Feb 2025 Rs.50
01.02.2025

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I'm very happy to be part of Chhaava

Vicky Kaushal

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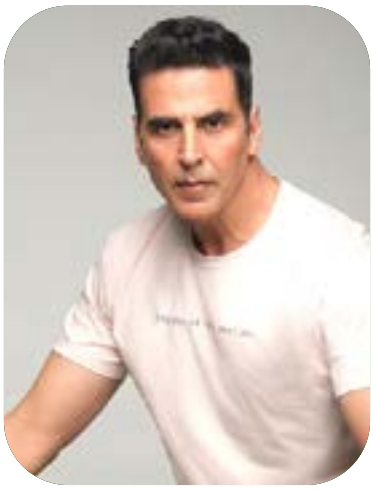

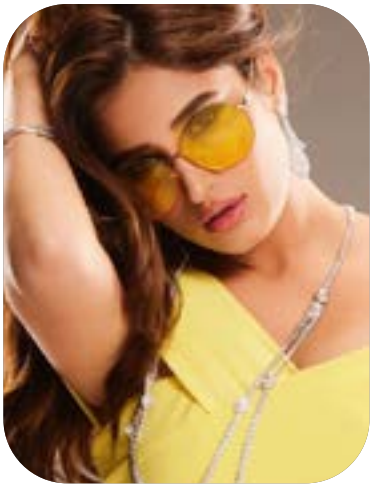

Seema Pimpley
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Amiri

Vicky Kaushal-starrer Chhaava should be shown to experts before release, says Maharashtra minister Uday Samant

The film, directed by Laxman Utekar, is a historical drama that portrays the life and reign of the Maratha warrior king Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj Taking to his X (formerly Twitter) account, Samant praised the effort to bring Sambhaji Maharaj's story to the big screen but insisted that utmost care should be taken to ensure historical accuracy and respect for the Maratha king. Samant also asked the producers and directors of 'Chhaava' to act responsibly, warning that the film's release could be "blocked" if any offensive content remains.

"It is a matter of joy that a Hindi film based on the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the protector of religion and protector of freedom, is being made. Such efforts are necessary to make the world understand the history of Chhatrapati. However, many have expressed their opinions that there are some objectionable scenes in this film. Our position is that this film should not be released without first showing it to experts and knowledgeable people. Anything that will harm the honor of the Maharaj will not be tolerated,""Our position is that the producers and directors of the film should take immediate action in this regard and remove anything objectionable. A further decision will be taken after watching the film; otherwise, this film will not be allowed to be released!" he added. Produced under the banner of Maddock Films, 'Chhaava' is a period drama that portrays the legendary story of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, played by Vicky Kaushal. The film is set to depict the courageous Maratha ruler's legendary reign, beginning with his coronation in 1681. The movie also stars Rashmika Mandanna. The movie is slated to release in theatres on February 14. At the heart of the film lies a narrative fueled by the pursuit of vengeance, as Aurangzeb vows to eliminate Sambhaji at any cost. Set against the backdrop of an escalating war between the Marathas and the Mughals, the film transforms into an adrenaline-fueled action film.
The trailer starts with a montage, offering a glimpse into the multifaceted life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj. The scenes weave together moments from his military campaigns and pursuits to his personal life, including his marriage. The trailer is packed with heart-pumping action sequences, showcasing Vicky's fearless warrior spirit as he single-handedly takes on hundreds of soldiers in intense battle scenes. The trailer concludes in a sequence, where Vicky's character engages in a fierce fight with a lion.

> Maharashtra Minister Uday Samant has urged Chhaava, starring Vicky Kaushal as Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, be screened for experts before its release.Maharashtra Minister Uday Samant has urged that the upcoming film 'Chhaava', which stars actor Vicky Kaushal as Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, be screened for "experts" before its release.

Chhaava: Vicky Kaushal Puts On Weight To Play Maratha Ruler - "Went From 80 Kg To 105 Kg"

Actor Vicky Kaushal on Wednesday said he was keen to do another action project after Uri: The Surgical Strike and found the perfect opportunity in the period movie Chhaava.

Directed by Laxman Utekar, Chhaava will see Kaushal in the role of Maratha emperor Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, who was the son of Maratha empire founder Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. At the trailer launch event of the film, the 36-year-old actor said he is content with his performance in the movie as he has given his absolute best. "During the prep, a lot of things happened, and I told Laxman sir that something right is happening somewhere. I feel shy to talk about the prep now that the work is done, but whatever was inside me, I gave it all to this. I am satisfied knowing that I had nothing more to give to any film than what I've given to this one," Kaushal said.

Kaushal also revealed that he gained 25 kgs to portray the historical character.

"The last action film I did was Uri: The Surgical Strike. After that, I was waiting to do another action film. Everything about this was new. I didn't know horse riding, so I took training for it.

"I also trained in sword, stick, and spear fighting for 6-7 months. I gained weight for the role – I went from 80 kg to around 105 kg, putting on 25 kg for the film," he said.

Also starring Rashmika Mandanna and Akshaye Khanna, Chhaava marks Kaushal's second collaboration with Utekar after 2023's family drama movie Zara Hatke Zara Bachke. Kaushal said he was initially "scared" about portraying such a legendary character but Utekar had complete faith in him. "There are certain characters that, when you get the opportunity to play them, you feel scared, wondering if you'll be able to do justice to them. That fear comes from knowing how deeply sentiments and faith are attached to such roles," he said. "More than living that life, understanding the culture, history and values was the biggest earning from the film and that's something I will never forget," he added.

Mandanna, who plays Sambhaji Maharaj's wife Maharani Yesubai, came to the event in a wheelchair. The Pushpa 2 star had recently sustained a leg injury while working out in a gym.

"It's an honour, as a girl from the South, to be playing a Maharani. Yesubai is the most privileged and special role I could have asked for in this lifetime. I was just telling Laxman sir that after this, I feel content enough to retire," she said.

Utekar, also known for films Mimi and Luka Chuppi," thanked Dinesh Vijan of Maddock Films for letting him make a movie about the "legendary warrior".

"I consider myself lucky that in our country lived such a great king who fought 127 battles and won every single one... It was my dream for the Maratha king, Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, and his sacrifices to be known across the world," he said.

Vijian, the producer behind films such as Street franchise, Badlapur, Munjya and Hindi Medium, assured the audience that the film will do justice to Sambhaji Maharaj's legacy.

"It's my 20th year (in the film industry). It is the hard work of all these years that we are in the position to make such a film," he said.

What's Sanya Malhotra Proud Of?

After making the festival rounds, the Sanya Malhotra starrer Mrs sets its streaming date on ZEE5 starting February 7. To make the announcement, Malhotra, her co-star Nishant Dahiya and Director Arati Kadav came together at the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival in Mumbai and unveiled the trailer in the presence of art buffs. In Mrs, Sanya portrays Richa, a newlywed whose sweet bliss of a new marriage goes downhill as she finds herself entrapped in the domestic routine at her traditional and patriarchal family home. The film also features Nishant Dahiya as the husband and Kanwaljit Singh as the father-in-law.

"Richa somewhere lies in all of us," Sanya says about her role. "I have seen her in my mom, I have seen her in my friends, I have even seen her in random women I met. This story is very special to me for the message it gives. The film is about the subtle conditioning on gender roles and it is something that's very close to my heart. I hope many more people will watch Mrs and appreciate our message."

Why Mrs Is Special For Sanya Malhotra

Mrs is a Hindi remake of Jeo Baby's 2021 Malayalam drama The Great Indian Kitchen which starred Nimisha Sajayan and Suraj Venjaramoodu. Sanya was named Best Actor at the New York Indian Film Festival last year and the film has been doing the rounds on the festival circuit including the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne, the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival in Estonia, the Palm Springs International Film Festival in the US, and the International Film Festival of India in Goa.

Nishant Dahiya on playing Diwakar in Mrs...

"During the shoot," says Arati, "I would tell Kanwaljitji and Nishant that even you are victims. As men, you can't cook the food you like because nobody taught you. Through this film, we empower men and not just women. They should realise that they are also victims of this system. That's really the idea behind this film." Arati hopes that Mrs touches a deep chord with the audience and leaves a greater impact on the society.

"When I first read the script, I felt like this was everyone's story. It is my story, my mom's story, my aunt's story, my papa's story. It made me think I should make this story with a lot of love and responsibility. People should change after seeing the film and they should question their life conditioning. That's my motive."

I hope this film will bring some change in people, their homes, and in our society.'

Sanya says she likes to cook and here's what she cooks best!

Sanya echoes Arati's sentiments and believes audiences will see a little of themselves in Mrs and will connect with the characters some way or the other. "It is a very special film. I know for a fact that a lot of people will be able to resonate with this film," says Sanya. I hope this film will bring some change in people, their homes, and in our society." "We have given our 100 percent to it, and it is looking very nice. I am very proud of it."

Samantha Ruth Prabhu

'I Have A Responsibility While Picking Roles'

Samantha's quietly persuasive presence as a fiercely protective mother and a closet assassin in Raj-DK's Citadel Honey Bunny, defines the emerging New Woman in Indian cinema. She is yet to emerge fully. But by jove, Samantha is determined to pull Her out kicking, dragging and screaming. She is ready to wait it out. But she won't play with the decorative doll. "I believe that I have a certain responsibility while picking roles,"

I know you say no to a helluva lot of projects. What is your criteria for saying yes to projects?

I believe that I have a certain responsibility while picking roles. A responsibility that means that I need to play characters that fairly represent women in society.

I think that women today are multi-taskers, they're world leaders, they're change-makers and it's time that the characters that we play on screen aren't defined by the male protagonist of the film.

That has been the norm for as long as we can remember?

Usually our characters are always defined by the male protagonist of the film and without any character-arc or life experience of our own. So it's important for me now to choose characters that fairly represent the women of today.

There aren't too many female parts that fulfil these preconditions?

Although now that would mean projects that I'm a part of are far apart, very far apart, and I wouldn't be on screen too often but I think that whenever I do get that opportunity I will seize it, will seize the opportunity and I will do my best to give it my all.

What next from you?

I'm ready for the next challenge.
I think the one I'm working on with Raj and DK next is also something very very different from what I've done before and it is a challenge of its own. So I am giving all of my concentration and all of my effort to this role.

‘Mumbai is a very safe place, but...’: Sonu Sood reacts to brutal attack on Saif Ali Khan

Actor Sonu Sood, while speaking to the media persons, called the Saif Ali Khan stabbing incident "very sad" and "unfortunate"Members of the Indian film industry have come forward to support Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor Khan following the attack on the actor at his Bandra residence early Thursday morning. The incident, which occurred around 2:30 a.m., left the actor injured and required emergency surgery.

Actor Sonu Sood, while speaking to the media persons, called the incident "very sad" and "unfortunate," and said that although he believes Mumbai is a "very safe city," such incidents are a wake-up call to be more alert.

"It is very sad. He is okay right now, but I think it is an unfortunate incident. Mumbai is a very safe place, but incidents like this remind us to be more alert. Security guards in buildings must be more attentive," said the actor.

Earlier, Saif's staff members were brought to the Bandra Police Station for questioning regarding the case but were later allowed to leave. The Mumbai Police has clarified that no arrests have been made so far, and the investigation is ongoing. The actor was attacked by an intruder in his 11th-floor Bandra flat at around 2:30 a.m. on Thursday. The incident occurred when an intruder allegedly confronted the actor's maid at his residence.

As Saif attempted to intervene and de-escalate the situation, it escalated into a violent altercation, resulting in the actor sustaining several stab wounds.

Saif was immediately taken to Mumbai's Lilavati Hospital after being stabbed by the intruder, where he underwent surgery under the supervision of a team of doctors.

According to doctors, Saif sustained a major injury to the thoracic spinal cord due to a knife lodged in his spine, and surgery was performed to remove a 2.5-inch-long knife from the actor's spine and repair his leaking spinal fluid. While Saif is "out of danger," doctors are continuing to monitor him.

‘We have been ignored’: Entertainment industry share expectations from Budget 2025

From a rationalised GST, simplifying tax framework to subsidy in shoot, stakeholders in the entertainment industry spoke to Mid-day on what they expect from the Union Budget 2025

All eyes are on Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman who will be reading out the Budget plans for 2025-2026 on February 1, Saturday in the Parliament. The budget plan for different sectors from health, defence, railways, income tax, and entertainment among others will be laid out tomorrow. Ahead of the budget session in the parliament, mid-day reached out to some stakeholders in the entertainment industry to understand what their expectations are from the forthcoming budget. **‘Rationalise GST’** Gaurav Sharma, Chief Financial Officer, PVR INOX Ltd says, “We urge the government to rationalize GST on cinema tickets to enhance affordability and drive footfalls while also simplifying the tax framework to reduce litigation and improve the ease of doing business. A more predictable and streamlined regulatory environment will enable sustained investments in cinema infrastructure, fostering long-term growth for the industry.” On the other hand, says that the GST has brought uniformity in taxation on ticket prices across streams as earlier the taxation on tickets varied from state to state with Maharashtra alone levying 40 percent. “Some states also levied 100 percent tax. But that has been changed with the GST in place bringing uniformity on the tax front on ticket prices,” he said. **‘No hope from the budget’** Mohan does not have much hope from the budget for the entertainment sector. Ask him why and he shares, “Every year around 4-5 months before the budget session, a delegation from the entertainment industry visits the central government and expresses their concerns regarding the business. However, no such thing happened last year,” he said. He stressed that the glittery box office numbers seen in 2024 will paint a picture that all is well in the industry and that there aren’t problems that need to be addressed. Girish Johar, producer and film business expert hopes for rebates in the cinema and exhibition segment, administration expenses and day-to-day maintenance at the production level. “We have been ignored in the past couple of years. If something comes up in the budget this year, it will be a big boost to the soft power that is being appreciated in the country.” **‘Single window clearance’** Another issue that stakeholders have commonly expressed is the need to ease the process of shooting in the country. States have been providing subsidies to filmmakers to shoot as it also boosts tourism and local employment. But experts believe more can be done to ease the process. “A single window clearance should be promoted so shooting can happen conveniently,” Johar said adding, “The government has taken steps to provide subsidies to shooting at live locations but a little proactiveness and little more concession will definitely add to it.” “From the consumer level, people need more disposable income,” he added, saying that a lesser GST on tickets, food and beverages will only be enticing to movie goers.

'Portraying Dr Singh Was Most Challenging'

Anupam Kher posted a **heartfelt tribute** to Dr Manmohan Singh, who passed away on December 26. Kher played Dr Singh in the film The Accidental Prime Minister, which opened to **mixed reviews** and reactions. "Manmohan Singhji's walk, his personality, his style of speaking are in the public consciousness. I could have easily fallen into the trap of mimicry but I avoided that,"

You played Manmohan Singhji in The Accidental Prime Minister.

It is easy to play a personality who is someone long gone, no matter how distinguished. With due respects to Ben Kingsley who was simply outstanding, he played Mahatma Gandhi long after the original character's physicality was a hazy memory on bank notes and vague documentaries. On the other hand, I had to play someone who is very much in the public domain. Manmohan Singhji's walk, his personality, his style of speaking are in the public consciousness. It is the most challenging role of my career. I could have easily fallen into the trap of mimicry but I avoided that. I could have ended up being caricaturish.

How would you rate your performance as Manmohan Singh?

I gave it my entire concentration.

We worked hard to make an epic homage to a man, scholar and politician, who is misunderstood, or rather hardly understood. We were not looking at the bio-pic on Manmohan Singhji as a small film. We made every effort to give the film the epic look that the man deserves.

Did Manmohanji see the film?

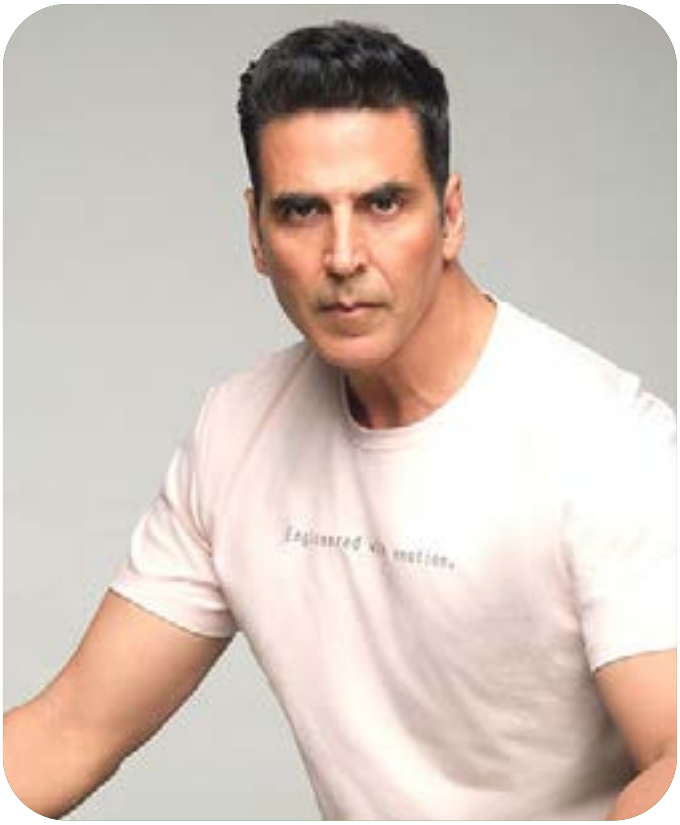
Dr Singh was always bound by what his party's high command wanted. He may not have wanted to disrespect their sentiments by seeing a film which did not flatter the Congress. I respect Dr Singh even more for being so sensitive to the wishes of his high command.

The film didn't get favourable reviews.

I was ridiculed by knowledgeable critics for my performance. My political loyalties were questioned. But finally, it is the public which gave the film the acceptance we had hoped for. Portraying Dr Singh was the most difficult role of my life. I had to make sure that our much misunderstood erstwhile prime minister did not get a raw deal. That's what he got during his tenure as the prime minister. We didn't want him to suffer more of the same indignity in our film. I am proud to have played Dr Singh with such dignity.

Akshay Kumar On Doing One-Two Films A Year: "If I Can Work, Why Shouldn't I?"

A lot of his recent movie releases, like Bade Miyan Chote Miyan, Sarfira, Khel Khel Mein, among others, didn't do well at the box-office.



On Sunday, at the trailer launch event of his upcoming movie Sky Force, Akshay Kumar said that in his 33-year career, it has been all about working hard and not only does he aim to continue doing so, but also to break his dry spell at the box office.

"It's not that it has happened for the first time. The best part is you keep on working hard. That is what I tell myself. If anyone talks to me about it, I say the same thing that you have to keep working hard," the actor told the reporters on being asked about not having a successful 2024 in terms of how his films fared.

For the unversed, a lot of his recent movie releases, like Bade Miyan Chote Miyan, Sarfira, Khel Khel Mein, among others, didn't do well at the box-office.

At the press event, Akshay shared that he witnessed such a roadblock many times in his career. He even revealed that people around him sometimes advise him to do "one film or two films" in a year.

"But I say if I can work, then why not? I have based my entire career on that," he said with his indomitable energy.

The actor also revealed that some have advised him to stop making content-driven films, but he doesn't want to give up. "I don't want to stop. I want to do these kinds of films as well as others. I am very proud that I made the film Sarfira, even though it didn't work," he stated.

Co-directed by Sandeep Kelwani and Abhishek Kapur, the film also marks the acting debut of Veer Pahariya, brother of Shikhar Pahariya.

Produced by Maddock Films and Jio Studios, Sky Force also features Nimrat Kaur and Sara Ali Khan in pivotal roles.

ARJUN KAPOOR TALKS ABOUT STEPMOTHER IN AN INTERVIEW, CALLS HER 'SRIDEVI MA'AM'

Arjun Kapoor, who scared audiences with his villainous role of Danger Lanka in Singham Again, was recently interviewed. The actor mentioned his stepmother Sridevi in the interview Arjun Kapoor is the son of producer Boney Kapoor and the late Mona Kapoor. He was only 10 years old when his father Boney married Sridevi in 1996. Arjun has always been close to his father but he has rarely spoken about his stepmom Sridevi. In a recent interview, Arjun mentioned her in the passing. Arjun referred to Sridevi while talking about late actor Satish Kaushik and his 1993 movie Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja, which was produced by Boney Kapoor and starred his uncle Anil Kapoor and stepmother Sridevi.

Arjun Kapoor mentions stepmother Sridevi

During an interview with Galatta India, Arjun said, "My entire life with my father was being on the Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja set. Even by today's standards, it is one of the biggest films we ever made. The film cost Rs 10 crore in 1992. It had Anil Kapoor, Sridevi Ma'am, and Jaggu Dada, Jackie Shroff. Anupam Kher was the villain. And there was a pigeon with Anil chachu (uncle) in the film, whose name was Django, and it was my favourite character at the time," Arjun said."During the film's shoot, Sridevi had already started dating Boney Kapoor while he was still married to Mona Kapoor. Boney divorced Mona in 1996 and married Sridevi in the same year when Arjun was 10 years old, while his younger sister Anshula Kapoor was just five. Boney and Sridevi have two daughters Janhvi Kapoor and Khushi Kapoor, who are also actors now.

Arjun Kapoor's relationship with step sisters Janhvi and Khushi after Sridevi's death

Sridevi passed away in 2018 because of an accidental drowning. He mentioned that after the tragedy, he and Anshula grew closer to Janhvi and Khushi and he has also become very protective of them. Days before his Bollywood debut in 2012 with Ishazaade, Arjun's mother Mona Kapoor passed away due to cancer. Coincidentally, Janhvi's mother Sridevi also died a few months before the release of her debut film Dhadak.

Arjun was last seen in Rohit Shetty's copverse film Singham Again. His villainous role Danger Lanka was liked by his fans. He will next be seen in Mudassar Aziz's romantic comedy Mere Husband Ki Biwi opposite Bhumi Pednekar and Rakul Preet Singh. The film will be released on February 21.

'Should be able to see panties': Priyanka Chopra recalls being disgusted by a director's comments at 19

Priyanka Chopra Jonas recently attended the Forbes Power Women's Summit where she recalled a horrifying experience when a director insisted on seeing her panties for a film

Global icon **Priyanka Chopra Jonas**, who's had an illustrious career in the film industry has time and again spoken about her past experiences where she was objectified by those in power. Now, the former Miss World is working hard to change the way women are treated in showbiz by using her influence.

She recently attended the Forbes Power Women's Summit where she recalled a horrifying experience when a director insisted on seeing her panties for a film.

When a director wanted to see Priyanka's panties.

Priyanka recalled, "I was speaking to the director and I said, would you speak to my stylist and just explain to him what you want in terms of clothes and stuff? I'm standing right next to him. He picks up the phone and goes, 'Listen, people are going to come into the movies to watch her when she shows her panties. So it needs to be really short so that I can see her panties. You know those people sitting up front? They should be able to see her panties.' And he said it like four times. And it's not even pretty in Hindi. It's worse.

"The Citadel actor, who was barely 19 at the time, was confined to her mother Madhu Chopra. "I went back home that night and said, 'Mom, I can't look at his face. If that's what he thinks of me, if that's how small I am, there's no space for growth.' And I just walked out of the movie and said, 'I'm sorry, I can't work.' And I've till date never worked with him. Whatever I decide to be will be my choice. How I want to be perceived will be my choice. Perception is reality and my perception is going to be my identity," she added.

Priyanka Chopra's work front

The actor is finally gearing up for her comeback to the Indian screens. She will star in SS Rajamouli's untitled next with Mahesh Babu. The pre-production phase is in full swing, with the script finalized. In May 2024, Mahesh embarked on a trip to Germany to prepare for his physically demanding character in the movie. Earlier, Rajamouli disclosed that his film is going to be a globetrotting action adventure.

Besides that, Priyanka also has Citadel season 2, Heads of State, and The Bluff on the Hollywood front.

'Film Industry Doesn't Like New Things'

'When you try to do something that's not been tried before, nobody likes that.'

Having made successful films like Rock On!!, Kai Po Che and Kedarnath, **Abhishek Kapoor** holds a niche for his directing talent in the Hindi commercial space.

'Gattu' Kapoor is gearing up for probably his most ambitious film yet, Azaad, which tells the tale of love and loyalty between humans and animals. Featuring Ajay Devgn in a retro look, the film marks the starry launchpad for Ajay's nephew Aaman, Raveena Tandon's daughter Rasha Thadani, as well as for a handsome jet black horse. "The fact that you're trying to create a new experience, the most amazing thing would be to find new faces so that when the audiences watch it, they're pulled into a world they've never experienced before," Abhishek Kapoor tells.

At the trailer launch, you said Azaad was almost 10 years in the making. What made this story stuck with you for so long?

I wrote the script in 2016, and have been waiting to make it since then. It's such a difficult movie. The industry doesn't like change, they don't like new things. They like to work on repetition. It has become a machine. If you're going to follow a trend, it's easier to just get things going. But when you try to do something that's not been tried before, nobody likes that. So you just need to wait for the right opportunity When it comes, you seize the moment, like I did with Azaad.

This seems to be a film that visually goes back to an old-fashioned aesthetic, like the Hindi cinema of the 1980s. Were there any films in particular that you were referencing or inspired by when designing the look for Azaad?

The hero of the film is a horse and when you want to make a movie about a horse, you definitely want to see him running. You want to see that galloping horse. And for that, you need open spaces. In today's time, if it's not a racecourse, where will you experience that kind of thrill and excitement? So you have to take it back in time when there was no development. That's how the period world came into the writing part. Once you go, you discover a new world and you try to tell people what was happening back then. In today's times, people are very attached to animals. As more awareness is created and people are appreciating nature, animal love is going through the roof. Today, we talk about how dogs are man's best friend. But can you imagine back in the day when there were no cars, no phones, no Internet, what that horse must have meant for a human being? Or the relationship they must have shared? All the wars were fought by heroes, whether Maharana Pratap or Prithviraj Chauhan or Chhatrapati Shivaji, and all of them had a special relationship with their horses. They were warriors together. I thought about taking it into a period space so that you can enjoy the landscape. That's how the film evolved.

What were your challenges during filming with a real horse?

Not only is it a real horse, it is my horse. At the very start, I didn't know whether to create it in CGI or import a trained horse. Because in the West, they have a far more evolved ecosystem for horses and animals. I didn't know where to start. Eventually, I put together a team to look for the most beautiful black horse they could find. They found him in a village in Punjab but he was not trained. When I saw him, it was like love at first sight. We got trainers from all over the world to train him as well as the actors.

When you're making a movie with an animal, you have to be respectful about it. You have to have high standards. There was a separate vertical setup, like an animal department. We had a full vertical of veterinarians, doctors, vehicles, an entire settlement was made. The horse was the star, and we had to work according to what was best for him. In the process, we learned so much. It's not a dog, you know, it's a horse. It's a very powerful animal. At the same time, he's very delicate and sensitive. To get a performance out of the horse, you've got to tune into their frequency. You can't expect them to become like human beings. Their vibrations are very different. Everybody had to tune into their vibrations and slow down.

In this film, you work with an established actor like Ajay Devgn and two debutants. What are some things you've taken away after working with them?

When you make a movie, it's not like any other business. When you go to the banking industry, they're all the same. One banker is probably a sharper businessman than the other. Movie-making is very personal. Everyone has their own contribution, their own strengths, their own personalities. Sometimes, someone who knows nothing can contribute the most. Movie-making is a very humbling process. If I'm working with a star of Devgn's stature, I am humbled. And when I'm working with newcomers, I am again humbled. I am very grateful that I get to do what I get to do.

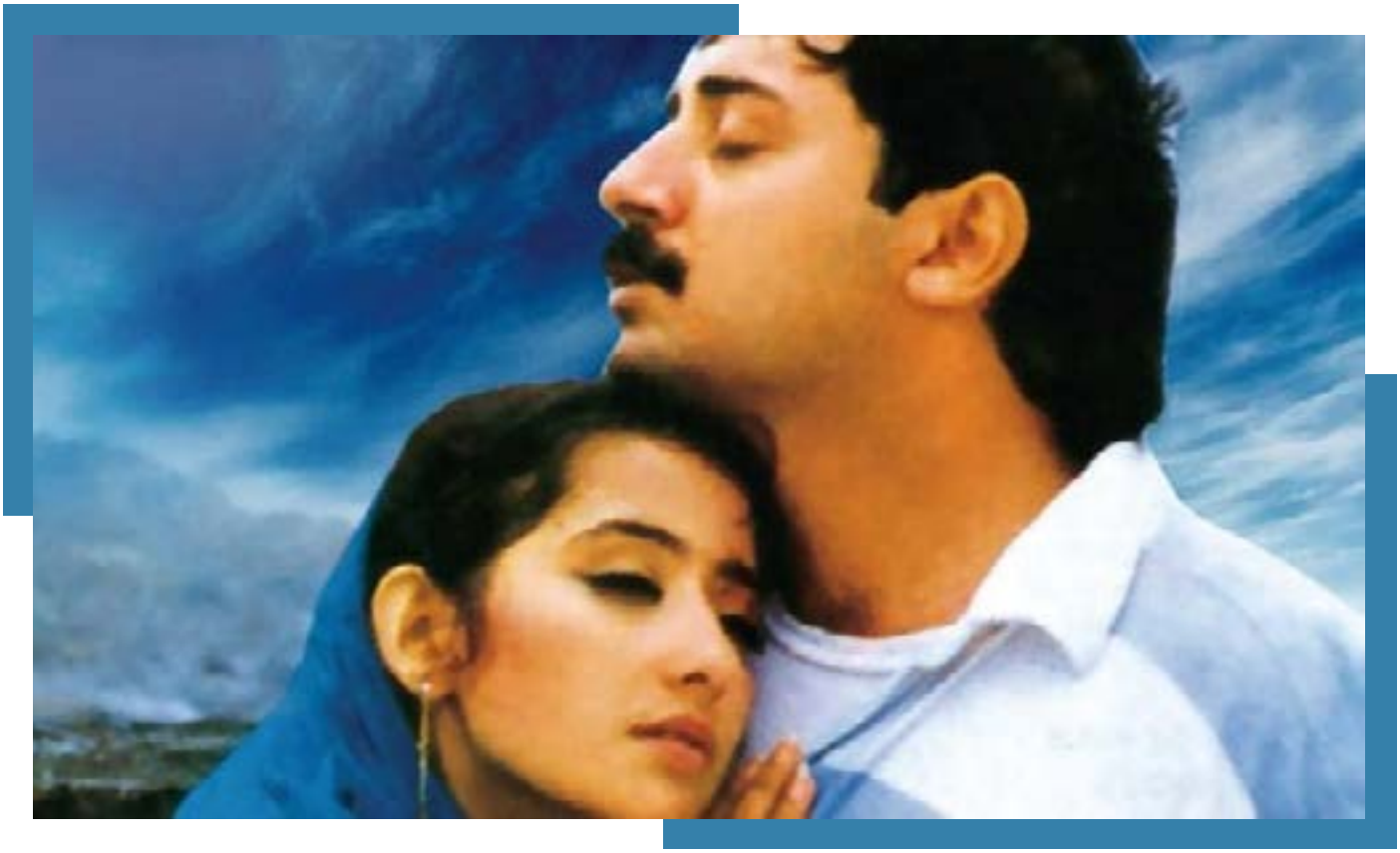
What was it about Aaman and Rasha that really worked for you?

I'm just looking for actors that can fit my characters. A story like Azaad demanded freshness and innocence. The fact that you're trying to create a new experience, the most amazing thing would be to find new faces so that when the audiences watch it, they're pulled into a world they've never experienced before. When you cast new actors, you try to see certain qualities in them that can fit the characters. You embrace them with their good and their flaws. Then you kind of marry (the qualities of an actor) with the character, so that they become inseparable.

How similar and different are Rasha and Aaman from each other?

They are very different individuals but they complement each other. The good thing is that there's no competition. I've seen that so many times when actors tend to compete (with each other). New actors want to be better than the other actors. But it is not about them. It is about the film. And they have to serve that purpose. If people enjoy the movie and the movie is a success, their careers will flourish. When a movie does well, it means everything about it has been embraced. Only then will they make a place in the audience's heart, and their careers will thrive.

‘I’ll Think Twice Before I Make A Film Like Bombay Again’



‘Films like Roja and Bombay, at that point of time, were not something about which I would be too worried.’ ‘I thought if I’m honest and if I’m reflecting what a normal person like me is feeling, then that honesty will come through.’

Filmmaker Mani Ratnam said that he initially thought of making his 2000 hit Alai Payuthey with Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol but then dropped the idea as he was unable to crack the climax of the film.

The Tamil-language romantic musical starred R Madhavan and Shalini and was later remade in Hindi as Saathiya with Rani Mukerji and Vivek Oberoi. The film revolved around two young people who elope and get married but soon cracks start to appear in their marriage.

"What I had planned to do with Shah Rukh was Alai Payuthey. I wanted to do it with Shah Rukh and Kajol and I told him the story and he agreed. But I had not cracked the last element of the story.

If you've seen Alai Payuthey it is built around one day and we keep going back to that one day, and when the accident happens and the wife is missing, he is searching through it. So, that element I didn't have at that point in time. So, we shifted to Dil Se..," Ratnam said at the open forum of G5A Retrospective. The filmmaker said he finally cracked the ending of Alai Payuthey during the making of his 1998 film, Dil Se... -- which featured Shah Rukh and Manisha Koirala in lead roles.

"Once I was finishing Dil Se.. I was able to solve this problem (with Alai Payuthey) , and I was still interested in doing it," Ratnam added. Saathiya, the Hindi version of Alai Payuthey, was directed by Shaad Ali. Mani Ratnam said every film goes through several changes during every step of the filmmaking from inception to casting and editing.

"You are never sure you got it correct.. . You are still trying. Even when you've written fully, when you shoot, you are looking for something more because it's still getting constructed. The director said films are pieces of people and bits of life and one tries to make them appear like a reflection of entire life.

"You need to elevate it. Actors have to come and make it alive, if they don't do so, you can shout at them," he said, adding, the process of fine tuning continues even while editing. When asked if it is possible to make films like Bombay or Kannathil Muthamittal today, Ratnam said he will have to think "twice"before making one.

"Films like Roja and Bombay, at that point of time, were not something about which I would be too worried. I thought if I'm honest and if I'm reflecting what a normal person like me is feeling, then that honesty will come through.

"You are not taking sides or trying to propagate anything. It's just the angst and pain, so I never had that fear. But every film got into trouble with the censor Ratnam said he started working on the two films, he never imagined that they would face any kind of problem.

"Today, probably I'll think twice before I think of it," he added. The director said "not all his films are political" as he chooses to weave a human story with the undercurrent of politics.

"It's not just politics. It's politics through human beings. And as human beings, they will not just make statements, they are living."

The filmmaker said these stories explore the characters, their relationship and their equation with family Citing the example of his movie Kannathil Muthamittal, the director said the mother-son relationship allowed him to weave in the perspective of the people of Sri Lanka

'I'M NOT WHO I WAS WHEN I WROTE DEEWAAR'

'We didn't create the Angry Young Man persona for Amitabh Bachchan.' 'We created the Vijay persona and then Amitabh Bachchan fitted into it.'

Yash Chopra's iconic film Deewaar, starring Amitabh Bachchan, Shashi Kapoor, Parveen Babi, Neetu Singh and Nirupa Roy, turns 50 this month. To celebrate this important landmark, a special screening of the film will be held at Mumbai's Regal Cinema on February 1.

Deewaar's script-writer **Javed Akhtar** (along with Salim Khan), looks back at the film and tells "If Deewaar and Sholay worked better than Aaakhri Dao in 1975, it is not necessarily because they deserved to. Many factors went into making Deewaar the film it was." -

Where do you place Deewaar in your dazzling repertoire?

Dazzling repertoire is not for me to judge. Yeh sab retro-tareef beqar ki baatein hai. We (Salim-Javed) did what we did back when we were younger, different people.

To praise ourselves for the impact that Deewaar made in 1975, and to take credit for it would be very unfair and embarrassing. It is like parents praising their own children. We've now... **Evolved?**

Again, a self-congratulatory word. It suggests that I have become a better person over the years, and I am not sure of that. No, I have moved on. I am not the person I was when I wrote Deewaar with Salim Khan.

Most of your fans consider it to be your finest work.

Mehnat toh humne apne saare scripts pe kiye, even the ones that didn't work like Imaan Dharam, Aakhri Dao and Shaan.

If Deewaar and Sholay worked better than Aaakhri Dao in 1975, it is not necessarily because they deserved to. Many factors went into making Deewaar the film it was.

What about the 'Vijay' factor?

What about it?

Would you say the Angry Young Man persona that Salimsaab and you created for Amitabh Bachchan, went a long way in making him the mega-star that he was?

I would like to correct you. We didn't create the Angry Young Man persona for Amitabh Bachchan. We created the Vijay persona and then Amitabh Bachchan fitted into it.

Was Rajesh Khanna the first choice for Deewaar?

No. He was signed up with Gulshan Rai, the producer of Deewaar, for a film. At that time, there was no Deewaar in the picture.

When the producer offered to have Rajesh Khanna in Deewaar, we (Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar) refused pointblank.

By then, Zanjeer was almost complete and we knew Amitabh Bachchan's potential. We wanted no other actor except Amitabh Bachchan for Deewaar. Rajesh Khanna with a romantic musical image would not have been right.

You fought to have Mr Bachchan in Deewaar?

Nothing so dramatic. Gulshan Raiji saw our point of view and immediately agreed.

Javedsaab, be as modest as you like, but in 1975, Salimsaab and you created history twice over with Deewaar and Sholay.

I admit 1975 was a turning point for us. Deewaar and Sholay released within seven months of each other. In 1978, we had Don and Trishul on two consecutive Fridays

‘What An Engineer Earns In A Month, We Earn In 2 Hours’

‘The more popular, the more work, the more money.’

Singer **Saloni Thakkar** is happy that her new track, Namo Namah Shivaya, is out and is receiving love. Composed by Devi Sri Prasad aka DSP, the song's video features Sai Pallavi and Naga Chaitanya from their upcoming Tamil film Thandel.

The song is special for Saloni, who calls herself an 'independent artist'. It marks her foray into the South after doing playback for numerous Bollywood films. "The South Indian people give you respect. The way they work is excellent. Until I gave the right take, DSP was not satisfied. He made me sing for three to four hours. He was so patient, and yet so adamant,"

How was your experience of singing for Sai Pallavi?

The song is in Tamil and her lip-sync is also in Tamil, and I am dubbing the Hindi version. It was very tricky because you have to match the lip-sync and the expression needs to be correct. And you have to match her energy, the way she's performing and portraying her character. I had to keep the same feeling and power in such a heavy track. I was singing full-throated in the studio and had to rehearse it 15-20 times before giving the final take.

I had this feeling that, you know, I should match the power. It's a Shiva track and the way they're dancing is insane! So I had to keep in mind that I must match their performance level. It was very random. I have no connections in the South. I am in Mumbai, and work in Bollywood. I got a call from an unknown number. It was his manager. He said DSP sir wants to try your voice. I could not digest the fact that they got my number and wanted me. They said you have to come in the morning. It was a 6 am flight and the song was supposed to be released after two days. I went to Chennai, and met him there for the first time. They told me they got my reference from my YouTube channel and liked my voice from one of my music videos.

How long have you been singing?

I have been treating myself as an independent artist. My YouTube channel got viral during COVID. I work on my music production and have my own studio. I've been singing since I was very young. I used to sing in school, college and in my locality. During that time, I got in touch with Sukh-E (songwriter and singer). He heard me and straight away asked me to come for his shows. He made me believe that I had that stage presence. That's how my journey started. It's been seven years now, since I've been performing and singing. I sing jingles, sing in movies and serials. I'm also busy with live events.

How old were you when you recorded your first song?

I was 20. It was the title track for the film, Veere Ki Wedding, starring Pulkit Samrat and Kriti Kharbanda. That was a wedding song and I am known as a wedding performer. So it was such a coincidence. I am known for my versatility. If you see my videos, I sing songs of Sidhu Moose Wala, unplugged sessions, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marwari...

How do you look at competition in the singing world?

There is a lot of competition. Everybody works very hard.If you believe in yourself, if you have talent and are passionate, it happens. I had never thought DSP would call me. With films that don't do well in Bollywood, everybody focusses on their independent things. Being an independent artist, you have to create your songs, do the production, mix it, master it, give your best vocals, and then shoot it, promote it... The responsibility is not just singing, it is also about the reach. I have recreated a song called So Gaya Yeh Jahan with Jubin Nautiyal. It was backed by T-Series but it did not make any difference for me. It just came and went. So I realised I have to pull up my socks and work on myself in every way. That's why I started my YouTube channel.

Did you see any difference between Bollywood and Southern musicians?

Yes, there is a lot of difference.
The South Indian people give you respect. Randomly, I got a call from DSP. They gave me a business class ticket, a room in a five-star hotel. When I went to his studio, they were so kind. The way they work is excellent. They are so particular about the pronunciation, about the feel. Until I gave the right take, DSP was not satisfied. He made me sing for three to four hours. He was so patient, and yet so adamant. As an artist, it was very impressive to see his passion towards his work. I have sung in Bollywood. I have done scratches for the A-list composers here. They just dub us in 20 or 30 minutes and will say, see, we finished the recording in just half an hour.

Just like actors, even singers need to work on their brand image today. It is visible from their social media, fashion outings, public appearances. Do you enjoy this extra effort that you are expected to put in, which is otherwise so different from your core profession?

Yeah, there are a lot of things. I am constantly thinking about what to post next, what to wear next. I can't repeat clothes for events. The image is very important but it's not everything. I don't know why singers are so much into this. Because it is there in the market, I follow it. But my focus is on singing. I'm a very reserved person. Doing these things is a heavy task for me. I work on my Instagram, Facebook and YouTube simultaneously. That's why I have had no time in the last two or three years. My team and I are working day and night.

How expensive is it to be a singer today?

It is expensive but you earn a lot also, no? If you compare this to an MBA or an engineer, what they earn in a full month, we earn in two hours by performing. It is up to you how you're taking up your profile, and how popular you are. The more popular, the more work, the more money.

There are camps within the music industry where certain people prefer to work only with their favourites.

Oh, it exists 100 per cent.
They all work in camps. They all work in groups. I don't know on what basis these singers get opportunities. I have no idea what goes on in these camps. I am not a part of a single camp, and I don't even want to be. I think real talent should come up, and if you are giving songs to a talented singer, a good voice, then the composer will also grow. That is why Lata Mangeshkar was given all the songs because through her voice, the composers got the limelight. It was a very different way of thinking at that time. I don't relate with today's times at all.

Who do you consider your idols from the music world?

Lata Mangeshkar, obviously. I really wanted to meet her once, but it didn't happen

‘I Want To Make Serious Films That Are Also Cheesy’

‘In Mumbai, isolation is a very different isolation.’
‘It’s not about actual physical loneliness.’
‘It’s the loneliness in the company of others, and I felt that that is a very Mumbai thing.’
‘You can be travelling in the ladies compartment squashed against everybody’s armpits and still be really, really sad and alone.’ Payal Kapadia, the acclaimed director of All We Imagine As Light, speaks to Raja Sen, the well-known film critic.

Speaking with **Payal Kapadia** is even better than watching her film. The director of All We Imagine As Light is fizzy, excitable and, even when her acclaimed film is conquering the world, disarmingly down to earth. I can't think of a better ambassador for modern Indian cinema. I spoke with the filmmaker about the specific creative decisions behind her film.

Where does the rice cooker come from? Why does the film seem to have been made in two distinct halves? Why is the aesthetic the way it is? Does she see herself as a romantic filmmaker? Here is Kapadia's spoiler-y conversation about why All We Imagine As Light is the way it is with **Raja Sen**.

Let's start with the rice cooker. When it appears in their life, it's this shiny, totemic instrument. It reminded me of the bottle of Coca Cola in The Gods Must Be Crazy.

Oh! Interesting ref (erence)! I guess it's similar because of the context.

Yes, and it is so new to them. A completely alien and consumerist device landing up without warning.

I actually really liked this movie when I was a kid. It was a great film, no? (Laughs) Thanks for reminding me of it. So yeah, this cooker was like that only. I was trying to think about this kitchen appliance where this 'family life' of ladies is sold to her.

We eat a lot of rice (in India) but the rice cooker is still a little higher level. If you have that money, then you can get a rice cooker. And then the woman's life is easier because she can make more rice for other people. But she doesn't have a family.

So, for whom will she make rice? She doesn't need such a big cooker for herself. So I was thinking about that, like, the rice cooker as a feeling of this family unit. And also this, like, this consumerism and capitalism that is mixed so nicely in India -- not nicely but violently, with patriarchal feelings that are sold to women.

I was thinking about what could be that it embodies all these different dots in my head, but it can be something really normal, like something so banal, like a cooker.

Right. And like you said, it's something you don't necessarily need.

Yeah. But you think that your life will be better and I will be a better mother, wife, all these things because of a cooker.

Let's talk about the genesis of the story itself. Where did this begin for you?

I started writing this film in my final year at FTII, doing my diploma film.At that time, I didn't have a script. There were six months to make the film, and I had two family members who were in different medical situations. I was the only one in my family who was going from one to the other place.

I was spending a lot of time in waiting rooms basically and with nurses at this time. And because you're a student and every mise en scene becomes, like, interesting. So I said I'll make this film.

It will be in a hospital and it will be about nurses because it's a space where a lot of women work. And in our country, places where a lot of women work are not that many. I started meeting people.

I started doing research. I made pals with the nursing ladies, and heard a lot of their stories about training and leaving home.

I realised I could actually make a much longer film. That 20-minute diploma film would have been neither here nor there. One of my main focuses or obsessions was this contradiction that exists in India like it comes from, let's say, even (Ritwik Ghatak's 1960 classic) Meghe Dhaka Tara of a woman who is supporting the entire family but nobody is there for her.

Yes, the love for that film comes through.

In fact, I even wanted to put a reference to a chappal breaking. But I didn't do it. I love this movie so much. I'm a big Ghatak fan. And just think from that time to now, things are not that different.

You met many nurses, heard many stories. When did it become clear to you that you wanted to tell the story of an older nurse and a younger nurse? That dynamic that drives the film.

When I started writing the film, I was younger. For me, that time, I was looking a bit at the older nurse. The film is through the younger nurse looking at the older nurse. Then I grew older. Now, I'm 38. So, I'm closer to the older nurse.

When did you start working on the film?

I was maybe 31, 32. So I was younger then and my preoccupations were different. Later, I became more empathetic towards the older nurse. I think my allegiance has shifted.

What about Parvathy?

Parvathy wasn't a major character before. But when I started doing pre-production, I had this stupid idea that I would cast actual Konkani ladies who vare from Mumbai and are working. I met some 200 women, and they were like, we are not taking a holiday from our job to work with you.

Who will give us a job back after this? Are you going to employ us? So I realised I can't do that. But that process made me meet a lot of interesting women from the region who have a history with the mills, have a history with displacement in Mumbai. This kind of opened up a world for me and Parvathy became a much bigger character than she initially was.

I felt she is kind of like a reflection of Mumbai, of the Maharashtrian women who had to kind of pull up their socks and replace the men in their families because of the mill strikes.

As a non-fiction filmmaker, do you find that these processes like casting become exploratory for you?

That instead of just casting, you are listening to their stories and letting all of that develop your overall narrative.

Yeah, that helps me a lot. Even while writing the script, (I like) meeting a lot of people just for the sake of meeting. Because life is interesting, it's more interesting than one can imagine, what imagination can do.

What about the visuals? Did they come alongside the writing?

Yes. When I was working with my DOP (Director of Photography

Ranabir Das), we would shoot a lot of Mumbai, over many monsoons. Like without that script, let's see how it is.

How does red look in the monsoon? How does a BEST bus look? How does a skywalk look?

Doston ko bulaate the kabhi kabhi ki can you all just go in the metro and be our actors? I have a lot of weird footage from this time. I think, yeah, maybe that comes from non-fiction. It's what I enjoy.

You can shoot a bit, you can edit, then you can say, let's do it again. In fiction, that doesn't happen. I was a bit nervous also, I think, that I wanted to have everything inside me internalised so that I could approach the fiction somehow.

Fair. And what was the most challenging bit in terms of fiction? Was it the act of writing? Because while your documentary, A Night Of Knowing Nothing, had a fictional romance over real events, it must be different to create characters and narratives from scratch.

Yeah. It took a long time honestly, like, writing it and changing because as you grow older, like I said, your relationship with the material changes. I think that's true of non-fiction also, like, when I started making I Don't Know Nothing, it took five years.

So how we were shooting in the beginning and how we were looking at that footage five years later was so different. And I think that's also good, like, you're changing all the time, and that's life.

So I think writing was hard. I've written shorts before but that is a whole different thing, and features are a whole different mindset because at the end of the day, you have to sustain it for that long. Here, the script has to hold. It can't just be like, oh, nice feelings.

Is that why the film is structured like two films?

Yes. What I did for myself and something that I was very keen to do was to make a two-part film because I felt I could handle, even if I wasn't doing non-fiction, maybe I could shoot in a nonfiction way -- so that if I shoot the first part, I get two months to edit, and then I can do my recce again and then shoot the next part after a few months. That is a non-fiction process.

I sneaked it into the script just to know the kind of person I am, my temperament to protect that. But I also wanted the season to change. And I wanted to work with time. So the first part of the film is very much more montage, the scenes are shorter. But the second part is one day. I think cinema is a medium where we can do a lot of things and that excites me a lot. So, I wanted to try it.

When I was writing it, I realised that it's nice to make these theories, but when you're practically doing it, how does time feel? It became a bit hard for me and it was a lot of trial and error that finally the film is what it is. But I like that also. I think that the joy of filmmaking is also not knowing.

Absolutely. To put yourself out there and see what turns out.

I really like the films of Miguel Gomes. I don't know if you know him as a filmmaker, but every film, he's made a lot of films, is like an experiment.

Given your last film and this one, is romance a big theme for you? Are you a romantic filmmaker in that sense?

Yeah, I'm very romantic.
But I started making both films in my early 30s. At that time, the romance was all my friends were in that stage, like should I be with this person, should I not be?

I went to FTII a bit older, so most of my friends were younger than me. So maybe I was always listening to the two themes that were moving to Mumbai, and can I be with this person, will my parents accept them.
Now things have changed. So maybe in the next film, I won't have the same preoccupations. This time I think it was very much part of my immediate zeitgeist. So I think that's why. But I am very romantic. I love romantic movies.

Because in terms of romance, it's not just the young nurse and her spy vibe in the burkha on the train. It's also the missing husband and the fable we end up with.

I like romance, you're right, I shouldn't shy away from it. It's so nice yaar, romance. I think I'm a bit of a cheesy person. wwI want to make serious films that are also cheesy. If you can find a balance like that... I think Apichatpong (Weerasethakul, Thai director) is like that. He's serious, but also really cheesy: 'I can't sleep, I can't eat.'

I think that's poetry, right? If you're trying to go with a certain lyrical or poetic style, you have to embrace a certain cheesiness as well.

Yeah, I guess so.

Aesthetically, you've shot both halves so differently. In the first half, there's a washed out, diffused, almost dreamlike quality to the way Mumbai is shot, especially that shot where you see the train in the background through a window and a character talking on the phone in the foreground.

The other part outside the city is very spare, it becomes all about room to breathe, and the fact that the characters finally have space is the dream itself.

So the Mumbai part, we wanted it to be like a lot of planes, so you always see somebody in a relationship to a background. So if she's in her house also through the window you're seeing the train passing. Or if Parvati's talking, behind her is the hospital.

Many layers of things. Because in Mumbai, isolation is a very different isolation. It's not about actual physical loneliness. It's the loneliness in the company of others, and I felt that that is a very Mumbai thing or actually any big city thing.

You can be travelling in the ladies compartment squashed against everybody's armpits and still be really, really sad and alone. So I was thinking a lot about all the characters, the space, everything being interconnected, not separate.

But in the second half, it was more like a funnel where it's just these three characters and their internal landscape becomes more important.

Their dreams, their desires, their close ups. Because in no way do I want to say that the countryside is better. That's also going to be really hard. It starts with Anu coming into the house saying there's no electricity here. It's not going to be easy for her.

The film is very blue, very cool. The city sections, especially.

Cooler in the first half, yes, but also dank. That was the intention, trying to get how the city is this kind of yucky wet sometimes. You don't like it.

Like in Mumbai rains, if you travel by train, your pants get wet up to here (gestures to knee) and then you're just suffering. You're wearing those horrible fake Crocs, those Bata ones, and your feet are... (shudders) Anyway, so I wanted to capture that feeling also.

Let's talk about your actors, who are fantastic. Did you workshop a lot? Because they seem so easy around each other and they play off each other so well and so effortlessly, especially the two of them sharing a home.

Yeah, yeah. With Anu and Prabha, we lived together for three weeks. They were staying with me and every day we would be doing in the kitchen, things, we would be doing in my bedroom, things. The DOP was also there in the workshops, so it was nice because that way, we could really feed off them as actors.

I don't speak Malayalam, so for me to internalise the language it took a long time to be able to direct in that language. I had an associate director who is Malayali and we had worked together for two years for the cadence of the language to work out.

We gave each of them a regional identity also, like Anu's from Palakkad, Prabha's from Kollam, so how their slang will be and all these kinds of things we had worked out beforehand. So I needed time in the workshops.

It wasn't just for the actors, it was for me as well. With Chhaya, it took fewer days because I speak Marathi and Hindi.

Also, Divya (Prabha) and Kani (Kusruti) are very old friends but in the film, they are roommates and a little weird with each other. So how to bring that in as well. They are very different from their characters in the film. Kani is not at all this person, and Divya is very jovial but Anu is ridiculous -- no one can be like that at all times.

Sounds like you had a blast.

Yeah. We took a long time to work together but because I am a process person, I enjoyed this. It was like documenting, and we were watching a lot of those rushes. We would shoot, we would watch it in the evening, and see what is interesting. We added scenes because some of the chemistry was so nice. It's good that you find people who are willing to give you that time.

Critics have loved the film. Have you heard any bad reviews?

Have you seen my Letterboxd? One or two will come. 'I went to sleep.'

It's okay for a film with a dream-like quality to make you sleep.

(Laughs) Oh, I should start using this profound answer, like Apichatpong! Mostly it's been quite positive, thankfully, and that's all one can hope for while making a film. In our profession, anyone can say anything and you have to be okay with it.

Slowly, slowly I'm trying my best to be okay. (At this point, we hear an agitation outside the window. Women we raising their voices. We step to the window and see that this is a rally of schoolgirls, encouraging citizens of Mumbai to cast their votes. Kapadia is instantly ecstatic.) (Laughs) Awesome. So good! What a sight!

Yes, young women making themselves heard. I love it. (Thrilled laugh)

These are the kids who will watch my films

‘Human Beings Are Like Trees, We Keep Growing Till...’

'Your relationship with your child is changing every single day, ditto your relationship with your parents.'

What makes interviewing **Gul Panag** always interesting is that she will never duck a bouncer or play a ball quietly to the covers. She is honest, straightforward and fearless, giving her 100 per cent to everything she does, be it running a half-marathon, flying a plane, campaigning for elections, running an enterprise or playing a character who is the polar opposite of her. Season Two of the Amazon Prime Video series, Paatal Lok, sees her play Renu, the wife of Jaideep Ahlawat's Inspector Hathiram Chaudhury. The actress says, "In our patriarchal society, there is a Renu in every middle-class household but we don't realise this till she holds up the mirror."

Not just Hathiram Chaudhary, even his wife Renu has struck a chord with the audience in Season Two of Paatal Lok. What would you attribute this growing empathy to?

Well, like an average homemaker, Renu's life too has so far revolved around her husband, Hathiram, who is never around, and her son, Siddharth aka Siddhu, who has gone off to college, leaving her alone and lonely, grappling with the 'empty nest' syndrome. There was always a gap between Hathiram and her which in Season One was filled by the child. The core of any married couple is how they raise the next generation and, in this case, since both Hathiram and Renu were on opposite ends of the spectrum, the relationship was fraught with conflict.

But that's changing now, right?

Yes, they may still not be on the same page but now, we see a consensus building. There's a new-found maturity even in Renu who, towards the end of Season Two, is open to the idea of meeting her son's girlfriend which signals that the relationship is evolving. Professionally, Hathiram is still where he was in Season One but personally, the inspector has grown.

So has Renu.
After years of the family being her priority, she is finally looking inwards, asking herself, 'But what about me? Where do I go from here?' I guess that's what has resonated with so many people either because they feel the same way as Renu or because they are guilty of making someone else feel that way. In our patriarchal society, there is a Renu in every middle-class household but we don't realise this till she holds up the mirror.

Another reason why viewers have warmed up to the big-built Haryanvi cop and his no-nonsense wife is because Hathiram and Renu's romance is so real, so relatable.

(Laughs) Yeah, there's that meme which has gone viral to which I get tagged frequently.

The one where Renu calls Hathiram in Nagaland where he is going through a difficult time and asks him how he is...

(Chuckles)
He replies that now that he has heard her voice, he is fine. The admission -- while romantic -- is so rare for them that not knowing how to react, she asks him if his stomach is fine.

'Gas to nahin hai?'

(Laughs) Yes, that's real life romance for you that has grown out of years of companionship and bonding. That's the beauty of Sudip's writing, the depth and incisiveness in it that has brought even a supporting part like Renu so much love.

Does Renu's bonding with the orphaned Guddu in Season Two mirror your relationship with your son **Nihal?**

When we shot Season One towards the end of 2018, my son was around eight months old and I was still grappling with the challenges of being a new mother. He turns seven next month which means that I could bring six years of motherhood to my workplace in Season Two. But I wasn't trying to be the mother Gul is to Nihal when playing Renu because that would have been dishonest to the character because I am nothing like her.

But my life's experiences did add certain elements to the performance Just when Renu is becoming a little more emancipated and empowered, trying to explore a space for herself by using her education to tutor little kids, Guddu is foisted on her by her husband.

It's a responsibility she doesn't welcome initially because it feels like an encumbrance, but then it brings back memories of Siddhu from when he was four years old. Parenting had been a struggle then because both husband and wife were grappling with it, but now Renu realises she is missing that time with her son and wants to relive it with Guddu.

Do you miss your son from when he was four years old?

I miss him even from six months ago.
He's always been very specific about what time I will be back home every time I step out. If I'm late, I always say sorry. Earlier, he would say, 'It's okay, mamma.' (Laughs) But now, my son who is fairly articulate will ask me if the apology is 'unequivocal' or 'conditional'. Your relationship with your child is changing every single day, ditto your relationship with your parents. Human beings are like trees, we keep growing till death cuts us down. Sudip manages to capture this growth through the layers of his writing.

Since Delhi goes to the polls on February 5, let's talk politics now. What made you take the plunge?

The idea of joining politics came from wanting to do the best that I could. But I realised I couldn't do my best due to circumstances beyond my control. First, my child was barely two-and-a-half years old when Punjab went to polls and I wanted to contribute fully to his growth.

Second, I did not have a limitless source of revenue, and to remain honest in politics, you need to have a steady source of revenue to fuel your car, to pay your mobile bills, your child's school fees and so on. If you are being financed by somebody with interests, they will not just expect to recover their investment, but chances are they will try to extract three to four times more from you. Therein lies the fundamental problem that leads to corruption.

But you raised funds publicly?

Yes, I fought my campaign with what was allocated by the Election Commission of India.

How do politicians fund themselves?

The way to encourage honest politicians is to allow them to pursue their core profession along with politics till they are elected, the way they do in the West. They, of course, choose to take a pay cut once they are elected.

Should actors continue to act once elected?

If lawyers like Kapil Sibal, P Chidambaram and Arun Jaitley could continue to practise even after they are elected, why shouldn't actors? Kangana (Ranaut) continues to act, direct and produce films even after becoming an MP. But it's different when you become a minister like Smriti Irani was or like Kapil Sibal was or like Dr Mahesh Sharma was because that's a fulltime job.

You are no longer with the Aam Aadmi Party, right?

Yes. Even though I led the Aam Aadmi Party's campaign in Chandigarh during the 2014 elections, I have not been with the party since 2021. I did not announce it at a press conference or make a big noise about it because I did not want to exercise any leverage from my resignation. Since I was not able to do my best in the circumstances, I felt I must recalibrate and do something else.

Any possibility of getting back into active politics in the future? Yes. I remain committed to my goal of serving in public life but I'm flexible in my approach.

I'll wait till circumstances support me and enable me to do the best I can without being dishonest to myself or to others

'...just be neutral about everything.' 'I will just take life as it comes.'

When Preeti Panigrahi was selected for Girls Will Be Girls in 2022, little did she know her life would change dramatically after the film's resounding worldwide reception. Cut to 2024, Preeti is on every prestigious 'Best Actor' list and is hailed as a breakout star.

"I know it's demanding, but it's also something I want. I want to stay occupied. I'm very happy that I'm not lying on my bed throughout the day and scrolling through my phone,"

Tell us about yourself.

I come from Odisha. When I was two, we shifted to Noida and have been living there since. My father has an intense passion for films. He collected cameras through his college days, his library is full of rare film books. He also has a film collection. So yeah, I have no doubt why I ended up in films. My sister is a great dancer. She's currently pursuing her PhD in London. I've seen her perform on stage and that inspired me.My mom is a vice principal of a school. For her, learning never stopped. She's the most evolved person out of all four of us. And she writes too.

When did your family see Girls Will Be Girls and what was their reaction like?

They got to watch it in London when we were visiting my sister. There was a screening happening in London. It was an emotional experience because I think more than me, it was a collective family dream to have me on the big screen. I wasn't sitting with them for obvious reasons because I'm very shy. I sat in the front row. My mom had already read the script, so she knew everything about the film. She was probably watching it like a crew member. Before the film started, all of them had a group hug and cried. And when the film got over, they had a group hug and cried again, without me. (Laughs) I'm very happy that they were involved in the process through and through, and were extremely encouraging. My dad has a ritual that every Sunday, he will watch at least four films. Last Sunday, he watched my film four times and called me, asking, 'How did you do that?', 'What was that reaction that you gave?', 'How are you so controlled?'

How much has your life changed once the film was released on OTT after a year of doing festival rounds?

(Takes a brief pause.) I don't know how to put this.
Maybe on social media and on the public platforms, it looks like a lot has changed. But until and unless I feel like a monumental shift in my emotionality or mentality, I don't see something very big happening. I want to stay grounded and feel normal about everything because there will be severe highs and severe lows. And I don't want to get to that. It's been almost a year that we have been going around with the film, and there have been ups and downs. The film releases in one country, and we get some buzz about the film. But after that, it quietens again. This roller coaster has taught me to just be neutral about everything. Even now, I feel like I will just take life as it comes. I won't stop being grateful for whatever the film has given me so far. It's way too much. I want to work, of course, I want to act more, but if there are no opportunities out there for me, I'll try to create more opportunities because I'm learning how to make films.

Have you started receiving offers? Have you signed anything?

(Laughs.) Not really. That hasn't happened. But I'm very happy with the film having a platform like Prime Video and getting a lot of accessibility. A lot of people are watching it. They are appreciating it and reaching out to us.

Since you are new to the industry, how are you warming up to the demanding nature of this job? What new things have you discovered about this profession?

I'm learning a lot right now.
I know it's demanding, but it's also something I want. I want to stay occupied. I'm very happy that I'm not lying on my bed throughout the day and scrolling through my phone.I'm going out, traveling from one location to another, speaking to people, attending screenings. I feel that has broadened my world. I'm meeting people I've always wanted to work with. It's a nice time in my career. I have endless possibilities of what kind of an actor I can become.

What role do Producers Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal play in your path? Do you consider them your mentors?

Yes, of course. I'm so grateful for that because I'm always constantly asking them. I'm always picking on their brains and they're very welcoming. We hang out at their place sometimes. At Sundance, we shared a lot of notes about films and cinema. There's a platform called Letterbox where we can count what films we want to watch. We share notes on that. It helps that these people have already been in the industry as actors and now they've become producers. So they have an all-round experience to share with us.

Hypothetically, if you were to meet up Mira what would you ask or tell her?

You made me really emotional with this question! I would just give her a big warm hug. I have so much love for that girl, the way she's written. She's beautiful and deserves everything. I'm very happy that quite early on in her life, she realised that her mom is her true support and champion. I'm going to ask Mira, 'Hey, where's your mom?' Because Anila would hate it. She would be like, 'Wait, I'm also here.' (Laughs.) I would just give them both big, big hugs.

The Girl Who Made A Huge Splash

'In 2024'

I was like this is unbelievable. 'We had Tannishtha Chatterjee, Divya Dutta, Rasika Dugal, Dia Mirza... women I've idolised.'

As someone new to the screen, how many times do you think **Preeti Panigrahi** would have seen her debut feature film, Girls Will Be Girls?

"I recently watched it for the 17th time," the 22 year old says in a bashful voice. "It's been an insane number of times." Preeti won the Special Jury Award for her performance at the Sundance Film Festival. Since then, she has been touring festivals and special screenings to gauge audience's reaction to the film. In Girls Will Be Girls -- backed by actor-couple Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal and directed by Shuchi Talati -- Preeti plays a high schooler named Mira in a tender and empathetic coming-of-age tale of her romantic and sexual awakening. "My dad has a ritual that every Sunday he will watch at least four films. This Sunday, he watched my film four times and he called me and he's like, 'Wow, how did you do that?' 'What was that reaction that you gave?' 'How are you so controlled?'," Preeti -- who critics consider the standout actor of 2024 -- tells **Mayur Sanap/Rediff.com** in a two-part interview.

Do you still think about Mira? Where do you see her now?

I think she is doing very well. She is a confident woman and always takes risks but also very calculated risks. She will research before stepping into anything. By the end of the film, she made a very wise decision. I feel like she

would also end up somewhere like me. But she's a science student, I'm a humanities student. So she might have gone into research somewhere. If she becomes an engineer, which I would not want her to become, I think she would have this great life of traveling on the side, meeting new people. Also being regularly in touch with her mother, and probably helping her mother run up a business on the side. I do think of Mira every time I watch the film but I think I look at it more from my performance perspective, not as a character perspective. But I also think of Mira every time anyone reaches out and tells me that they feel very seen. So, Mira exists in all of these people.

Usually, actors say that they don't like to watch themselves on screen because they tend to get very critical of their performance.

Yes, the first time I watched the film I didn't like it because I was very critical of myself. I was like, no, this is not nice. Why am I so bland here? Why is my face so quiet here? I should be doing something. Now whenever I watch it, I watch it for the audience. I feel like I'm sitting with a bunch of people and I want to constantly engage with their reactions. And every audience is a new audience. So every audience has a fresh reaction. It's like watching the film all over again.

There's a video from the screening where we see the likes of Dia Mirza, Konkona Sen Sharma crying and hugging you after watching the film. What was that moment like? What did they say to you?

It's so difficult to put into words.
We just got done with the screening and I was just standing near the exit and everyone just stopped everyone and started clapping. That's when Konkona just walked up, and both of us froze. She was tearing up, and I was like this is unbelievable. There we had Tannishtha Chatterjee, Divya Dutta, Rasika Dugal, Dia Mirza... you know, all of these women I've idolised and grown up looking forward to their work and everything. I was really happy because it was just a bunch of powerhouse women, like all these heroines and not heroes. I mean, of course, you can look up to your male role models, but I think I was very happy that I had a bunch of female role models at that moment. It felt like a very protected environment. The industry can become a competitive space but I really look up to the people who make it not a competitive but a collaborative space. They look like they were all kind of sheltering me. They had this touch, which was like, we will take care of you. It' a very, very, very beautiful moment in my life.

You have done a few commercials before this. How did you get to know about Girls Will Be Girls?

Because of the pandemic, we weren't going to physical classes in college. I was at home and that is when a lot of work was happening in the industry. Whatever ads or short films were coming my way, I could do them, without missing my classes. Later, I got to know about Girls Will Be Girls right when my college had finished. I'd given my final exams and a friend reached out to me. She was interning with the casting director and had seen my commercials. She said they are doing a film and that, why don't you send your introduction. I used to think this was Dilip Shankar's (the casting director for Girls Will Be Girls) first directorial. I was very excited for it because he's a legend.

While speaking about your audition, your director Shuchi Talati once said she liked that you didn't bat an eyelid while most other girls were coy in their audition. There was this quiet confidence in you already, as she said. Did you ever ask Shuchi or Producer Richa Chadha what they liked about you?

I remember the first time I met Shuchi, which was in Bombay, she told me that it's surreal to see you finally, in flesh and bones. She had only seen my videos till then. I was like, wow, she already likes me so much. (Smiles) I got to know about the producer's reaction way later. That was in Sundance. But in between, there was one time right before the shoot when we were doing some look tests. That's when Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal were getting married.They had come for a very brief visit to see how things were going. That's when Ali Fazal walked in and said, 'Hey, how are you? You're amazing.' I was like, wait, this person? This is huge! I'm a big fan of Guddu bhaiya (Ali's character in Mirzapur). The film was the last screening at Sundance and I was supposed to leave in a couple of hours. We had just got done with the screening and it was a very emotional screening. When we were walking back home, Richa said I just saw Preeti walk down the aisle for the Q&A and the thought suddenly flashed in my head when we were watching her audition and just froze for a second because we knew we'd got her. It sounds extremely cinematic and dramatic but this is how it happened. It's just a lot of things happening at the right time.

Were you always sure of making a career in films?

Yes. Just to have a security backup, I was focusing on academics too. I was pursuing history honours in my graduation. Right now, I have also enrolled in animation. This is not like a backup plan. I always wanted to learn how to make films and finally I'm getting that opportunity to do it.

Ghum Hai Kisikey Pyaar Meiin : Bhavika Sharma CONFIRMS her exit; reveals more details about the leap

In an exclusive conversation with Pinkvilla, Bhavika Sharma confirmed her exit from Ghum Hai Kisikey Pyaar Meiin and even spilled more details about the upcoming leap.

Ghum Hai Kisikey Pyaar Meiin is set to surprise audiences as the makers are introducing a new leap very soon. Bhavika Sharma, who plays the female protagonist in the show, has confirmed that the show is heading for a leap, and she, along with the current cast, will not be a part of the show after this transition. While exclusively speaking with Pinkvilla, Bhavika shared more details about the upcoming leap in Ghum Hai Kisikey Pyaar Meiin.As the actress confirmed her exit, we inquired about how her track in the show would come to an end. When asked, Bhavika revealed that she has no information on how her track will conclude in Ghum Hai Kisikey Pyaar Meiin. She exclusively told Pinkvilla that the current star cast will wrap up the shooting of the show by the end of January 2025.

When asked whether she would appear on screens again immediately after Ghum Hai Kisikey Pyaar Meiin, the actress said, "If I get good offers, why not." For the uninformed, Bhavika Sharma was roped in to play the lead role in 2023 after Ayesha Singh and Neil Bhatt's exit. Initially, Bhavika starred opposite Shakti Arora, who played Ishaan. Their track received immense love from viewers. However, the show took a leap of 7 years in June 2024, and Shakti's track concluded in Ghum Hai Kisi Ke Pyar Meiin.

At present, Ghum Hai Kisikey Pyaar Meiin stars Bhavika Sharma and Hitesh Bharadwaj in lead roles. While Bhavika essays the role of Savi, Hitesh plays Rajat. Now that the leap is confirmed, fans will soon see new faces playing lead roles in Ghum Hai Kisikey Pyaar Meiin.

'We Will Also Make Waves One Day'

Sai Tamhankar got her first break in the 2008 critically acclaimed Subhash Ghai film, Black & White. In the same year, she appeared as the lead in her first Marathi production Sanai Choughade, co-produced by Ghai's Mukta Arts. In the following years, Sai cemented herself as a familiar face in the Marathi scene where she played a diverse roles across television and films -- a surrogate mother (Anubandh), a seductress (Pune 52), a troubled love interest (Duniyadaari), a jilted lover (Time Please), a bored housewife on a mission to lose weight (Vazandaar) and a meek wife who gets entangled in village politics (Dhurala). It doesn't stop there. Sai transitioned to Hindi where she got opportunities to showcase her talent through films like Mimi, Love Sonia, India Lockdown, As her body of work continues to feature a mix of Hindi and Marathi films, Sai says she is in 'no rush' but now wants to be 'exclusive' to Marathi. "I've realised that even if I won an award and come home, I don't dwell on that joy or my achievement so much. I move on to the next page," the actor shares with

Is it annoying when people mispronounce your name as 'Saai' instead of 'Sayee'? Do you correct them or do you just let it be?

It is annoying. (Laughs) I do correct them. It is such an easy name, if you still fumble with that, it does feel bad. But now people know me and those who know me know the pronunciation of my name.

You made your acting debut in 2008 with a rather unconventional role of a single mother in Sanai Choughade. What drives you to pick your characters? How different is the current Sai from that Sai?

Well, I know my job now.
Now with the experience, I know a lot more -- be it the technical aspect or the character building or how to be in front of the camera. In terms of these things, of course, I've changed a lot. In terms of my choices, nothing has really changed. It's the same. I still heavily gravitate towards unconventional stuff. I like different things, challenging things or something that will throw me completely out of my comfort zone.

You once described yourself as a restless person. Does that show in the career choices too? Does it fuel your hunger to experiment with different mediums and languages?

Yes, it does. I've realised that even if I won an award and come home, I don't dwell on that joy or my achievement so much. I will move on to the next page. I feel I have changed a little with time and practice. It's okay to dwell in your achievement. It's okay to take it slow. I have recently realised this and started making changes. Otherwise, as you correctly said, I am a perpetually restless person. I cannot sit in one place for a long time.

Priyanka Chopra once said she would walk into rooms as a newbie and introduce herself when she transitioned into Hollywood. Do you relate to that with your experience in Hindi? How difficult is it to reconstruct the star image when you were already such a big name in Marathi?

When you are in new waters, you have to follow the rules of that water. You have to change your behavioural patterns according to that terrain. Sometimes you feel what is happening to me, or what am I doing? It's quite human to feel so. But I've never approached it that way. When you venture into something new, you have to start from scratch. It's perfectly okay to start from scratch because it keeps you grounded. It gives you a reality check. It's great learning to be working in a new industry. It only makes you stronger and makes you grow.

As an actor, is it limiting to work in the industry that isn't recognised outside its borders? Why do you think Marathi movies and actors don't get popularity like other regional industries?

As an industry, I feel there should be a little bit of unity, which is not there. I feel unity is the best policy and we need to work on that. And of course, the budget. Even after so many years, people are asking will there be a recovery or not? This is the question that is asked to the producers, which is unfortunate. Having said this, I know there are some film-makers who are breaking this path. Like, someone went to Berlin, someone got a Golden Bear. It's not that we are not making waves internationally. We definitely are, but the frequency is less. It's a process. It's a journey. Nothing happens overnight. If we give this journey its due time, we will also make waves one day. I think that day is not too far.

‘When I Got The Paatal Lok Demo...’

‘...it was for a very, very big lead actor.’ ‘I looked at it and saw how beautiful she was. I was like, there’s no chance I’m getting it.’ ‘I auditioned and as luck would have it, they were looking for someone like me.’

Niharika Lyra Dutt had a good 2024, as she featured in two big ticket shows, Call Me Bae and Doctors. Making into the glitzy world of Bollywood was a distant dream for this actor from a humble theatre background. But in the last few years, she was seen in many well-received shows including Pataal Lok, Eternally Confused and Eager for Love and Choona.I have been a Kuch Kuch Hota Hai fan. Since childhood, I have been Anjali. Obviously, I told my adult brain that these are dreams you don't need to have. So I didn't dream about Yash Chopra. I didn't dream about Dharma,' Niharika tells **Mayur Sanap/Rediff.com.**

How was your experience playing a doctor in Doctors?

I had the best time! It was possibly my most rewarding experience till date because I got most of the meat with Keyuri's character. Also, the fact that she has gray shades was exciting to explore. Now, it has been released after two years, and I'm very nostalgic about that time we had as a team.I am very happy that it is being recognised.

Be it Sarah Matthews, the journalist you played in Pataal Lok or Keyuri Patel in Doctors, it must be surreal to play such earthy characters and depicting these professions.

(Theatre personality Konstantin) Stanislavski talked about what if, right? The question of Magic If. It's always Lyra as Keyuri Patel or Lyra as Sarah Matthews. So it's very interesting to think about this parallel universe, where I'm a completely different person and in a completely different world.

What would be my fix? What would be my occupational hazards? What would be the thing that doesn't allow me to sleep at night? What would be the thing that adds fire to my belly? Being those people was such an internal process. Whenever I get a character, the first thing I do is I write it down. I make the script the Bible and then make a mix of similarities and differences between me and my characters. The similarities are incredible because I can really lean on them. But the differences can tell you about the choices the character makes, and you have to justify them.

Has acting always been your passion? What motivated you to come to Mumbai and follow your dreams?

Honestly, I didn't want to come to Mumbai. I used to pull my nose up at the thought that this is a valuable place. I was doing theatre from a very young age. My parents were also from theatre. So it was an expression that lived with me since the age of six. I've been directing and acting my own plays. I finished my graduation in Delhi and applied for a scholarship. But I didn't get it. I got a score in drama school. I heard that there would be a maximum batch of 13 and we were being taught by people who were professionals in the industry in Mumbai. My parents very sweetly funded that education and I shifted my bag and life in a week, and came to Mumbai. I didn't know what would happen. I didn't know how long I would stay there. Now, it's been 10 years.

This industry is high on favouritism and connections. How have you navigated your way through that?

I knew that nobody knows me, that nobody would stick their neck out to put their money on me as a lead or whatever. I was honestly just happy to do the work that I was getting. Of course, it had to align with the kind of work I wanted to do. I would audition for things and when I got them, I would just be very glad. Then I realised that for me, work will get me more work. I'm grateful that I have managed to work with some fantastic teams. I hope this attitude will allow me to work with even better names and better scripts in future.

When you do projects like Paatal Lok and Call Me Bae, which are backed by big names, what changes does it bring for you as an actor?

During Paatal Lok, I didn't believe it.

When I got the demo for the audition, it was for a very, very big lead actor. I looked at it and saw how beautiful she was. I was like, there's no chance I'm getting it. I always saw myself as not mainstream, so I thought there was no chance I would get it. I auditioned for it and as luck would have it, they were looking for someone like me. I still remember when I stepped out of the Clean Slate office, I called my mother and it was an unbelievable feeling. I had watched NH10 when I was still in college in Delhi, and remember being moved by it. That was a female-led cinema and it was really, really good.

I was so interested in Anushka Sharma and Sudeep Sharma that I definitely wanted to work with them. When I stepped out of the Clean Slate office, it was an unbelievable feeling because I felt like someone who is not mainstream was given a chance. Then I realised that the entire team was built like that. The preference was given to the talent and who will do the best job. During Call Me Bae, it was very funny actually. I have been a Kuch Kuch Hota Hai fan. Since childhood, I have been Anjali. Obviously, I told my adult brain that these are dreams you don't need to have.

So I didn't dream about Yash Chopra. I didn't dream about Dharma. I was very happy in the OTT world with whatever work I was getting. When I got the audition and got through the first round, then the second round, Colin (D'Cunha, director of Call Me Bae) called me to meet him at the Dharma office. A really funny thing happened. His assistant had given me his number and I told the watchman, 'Brother, I want to go to Yash Raj's office.'

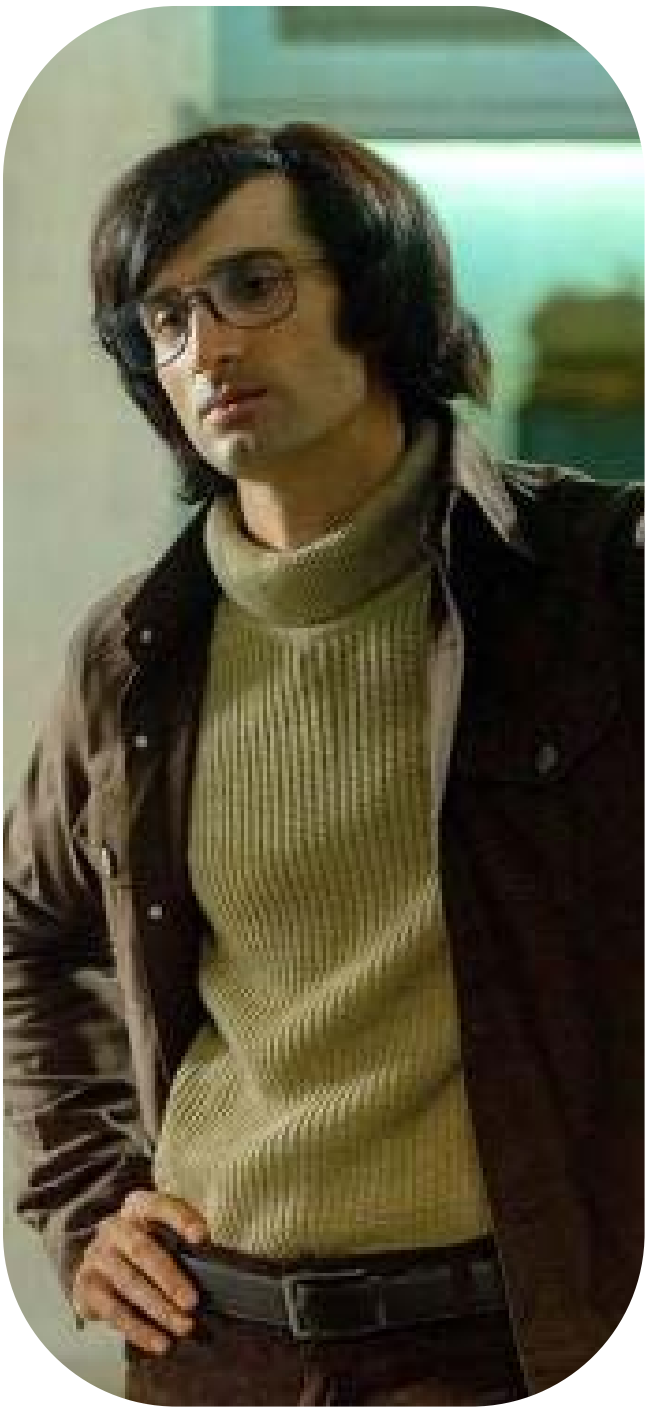
And he's like, no, Yash Raj office is not here. I called the assistant, saying Yash Raj's office is not here, and he's like, 'Niharika, you have to come to the Dharma office.' I guffawed loudly. I was like, oh my God! I don't think it hit me. Till that point, I think I was just trying to tell myself that I can do this. I can be a part of such a universe and really worked hard to put my best foot forward to be able to be as assimilated in that kind of a universe. I think it was at the premiere when I introduced Karan Johar to my father. That was a surreal moment for me.

'I Focused On Studying Charles Sobhraj'

'The opportunity to live as the Serpent excited me.'

Sidhant Gupta seems to be shaping into quite a bio-picker.

In Vikramaditya Motwane's well-reviewed Web series Jubilee, Sidhant played a Dev Anand doppelganger. Right after that, he played Jawaharlal Nehru in Nikkhil Advani's Freedom At Midnight. Now it is the vile but charming Charles Sobhraj in Motewane's next series, the excellent prison drama, Black Warrant. "I must strive to ensure the newness is reflected in every character that finds me,"



You have changed your phone number. Congratulations on a new beginning?

Thank you. I had to change my phone number to preserve some peace. This new beginning feels right. I must strive to ensure the newness is reflected in every character that finds me.

Was it tough playing Charles Sobhraj, especially with that peculiar accent?

The accent was hard and the psychology was complex. In chasing the mystery, I became one myself, and that felt charming in a way.

After Nehru, Sobhraj is quite a leap. How did you land the role? Did you watch other actors who have portrayed him?

They are two entirely different skies -- one contributed to society, while the other took away from it. I focused solely on studying Charles Sobhraj. Vikramaditya Motwane called me and offered me the role. The opportunity to live on his set again as the Serpent excited me.

Are you satisfied with the progress you've made so far? What can we see you in next? I'm satisfied when I go to bed but wake up feeling, 'It's not enough.'

It keeps me going.
As of now, I'm reading stuff that is coming my way.

'I Can't Keep Shooting My Mouth Off'

'Modiji remaining healthy and happy is something I pray for all the time.'

Rupali Ganguly, whose Anupamaa has made her a household name in many north Indian homes, laughs off rumours of her exit from her signature serial in this interview

You recently joined the Bharatiya Janata Party.
Yes, it was a very big deal for me, you know meeting PM Modiji, then joining the BJP was also a big moment for me.

Would you say that was the highlight of the year for you?
Anupamaa doing well throughout the year was also a highlight. My family is happy, healthy, that is again one of the biggest highlights. But on the downside, losing my mother-in-law, that was the only thing last year that was the downside. When you lose an elder, when you lose a mother, the protector, the custodian, the umbrella is gone from over your head.

The rest has all been one big sweep of joy?
Rest it has been a great year. You know, I haven't been able to watch any films recently. I watch a lot of Anupamaa. I watch a lot of other shows on Star Plus because that is my job, and I watch animation. I loved Moana.

Any regrets?
No, nothing as such. I just think I should learn to keep my mouth shut in interviews or not give interviews at all. I think that's one thing that I should learn because I have no filter and you know, I should understand that I can't keep shooting my mouth off.

What are you looking forward to this year?
First and foremost, I look forward to my family's health and their happiness, then my unit's well-being, good work, do some great scenes, great work. And yes, a lot of work towards the welfare of fur babies. So that is something that I look forward to, to get closer to my dream of having my dream animal shelter. Because as long as you don't live in it yourself, you have to be there with the kids yourself. And the dream I know I have, you know, it's soon going to be a reality and that is the goal to work towards it. To do more work for the fur babies and to make my family proud of me and all the people that I love should remain healthy and happy.

Your closing thoughts?
God bless everybody, God bless everybody. My India should be shining and it should grow leaps and bounds under the supervision, under the leadership of Shri Narendra Modi. India is shining and it has to shine even brighter

Expert guide to winter nutrition

Nutrition experts outline common health concerns, key nutrients, seasonal superfoods, and bust myths to help you stay healthy this winter

Winter, a season marked by cosy nights and festive cheer, can also bring about a host of health challenges. The changing weather can negatively impact our health and weaken our immune system, owing to the colder temperatures coupled with decreased sunlight exposure. However, incorporating superfoods into your winter diet can significantly boost immunity by providing essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. By further understanding the common health concerns and adopting a proactive approach to nutrition, we can effectively bolster our immunity and enjoy a stress-free winter. Dr Thousia Hassan, consultant-dietitian and nutritionist at Motherhood Hospitals, Bangalore, and Tanisha Bawa, certified nutrition coach and founder of Tan 365, outline common health concerns and key nutrients and share seasonal Indian superfoods to include in your diet to boost immunity and for holistic health improvement this winter. Winter in India can bring about a range of health concerns due to the seasonal changes in temperature, humidity, and air quality. Hassan outlines common health issues below:

Respiratory issues

The cold, dry air during winter can lead to an increase in respiratory issues such as asthma, bronchitis, and the common cold. Air pollution, which tends to be higher in many Indian cities during winter months, also exacerbates these conditions.

Joint pain and Arthritis

The cold weather can cause muscles and joints to stiffen, leading to discomfort, especially for those with arthritis or other joint-related conditions. This is because the low temperatures can reduce blood flow to the extremities.

Dry skin and dehydration

Cold air tends to sap moisture from the skin, leading to dryness, itching, and cracking. Dehydration is also a risk, as people tend to drink less water during the winter months, despite the body still needing hydration.

Weakened immunity

The body may be more susceptible to infections during the winter months, especially if you're not eating a well-balanced diet or getting enough sunlight for vitamin D synthesis.

As an expert in gut and hormonal health, Bawa frequently emphasises anti-inflammatory diets for clients instead of highlighting seasonal variations.

Debunking Myths

You need to eat heavier foods to stay warm.
It's commonly believed that the body needs heavy, high-calorie foods to stay warm in the cold. "Winter definitely calls for more warming foods, but it's important to stay clear of excessive fats and sugars, which can cause inflammation and slow digestion, and instead choose nutrient-dense, anti-inflammatory elements," states Bawa.

You don't need to stay hydrated as much
Assuming that less water is required because of decreased perspiration, many people likewise undervalue the importance of staying hydrated throughout the winter. "In order to keep the skin hydrated and digestion at its best, it is essential to stay hydrated. Furthermore, seasonal superfoods high in fibre and antioxidants boost overall health by naturally reducing inflammation through a diet based on anti-inflammatory principles," explains Bawa.

Key nutrients for winter wellness

To combat these winter woes, it's essential to focus on a nutrient-rich diet. By incorporating certain key nutrients, we can strengthen our immune system, protect our skin, and improve overall well-being. Hassan lists key nutrients to include in your diet this winter:

Vitamin D: Due to limited sunlight exposure, it's important to focus on foods rich in Vitamin D, such as fortified dairy products, eggs, and salmon. Vitamin D helps in immune function and bone health.

Vitamin C: Found in citrus fruits, bell peppers, and leafy greens, Vitamin C helps boost the immune system, especially when we're more prone to infections during the colder months.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids: These healthy fats found in foods like walnuts, flaxseeds, and fish support immune function and help reduce inflammation, which can be exacerbated by the cold weather.

Zinc: Zinc is essential for maintaining a strong immune system; zinc-rich foods like pumpkin seeds, lentils, and chickpeas are beneficial during winter.

Five seasonal Indian superfoods for winter

The cold weather tends to suppress the body's natural healing processes, making it more vulnerable to infections, joint pain, and low energy. Superfoods, due to their dense nutritional profile, are particularly beneficial during winter months as they provide the body with concentrated nutrients that can support immune function, fight inflammation, and improve overall health. Bawa shares five Indian superfoods that must be a part of every diet this winter.

1. Amla

Indian gooseberry (amla) is a little green fruit that provides a great source of vitamin C, which is vital for a healthy immune system. Additionally, amla has nutrients and antioxidants that promote detoxification, skin vitality, and digestive health. It's especially helpful in the winter because of its high vitamin C concentration, which helps prevent respiratory problems and seasonal colds. For optimal benefits, amla can be consumed raw, in chutneys, or as a juice.

2. Ginger

A traditional cure for preventing cold winter chills, ginger is well-known for its warming qualities. It helps ease coughs, sore throats, and digestive problems because of its potent anti-inflammatory and antioxidant qualities. Additionally, ginger promotes circulation and gives the body a natural, calming heat. To reap the advantages of ginger, use it in your tea, soups, curries, or even desserts.

3. Sesame seeds (til)

The nutrient-dense seeds provide calcium, magnesium, zinc, and iron– all of which are essential for strong bones and a healthy immune system. Sesame seeds provide body warmth throughout the winter months and are frequently added to savoury recipes or eaten as a tasty treat in the form of sesame brittle (tilgul). Use sesame seeds to enhance the taste and nutritional value of salads, chutneys, and traditional Indian desserts.

4. Sweet Potatoes (Shakarkand)

A wonderful source of complex carbohydrates, dietary fibre, and vitamins A and C, sweet potatoes are a multipurpose root vegetable that is ideal for the lower temperatures and shorter days of winter. In addition to aiding in digestion and blood sugar regulation, sweet potatoes offer a gradual release of energy. For a hearty, wholesome side dish, try them roasted, in curries, or even boiled with a dash of spices.

5. Jaggery (Gur)

Rich in iron and antioxidants, jaggery is frequently used as a natural sweetener in Indian cooking. By enhancing blood circulation, promoting energy levels, and aiding in digestion, it aids in the body's cleansing process. Jaggery is perfect for teas, desserts, or adding to regular dal since it adds a subtle sweetness and warmth to your wintertime meals.

Easy yet delicious ways to include winter vegetables in meals

Winter brings a range of vibrant vegetables that are both nutritious and versatile. Spinach and carrots are particularly abundant and beneficial in cold weather. Bawa shares some simple ways to incorporate these into your meals:

Spinach

1. Spinach potato vegetable: A traditional North Indian side dish, aloo spinach sabzi is a moderately spicy stir-fry of potatoes and spinach that goes well with rotis or as an accompaniment to dal.

2. Stir-fried spinach and mushrooms: This dish is a tasty side dish that's high in antioxidants and fibre. For a quick and filling side, stir-fry with garlic and a little soy sauce.

3. Spinach rice: This easy yet tasty dish is a hearty, high-iron, high-fibre dinner made with rice, spinach, garlic, and spices.

Carrot

1. Carrot mixed vegetable sabzi: This dish incorporates carrots along with other seasonal vegetables in a mildly spiced curry. It's a comforting and nutrient-dense side dish.

2. Carrot and peas curry: A staple winter recipe, this curry combines the sweetness of carrots and the texture of fresh peas, cooked with mild spices. It's a warming, nutritious dish that pairs well with parathas or rice.

3. Potato and carrot stir-fry: This simple and traditional recipe involves cooking potatoes and carrots with cumin and turmeric, making a warm, earthy side dish ideal for cold days.

Mahakumbh 2025, one of the largest spiritual congregations in the world, commenced on Monday with lakhs of devotees taking a dip in the holy Sangam. This grand gathering does not only hold spiritual significance but is also set to be a platform to boost global tourism. To facilitate the same, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has rolled out several initiatives aimed at increasing domestic and international tourism. This mega event, expected to attract 40-45 crore visitors from across the world, offers a unique opportunity to showcase India's cultural and spiritual heritage, and tourism potential.

Tourist helpline to social media buzz, know all about the measures to promote global tourism at Mahakumbh 2025

Incredible India Pavilion

The Ministry of Tourism said it is setting up the Incredible India Pavilion, a sprawling 5000 sq ft space at Mahakumbh, which will give a glimpse into India's rich cultural heritage to devotees, foreign tourists, scholars, researchers, photographers, journalists, the expat community, Indian diaspora, among others. The pavilion will also feature the Dekho Apna Desh People's Choice Poll, allowing visitors to vote for their favourite tourism destinations in India.

Tourist helpline

To cater to the specific needs of foreign tourists, influencers, journalists and photographers attending Mahakumbh, the Ministry of Tourism has set up a dedicated toll-free Tourist Infoline (1800111363 or 1363). Besides English and Hindi, the toll-free Infoline is operating in ten international languages and also in Indian languages including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Assamese and Marathi. The service will provide assistance, information, and guidance to make the experience seamless and more enjoyable for international visitors.

Social media buzz

The Ministry has launched a major social media campaign to generate buzz and create awareness about the mega event Special hashtags such as #Mahakumbh2025 and #SpiritualPrayagraj are being used to encourage people to share their experiences and moments from the event.

Accommodation and transportation

The Ministry of Tourism has collaborated with key tourism stakeholders like the Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (UPSTDC), IRCTC and ITDC to offer a range of curated tour packages and luxury accommodation options.

ITDC has set up 80 luxury accommodations at Tent City, Prayagraj, while IRCTC is also providing luxury tents to accommodate the influx of pilgrims and tourists. To ensure seamless travel for tourists attending the Mahakumbh, the Ministry of Tourism has partnered with Alliance Air to enhance air connectivity to Prayagraj from multiple cities across India. This will facilitate easier access for domestic and international visitors, allowing them to reach the event with ease and convenience.

Feburary 2025

TAROT

Loveena Crystal Gaze
(Tarot card Reader, Numerologist)

ARIES
(March 21- April 19)

Investment in property is highlighted, take advantage of divine timing. Universe is in a generous mood. Financially good period ahead. Rejoice and celebrate.

Angel msg- Angels are blessing you with romance in your life.

TAURUS
(April 20- May 21)

Money inflow is encouraging, positive energy will attract new clients. You are going closer to your goal. New and better part of life is beginning for you bringing joyous and happy moments.

Angel msg- Bonds of love will be strengthed.

GEMINI
(May 22- June 20)

Visualise your dreams and smooth road ahead, Stay optimistic. Let Universe bring Changes in your Career. Soar with happiness.

Angel msg- Be ready to meet some one new, rapport will be intense .

CANCER
(June 21-July 22)

Spread your wings, Angels are guiding you to new horizons. Time for changes and new beginnings. Celebration time ahead. Welcome the new dawn in your life.

Angel msg- Divine timing is at work in your love life.

LEO
(July 23- Aug 22)

Rainbow of happiness is coming your way, receive with open arms. Angels are blessing you with more comforts and luxury. Money inflow is encouraging.

Angel msg- Love life will bring surprises for you, giving you unexpected happiness.

VIRGO
(Aug 23- Sept 22)

Angels are guiding you in Miraculous ways, your Aura is energized for financial gains. Let go of old energy to allow in newer vibes.

Angel msg- Thank the universe, love blossoms.

LIBRA
(Sept 23- Oct 22)

A new Venture will turn profitable, Angels are bringing miracles in your life, a blessing of some kind. Abundance in money is coming your way. You will touch heights in your Career.

Angel msg- Be ready for romance, love life will blossom.

SCORPIO
(Oct 23- Nov 22)

There is luck and fortune in store for you. Excellent period for new projects to be Successful. Have faith in universe. Keep charging ahead. Aim high to achieve Success.

Angel msg- Magical energy is Surrounding your soul mate relationship.

SAGITTARIUS
(Nov 23- Dec 21)

You enter a positive period in your Career, with fame and recognition coming your way. Property issues will get settled. Universe is blessing your dreams.

Angel msg- News from a loved one will bring happiness in your life.

CAPRICON
(Dec 22- Jan 20)

Wheel of fortune has begin to turn in your favour. Heaven is working behind the scenes to help you. All blocks in your Career are over.

Angel msg- Let Universe bring Changes in your love life.

AQUARIUS
(Jan 21- Feb 18)

Change is upon you, New avenues of income and Opportunities coming your way. Magical energy is Surrounding you. You will achieve your goals

Angel msg- Message from your loved one will bring joy and happiness in your life.

PISCES
(Feb 19- March 20)

Welcome changes in your life, deals will be Signed. Miracles will happen in your life and Career will make financial gains for you.

Angel msg- Romance will bring smiles in your life.

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- Project Work

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