

Meet **Sima Taparia**, the Indian matchmaker who has married traditional sensibilities with modern-day choices.

Text * **Benaifer J Mirza**

Matchmaking on Netflix

PHOTO BY VIKRANT SAPLE; HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY SHONALI RAJPURKAR
FROM TEAM ASHA HARIHARAN AT AHA EDUCATION

Sima Taparia

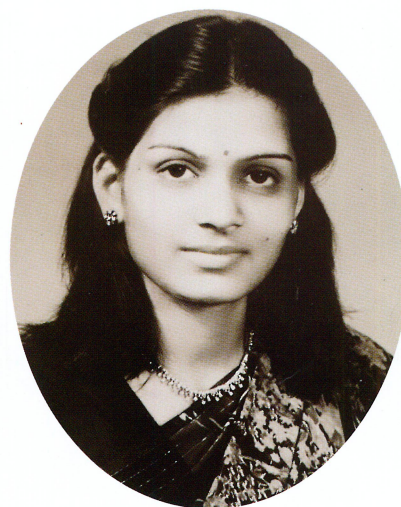


hey say marriages are made in heaven. We would say Sima Taparia makes them possible on earth. Taparia, or 'Sima from Mumbai', as she is more popularly known as, has become a household name today, thanks to the success of *Indian Matchmaking*, a docuseries that was aired on Netflix India in July 2020. In many ways, she has redefined the way arranged marriages were looked at and perceived in India.

Early years

Hailing from Gulbarga (renamed as Kalaburagi in 2014), Karnataka, Taparia has fond memories of her childhood. Her family, the Lahotis, were rich and affluent industrialists and the fourth richest family in India at the time. Her father, Shri Ramesh Chandra Lahoti, was a highly respected and well-known figure in Gulbarga and South India. Speaking about her father's qualities that she has imbibed, Taparia says, "I have always followed in my father's footsteps. People say that I look like him, speak like him and also have the gift of connecting with people, just the way he did."

After she completed her HSC, her family started looking for a match for her, and that is when she met Anup Taparia, her partner for life in the truest sense of the term. Today, she owes every bit of her success and happiness to him. Her aunt, Usha Somany (of Somany Ceramics Ltd), was instrumental in this union. Sima and Anup tied the knot in May 1983 and were blessed with two beautiful daughters—



Ritu in 1986 and Mridu in 1993. Ritu and her husband, Aditya Bagree, were blessed with a beautiful daughter, Anaishaa, last year.

The Taparia clan hails from Jaswantgarh, Rajasthan. While the extended family owns Taparia Tools Limited, Supreme Industries Limited, Famycare Ltd and Supreme Petrochem Limited, Sima and Anup together are promoters of Pregna International Ltd and Permanent Magnets Ltd.

From floral designs to matchmaking

After getting married, Sima Taparia moved to Nashik with Anup for their factory Taparia Tools Ltd. The urge to be on her toes constantly kept her busy with a number of activities, including painting, the aim being to do something special in her life. She would also visit Mumbai once a month to buy a few things, but most importantly, to import artificial flowers. A trip to Spain, where she had seen some beautiful artificial flower decorations, had inspired her to start Natural Look, her own business of artificial floral designs and décor.

In 1991, she and Anup moved to Mumbai. Even though her business of artificial flowers was doing well, she still had an inner desire of doing something bigger and better—something that would use her gift of being a gregarious person to the fullest.

*Clockwise from top right:
Sima Taparia at 18;
Sima and Anup Taparia
in their younger days*





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Even though she had played cupid for her sister, Preeti Sodani (who is now happily married in Boston), 25 years ago, she had never thought of taking up matchmaking professionally. Coincidentally, in 2005, one of her friends suggested that she should try her hand at matchmaking, and that is when she thought of giving it a try. She adds, "My friend told me that very often matchmakers don't take the responsibility of doing the required amount of background checks. Thanks to my goodwill, people trusted me and my skills and knew that I would suggest or recommend a prospective bride or groom to someone only after I would be assured of things."

In this age of online dating apps and matrimonial websites,

what is it then that makes Taparia stand out from the rest? In response, Taparia shares, "While these online dating and matrimonial sites are good, they don't give clients a whole lot of details. While it's all about a click, one doesn't get to know much about the prospective candidate's background and other details. On the other hand, when someone contacts me, I scan their biodata, screen them, go to their house, and put in all the hard work necessary to make it a safe and good match. Even with this ongoing Covid situation, I have travelled to various

such as Nagpur, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai and even London to meet families and prospective allies. I gather confidence in a prospective groom or bride only after meeting his or her family, knowing their background, seeing their business and standard of living. An individual's upbringing and family values are very important. I also see the preferences of the boy and the girl and try to make a match on that basis. Nothing like this is there on online dating or matrimony platforms. This is my personal service and people feel safe and secure about it."

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Further, she says she considers every prospective bride or groom as her daughter or son and puts in that kind of effort and hard work in every alliance she works on. “God has sent me to match a certain couple. It will happen through me only if it is destined,” she adds matter-of-factly, though.

So, what is the definition or secret of a happy marriage? Taparia says, “A marriage is the meeting of two souls. Love and respect for each other are very important. Of course, a little bit of compromise and adjustment is necessary in every marriage or relationship. Ego and lack of patience are the issues in today’s marriages. My advice to today’s couples is that it’s important to play the balancing act—enjoy your individual life and respect your family life too. That is when things will go smoothly.”

Indian Matchmaking

While Taparia has taken the OTT platform by storm with *Indian Matchmaking*, her tryst with the small screen actually began with *A Suitable Girl*, a documentary directed by Smriti Mundhra, which was aired on Netflix India in 2017. *A Suitable Girl* began in 2010 when Mundhra (the daughter of the legendary Indian American director Jag Mundhra) decided to make a documentary on matchmaking. This was a

compilation of three individual real-life stories, and Taparia’s story revolved around how a matchmaker matches her daughter. She recalls, “*A Suitable Girl* was shot from 2010 to 2016. Mundhra wanted to conclude the show with my daughter, Ritu’s marriage. Everything in this documentary was straight from the heart. Like the last scene, where I’m crying, everything was natural... there were no scripted lines and dialogues. Nothing was planned. The camera followed me everywhere, be it inside my home, or when I travelled to Hyderabad and Delhi... everywhere!” Mundhra went on to win the prestigious Best New Documentary Director Award at the Tribeca Film Festival for her exceptional direction of *A Suitable Girl*.

A Suitable Girl was probably just the beginning of many firsts for Mundhra and Taparia. After the success of this documentary, Mundhra pitched the idea of creating a show on the lines of matchmaking to Netflix India. And, the rest, as they say, is history. Work started in October 2018 and the shooting of *Indian Matchmaking* began in April 2019. Shot across eight cities in the USA and in Delhi and Mumbai, the show reached dizzying heights of success and counts among the biggest releases on the OTT platform this year. Of course, the undisputed star of the show was none other than Sima Taparia! *Indian Matchmaking* released on July 16, 2020, and Taparia’s mobile phone and landline hasn’t stopped ringing from



clockwise from top left: Sima Taparia (sitting, middle) with girl crew members of *Indian Matchmaking*; Sima Taparia (left) with upam Kaur, one of the participants of *Indian Matchmaking*

acing page, clockwise from top: Sima Taparia sitting with a poster of *Indian Matchmaking*; Sima Taparia (right) in action during the shoot of *Indian Matchmaking*





*Clockwise from top:
Sima and Anup
Taparia holidaying
at the Niagara Falls;
Sima and Anup
Taparia on their
wedding day*

Today, ‘Sima from Mumbai’ has become a household name in every corner of the globe, and the audience has fallen in love with her simplicity, humility, honesty and innate Indian values

that day. She has received immense love and appreciation for her honest, straight-from-the-heart, real-life portrayal of a matchmaker in the eight-part docuseries. She has also received more than 4,000 emails appreciating her for her extremely honest and beautiful representation of an Indian (female) matchmaker. Today, ‘Sima from Mumbai’ has become a household name in every corner of the globe, and the audience has fallen in love with her simplicity, humility, honesty and innate Indian values.

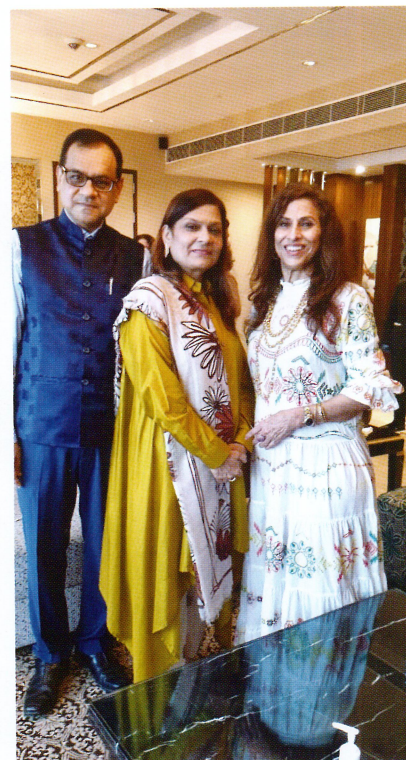
The concept of arranged marriage, which until the release of *Indian Matchmaking* was considered as pretty “uncool” by the youth, is now viewed differently by them. According to Taparia,

there has been a considerable shift in the way people are approaching arranged marriages now. In fact, while Season 1 of *Indian Matchmaking* may not have had a lot of candidates interested in participating in the show, a probable Season 2 could see people queuing up to become a part of such exceptional docuseries. Of course, while the participants in the second season could be new and different, we truly hope that the one constant in this show would be Taparia.

Other passions

Coming to her hobbies and passions, Taparia says, “I am very fond of learning new things. But while I love to dabble in a whole lot of things, I have also realised that I cannot become a master of everything. I’m extremely fond of cooking and feeding people. When we have guests at our home, we prepare at least 12-13 dishes. Also, Anup and I love travelling. We are globetrotters. Barring three or four countries, we’ve pretty-much travelled across the globe!”

And, of course, she loves to socialise, which, in a way, is an extension of her career; or, probably, her career is an extension of her amazing socialising skills. In fact, she is a problem-solver, who has become the go-to person whenever any-



Clockwise from top left: Sima Taparia with her family (l-r) Anup (husband), Aditya Bagree (son-in-law), Ritu (elder daughter), Mridu (younger daughter) and Sima; (L-R) Anup Taparia, Sima Taparia, Shobhaa De; Sima Taparia (right) with Shri Chennamaneni Vidyasagar Rao, ex-Governor of Maharashtra (left)

of her friends or relatives are in need of any help or assistance. On her part, she confesses that she feels an unexplainable sense of satisfaction in helping people.

Taparia is also an integral part of many well-known clubs, including Deepsakhi Club, Rotary Club of Mumbai, and Ruchika Club. She co-founded Deepsakhi Club 25 years ago, with the intention of giving the usually homebound Maheshwari woman a place and platform where she can unwind and be herself. This year, the Club celebrates its silver anniversary. Taparia's passion and energy for life and doing various things are

infectious, and this explains why she is so popular across various clubs and circuits, not to mention her popularity on a global scale, of course!

Living her dreams

Quoting a famous line from a Bollywood film, Taparia says, "Agar kisi cheez ko dil se chaaho, toh poori kayanat usey tumse milane ki koshish mein lag jaati hai." This translates to 'If you truly love something with all your heart, then the universe comes together to make that dream a reality.' She confesses that while she did feel like closing down her matchmaking business twice due to certain highs and lows, given the uncertainties and unpredictability that it comes with, Anup kept encouraging and pushing her and didn't let her give up. He explained to her that one needs to strive constantly in any and every job or profession. This kept her going and has made her journey truly inspiring and worthwhile. And with that, Taparia today is living her dreams and also making many dreams of love and togetherness come true. *

