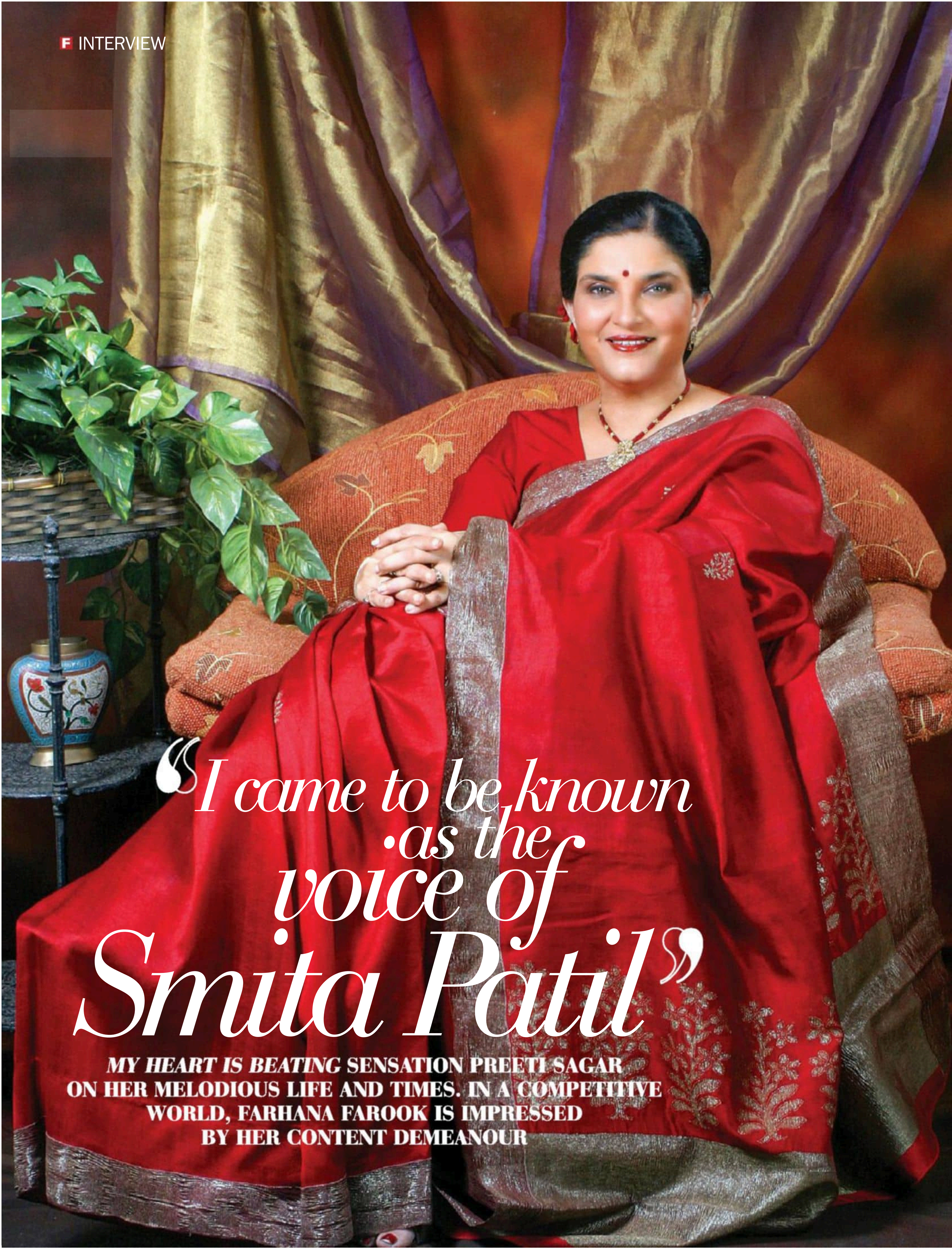
Certainly, the technical aspect differs when you're working on movies, as you're mostly working with cues, as you mentioned earlier. You might first look into finding the character sound for a specific cue. Sometimes, I'm asked not just to do one but to represent one character suite or theme. It might be multiple cues and I could be used for many different moments in a film. It's different from recording for someone's album or creating music for audio without a picture. The technical side is different. But for me, number one is always musical empathy. Making music is like making contact with a

language that is in a higher form because it transcends all boundaries of culture. It allows us to amplify emotion and the rhythms of life.

Lastly, what's it like going viral?

That's quite relevant to the theme of *Fateh*, which deals with cyber-crime issues. I know this is a strange reply. But I don't do social media. I'm still invested in raising awareness about the dangers and problems with social media algorithms and the dark side of it. People are being exploited and brainwashed by information and led in the wrong direction. Coming to your question,

not knowing I was going viral was actually a good thing because at the time, I was working on *Dune 2* and needed to be a blank slate. When I start a new project, I meditate and clear my mind so that I can fully understand what the director is looking for. If I were aware of what's happening in the world, I would have to work to clear out the noise. Maybe my chant sounds like a warrior call and people want to know what it means. And suddenly it goes viral. All of my expressions are the purest love you can imagine. When I hear that it's gone viral and people are making reels, it feels like I've won the biggest award. ■



*“I came to be known
as the
voice of
Smita Patil”*

**MY HEART IS BEATING SENSATION PREETI SAGAR
ON HER MELODIOUS LIFE AND TIMES. IN A COMPETITIVE
WORLD, FARHANA FAROOK IS IMPRESSED
BY HER CONTENT DEMEANOUR**

Remember the iconic soap ad where the model hums *La, lalala, la, la, la...*

Such was the magic of Preeti Sagar's voice that her humming still has a huge recall value. The soap ad was celebratory of her potential. Early in her career, jingle sensation Preeti Sagar understood the importance of keeping it natural and nuanced. Daughter of the well-known actor/singer/filmmaker Moti Sagar, music was the backdrop of her life. Fame embraced her heartily with B Nagi Reddi's *Julie* (1975). The bold teen romance, aided by tantalising tunes, was a winner. The crowning melody was the English number *My heart is beating*, rendered by Preeti. "Rajesh Roshan guided me to bring in the emotions, what words to stress, and how to lift the notes," recalls the singer. The chartbuster won Preeti fans and the Filmfare Trophy. Prodigious Preeti impressed audiences by faultlessly rendering the classical *Piya baaj pyaala piya jaaye na*, composed by Vanraj Bhatia for Shyam Benegal's *Nishant* (1975). Preeti belted another rustic rhapsody, *Mero gaam katha parey* in *Manthan* (1976), which went on to become the signature soundtrack of the resultant brand Amul. So pastoral and passionate was the track that it even left Prince Charles enthralled. After songs like *Tumhare bin jee na lage ghar mein* (*Bhumika*, 1977) and *Shamsheer barahna maang ghazab* (*Mandi*, 1983), Preeti soon came to be known as the voice of Smita Patil, a champion of *avant-garde* cinema. In showbiz, where rivalry is ruthless, Preeti denies having encountered any. Opting to contribute to children's entertainment, she pioneered audio versions of nursery rhymes and created a Fairy Tales series. She goes on to narrate her story in her own words.

"MUSIC IS MY INHERITANCE"
Fortunately, I was exposed to the

best of the both worlds, education and entertainment. My mother, a Gujarati, was an English professor at Bhavan's College, while Dad was a Mathur from the Kayastha community in Northern India. The Kayasthas have songs for every occasion, weddings, childbirth, festivals. As a child, I enjoyed singing with Dad. Music is my inheritance. Once Lata Didi's *Tu jahan jahan chalega* (Mera Saaya, 1966) was playing on the radio. I too sang along. Mother realised my potential but she didn't encourage me as I was



I'd just joined St Xavier's College when music director Rajesh Roshan asked Dad if I would sing an English composition for *Julie* (1975). Dad said, "*Dekh lo!*"

only in the seventh standard. It was in the late '60s, when I was in class 10, that I sang the first commercial for the newly launched Vividh Bharti in the late '60s. It was for Kashmir Snow, a cold cream. I began getting offers to sing jingles. The Liril soap jingle, composed by Vanraj Bhatia, became extremely popular. Vanraj uncle and my mother were friends. They'd studied at the New Era School. Vanrajji told me in his inimitable style, "*Chalni mara maate*

gaani!" (Come on, sing for me!). Through the years, every time the Liril ad was revamped, I was asked to render the signature melody. I sang more than 10,000 jingles, including those for Nirma, Pan Paraag, Hawkins, Lipton, Amul...

"MY HEART IS BEATING"

I'd just joined St Xavier's College when music director Rajesh Roshan asked Dad if I would sing an English composition for *Julie* (1975). Dad said, "*Dekh lo!*" (See for yourself!) I was nervous on the recording day. Dad infused confidence in me, saying, "*Beta*, we didn't approach them. The song has come to us. You give it your best. If you feel you can't do it, say sorry and leave. There's nothing to fear." We were recording the song at Mehboob Studio. Rajesh Khanna and Shammi Kapoor were shooting for *Bundal Baaz* (1976) on the floor below. When they heard the track, they came up to see who the singer was. On seeing Dad, they said, "We didn't know you had such a grown-up girl. Where had you hidden her?" Being an English song, I believed it would play in the background or at a club in the film. But when I watched *Julie*, I was surprised. It was filmed on the heroine Lakshmi. Rajesh had guided me to bring in the emotions, what words to stress, and how to lift the notes. Also, the accent was natural, without an American twang, so Indian audiences could relate to the number. I heard some people sitting behind me say, "Who's sung the song? It doesn't seem like Lata Mangeshkar or Asha Bhosle." I wanted to turn around and say, "I've sung it." But I felt awkward. I received the Filmfare Award for it. It was a silver trophy because Filmfare was celebrating its silver jubilee year. I visited Delhi to receive yet another award for the song. While I was walking on the streets there, I could hear *My heart is beating*

playing from every house. It was heartwarming.

“PIYA BAAJ PYAALA PIYA JAAYE NA... WAS SO COMPLEX”

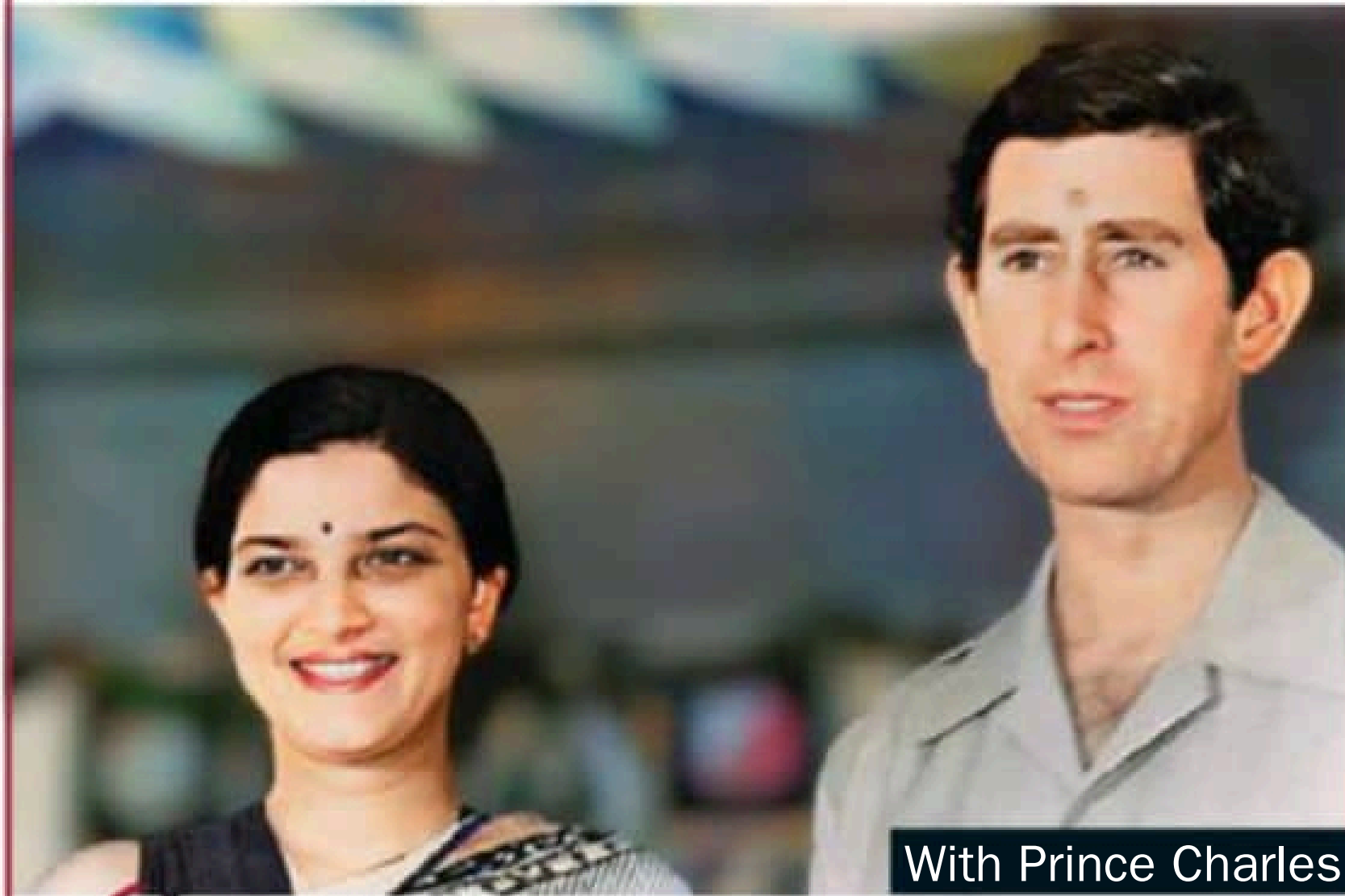
I’d sung many commercials composed by Vanrajji and made by Shyam Benegal’s Blaze Films. So, when Vanrajji composed the music for Shyamji’s *Nishant* (1975), he offered me the classical *Piya baaj pyaala piya jaaye na*. It was filmed on Shabana Azmi, who was my senior in school. The complex *Piya baaj* was in contrast to the lighthearted *Julie* number. Surprisingly, it was okayed in one take, though I’d not undergone any training in classical music. But for the next three days, I couldn’t talk. I’d exerted my vocal cords, the notes being high. Vanrajji’s speciality was that while you sang in one track, his music took another route. But when heard together, the result was beautiful.

“I WAS PREGNANT WHEN I RECEIVED THE FILMFARE AWARD FOR *MANTHAN*”

Shyam Benegal’s *Manthan* was inspired by Dr Verghese Kurien, the father of the White Revolution. A song was first written by a well-known Gujarati writer. But on reading the lyrics, Shyamji said, “This is not what I want. I want a blend of the Hindi and Gujarati dialect.” My sister, Neeti asked if she could attempt writing the lyrics. That’s how *Mero gaam kaatha parey* came about. At the recording, Shyamji told me, “I don’t want the Preeti Sagar of *Julie*. I want you to sound like a folk singer, like a *rabaran* (a tribe in Gujarat).” I pushed my voice to convey the sense of abandon. The phrase ‘*doodh ki nadiya*’ is metaphoric of the ‘milk revolution’. The line *Mhare ghar angna na bhoolo na* (Don’t forget my home, my courtyard) hints at the subtle romance between Girish Karnad and Smita Patil’s characters.



With father and actor Moti Sagar



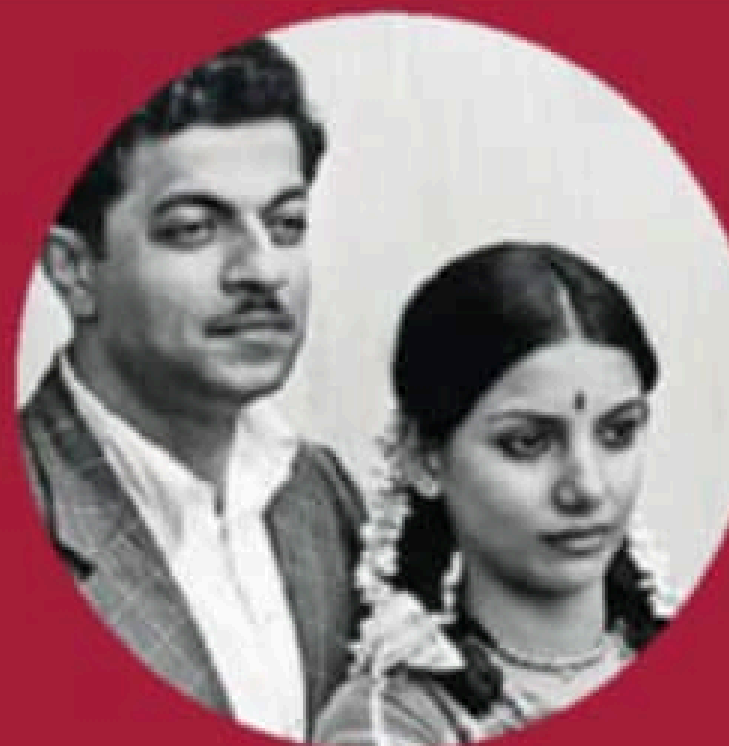
With Prince Charles

“The complex *Piya baaj* was in contrast to the lighthearted *Julie* number. Surprisingly, it was okayed in one take, though I’d not undergone any training in classical music”

PREETI SAGAR’S TOP SONGS



My heart is beating (Julie)



Piya baaj pyaala (Nishant)

Tum itni sundar ho (Anand Ashram)

Khota paisa nahin chalega (Dooriyan)



Mero gaam kaatha parey (Manthan)



Tumhare bin jee naa lage (Bhumika)

What’s your problem (Kalyug)

Shamsheer barahna maang ghazab (Mandi)

When Prime Minister Shri Deve Gowda visited Anand in Gujarat, Dr Kurien invited me to sing the song. Prince Charles too visited Dr Kurien’s dairy farm in Anand in 1982. Dr Kurien asked me to come there and perform live for Prince Charles as he loved the song. The farmers were present at the event too. Truly, music has no language. When I was honoured with the Filmfare Award for *Manthan*, I was expecting my first baby. Being in the last month of pregnancy, I walked up to the stage slowly. I couldn’t hold the ‘heavy’ Black Lady. Plus, there was a huge hamper of cosmetics. Shashi Kapoor helped me carry it. *Manthan* re-released in India in June 2024. I attended the screening at the Eros theatre. Naseeruddin Shah came and sat on the floor near me and said, “It’s taken me 48 years to tell you how much I love *Mero gaam...*”

“I WAS KNOWN AS SMITA PATIL’S VOICE”

Bhumika (1977) is Smita Patil’s landmark film, reportedly based on the memoirs of Marathi actress Hansa Wadkar. I rendered three songs – *Mera ziskila balam na aaya* and *Tumhare bina jee na lage* and *Saawan ke din aaye sajanwa*. I came to be known as her voice. The songs featured in a film within the film. The *lavni* *Mera ziskila balam* had *latkas* and *jhatkas*. It had to be sung with the same gusto. *Tumhare bin jee na lage* was being filmed on Smita at Jyoti Studio. I remember watching the shoot. Smita was my senior in St Xavier’s College. She was already a newsreader on Doordarshan then. We’d admire her from a distance. She was dusky, had sharp features, and wore cotton sarees. Her car would come to pick her up. She was so unassuming and simple that it was difficult to imagine that one day she’d become a film star. In a memorable gesture, She visited me in hospital when I delivered my first child, Akansha. When



to sing. He'd tease me, saying, "*Theek se gaa varna dekh!*" (Sing properly, or else watch out!)

"NO SONG WAS TAKEN AWAY FROM ME"

My parents were extremely protective of me and my sisters, Neeti and Namita. Dad accompanied me for every recording. I'd look at him for approval. He was my critic and cheerleader. In fact, even industry people called me '*Bitiya*'. My parents insisted on keeping it dignified. They said, "You will not ask for work. People will approach you if they want you." I didn't face any rivalry. No song was ever taken away from me. People blame other singers, saying they didn't let them come in. But no one did that to me. I didn't step on their toes either.



When I was honoured with the Filmfare Award for *Manthan*, I was expecting my first baby. Being in the last month of pregnancy, I walked up to the stage slowly. I couldn't hold the 'heavy' Black Lady... Shashi Kapoor helped me carry it

Smita passed away in 1986, I was shocked. She'd just delivered a baby (Prateik). I met Prateik recently. He hugged me and said, "Aunty, though I've never met you before, I know you as my mother's voice."

"SHASHI KAPOOR WAS SOOO... CHARMING"

In Shyam Benegal's *Kalyug* (1981), the song *What's your problem?* was filmed on newlyweds Anant Nag and Supriya Pathak on their honeymoon. Supriya's character carries a cassette player, which plays this song. I lent a carefree vibe to the track. The girl is much younger and identifies with the jargon of the song, while Anant's character doesn't. Shashi Kapoor, being the producer, was present during the rehearsals and recording. He was so cute and charming. The moment I'd see him, I'd fear how I'd be able

People get angry if you try to snatch their work. By God's grace, there was no need to do that. I was born with a silver spoon. Music was a hobby I pursued.

"I WASN'T SURE IF I'D BE A GOOD ACTRESS"

After appearing in the music show *Aarohi* in the mid-'70s, I received many film offers. In fact, I was around eight when I was first offered the role of Mini in Balraj Sahni's *Kabuliwala* (1961). Dad had declined the offer. I was selfish in a way. I knew my vocal cords would sustain for a long time but I wasn't sure if I'd be a good actress. What if I flopped? As an actor, you have to maintain your figure. You have to torture your body, maybe resort to some pulls and tucks, even Botox. As a singer, people appreciate you but don't bother you. At the most, they may ask for a picture. I don't need bodyguards around to push



away people trying to touch me. Above all, I'm a private person. Once my music is over, I go home. I'm not the partying or networking kind. That's why after making a mark, my parents said it's time to settle down. Mine was an arranged marriage. My husband, Soami Saran, was working with Mahindra & Mahindra. He retired as President of Alternative Technologies. After marriage, I could have continued and sung a million songs. I was offered many shows. But my daughters, Akansha and Aneesha, needed me. Today, they're married and have grown-up children.

"DON'T GET OVER-AMBITIOUS"

I have no regrets. I dabbled with all kinds of music – bhajans, nursery rhymes, pop songs, a Fairy Tales series... Even grey-haired men say that they've grown up on my nursery rhymes. That makes me wonder what my age is. It's funny and cute too! In the 1990s, Angela Films, my father's company, produced the children's TV show *Phulwari Bachchon Ki*, hosted by Namita. We've made public service films for all ministries in Delhi, including the Ministry of Water Resources, Overseas Indian Affairs... We've also made corporate films. I've started my YouTube channel called Preeti Sagar Nursery Rhymes. I love children. They seem to be neglected in today's age of consumerism. My message to new singers is: don't get over-ambitious. It can lead to frustration. First, secure your bread and butter. Then pursue your passion. If it's meant to happen, it will. I never intended to be a singer. It was written in my *haathon ki lakeer* (the lines of my palm). Your overall wellbeing is important. I've lived a dignified life. The love of my fans is immense. What more could I ask for? *Kya laye the, kya lekar jaayenge...*! (What did we bring, what will we take away...) ■



💬 Till date, I tease Dharamji that because of him I couldn't play the heroine. *In return, he affectionately kisses my forehead. He's a 'darling man'* 💬

Mother. *superior*

FROM SHAKTI SAMANTA TO SANJAY LEELA BHANSALI, VETERAN FARIDA JALAL IS AN ACTOR FOR ALL GENERATIONS. FARHANA FAROOK RECORDS HER MEMORIES AND MILESTONES

Farida Jalal has been ‘family’ to audiences for more than five decades. Sister, wife, mother, grandma... she reminds you of your own back home. Amiable and authentic... that’s been her vibe. From superstars Dilip Kumar, Rajesh Khanna, Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan to Salman Khan and Hrithik Roshan... She’s been intrinsic to every era. A *Filmfare* ‘prodigy’, as she describes herself, she lent dignity to the Supporting Actor category – beginning from *Paras* in the ’70s, where she played Sanjeev Kumar’s weebegone sister. Her moving portrayal as Amitabh Bachchan’s physically challenged sister in *Majboor*, won her the Special Jury Award. The winning streak continued in the ’90s,



Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar

when she walked away with the Black Lady for Raj Kapoor’s *Henna* and Yash Raj Films’ *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. While she was commercial cinema’s surest bet, what extols her craft is stalwarts like Satyajit Ray, Shyam

Benegal, Gulzar and Kundan Shah handpicking her for their acclaimed films *Shatranj Ke Khilari*, *Mammo*, *Khushboo* and *Kya Kehna* respectively. The actor, who has hit TV shows including *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*, *Dekh Bhai Dekh*, *Shararat* and *Balika Vadhu* in her repertoire, recently wowed the digital space as Qudsiya Begum in Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar*. As the doting grandmother of Nawab Tajdar Baloch played by Taha Shah Badusha, she was heart in royal garb. “First I played the sister, then mother and now grandmother! *Meri mamta se koi nahin bacha* (no one can escape my love),” beams the 70-plus actor enjoying the afterglow of applause. Excerpts:

CHANCE AND CHANGE

Farida Jalal’s parents, Najuba and Mohammed Sami Chaudhary, separated when she was barely two. “Nani, Mummy, Khalid (older brother) and I... we four made our family,” says Farida. Her grandfather was a businessman from Iraq. Farida completed her schooling from St Joseph’s Convent in Panchgani. “I once told my Nani that I wanted to become a nun because they were so kind,” she smiles.

Her acting career took off when Farida, along with Rajesh Khanna,

won the United Film Producers Talent Hunt sponsored by *Filmfare* in 1965. Soon, she was offered *Taqdeer* (1967) by Tarachand Barjatya’s Rajshri Productions. She was ecstatic when the banner offered her *Jeevan Mrityu* (1970) opposite Dharmendra. “I was so happy. I couldn’t sleep the whole night thinking I’d be playing a heroine. But Dharamji said since I’d played his daughter in *Baharon Ki Manzil* (1968), he couldn’t be my romantic lead,” she recalls the disappointment. “Till date, I tease Dharamji that because of him I



← Farida Jalal with the Filmfare trophy

couldn't play the heroine. In return, he affectionately kisses my forehead. He's a 'darling man.'" she says adding, "The Deols are a different breed. They have an old-world dignity."

Shakti Samanta's *Aradhana* (1969) with Rajesh Khanna slalomed Farida into the limelight. "*Aradhana* was running at Roxy while *Do Raaste* (1969) at Opera House. Both were blockbusters. Kaka had become a superstar. Truly, there's been no phenomenon like him," she recalls. "Yes, Kaka was a bit arrogant. Even while shooting *Aradhana*, he was aware that he'd 'arrived'. When I'd ask for rehearsals, he'd get upset and say 'kitne rehearsals!' Rinkudi (Sharmila Tagore) was supportive. She'd say Farida can ask for as many as she wants." With time a thaw set in between Farida and Rajesh. "We became 'pally' while attending many events celebrating *Aradhana*'s success. Kaka would joke, 'See how girls are crazy about me. *Aapne ghaas nahi dala toh kya huwa* (no problem if you didn't give me attention). I'd say 'Maan gaye'," she smiles.

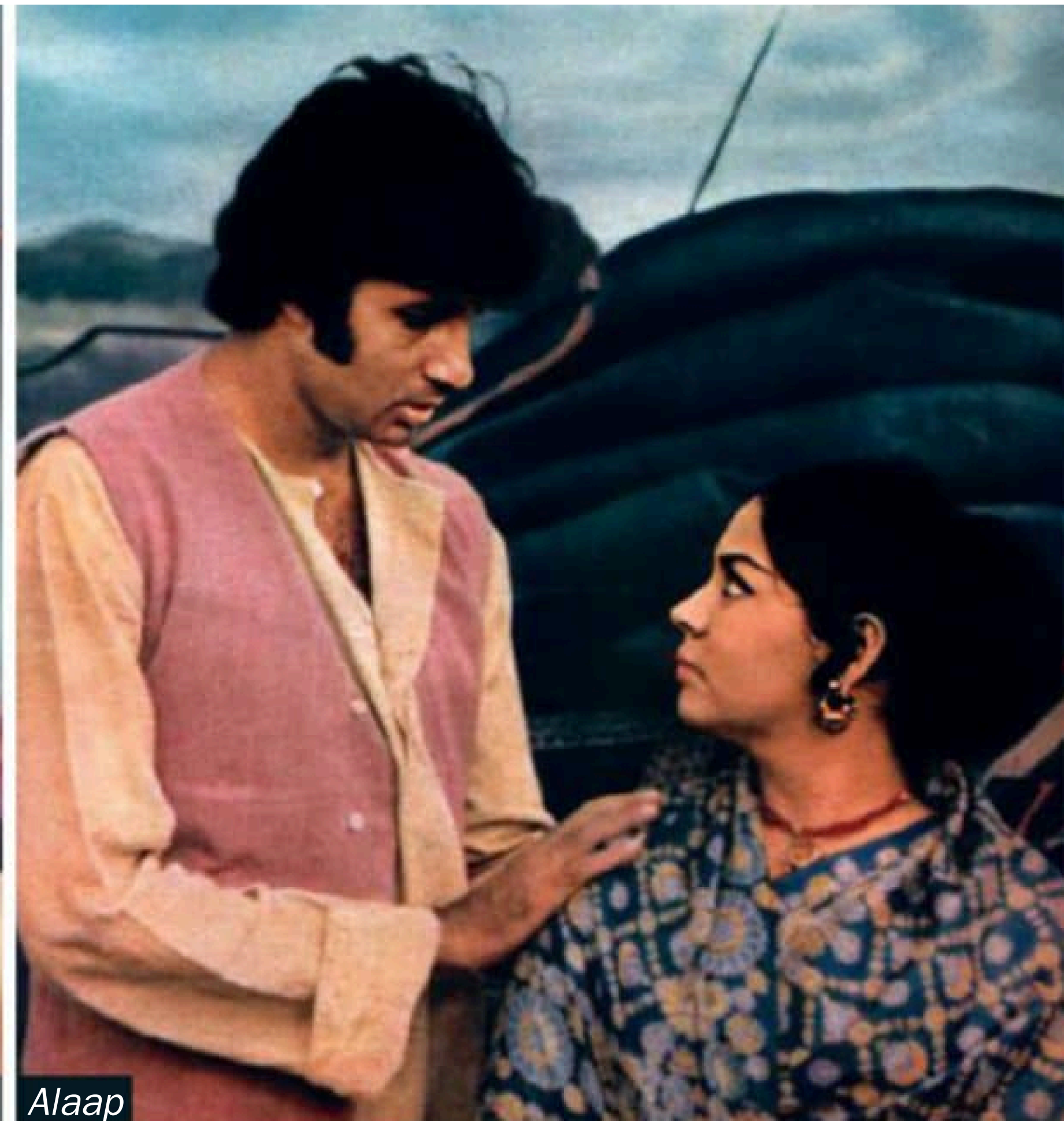
A Bhimsingh's *Gopi* (1970) rewrote Farida's career. After playing Dilip Kumar's sister in the film, she became Hindi cinema's 'iconic sister'. "Every hero worshipped Dilip *saab*. So, they wanted me to play their sister on screen too. I was told it was a mistake to play 'sister' in the beginning of my career as I'd get slotted. But I don't agree. As a heroine, I'd have worn lovely clothes, looked beautiful and sung songs. I did much more than that by playing supporting characters for which I won so many Filmfare Awards," she beams.

FILMFARE CONNECTION

The self-confessed 'Filmfare prodigy' elaborates, "*Filmfare* has been significant in my life. Filmfare Awards is our answer to the Oscars. We'd die to be on the stage to receive it," says Farida who won the Best Supporting Actor for playing Sanjeev Kumar's sister in *Paras* (1972). She played Amitabh Bachchan's sister in *Majboor* (1975) and was in the running for an award. But there's a



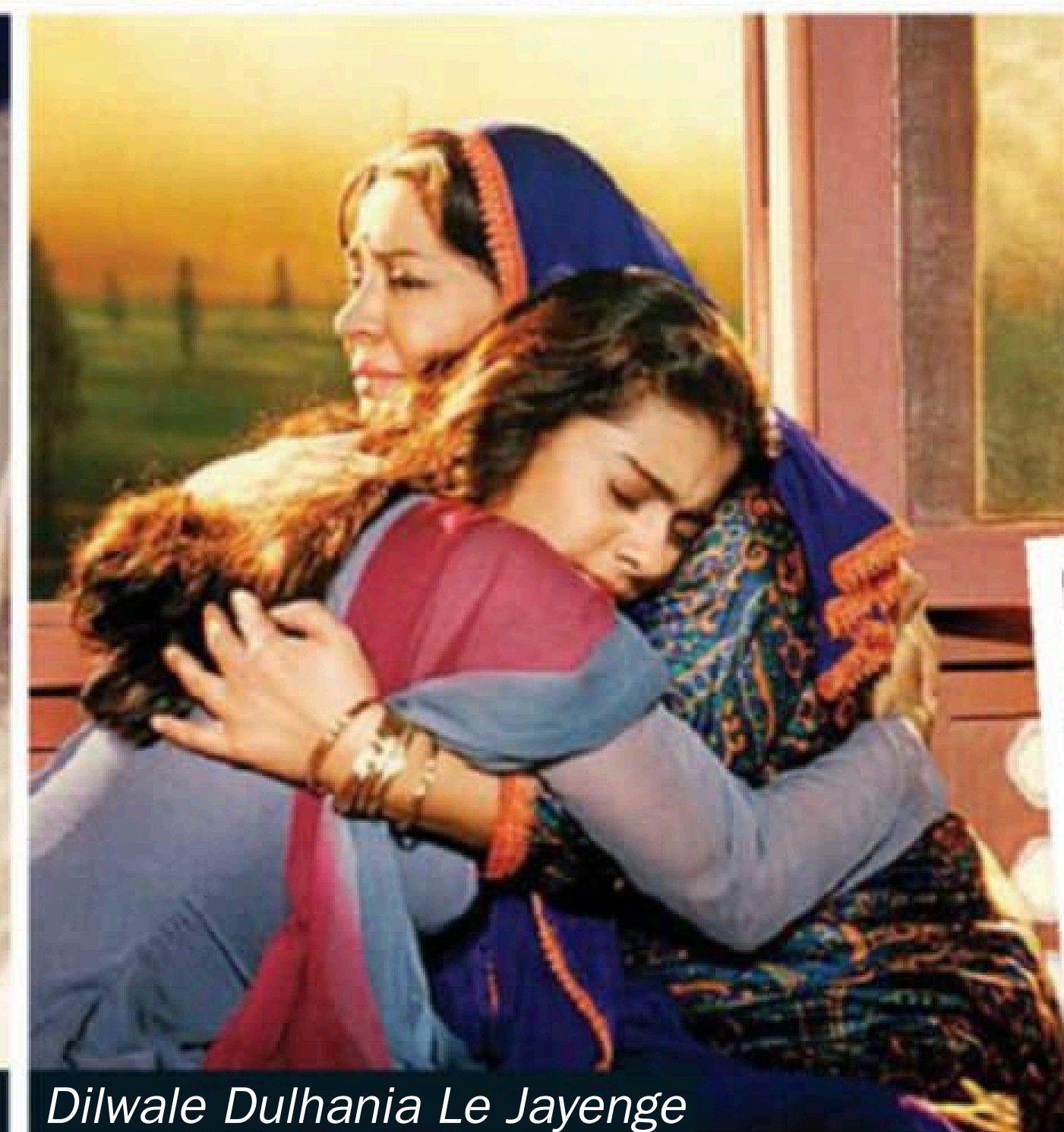
Bobby



Alaap



Mammo



Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge

As a heroine, I'd have worn lovely clothes, looked beautiful and sung songs. I did much more than that by playing supporting characters

twist to the tale. "Nadiraji had done a great job in *Julie* (1975). She melted our hearts with her performance of an unyielding mother who eventually softens. Filmfare believed that she deserved to be awarded as she'd reached a certain age and perhaps that would be her last chance. In fact, even I'd voted for her. So, she was given the Best Supporting Actor Award. I went up on stage and kissed her saying 'you deserved it'." On the other hand, Farida, who had

won many votes for *Majboor* was honoured with the Filmfare Special Jury Award, an award given only to Rajendra Kumar for *Sangam* (1964) till then.

Post a sabbatical, Farida bagged the Filmfare Best Supporting Actor for Raj Kapoor's *Henna* (1992), her comeback film where she played Bibi Gul, the village doctor. This was followed with Best Actor Critics' for *Mammo* (1995). "Interestingly, Shyam Benegal was impressed by my cameo of a mentally-challenged girl in *Bobby* (1973). This made him sign me for *Mammo*.

Ditto with Satyajit Ray. "I feel proud that Ray thought of me along with Shabana Azmi for *Shatranj Ke Khilari* (1977). He told me, 'When I saw you in *Bobby*, I thought 'wow what a wonderful actress! I must work with her.' That was such a high for me. I'm so grateful to Rajji (Kapoor) for giving me such an impactful character," she says. "Decades later, Aditya Chopra's



Kuch Kuch Hota Hai

POPULAR SONGS FEATURING FARIDA JALAL

- **BAAGHON MEIN BAHAR HAI** – Aradhana (1969)
- **KOI SEHARI BABU** – Loafer (1973)
- **DEKH SAKTA HOON MAIN KUCH BHI** – Majboor (1974)
- **SUN SUN KASAM SE** – Kaala Sona (1975)
- **YE FASLE TERI GALIYON KE** – Mammo (1994)



With Jaya Bachchan

“When my mother passed away Jaya (Bachchan) was the first to arrive. She said, ‘Fari main Maa toh nahi ban sakti but I’m there for you’”

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995) conquered the night with Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol winning the Best Actor trophies and Amrish Puri and I being awarded the Best Supporting Actors,” recalls the actor, who played a mother urging her daughter to follow her heart.

STRAIGHT AND NARROW

Given her strong screen presence, Farida left established heroines feeling insecure. “I was told so by some directors and producers. If a girl, lesser in name, fame and fee, walks away with the scene I’d have felt the same. If I only sang songs, while the substantial stuff was given to her, I’d have felt the same,” she reasons.

Yes, she was ambitious but

integrity was non-negotiable for Farida. “I have said ‘no’ to many things – including double meaning dialogue, inappropriate clothes, a character going wrong...” she says. There was no gossip about her either. “Those days, link-ups were not part of the game. What mattered was hard work. Unfortunately, today being linked with someone or being photographed with someone translates into publicity. In fact, the media is called when people want to be seen with so and so.” She humorously concedes, “A *masoom* flirtation is part and parcel of working together. But be it anywhere in life, you have to draw the line. The film industry may be maligned but it’s the best. It all depends on how you carry yourself.”

FRIENDS FOREVER

Farida cherishes the unconditional friendships she formed along the way. Like her bonding with Jaya Bachchan. “The first time I met Amitabh Bachchan was when we were flying together to Kolkata to receive the prestigious Bengal Journalists’ Association Awards. He was to receive it for *Anand*, Jaya Bhaduri for *Uphaar* and me for *Paras*. With time, Jaya and I became thick pals. She’s *munhphat* (outspoken) but honest at all times.”

Amitabh and Jaya would take ‘Faru jaan’ along with them for an evening out at the Taj’s Sea Lounge in Colaba. “I didn’t want to be the *kebab mein haddi*. But they insisted I accompany them. One moment they’d be fighting, the next they’d be ‘lovey dovey’. It was heartwarming to watch them. Those days they were shooting for *Abhimaan* (1973). It was fun hearing them discuss it.” For Amitabh and Jaya’s impromptu wedding Asrani, Gulzar and Farida were the only ones invited from the fraternity. Post Jaya’s marriage, Farida often visited the Bachchan home Prateeksha. “I was among the first to land at Breach Candy Hospital when Shweta and Abhishek were born,” recalls she. Though life took them on different paths, the



Kaka was a bit arrogant. Even while shooting Aradhana, he was aware that he'd 'arrived'. When I'd ask for rehearsals, he'd get upset

affection has endured. “When my mother passed away Jaya was the first to arrive. She said, ‘Fari main Maa toh nahi ban sakti but I’m there for you.’ That’s something that’s stayed with me. If you have a friend like Jaya, you won’t ever feel alone.”

Another friendship she cherishes is with Saira Banu. “I’ve seen Sairaji from the beginning of her career. She was the overprotected child, educated in London. She began as an actor in 1961 with *Junglee* and became a topnotch heroine. But she didn’t think twice before getting married in 1966. From day one, she was clear that she wanted to be Mrs Dilip Kumar. She looked after him so devotedly.”

MARRIAGE AND MORE

“By the way, I too fell in love,” she says. She met actor Tabrez Barmavar on the sets of *Jeevan Rekha* (1974). “He’d keep reading a book in a corner and hardly spoke. I thought he was proud. But ultimately, I fell in love with him. Maybe, because he was different from others,” she says about her husband, who hailed from Bhatkal, Karnataka. Tabrez was

serious about Farida from day one. “We became friends and would chat about all things under the sun. But the first thing he asked me was, ‘Will you marry me? I want to have you in my life as my wife.’ I loved it,” she blushes at the memory. They got married in 1978 and were blessed with son Yaseen Barmavar. The couple moved to Bangalore where Tabrez helmed a business. That also explains Farida’s absence from films for a few years.

Sadly, Tabrez passed away in 2003. “Jaya came to see me. She sat with me on the bed and spoke to me at length. In contrast, those who Tabrez had obliged many times didn’t even bother to call. It hurt deeply,” sighs the actress.

BITTERSWEET MUSINGS

During the 1990-2000s, she was part of blockbusters including Dharmesh Darshan’s *Raja Hindustani*, Yash Raj

Films’ *Dil To Pagal Hai* and *DDLJ*, Dharma Productions’ *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* and *Student Of The Year*, Rakesh Roshan’s *Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai* and Rajshri Productions’ *Main Prem Ki Deewani Hoon*. The actor, who was a regular with reputed banners, rues the fact that they stopped offering her roles. “*Bahut mila hai mujhe*. But I was heartbroken when people shifted loyalties. People who used to say, ‘we can’t make a film without you’ seemed to have forgotten me. At times I’ve said yes to a character that was not worth my while just for the sake of the relationship. That must be paid back. At one point you needed me. Now that I need you, where are you?” she asks.

Farida ticked a box on her wish-list when she did Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s *Heeramandi*. Playing the kind grandmother to Taha Shah Badussha’s character of a nawab in love, Farida was all about aristocracy and affection. “In all humility, being able to speak Urdu has been a plus point,” says Farida, who’s now re-energised for her upcoming films with Vishal Bhardwaj and Sajid Nadiadwala.

Apart from that the 70-plus actor leads a ‘peaceful’ life. “I wake up early. I perform *namaz*. I talk to my Creator before I begin my day. I have the best son in the world. Yaseen looks after me like a baby. I’ve no place for malice in my life. *Paisa toh har koi kama leta hai*. Earning respect is the biggest award for me.” ■

your say

reader's reviews, box-office, celebrity column & more

INSTA LIKE

Medley of moments

Check out what your favourites are upto on Instagram...



@aliaabhatt: 2025 : where love leads & the rest just follows...!! happy new year all

Alia Bhatt, Ranbir Kapoor and Raha always look like the perfect family.

@priyankachopra: Shaadi ka ghar.. !! and it begins tomorrow ❤️ mere bhai ki shaad hai @siddharthchopra89 with @neelamupadhyaya !! ❤️ sangeet practice to fam jams. So good to be home 🥰 my heart is full, and so is my schedule. Who said a wedding is easy? no one... but is it fun? Absolutely ! looking forward to the next few days ❤️



Priyanka Chopra Jonas doesn't let the stress of her brother's wedding get to her posing skills.



@SrBachchan: T 5276 (i) - मारा इंग्लैंड को!

Winning ways. Both Amitabh Bachchan and Abhishek look engrossed during the India-England T 20 cricket match.



@janhvikapoor: Happy new year! ❤️

Janhvi Kapoor makes binging on coconut look as alluring as munching chocolate cake.



@khushikapoor: He made it to the grid, will make it to your hearts soon 🥰❤️😊

This photo of Khushi Kapoor and Ibrahim Ali Khan is too cute to behold.

Readers write in their rants and raves pg 120

Shatrughan Sinha's racy rejoinders pg 122



IN THE MAIL

READERS WRITE AND BITE BACK... WITH LOVE AND AFFECTION



Kareena Kapoor Khan

1st Prize
₹1500

KAREENA'S OTT GLOW

Kareena Kapoor Khan's acceptance speech was incredibly heartwarming. She is a huge name in Bollywood and seeing her shine on the OTT platform was such a delight. It goes on to show the range of her talent. I also have to mention her stunning outfit for the award night, which was absolutely gorgeous. Browsing through the pages of your last issue (January) was exciting. I couldn't help but admire how glamorous the stars looked. The stars were at their fashionable best for the OTT Awards and the way you presented them in the magazine was a visual treat to the eyes. Talking of looks, my favourites were Kareena Kapoor Khan, Ananya Panday, Manisha Koirala and Vedang Raina.

Aarya Iyer, Mumbai

HEARTFELT SPEECH

In your last issue (January), I liked Kareena Kapoor Khan's winning speech where she gave a shout out to the three important men in her life—Saif Ali Khan, Taimur, and Jeh. She even posted a couple of photos on social media of Jeh holding the award. It was so adorable.

Sanya Patel, Ahmedabad

OTT AWARDS AHoy!

I have been a fan of Filmfare Awards since childhood and with the introduction of the OTT Awards, it feels like the cherry on the top. Naturally, I was excited to dive into all the shows, films, and actors who have made their mark in the OTT space over the past year. The last issue (January) covered the winners really well. It felt fresh and exciting.

Anirudh Sharma, Delhi



Abhishek Bachchan

ABHISHEK AND KAREENA'S FULL CIRCLE

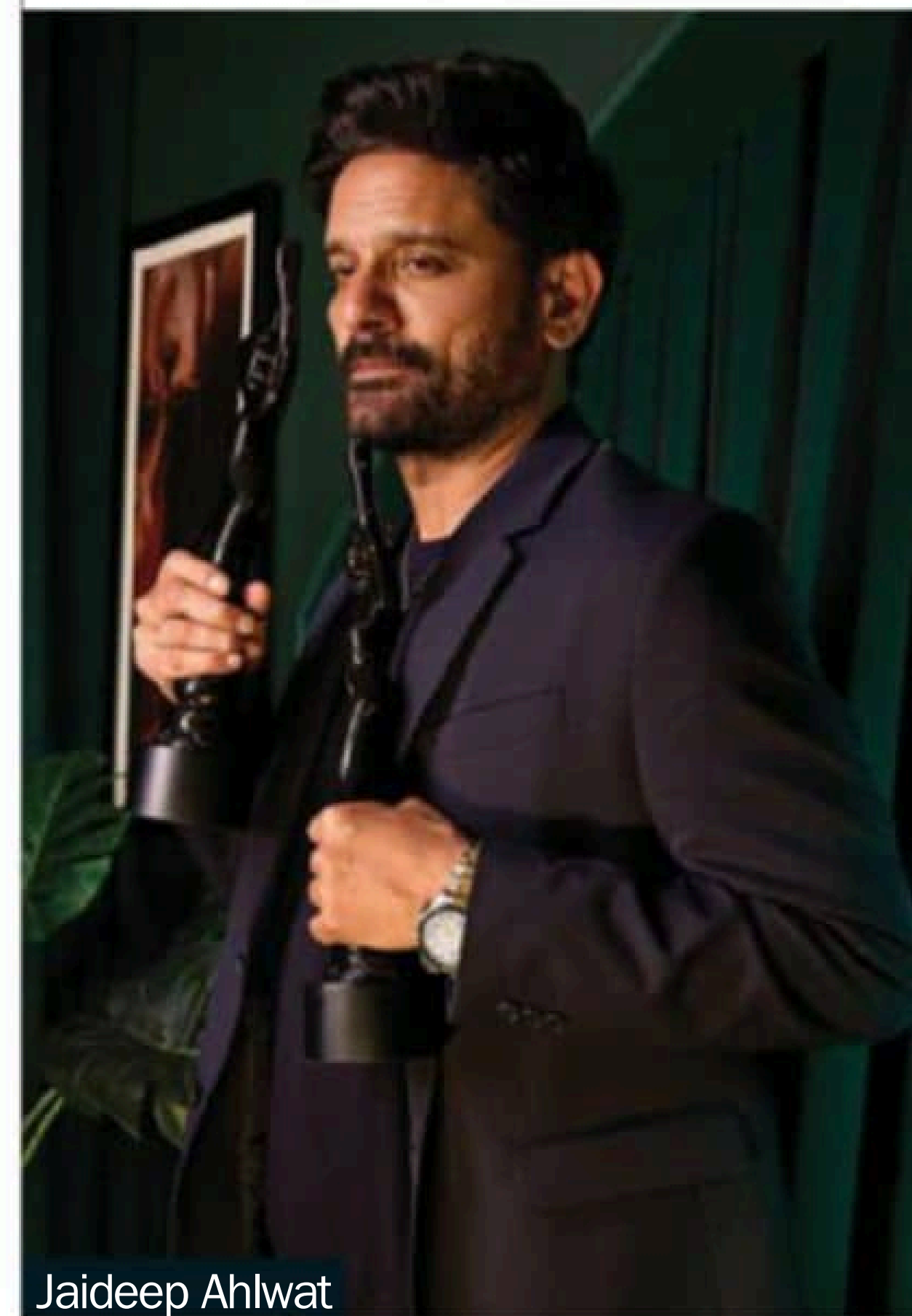
In your last issue (January), I particularly enjoyed reading about Abhishek Bachchan advising men to listen to their wives and reminding everyone of his love and devotion to his wife, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan. Later, he presented an award to Kareena Kapoor Khan, his first co-star. It felt like life has come a full circle for them highlighting their decades of friendship.

Simran Singh, Jaipur

JAIDEEP AHLWAT'S RECOGNITION

Jaideep Ahlwat has been one of my favourite actors for a long time. I have liked him since his *Gangs of Wasseypur* days and now others have also finally recognised the calibre he has as an artiste. It was good to know about the camaraderie he shares with his peers such as Rajkummar Rao and Vijay Varma.

Priya Verma, Bengaluru



Jaideep Ahlwat

ANANYA PANDAY'S HUMBLE WIN

I really like Ananya Panday as an actor and reading about her winning a Filmfare Award for *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan* was the highlight of your last issue (January). I particularly liked how humbly she shared that she draws inspiration from Kareena Kapoor Khan and the outfit she chose for the evening.

Kritika Joshi, Lucknow

2nd Prize
₹1000



Ananya Panday

ANANYA'S MOMENT OF GROWTH

In your last issue (January), I particularly enjoyed reading about Ananya Panday's winning speech after she won the Best Actor Award (Female) for *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan*. From her debut film to now, it's clear that the actress has shown a lot of potential and growth. I loved how she expressed her feelings for Kareena Kapoor Khan and admitted that she is obsessed with the actress.

Neha Desai, Pune



Rajkummar Rao

Rajkummar Rao, Vijay Varma and Jaideep Ahlawat have truly shown that if you have talent, you will eventually receive the recognition you deserve.

Anjali Rathod, Jaipur

I enjoyed reading about Jaideep Ahlawat's award speech in your January issue. He is a powerhouse of an actor and his win was well deserved.

Amar Varma, Lucknow

Manisha Koirala is the definition of strength, determination and grace.

To see her shine so brightly after defeating cancer was heartwarming.

Priya Mehta, Delhi

I am eagerly awaiting the main Filmfare Awards issue, and the OTT Awards edition has only heightened my anticipation.

Ravindra Meshram, Mumbai

The OTT series and films offer more to the viewers than their traditional counterparts and kudos to Filmfare for recognising their efforts through the OTT Awards

Shyam Goel, Ranchi

HEERAMANDI: A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

I had a fantastic time reading the coverage of the series and films that won at the OTT Awards. *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar* is my favourite series of 2024 and I am glad Manisha Koirala bagged a Filmfare Award for the same. Her portrayal of Mallikajaan was nothing short of mesmerising. I also enjoyed reading about who wore what in your last issue (January).

Madhuri Reddy, Chennai



R Madhavan

R MADHAVAN'S DEDICATION

R Madhavan has been my favourite for a long time. It was good to read in your last issue (January) that he dedicated his Filmfare Award for Best Supporting Actor (Male) for *The Railway Men* to the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy. The hosts also joked with him about his skincare and his response to that was hilarious and witty.

Tanuj Pant, Dehradun

REMEMBERING SHYAM BENEGAL

In your last issue (January), the section about the late filmmaker Shyam Benegal was fascinating. It was a treat to read the feature about the filmmaker's work and his worldview, which is very different from what filmmakers have today. His contribution to parallel cinema in India remains unparalleled, and it is unfortunate that we lost such a visionary artiste so soon.

Raman Desai,
Bangalore



Shyam Benegal

MEIYANG AND SHARIB'S COMIC CAPERS

In your last issue (January), I enjoyed reading about the fun banter between the hosts Meiyang Chang and Sharib Hashmi. Both of them are good actors with great comic timing. It was nice knowing about how they joked with Abhishek Bachchan about men listening to their wives and their camaraderie with Rajkummar Rao when he went up on the stage to accept his award.

Sakshi Kumar, Hyderabad



Meiyang Chang
and Sharib Hashmi

A GIANT RESTS

I am an ardent admirer of Shyam Benegal's incredible work in Indian cinema. His films, with their rich storytelling and deep social commentary, have always struck a chord with me. Whether it's the powerful narrative of Ankur or the thought-provoking exploration in Nishant, his work continues to shape the landscape of Indian cinema. His ability to blend realism with compelling character studies is unmatched. Thanks *Filmfare* for providing him with a heartfelt obituary.

Abhinandan Shrivastava,
New Delhi

A QUEEN'S JOURNEY

I enjoyed reading about the award speeches in your last (January) issue. Especially about Manisha Koirala. Her journey is inspiring to so many people, including myself. She beat cancer and came back to showbiz to show everyone that she is indeed the queen. Reading about her emotional winning speech touched me.

Aarti Mehra, Chandigarh



Manisha Koirala

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PHOTOGRAPH: MEETESH TANEJA

Shatrughan Sinha's Rapid fire

As Saif Ali Khan was not safe in Mumbai, what do you think about the safety measures adopted by the Double Engine Sarkar for the common man?

J P Singh Kaka, Bhopal

Let's not drag the government into this just yet. It's terribly unfortunate what happened to our dear Saif Ali Khan. Rumours and blame games won't help. Mumbai Police and the Maharashtra government seem to be on the case. Whether Saif is safe or not, only time (and a thorough investigation) will tell.

Why does vulgarity get so much respect in today's world?

Dibyasha Mishra, Bhubaneswar

Why do political parties in India announce monetary schemes and lay foundation stones just before elections?

R Ramakrishnan, Dombivli

For impact, of course! As the poet Dushyant Kumar famously said: *Kahan to tay tha charaghan har ek ghar ke liye/ Kahān charagh mayassar nahin shahr ke liye.* Before elections, promises are made like "a lamp for every home," but after elections, they're forgotten and the whole city lies in darkness. Every party has a tale, and every politician has a script—meaningless in the long term but effective during elections.

Because, my dear, we've collectively decided that morals and self-respect are so last century. Vulgarity, along with everything else that's questionable, seems to be the flavour of the day. As they say, "Anything goes, as long as it gets the views."

What is the next phase after death?

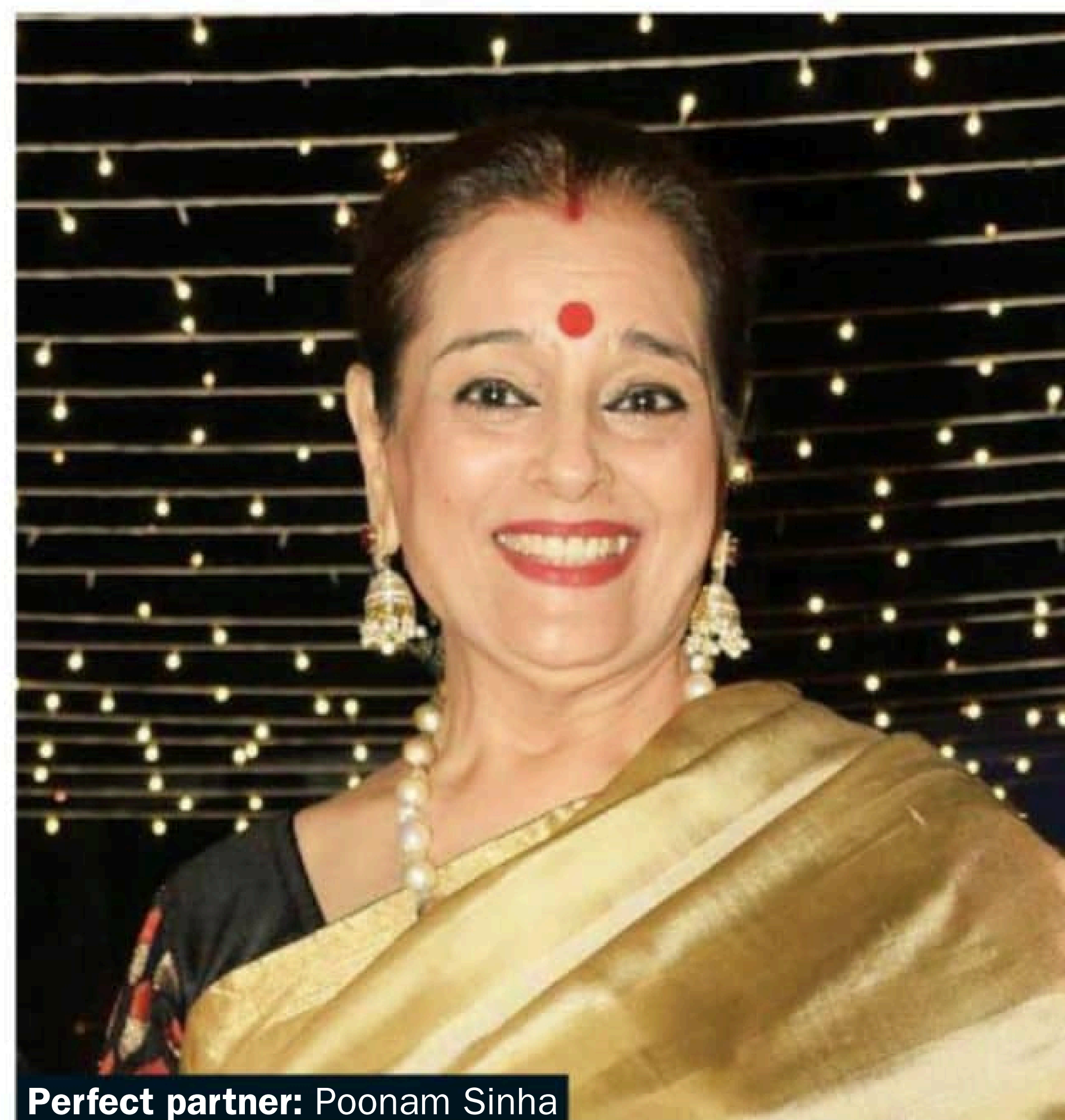
Seema Sabharwal, Chandigarh

Birth. Or rebirth, if you prefer. A new life begins, but whose life? Don't ask me, I'm still figuring out this one.

A woman's life changes after marriage; she leaves behind her family and everything, yet stays strong to build a family. What do men sacrifice after marriage?

Riki Mishra, Bhubaneswar

Men sacrifice their freedom, lifestyle, friends, health, wealth, and the ability to binge-watch cricket without commentary. Marriage is a team sport, and everyone loses a bit of themselves to gain something greater.



Perfect partner: Poonam Sinha

What is your take on the latest threats like deepfake videos and digital arrests?

R Ramakrishnan, Dombivli

These are now part and parcel of modern life. You can accept it, reject it, or ignore it—but the best approach is to learn to deal with it. After all, we live in the digital age. What's real or what's fake – it all depends on one's perspective.

How do we stop overthinking in life?

Gurmeet Kaur, on email

Keep calm and carry on, preferably with yoga, meditation or a strong cup of *chai*. Learn to ignore the irrelevant, because overthinking is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do but gets you nowhere.

What are some mind-blowing facts that sound unreal but are actually true?

Neeraj Sabharwal, Chandigarh

India invented photosensitive ink for marking voters' fingers and the EVM machine for "clumsy" counting. There



Saviour: Saif Ali Khan

are countless examples from history and science that sound too bizarre to be true but they are. Truth is stranger than fiction, and often funnier.

As Indians, why should it concern us who gets elected as the U.S. President? The American policy towards India is unlikely to change significantly. Your comments?

Abhijit Ghosh, 24 Parganas (North)

The U.S. is the most powerful country in the world, and keeping a good relationship with them is crucial. Whether their policy changes or not, it's always wise to stay on their

radar—preferably in a good way.

Wife.... Your definition?

C R Hariharan, Aluva

Everyone has a different perspective. Better half, best friend, mystery, ringmaster, ultimate controller, *ardhangini*, *sarwangini*... For me: my wife is happy, and I'm married. Need I say more?

Why did the film industry hesitate to produce a film on the Naval Revolt: February 1946, which had shaken the roots of the British?

Saviter Singh, Mumbai

First, you'd have to explain the Naval Revolt of 1946 to

1st Prize

Why is Shatrughan (Sinha) of Bollywood more famous than Shatrughan of Ramayana, even though he was the brother of (God) Ram?

Gurdial Singh Salaria, Jammu

The answer lies in your question itself. Shatrughan of Ramayana had nothing much to do in the original text or the subsequent adaptations. Nature, in its infinite wisdom, decided to compensate by making Bollywood's Shatrughan a star. Divine justice, I suppose.

2nd Prize

What is the single insight that changed your life the most?

Vishal Madan, Panchkula

Whether it's a single insight or a life-altering night, what matters is that the change leads to growth, truthfulness, and a better version of yourself. Life's a journey, and sometimes the detours are more scenic than the main road.

the film industry. Second, I suspect they're not quite ready to tackle such politically charged stories. Bollywood prefers *masala* over history. They're most likely to turn it into a love story. So don't give them such ideas.

How can we live a peaceful life in today's social media age?

Karan Singh Rathod, Gurugram

True peace in the social media age is the rarest of rare things. We're all racing against time, trying to keep

up with the relentless pace of the digital world. My advice? Log off occasionally and smell the roses or atleast the coffee.

What are your New Year wishes for Filmfare readers?

C R Hariharan, Aluva

May you all be blessed with love, peace, prosperity, hope, brotherhood, and wellbeing. May abundance prevail, and may your New Year be as blockbuster as a 1000 crore earning Bollywood film.

(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.

Win!
CASH PRIZES

1st prize

₹3000

2nd prize

₹2000

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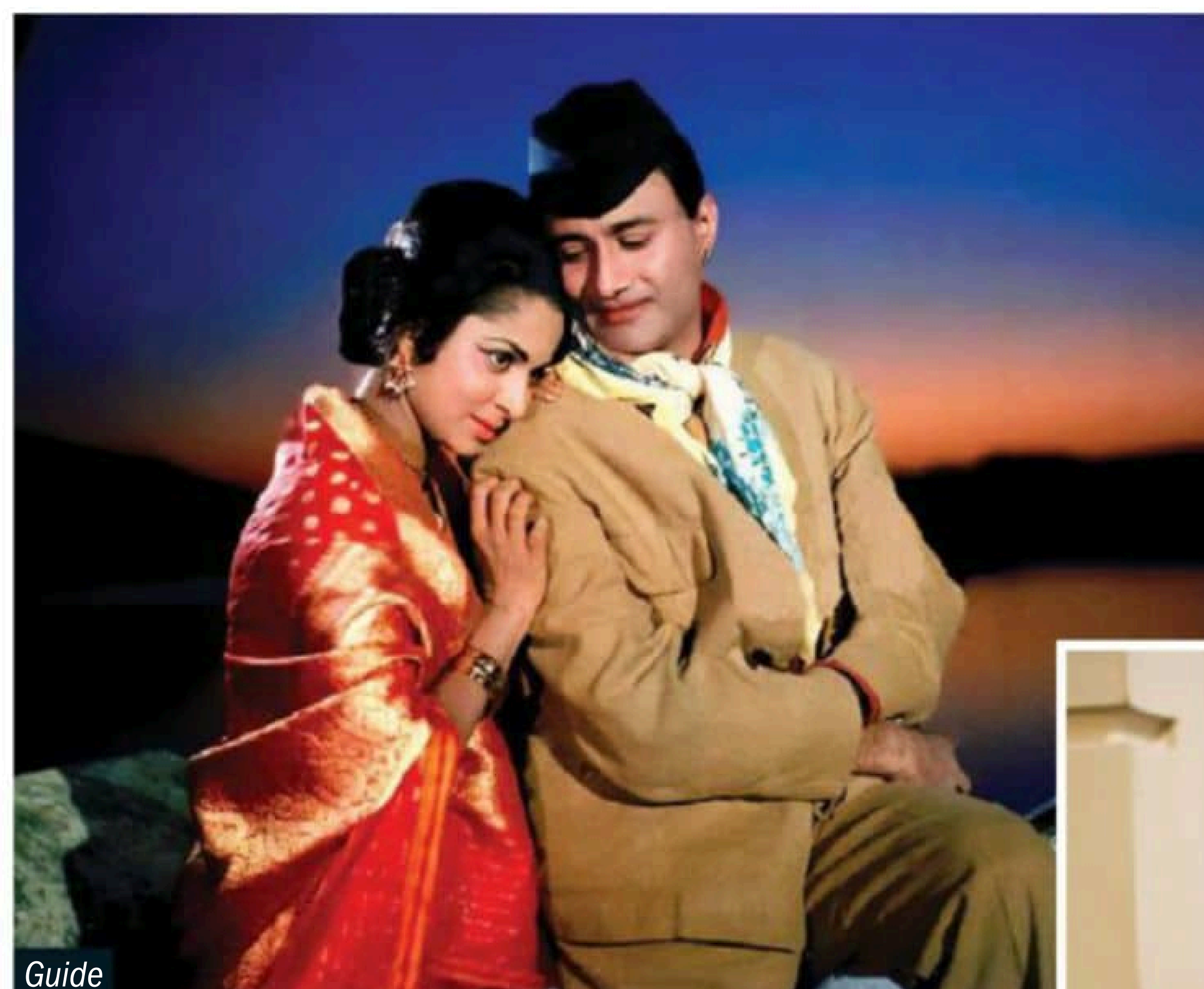
YOUR QUESTIONS WILL BE FORWARDED TO: Shatrughan Sinha, who insists his answers do not reflect his political and social views.

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Survivors...

While Bollywood has often portrayed married women as submissive, pativrata figures, there have always been exceptions. In *Guide* (1965), Rosie, played by Waheeda Rehman, leaves her cheating husband to carve out a career for herself as a dancer. She doesn't rely on anyone and even leaves her lover (Dev Anand) when their worldviews don't align. In *Arth* (1982), Shabana Azmi plays a character who not only forgives her cheating husband but also chooses to live life on her own terms, instead of aligning herself with a man who has always loved her from a distance. *Silsila* (1981) sees Rekha boldly engaging in an extramarital affair, driven not just by love, but also by lust and longing, which ultimately leads her back to her former lover. *Ijaazat* (1987), with Rekha again in the lead, shows her walking out of a loveless marriage and starting a new life, a theme that was bold for its time. In *Damini* (1993), Meenakshi Seshadri challenges her entire family in the pursuit of justice for a housemaid. *Astitva* (2020) features Tabu as a character who, in her desire to be a mother,



Guide

chooses to get pregnant by her lover.

In *English Vinglish* (2012), the middle-aged protagonist, played by Sridevi, is mocked for being a traditional *bahu* who can't speak English properly. Even her own children join in the ridicule. However, she doesn't buckle under the pressure. Instead, she learns the language on her own, with help from unexpected sources and regains her confidence. *Kahaani* (2012) features Vidya Balan, who, while pregnant, transforms into a femme fatale seeking revenge for her husband's death. The unexpected twist, from a flustered wife searching for her husband to an avenging angel, shocks the audience. *The Lunchbox*

(2013) presents Nimrat Kaur as a neglected wife who embarks on a platonic affair with a stranger, communicating through a series of notes delivered in lunchboxes. The film is both sweet and poignant. In *Mulk* (2018), Taapsee Pannu plays a daughter-in-law on the verge of divorce, but she fights in court to defend her family's honor. In *Thappad* (2020), Taapsee portrays a woman who refuses to tolerate even one instance of domestic violence, challenging ingrained patriarchy and fighting back.

The recently released *Mrs.* is a retelling of Jeo Baby's Malayalam film *The Great Indian Kitchen*



Mrs.



Thappad

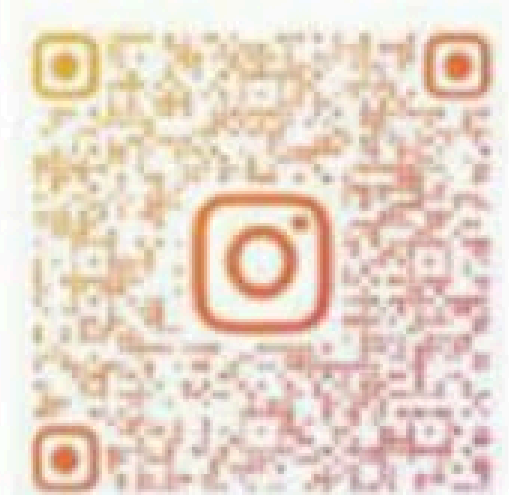
(2021). It exposes the deep roots of patriarchy in society, featuring a protagonist who decides to reclaim her identity by walking away from an unloved existence. The dance she performs at the end of the film becomes a symbol of her liberation. Films like these are crucial to changing perspectives and improving the lives of millions struggling under the weight of patriarchy. Hopefully, many more filmmakers will pick up the gauntlet.

jitesh.pillai@wmm.co.in
Twitter: @jiteshpillai



QUEEN OF MATCHMAKING: SIMA TAPARIA

Renowned matchmaker Sima Taparia has connected hearts since 2005, featured in the Emmy-nominated Netflix series "Indian Matchmaking." With numerous accolades and plans for global outreach, she inspires individuals in their quest for meaningful relationships.



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