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GOUTAM GHOSE.

'I don't know how long cinema will survive

Janhvi Kapoor

IMPOSSIBLE TO FALL IN LOVE

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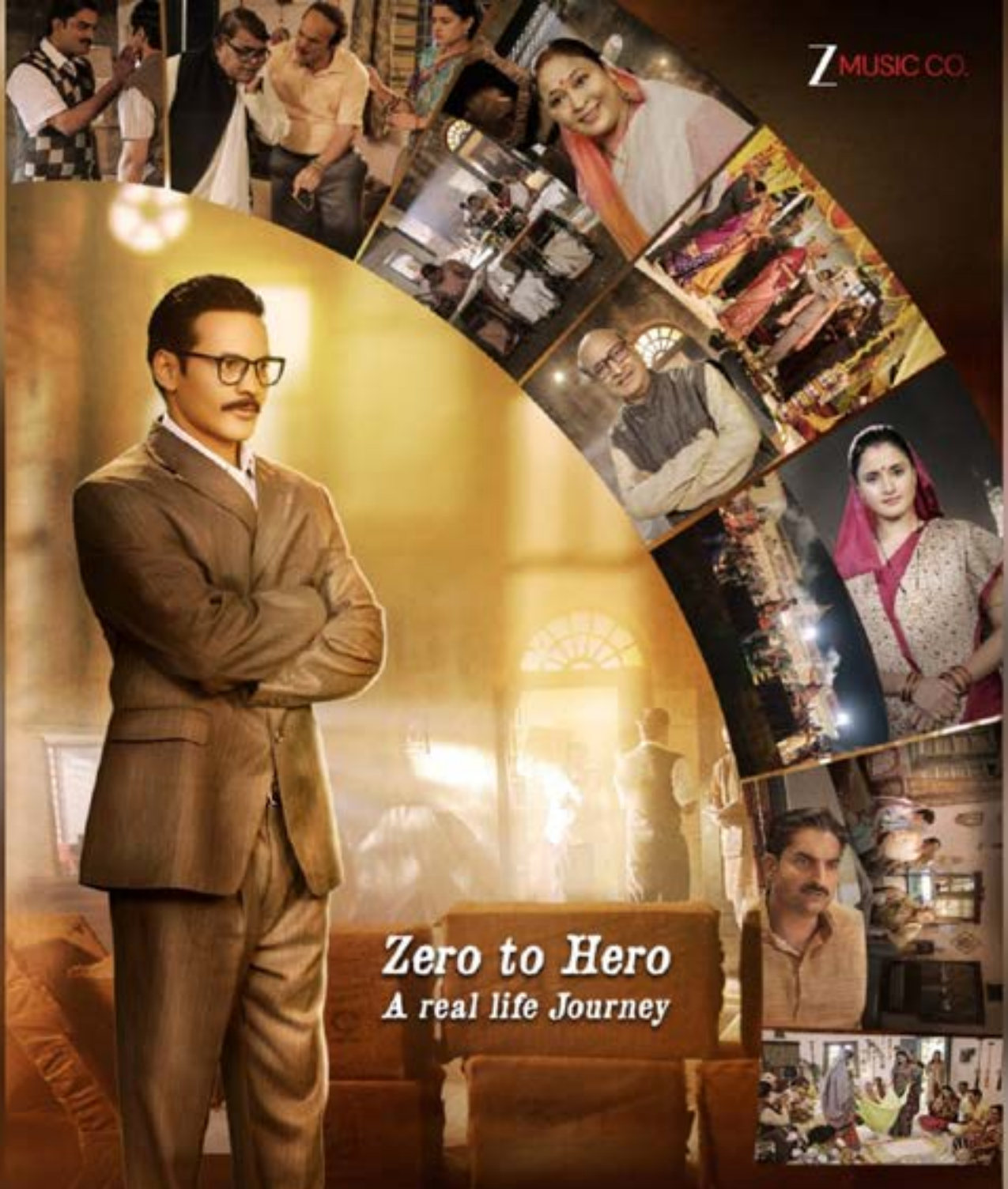

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Printed Published & Owned by
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"IMPOSSIBLE TO FALL IN LOVE"

Janhvi Kapoor On Relationships In 2025

Janhvi Kapoor's latest rom-com, Param Sundari, has hit theatres and depicts a story of two distinct personalities. While presenting romance on screen is easy, Jahnvi's perception of love in real life is much deeper. In her latest interview, the actress shared her opinion about the changing notions around love and relationships in modern times.

In a conversation with Vogue India, Janhvi was asked about her views on love when people seek instant gratification. The actress explained, "It's so funny that you asked me this, because I was just thinking about it the other day.

> She mentioned that we have become so inflexible in our beliefs that we evaluate others more harshly.

I think it is almost impossible to fall in love now. If you're from this generation and you're navigating your way in this world of finding a partner, instant gratification has made the entire idea of romance so transactional that I don't know if we have the patience, aptitude or openness for a real connection."

JANHVI KAPOOR

JK reflects on the weight of comparisons, reveals her wedding plans: 'They see Sridevi in me'

Kapoor, daughter of the legendary Sridevi, reveals her childhood struggles with paparazzi attention in a recent interview. She recalls Sridevi's warning about comparisons to her illustrious career and the challenges she faced after her mother's passing, including public judgment. Despite the pressures, Janhvi honors Sridevi's legacy while forging her own path in cinema.

Janhvi Kapoor has been in the limelight of the film world since she was a little girl. As the daughter of the beautiful queen of the screen, Sridevi, every step she took was in front of the audience. Janhvi Kapoor has now shared about her childhood concerns in an interview with Vogue India. The paparazzi followed her from school age; going to school, going to a concert, standing hand in hand with her mother at the airport—everything became news. Although it was a game for her when she was young, later it became a huge burden for Janhvi Kapoor. Especially in the era of social media, he became the center of much attention at the end of the decade and at the age of sixteen.

Sridevi's prophetic words on comparisons

Continuing in the same interview, Janhvi Kapoor shared how her mother Sridevi's legacy changed her life. "They won't compare my first film to my mother's first film. They will compare it to her 350th film. That's a burden no one wants," Sridevi would always say. Janhvi Kapoor still feels how true those words are. Although those comparisons put additional pressure on her achievements in cinema, she never forgot the pride that "at least I am being compared to the greatest actress in history."

Janhvi opens up on battling judgment after Sridevi's passing.

At the same time, the grief after losing her mother, Sri Devi, and the media attention that followed were her biggest challenges.
"If you laugh after losing your mother, they'll call you a critic, and if you cry, they'll call you a cold person. Even our misery has become entertainment for people," she shared painfully. Janhvi Kapoor and her sister Khushi said that because they didn't show their pain, people treated them like human beings. She said that experience had shaken her faith in human nature.

Janhvi carves her own path while honoring Sridevi's legacy

Despite all this, Sridevi's love and protection remain strong in Janhvi's memories. Sridevi was adamant that her daughters should not enter the world of cinema. The reason—"I don't want my children to experience the challenges, burdens, and dark sides of cinema that I've seen." But at the same time, she understood their passion and dreams for the art world. Today, Janhvi Kapoor, remembering her mother's words and guidance, is carving out a path for herself. Although she grew up in Sridevi's shadow, Janhvi Kapoor's aim is to use the light of that shadow as a guide and move forward.

Janhvi dreams of a quiet Tirupati wedding

I want my wedding day to be very simple and comfortable. The wedding should be held in Tirupati, with a very small number of people present, and should be done quickly. But my bridal gown will definitely be Manish Malhotra because he's my favorite person, and he is like my family.

'Param Sundari': 5 Reasons that make Janhvi Kapoor & Sidharth Malhotra's movie shine. Love stories have long been the soul of Hindi cinema, and Tushar Jalota's latest offering, 'Param Sundari,' is a beautiful reminder of why. A fresh take on cross-cu...

It's not just the accent:

Why Janhvi Kapoor's Param Sundari revives cross-language casting debate

Actors have, since the beginning of Indian cinema, hopped borders, crossed over to work in films that spoke languages other than their own. No one seemed to mind that the first actress (Sharadha) to win the National Award for a Malayalam film came from Andhra Pradesh. The very essence of acting was, after all, pretence — why not go all the way and adopt a foreign tongue?

Back then, dubbing artists became the voice of the non-native actor. When time passed and methods changed, more films embraced the authenticity of the voice and insisted on every actor dubbing for herself. But filmmakers did not always enforce authenticity in casting. A Tamil actor played Malayali and flaunted a broken, in-between language, a Bollywood actress played Tamilian and stuck to accented Hindi, and at least two Hindi actors tried to pass off as Malayalis in recent years and succumbed to stereotypes.

Why Param Sundari missed the mark

In the last two weeks, Param Sundari has received the maximum flak a film could, for its portrayal of the Malayali heroine, stereotyped in every single way a Malayali woman could be, and given the voice of an actor who could not pronounce the name of her character right. Thekkepaatil Sundari – mispronounced 'Thekkapetta' Sundari – in Janhvi Kapoor's broken Malayalam, became the perfect tool for trolls that have not stopped even after the film came out and got critiqued for more reasons than mere miscasting When Janhvi pronounced the name as 'Thekkapetta' and put 'Sundari' next to it, it translated to 'betrayed beautiful woman' in Malayalam slang. 'Thekkuka' is slang for betrayal, and 'thekkapetta' would mean 'the one betrayed'. It did not help the film that the term has, in recent years, taken on a misogynistic flavour, used mostly by men to derogate women who broke up with them..

Social media influencers had a field day, dressing themselves into caricatures of the Malayali stereotype the film projected – women with Rapunzel hair [wigs], saying they prefer Mohiniyattam costumes at home, insisting on wearing jasmine flowers before going to the restroom, and carrying coconuts in their hands at all times. Imagination ran wild. Many asked seriously, why could they not cast a Malayali to play a Malayali, so that it would be her Hindi which might be flawed, and not the other way around.

Accent Is No Barrier, Caricature Is..

Authenticity is often the compromise that filmmakers make to get the actors of their liking into films of another language. In Malayalam cinema, after Sharadha, came a series of actors from other states who not only played the native woman but also won admirers for passing off as one — Zarina Wahab, Sumalatha, and even Sridevi (late actor and Janhvi's mother) were household names for the audience. The only difference was that their stories were authentic — written by Malayalis — and their voices, dubbed, unless they played the non-Malayali.

The practice was not limited to women. Senior male actors like Amol Palekar, Om Puri, Naseeruddin Shah, and Anupam Kher played Malayali men, struggling to pick the nuances but making convincing portrayals of their characters.

Mammootty and Mohanlal comfortably transformed into unforgettable Tamil characters. Shah Rukh Khan admirably pulled off his Tamil debut in Hey Ram. Skills overcame differences, as long as the representation was paid heed to, and the culture was respected.

> Casting other-language actors needn't be a frowned-upon practice, especially in times that more and more borders are drawn to separate man from man. You only need to write around it.

Salman Khan

Says he wants to start a league for childhood games like chor-police, hide and seek, gilli-danda

Salman Khan recently joked that he wants to start a league for childhood games like chain cook, hide and seek, and cops and robbers. And for the educated people, he would also like to start a doctor-doctor league Bollywood superstar **Salman Khan**, who made a surprise appearance at the kick-off for Season 3 of the World Padel League, humorously suggested creating his own leagues for classic childhood games like "hide and seek" and "Chor Police"

Speaking at the event, Salman, whose brother Sohail Khan owns a team at the World Padel League, said: "Main goti league kholunga, kanche, main gilly danda league kholunga is prakaar ke league khelunga, chain cook, hide and seek league, chor police league, main in sab league main interested hun. Aur phir educated log hai toh, main doctor-doctor league kholna chahunga.

"(I will start a marbles league, a gilli-danda league. I want to play these kinds of leagues—chain cook, hide and seek, and cops and robbers. And since there are educated people, I would also like to start a "doctor-doctor" league." Talking about Salman, he is set to return as the host for the nineteenth season of the controversial reality show **Bigg Boss**, which is expected to get its grand premiere on August 24.

Salman, who was last seen in the action-drama Sikandar directed by A. R. Murugadoss, had shared, "I have been a part of 'Bigg Boss' for very long now, and as we all know, Bigg Boss reinvents the game every year, aur iss baar, it is gharwalo ki sarkar. And when too many people start pulling the strings, it's bound to get messy. That's when the cracks show, and the house turns into a warzone," said the 59-year-old superstar.

Talking about Sikandar, the film also stars Rashmika Mandanna, Kajal Aggarwal, Sharman Joshi, Sathyaraj, Jatin Sarna, Sanjay Kapoor, Prateik Babbar and Kishore.

Salman will also be seen in the film **Battle Of Galwan**, helmed by Apoorva Lakhia. The film is said to revolve around the intense confrontation between Indian and Chinese troops back in 2020 in the Galwan Valley, a disputed border region in Ladakh.

Vidya Balan urges support for Indian weavers on National Handloom Day: ‘Embrace our cultural heritage’

Every year on August 7, National Handloom Day is celebrated to recognize the invaluable contributions of India’s weavers and the heritage of the handloom industry. In 2025, the country marks the 11th year of this special observance

In the video, she is seen closely observing the weaving process and engaging in conversations with the artisans to better understand their work and craftsmanship. Her visit highlights the dedication and skill of India’s weavers and reinforces her continued support for traditional textiles. Actress **Vidya Balan** took to social media to highlight the importance of preserving India’s rich textile heritage on National Handloom Day.

In a heartfelt message on Instagram, she urged people to support Indian weavers by embracing handloom products, especially pure silks with the authentic Silk Mark Label. Balan encouraged citizens to take pride in their cultural identity and continue promoting indigenous craftsmanship. The ‘Dirty Picture’ actress, known for her deep love for handloom silk sarees, shared a video of herself visiting a facility where pure handloom silks are crafted. For the caption, Vidya Balan wrote, “Today as we celebrate the National Handloom Day, let us honor our weavers. Let us embrace our identity and cultural heritage. Encourage and embrace our handloom pure silks. And always buy silk with the Silk Mark Label. #MySilkMarkMyTrust.”

Every year on August 7, National Handloom Day is celebrated to recognize the invaluable contributions of India’s weavers and the heritage of the handloom industry. In 2025, the country marks the 11th year of this special observance.

For the unversed, August 7 was chosen as **National Handloom Day** to remember the Swadeshi Movement, which began on this day in 1905 during India’s fight for independence. The movement encouraged people to stop using British goods and support locally made products, especially handwoven fabrics, which became a powerful symbol of self-reliance and resistance.

To honor the role of handloom in the freedom struggle and promote it in today’s times, the Government of India officially declared August 7 as National Handloom Day in 2015. The first celebration was held in Chennai

'Chiranjeevi Dances Better Than Heroes Half His Age'

'He has a 'never give up' attitude to work and life.'

Adivi Sesh pays tribute to Chiranjeevi on his 70th birthday on August 22. The legend has shaped cinema for multiple generations, and he continues to do so."

Chiranjeevi hits 70 on August 22.

The legend has shaped cinema for multiple generations, and he continues to do so. He makes his juniors feel old.

Your fondest memory?

My fondest memory is the way he showered love upon us during the shooting of Major. He made and brought us our lunch himself. People don't realise just how magnanimous Chiranjeevigaru is.

Has he been a personal influence?

I'm grateful to have grown up on his cinema and get inspired in his cinema. I'm stunned that he still acts and dances better than heroes half his age.

Your favourite Chiranjeevi films?

Jagadeka Veerudu Athiloka Sundari, Rudraveena and Aapadbandhavudu are some of my favourites.

If you had a chance to share screen space with Chiranjeevi, what kind of cinema would you like to do?

I don't know if I have ever dreamed of sharing screen space with him; I have always thought of myself as a little kid in the audience, watching him entertain the masses. But if I do, it would be the opportunity of a lifetime.

What makes him so inspiring?

He has a ,never give up' attitude to work and life and that is one of the pillars of his youth and more importantly, his legacy.

THE ONE PROBLEM ALL PARENTS FACE

Soha Ali Khan will debut in her podcast titled All About Her, which will feature discussions with Bollywood actresses regarding mental health, fitness, postpartum and other subjects related to women's lives.

Soha revealed that sister-in-law Kareena Kapoor Khan will be on her show to discuss parenting.

'I really respect her for so many things. But what I respect her for is her approach towards parenting. And so we have an episode with her on positive parenting,' Soha says about her sister-in-law.

Kareena married Saif Ali Khan in 2012, and they have two sons, Taimur Ali Khan and Jehangir Ali Khan.

'There are many problems with parenting. Media is now social media. We are public figures, of course. We are actors. We are known faces. There are some positives with that. There are some negatives too,' Soha said.

But the problems in raising kids are similar for all parents, irrespective of their profession and nationality, she added.

'One problem for all parents is social media. You have to be aware of what your child is doing. Maybe every parent has seen that show, Adolescence, where you think your son or daughter is safe at home, locked in their room. But they are interacting with the world through the Internet. If you don't talk to your child, don't communicate, it is scary," Soha said.

While she pointed out the modern problems with parenting, the actress narrated her own experience with the media after she gave birth to her daughter, Inaaya.

'As far as paparazzi or media is concerned, my own personal experience has been good. Whenever we have said, please don't take pictures of Inaaya, we are in the swimming pool, this is a private moment. They have been respectful of that,' she said.

Soha believes celebrities should acknowledge their influence and be cautious about the content they post, as people look up to them.

'Actors don't want to be role models but we are, and we have to accept that. That's why we have to play the role with responsibility. We can't just say we are who we are, so don't follow us,' she said.

'It's important to understand that people do follow us and therefore, be true. So that you are not misleading people.'

Playing a negative role was a positive experience for me, doing things I'd never do in real life.

Nagarjuna plays the villain for the first time in his career in Coolie. But there's another first for him in the film. He makes the big reveal to adding, "I have dubbed in all three languages -- Telugu, Tamil and Hindi -- for the first time."

You play a villain in Coolie.

I haven't played a villain before; that was the fun of it. The guy I play is really evil, so much so that when Lokesh (Kanagaraj, Director) came to me, I asked him, 'Can anyone really be so evil?' He assured me that there are people who are even more evil than this.

Was it tough for the director to convince you?

Yes. When Lokesh came to me, I was hesitant. I didn't know if I should do this, whether my audience would accept me in a negative role. Lokesh had to narrate the role several times before he could convince me.

But now, I am glad I did this. It's a change from the convention roles. This guy in Coolie is a law unto himself. He does what he wants to. There is no one to stop him, or so he thinks. I'd never do it in real life. There is something else which I haven't done before.

What is that?

I have dubbed in all three languages -- Telugu, Tamil and Hindi -- for the first time. I don't know if other actors have done this, I am sure Kamal Haasan has done it.

Another first was working with Rajinikanth.

Yes. I had known Rajini sir for many years but we had never worked together. As a professional, everything you have heard about him is true. He is kind, humble, gentle, supportive and down-to-earth. It was a pleasure working with him. This is his 50th year in films.

It is your 39th year in cinema.

Actually, much longer. Vikram (1986) was my first film as a leading man, but I started as a baby actor much earlier.

Your Hindi debut, Ram Gopal Varma's Shiva, is being re-released.

That film is one of my favourites. It still has grit, and relevance.

There's Something I Haven't Done Before In Coolie

Jaswinder Gardner:

A Versatile Star Balancing Cinema, Web & Real Life with Grace

Q: Jaswinder, your journey has spanned ads, films, and now strong roles in web series and web films. How do you look back at your path so far?

A: I feel grateful. From over 600 commercials – many award-winning – to films, television, and now web platforms, each step has taught me something new. I've played a wide range of characters and I think what's helped me is sincerity, discipline, and consistency. I truly value every opportunity that's come my way.

Q: You've had the chance to work with some of the biggest names – Amitabh Bachchan, Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar, Sridevi, Tabu, Manoj Bajpayee, Paresh Rawal, John Abraham, Ayushmann Khurrana, Pratik Gandhi, and South superstar Jagapati Babu. What were those experiences like?

A: Honestly, unforgettable. Sharing screen space with Amitabh ji and Sridevi ji, Tabu was an honor. They carried immense grace and professionalism, and just being around them was inspiring. Salman Khan and Akshay Kumar brought energy and charisma, Manoj Bajpayee and Paresh Rawal brought intensity and depth. Working with younger talents like Ayushmann, Pratik Gandhi, and of course, Jagapati Babu from the South, has been equally enriching. Working with Shilpa shetty was really fun.. Each collaboration has left me with lessons and memories that have shaped me as an actor.

Q: You're currently playing strong leads in the web space – can you tell us about your digital projects?

A: Yes, digital has opened exciting doors. State vs. Ahuja gave me a layered, resilient character that really connected with viewers. The Secret Rishta on kuku TV was another lead role – very different but equally intense, and I was touched by the response. Then there's Tota Udu Maina Udu, a web film which is a murder mystery. Playing the lead in that was a thrilling experience because it challenged me in a completely new way. And I also did Chhatrasaal, a historical web series, which was another fulfilling journey as it allowed me to step into a different era.

Q: You've done TV as well, and current show on colors "Manpasand Ki Shaadi. Your role as Devika Diwan created a lot of buzz.

A: Working with Rajshree is a dream come true for me, its truly a privilege getting to play such a powerful character. Manpasand Ki Shaadi is very close to my heart. My entry as Devika Diwan was impactful and audiences immediately noticed the strength, elegance, and power of the character. It feels good when a role makes a strong mark, because that's what every actor hopes for.

Q: People often call you versatile. You've done comedy, serious drama, thrillers, antagonists, even historical roles. What's your own take on your versatility?

A: (smiles) Yes, I've been told that a lot. And I think that's my strength – to adapt and blend into different worlds. I've enjoyed comedy as much as I've enjoyed intense, emotional parts. Playing antagonists has been exciting, thrillers push me in new directions, and historicals like Chhatrasaal were very enriching. I love the challenge of reinventing myself with every project.

Q: What kind of roles or genres excite you most now?

A: I'd say meaningful, layered roles that leave a lasting impression. Whether it's a strong drama, a thriller, or even a light-hearted comedy – as long as the role has substance, I'm interested. Cinema today is evolving so beautifully that actors like me can explore everything. I want to continue doing roles that audiences remember.

Q: Beyond acting, what keeps you balanced and energized?

A: My family. I love spending time with them. Simple things like cooking for them, doing up my house, or just being together bring me immense joy. I also believe in taking care of my health, fitness, and diet – it's important to be at your best physically and mentally. I'm very grateful for the small joys in life, because they keep me grounded and happy.

Q: We also hear you're involved in social causes. Could you share about that?

A: Yes, my husband and I are very passionate about education for underprivileged children. We support and encourage their education because we believe it's the one thing that can truly change their future. It's close to our hearts, and if we can bring some light into their lives, even in a small way, it feels meaningful.

Q: Finally, how would you like audiences and filmmakers to remember Jaswinder Gardner?

A: I want to be remembered as a History-Maker, Path-Breaker, and Barrier-Breaker – an actor who gave meaningful performances, built a legacy with dignity, and lived a life with purpose and grace.

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I'm Really Proud To Be A Brahmin.

'So my question was, 'What is it that you are proud of? What have you achieved? What is your contribution?' 'He had no answer.'

Shazia Iqbal is a trained architect, who started her film career as a production designer in many of Anurag Kashyap's films. In 2019, she made a short film called Bebaak, a part-autobiographical story of a young Muslim girl. The film traveled to many international film festivals. Iqbal recently directed Dhadak 2, the Hindi remake of the award winning Tamil classic Pariyerum Perumal, directed by Mari Selvaraj and produced by Pa Ranjith. Dhadak 2 is one of the rare Hindi films focusing on caste discrimination. The powerful, searing drama is produced by Karan Johar and stars Siddhant Chaturvedi and Triptii Dimri. It recently opened to **positive reviews**, and enthusiastic support from the Dalit and other OBC caste communities. It also got the endorsement of Gujarat MLA Jignesh Mevani who spoke at the screening that the film should get a tax-free status.

Shazia, I am wondering about your awareness of caste issues. You grew up in Mumbai in a Muslim household.

People know there is a caste system in India and caste discrimination...

Shazia: But they don't know how it's practiced when they are on the other side. Very early on, I wondered whether I was the right person to make this film. I believe that I would be a better person to make Bebaak than somebody else who has not lived that life.

But you can still navigate from the point of your limited knowledge, to reaching a point where you operate with empathy and compassion and are able to tell that story. And since you are adapting, there is already an inner voice at play, right?

Did they give you the script of Pariyerum Perumal?

Shazia: No. We watched the film but didn't just go with the subtitles. We had a Tamil-speaking person with us and he gave us the cultural context of the scenes.

We didn't want to keep each and every detail because our setting was different, but we needed to understand the source. See, Shyam Benegal made Ankur. You can find your way through research, conversations, and doing your homework. You can reach the base.

But if you ask me politically, what is right? Should there be more Dalit filmmakers telling their own stories? I feel, yes. Should there be more Muslim filmmakers telling their own stories? Yes, that is the ideal situation.

There are Muslim filmmakers, although they are not necessarily making Muslim-themed films. But Neeraj Ghaywan recently told me he is the only Dalit filmmaker working in Hindi cinema, who is open about his caste.

A filmmaker friend of mine wanted to cast a Dalit actress, and I asked Neeraj and he said, nobody will acknowledge that they are Dalit.

Shazia: Even we don't know. There were some OBC actors in our film, but not Dalits. But then, films are not just made by writers and directors. There were people from the Dalit Bahujan community in our crew. It's not that we are very far removed from reality, that we didn't know how to go about telling the story. Also, our script consultant Mrudul Nile is from the community.

You don't say the film is set in Bhopal because of the censor board directive. But I recognised Bhopal because of the lake. Why did you set it in Bhopal?

Shazia: We wanted it to be in a Hindi heartland, and Rahul grew up in Bhopal. One of the reasons I wanted Rahul on board was because I was raised around Mumbai. Rahul could bring authenticity in the dialogues, to have the dialect correct.

And you both knew each other?

Shazia: When I did production design for Sacred Games, he was an associate with Anurag. Then we worked on a few other films directed by Anurag. Shazia, I read in an interview that while preparing, you watched Stalin K's brilliant documentary India Untouched. That film is such an eye opener to the caste complexities in India, looking at caste divides even among Christians, Muslims and Sikhs.

Shazia: That is a stunning documentary. In fact, anyone who joined the project, had to watch a list of documentaries, including Anand Patwardhan's Jai Bhim Comrade and Stalin's film. We didn't want the references from any fiction film. Fiction is generally the voice of the filmmaker. We wanted people to watch documentaries and read books. Also, for research, we spoke to a lot of people in Bhim Nagar in Bhopal.

Rahul: We also went to law colleges and met a lot of students: Dalits, OBCs and also upper caste students. We were surprised that many were against reservations and they said it should be based on economic reasons. They told us some members of the community have done well economically. So the reservation policy should be updated.

Shazia: So it's a conversation. I know there are people who oppose reservations but feel they are not given the chance to understand the argument. It feels like merit-based, but merit-based will only work in an equal society. That equality doesn't exist. That is what we tried to say through our character Shekhar.

Shekhar's character does not exist in

Pariyerum Perumal. I understand he represents Rohith Vemula (the Dalit student who committed suicide in Hyderabad in 2016). When you add a character like Rohith, how did you think it would be viewed by the censor board?

Shazia: We didn't want to get into self-censorship. Otherwise, there is no stopping yourself. We knew this is a Hindi mainstream film and there are some things you can say, and some things you can't.

But when I was growing up, the films that mattered to me were those directed by Mani Ratnam, Saeed Mirza, or like Shyam Benegal's Mammo. When I saw Mammo and its protagonist Rizwan, I thought his problems were just like mine. When it came to making my own film, I wanted people to relate to it.

You mentioned Hindi mainstream cinema. How did you do the transition in the narrative, taking it from a small town and village in Tamil Nadu to a mid-level city in North India?

I will tell you of a particular incident. I spoke to a friend who's a director. Of course, I will not name him. I was looking for a co-writer and asked him if he knew anyone from the Dalit community. He asked what is caste? He got offended, when I finally asked him which caste he belongs to. I know generally, one shouldn't ask, but I was trying to get a sense. His response was, 'I don't know.

Is Brahmin a caste?' I was shocked. He's an educated, nice guy, but he is so privileged that he doesn't even need to know what his caste is. I talked to others as well and realised that in urban areas, the upper caste people are so privileged that they claim not to know their caste.

When Rahul joined the project, we decided to set the film in a city and to discuss this issue. Because if we adapt the film exactly like Mari had made, then how will the story progress? Hindi mainstream films are made with a certain grammar.

We thought we should pose a question to the audience, if this happens in cities also? Because caste discrimination happens in cities, except it's often invisible. In rural areas, it is much more visible. There are people who have said that we have moved the film to a city because it is a Dharma Production. But that is not the case.

Rahul: The worst thing is when

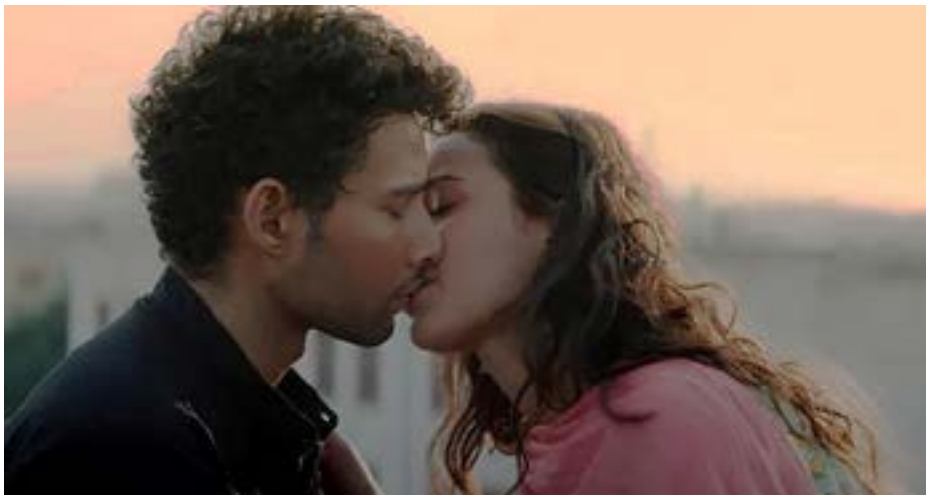
people say I don't believe in caste. I am not discriminating against anyone. That's such a problematic statement. A friend who knew I was working on this film, said, 'I am a Brahmin, but I don't discriminate. Why should I be ashamed?' Then, he added, 'I am really proud to be a Brahmin.' So my question was, 'What is it that you are proud of? What have you achieved? What is your contribution?' He had no answer.

I was also interested in the tropes of mainstream cinema. What thoughts went into that?

Shazia: Early on in conversations with Karan, he was certain that we would not shy away from talking about identity issues. But it was also clear that we will have at least four songs.

The Tamil film also had songs.

Shazia: When Rang De Basanti, Lagaan and Swades were made, the songs helped to move the story forward. We tried to do that also. I understand the power of mainstream cinema, where it reaches a larger audience. The kind of response that we have been getting for the last four-five days, it rattles you, it shakes you. So we know adding songs is not a big loss, as long as we are getting to say a lot.



You have romance in the film and the protagonists kiss. They also talk about it.

Shazia: We wanted to bring a change by expanding Vidhi's (the character played by Triptii Dimri) story line. In Mari's film, the Jo character is really not involved and is quite ignorant about what is happening around her.

Rahul: To keep Vidhi involved in Neelesh's (the character played by Siddhant Chaturvedi) life, we had to enhance the love story. Through Neelesh, she becomes more informed when she becomes part of his journey. Some people have said that we added the love elements because it is a Dharma film. But that's not correct. We wanted Vidhi's character to have a proper coming-of-age arc.

Shazia: That kissing scene was not sexual. It was an emotional bonding scene. He talks about his dog's death and she is talking about her mother's death. That is how they bond.

People pick on Dharma films and Karan Johar is often an easy target. But had it not been for him, your film and Neeraj Ghaywan's Homebound would not have been made.

There have been so few films that deal with caste and Dalit issues, except in Tamil cinema. Neeraj made Masaan 10 years ago.

After that very few films like Gurvinder Singh's Anhey Gorhey Da Daan (in Punjabi), Anubhav Sinha's Article 15 were made. Nagraj Manjule's Fandry and Sairat are both in Marathi. But caste is hardly discussed.

Shazia: Someone had posted a video reel from a screening in Banares, and someone said in the back 'Kitna caste dal diya hai'.

A friend told me that even though Sairat made Rs 100 crore (Rs 1 billion), a lot of people walked out of the screenings at mid-point.

But in Sairat, Nagraj did something clever. After making Fandry, a hard-hitting film, he made a commercial film with songs.

Shazia: That is what drew the audience. But when they went to the theatre, they realised the film deals with deeper issues.

Tell me about working with Triptii on the screen. Her scream in the end comes as a shock. But what a performance!

Shazia: When we were shooting, we had written Neelesh's monologue. A monologue is a very Bollywood trope but we wanted that. We felt that this was a behron ka desh and so something had to be said loudly, in a strong voice. Then we thought that now that Triptii has the information about her family, what will she do with it? She loved her father but whatever she had said at that moment would be so immaterial. We gave her lines but Rahul noticed on the monitor that she was hyperventilating. So he suggested what if she screams.This was not in the script but you should always allow some magic to happen on the set. I took Triptii aside and said when the tussle is happening between the father and his brother, just scream since you are already breathing heavily. Acting is so much of reacting, listening to your co-actor, so it's just a scream and see what happens. And in the moment, she screamed and she went on. It was not a brief scream. We shot it two or three times, but the first time she did it, everyone on the set became quiet. We knew we had captured it.

How was she once you called out cut?

Shazia: I didn't ask for a cut. I couldn't ask her to stop because it was the actor's moment.

But when the camera shut down, how was she as an actor?

Shazia: She was shivering. She had tears in her eyes.

Rahul: You cannot give fake emotions in a moment like that. She was really shaken. I remember Shazia gave her a hug.

The Maha Kumbh Mela Goes To Toronto!!

This kind of a story rarely happens in the film world, especially among indie filmmakers. Vimukt (In Search of the Sky), a small film set in the rural parts of Madhya Pradesh and the Maha Kumbh Mela, will soon play at the Toronto International Film Festival. Vimukt is **Jitank Singh Gurjar's** debut feature and is produced and written by **Pooja Vishal Sharma**, who is partly based in France. The film was shot in just 11 days. Vimukt narrates the story of a poor couple in a village, who have a mentally challenged adult son. After years of struggle, they decide to take their son to the Maha Kumbh Mela, hoping for a miracle.

The film stars two theatre actors, **Nikhil Yadav** (playing the mentally challenged son Naran), Raghvendra Bhadoriya (the father) and Meghna Agarwal, who plays Naran's mother and has acted in a few films. The rest of the cast are non-actors. Before they left for Toronto, **Aseem Chhabra** spoke to the Vimukt team via Zoom -- Producer Sharma, Director Gurjar, Actor Yadav and Cinematographer Shelly Sharma. It was their first time giving an interview.

Congratulations to the whole team. How did this project come about? I think Pooja, your drive started the project right?

Pooja: Last year, when I came back to India from France, I thought I needed to do something. There was so much talk that the Maha Kumbh Mela was about to take place. I wanted to visit, but my family and friends discouraged me, saying it would not be safe. But I felt the calling was coming from within me. Then this story came to my mind about a boy who is mentally challenged, and his parents leave him at the mela. I wanted to explore the story.

Shelly: Correct me, if I am wrong, Pooja, but wasn't it after you visited a village in India that you came across the story?

Pooja: Yes, and I read it also in the newspaper. These stories are very common in India.

So some parents go to the mela, and leave their children who have mental health issues, when they can't afford to take care of them?

Pooja: Yes. I started writing the story, and that's how the whole process started. Then immediately, we created a very small team.

Did you know Jitank and Shelley before?

Pooja: No. My younger sister saw Jitank's short film Baasan and was impressed. I liked his storytelling. I could see my film in the same genre. That's how we met him.

The Maha Kumbh Mela happened in January and February. You wrote the script, shot the film, did all the post-production work and now the film is ready to go to Toronto.

How did you guys do it so fast?

(The group starts to laugh.)

Pooja: We keep asking ourselves the same question. I always believe that teamwork is the most important element. We created a beautiful team. Shelly came into the picture, and when she took over, she guided us

The first hour of the film is set in the village. Did you shoot that first?

Pooja: We started with the Kumbh Mela because I was not sure how it would go. The idea was to let us finish the shoot at the mela.

If we succeed, we proceed. If we don't, we will come back..

How many days was the total shoot?

Pooja: The mela was six days and the village was for five days. So a total of 11 days to shoot the film.

Wow!

Jitank: We did the editing in 15 days. That was the first cut. On our first day at the Kumbh Mela, there was a fire and shook our confidence. There must have been a few crore people there. How do we place the camera in between them? We kept facing challenges -- doing the recce, shooting and then immediately after that, going to the village to shoot the first part of the film. We didn't have a full team. Each person was doing three or four jobs. Nikhil is our lead actor, but sometimes, he also drove the car.

Pooja: Serving tea, food, water. Everybody was doing everything.

But you placed the mother, father and Nikhil's character in the middle of such a crowded gathering. How was it all managed?

Shelly: We couldn't figure out how to manage the shoot because there were so many people, who were going to be extras but didn't know that. There is a scene where the father is taking the son to get him a dumroo. We had not brought a lot of the equipment, but we had to shoot that scene from a higher level. Jitank noticed a dust bin. We overturned the dust bin and I stood on top of it with the camera. Another time, when the father leaves the son on a bridge, Pooja and Jitank had visualised the bridge to be packed with people. We had two members in the crowd and they pretended to fight. When a few people looked towards the camera, one of the unit members yelled out ‚Tumhe Bhagwan ki kasam camera ki taraf mat dekho.' We were in such a religious environment and those words worked wonders. Nobody looked at the camera.

How did Nikhil stay in the character during such scenes?

Jitank: Nikhil would always stay in the character. We would call for a cut, but there was so much noise that Nikhil would continue being the character, Naran.

Most people actually thought he was mentally challenged and some even gave him money.

Nikhil: Some people left me Rs 50 and Rs 10.

Shelly: There is a clip where a sadhu thought Nikhil really had mental issues and handed him some money. We have kept that clip in the final edit.

Nikhil: And I have saved that money.

Jitank: We had to shoot it like a documentary and then stitch the narrative together.

Nikhil, I still want to know how you stayed in the character, when there were so many random people around you. How did you avoid tripping, banging into people?

Nikhil: I have done a lot of theatre, especially nukkud natak(street theatre). That training helped me a lot. During the shoot at the Kumbh Mela, I did have this fear... what if people do something to me? But I had to push myself and stay in character.

Jitank and Pooja, how long did it take you to write the script? Usually, people take years working on scripts.

Jitank: It took us about two weeks.

Pooja: This film was very clear in my mind. Jaise picture chal rahi thi dimag main. I was clear about the beginning, middle and the end.

Jitank: When I first talked to Pooja on the phone, there was so much conviction in her that I left whatever I was doing to join the project. We added the Braj Bhasha treatment. It's the language spoken in the Gwalior area where I come from.

My short film was also in Braj Bhasha. We added many small nuances from the area and that is how the script came about. Of course, we improvised quite a bit while on the set.IMAGE: A scene from Vimukt.

Tell us how you found the actors.

Jitank: Nikhil was Pooja's find.

Pooja: Last year, my sister and I were producing a play and Nikhil was in it. I told him I would like to work with him on a film although I didn't know when that would happen. But within a month, I started working with him on Vimukt.

Jitank: There's a theatre group in Gwalior called Kala Samooh. Raghvendra Bhadoriya, who plays Nikhil's father, is part of that group and he had also played the lead in my short film Baasan. He is actually a farmer. After the film's shoot, he went back to farming.

Pooja: We want to take him to Toronto, but he doesn't have a passport and not even an Adhaar card. He has raw talent as an actor, but otherwise, he's a farmer.

Jitank: Meghna Agarwal, who plays the mother, works in the film industry. We selected her after she auditioned.

Did you have a sense that TIFF will accept the film?

Pooja: We were confident that we had a good film that depicts rural India, the Maha Kumbh tradition, and a good cast.

But it is still great to get selected at TIFF. Anurag Kashyap also has a film (Bandar) at this year's festival, but he is a well-known filmmaker and his works have played at TIFF earlier as well. Did you know any of the programmers at TIFF?

We didn't know any programmers as such. But we knew we had to get someone to watch the film. We were fortunate that Meenakshi Shedde (South Asia programmer at TIFF) watched the film and liked it.

'Cinema's Greatest Challenge Is Reels'

Goutam Ghose is one of India's most celebrated contemporary film-makers. He has bagged multiple National Film Awards, along with the Golden Peacock for Best Film (Moner Manush) at the 41st International Film Festival of India.

He is also the proud recipient of the Vittorio De Sica Award in Italy, 1997, and in 2006, was awarded the Knighthood of the Star of the Italian Solidarity. Ghose, who turns 75 on July 24, is still chasing cinematic adventures.

In a two-part interview. "This year, at the first Asian Art Film Award in Macau, my son and I won the Best Cinematography Award jointly. I don't know about world cinema, but I don't think there's a precedent in Indian cinema for a father-son duo winning an award jointly."

How does it feel to bring in a milestone birthday?

I don't count the years I have lived. As long as my spirit is alive, I'm fine.

(Smiles) I have no outstanding debts, I don't pay EMIs. That gives me peace of mind, the freedom to chase adventures and yes, write haikus too.

What is the greatest challenge film-makers are facing today?

Their **greatest** challenge is how to separate cinema from Reels. Today, we usually shoot from just two angles; we either click a picture or take a selfie. Honestly, I don't know how long cinema will survive. Maybe in the future, it will become like opera, playing to a select audience. But all is not lost yet because the small, digital camera has really benefited indie film-makers, making film-making easier and cheaper. Shooting on celluloid was very expensive. Your script and pre-production had to be watertight to ensure that no raw stock was wasted. I still follow the discipline instilled by celluloid.

When I shot Raahgir: The Wayfarers, which is finally releasing after five years, my actors, Tillotoma Shome, Neeraj Kabi and Adil Hussain, were surprised I didn't want to take the shot from different angles as is common today. I told them that for me, every shot is a master shot because while working in the celluloid era, particularly in Bengal with a stringent budget, we mostly followed a 3:1 ratio and could go for a maximum of three takes.

In the digital age, young film-makers like my son Ishaan can work far more freely even within a tight budget.

Jhilli, the first feature film Ishaan directed, was shot in a dhapa (garbage ground) in Kolkata with characters drawn from that area. He used a small Sony camera, Sony A7, Canon 16-35mm lens and a hand-held stabiliser, recreating the sound completely during post-production.

I remember during Paar, I also shot with Shabana (Azmi) and Naseer (Naseeruddin Shah) on the busy streets of Kolkata, but I was wielding a heavier, more conspicuous camera, and we managed to pull off the shoot only because my stars were completely unrecognisable thanks to their costumes and make-up.

Paar won three National Awards, along with the UNESCO Award at the Venice International Film Festival in 1985, with Naseer winning the Volpi Cup for Best Actor.

It was also the recipient of the FIPRESCI Award and the Red Cross Award at the Verna Film Festival and even after four decades, you are still remembered for this 1984 Bengali film about two Dalit fugitives.

Many still remember Satyajit Ray for Pather Panchali, his first film as a director, and Shyam Benegal would sigh that he will always be known for his debut directorial Ankur. So, not just me, this happens with a lot of other film-makers as well.

When I made Paar, I didn't have the advantage of visual effects. Shabana and Naseer, along with the rest of the crew, actually risked their lives, the latter almost drowning twice, crossing the gushing Hooghly river with a herd of pigs and that crossing remains unforgettable.

Whether it is Paar, Antarjali Yatra, Padma Nadir Majhi or your most recent film Parikrama, the river has been a leitmotif in your narratives.

Yes. One reason for this could be that my family, during Partition, came as refugees from Faridpur in East Bengal (now Bangladesh). It is located on the banks of the river Padma and I've heard stories of the river from my grandmother and father.

I was born in Kolkata and West Bengal is perhaps the only state to be bordered by lofty mountains in the North and the Bay of Bengal in the South, the meandering valleys in between bound by water bodies. I grew up playing football, hockey and cricket by the Hooghly, also known as the Kali-Ganga and Bhagirathi-Hooghly river.

I would sit by the river and remember that it was this waterway which had brought the Portuguese, French, Dutch and finally, the English to India. Also, from the time we are conceived to our birth, we are swimming in our mother's womb, so the river is embedded in my subconscious.

(Laughs) Govind Nihalani would jokingly say that given my obsession with the river, I must have been a fish in my previous birth.

One understands your fascination with Padma and the Hooghly. But how did you come to helm an Indo-Italian co-production revolving around the river Narmada?

Parikrama is based on a children's novella, The Story of Lala, written by my Italian producer-friend Sergio Scapagnini. He gave me the manuscript to read, beautifully illustrated by his three daughters, and it touched my heart.

In 1999, the Italian edition won the prestigious Elsa Morante-Isola di Arturo Award and thereafter, Sergio wanted to come out with an English translation. I recommended the novella to my friend V K Karthika who was agreeable to Red Panda, Westland Books, publishing it in English, provided they could carry a blurb on the book cover stating that it would soon be filmed by Gautam Ghose.

As I had told Sergio almost two decades ago, I could see a film in this inspiring story of an 11-year-old boy from Raipur, who runs away to Mumbai hoping to make enough money to buy a piece of land so his tenant farmer father does not have to beg in front of the tax collector when crops fail. But I wanted to give the story a larger, more layered context.

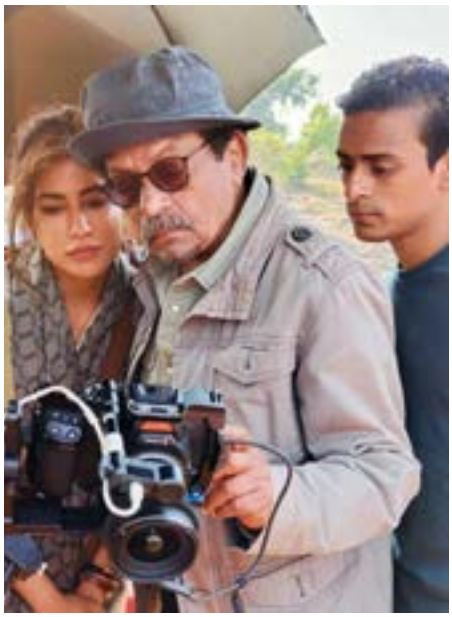
So, you brought in the Narmada?

Yes. In the postscript, Sergio had written that he met Lala in Mumbai, while walking on Juhu beach. I decided to orchestrate their meeting in the Narmada Valley after reading Amrit Lal Vegad's book Narmada: River of Beauty, which describes his parikrama (pilgrimage) around India's oldest river.

Legend has it that if you look at the Narmada even once, it can bring you salvation. My film begins in Italy, with a documentary film-maker, Alexander (played by Marco Leonardi of Cinema Paradiso and Maradona, Hand of God fame) as he prepares for his trip to India to shoot a documentary on the annual Narmada parikrama.

Alexander, the second protagonist I created, meets Lala, the first, at Amarkantak, the source of the Narmada. He learns that the young hawker boy's (played by Aayan Badkul) home and village were submerged by the reservoir project and decides to draw him into his documentary.

Life when juxtaposed with death is ironic and Alexander's son Francesco has lost his mother while Lala, who is around the same age, has been distanced from both, his birth mother and his metaphorical mother, the Narmada. While following the river, the film follows their lives too.



Didn't Sergio object to changes in his original story?

No. He respects me as a film-maker and told me that I could adapt his book freely. (Laughs) I had met him at the Venice film festival where after

a screening of Paar, he chased me, shouting, 'Mr Ghose, I've seen your film, could I speak to you?'

We subsequently became good friends. What I loved about his story is that young Lala, despite all his trials and tribulations, does not lose hope or courage, as he migrates to the city and makes a success of his life.

Sergio introduced me to this wealthy guy who dealt in diamonds and had offices in Europe and Rajasthan. I later learnt that the man was Lala and he had not lost his humour or humility. (Smiles) The kids I met in the Narmada Valley during my recce for Parikrama had the same cheeky humour.

Your son and you worked together on Parikrama, right?

(Beams proudly) Yes, Ishaan had shot one of my films earlier. This one we did together, as father and son. This year, at the first Asian Art Film Award in Macau, we won the Best Cinematography Award jointly.

I don't know about world cinema, but I don't think there's a precedent in Indian cinema for a father-son duo winning an award jointly.

Ishaan actually went to the US to study music, but he was soon fascinated by the camera I had given him, and on his return, he joined my film unit.

(Laughs) We are the Filmwallahs.
My wife Nilanjana has been working with me since 1978, when I flagged off my first film Maa Bhoomi; she does the costumes.

My daughter Anandi was also involved with my films, but now works independently in Mumbai, making ad films. My son-in-law is a sound designer.

You have won several National Awards. Of late, there has been the occasional controversy over the national honours. How do you react to that?

I remember the Golden Lotus I won for Dakhal adjudged Best Feature Film. The chairman of the jury that year was Ashok Kumar, and on the panel with him were B R Chopra, Bhupen Hazarika and Salil Chaudhury.
We still have intelligent and illustrious people on the jury, but might need to review the selection process to make the awards attractive.

Aren't film festivals losing their shine, increasingly becoming promotional platforms and money-making endeavors?

I have attended many festivals when they were a place for film lovers.

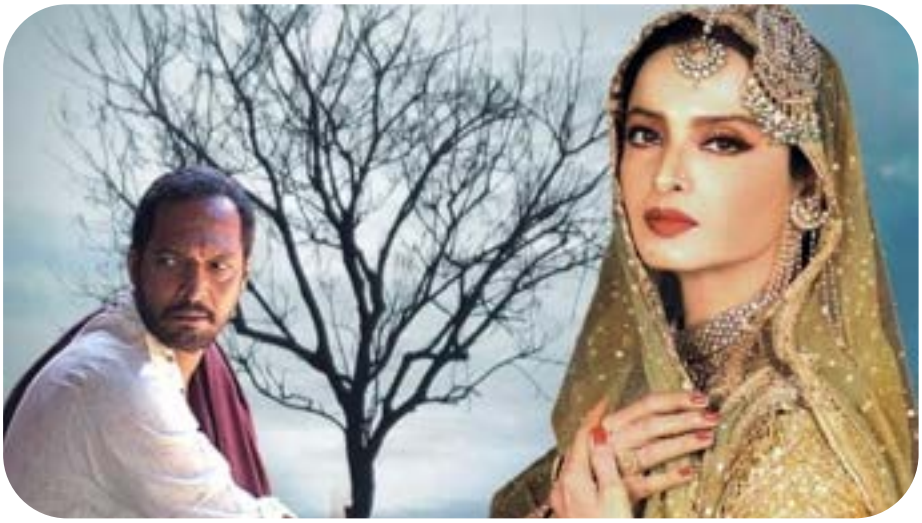
I was at the Cannes film festival this year and was encouraged to see that they have managed to seamlessly combine art and commerce. Venice is also trying, but many of the others have become more business-oriented.

I was the founder chairperson of the Kolkata International Film Festival and in 2024, at the request of the West Bengal chief minister (Mamata Banerjee), I agreed to return as the chairperson of KIFF in its 30th year.

I have agreed to come back as the chairperson this year too and hope to screen many more interesting films from across the world.

'Corruption Is No Longer A Bad WORD'

'When India opened its doors to the world, moving away from an agrarian to a market economy, everything, whether life or love, was commodified.'



In the first part of a fascinating interview, film-maker **Goutam Ghose** was worried about '**cinema's greatest challenge'.**

"Capitalism has been there since the late 19th century, but now there's the need to grab everything, to destroy and construct. Corporates are only interested in profits and the 'work 24x7' mantra is leading to early burnout. Controlling this speculative economy is essential to our survival," Ghose tells Rediff Senior Contributor Roshmila Bhattacharya in the concluding segment of the interview.

What is the greatest challenge human beings are facing today?

I should think it is greed. Corruption is no longer a bad word; it is a part of our lives today.

In 1991, when India opened its doors to the world, moving away from an agrarian to a market economy, everything, whether life or love, was commodified. Since I travel with my films around the world, I could understand what was happening and tried to sound a warning through Gudiya and Yatra.

But not many understood what I was saying then. Our greatest gift as human beings is the power to think. Once we stop doing that, we become robots and that's scary.

Talking about Yatra, how did you elicit such a wonderful performance from Rekha who has always been a part of mainstream Hindi cinema?

Rekha, Nana Patekar, Deepti (Naval), they were all superb.

As a director, it is your responsibility to point out to your cast that while you admire their stardom, it is imperative that they become your character.

I have had friendly relations with all my actors and if there are any arguments or conflicts, even that's desirable as it can only help the film. I have fond memories of Rekha. She needs to do more serious films.

Would you want to go on another yatra with her?

Why not? That would be interesting as she is a wonderfully spontaneous actress with an innate sense of music and dance. But now, many want me to make another Telugu film. My first film was in Telugu, and even after our decades, evokes a lot of nostalgiaMaa Bhoomi is a cult film today and Hyderabad is still like a second home for me.

(Laughs) Everyone there keeps asking me to make another Telugu film and I joke, 'You think I should make my swan song here?'

Language is not a problem?

With a good interpreter you can make films anywhere in the world and in any language. Parikrama is in Italian, English and Hindi, maybe I can make this one in Telugu and English.

Commercially, Tollywood is doing better than Bollywood or even Bengali cinema...

Yes, Bengal has a viewership of 28 crore (280 million), including the diaspora and Bangladesh, yet its turnover is less than Rs 300 crore (Rs 3 billion). Telugu cinema in comparison caters to a population of just 9 crore (90 million), but has an annual turnover of Rs 3,000 crore (Rs 30 billion). The young people there are making wonderful films and are marketing them successfully around the world.

Cross-pollination of talent is a trend today.

You could make your Telugu film with actors from Bollywood, Bengal and the South.

Yes, and I could even cast actors from the North Eastern states like Assam and Manipur. Right now, I'm still working on the idea, it has to inspire me to turn it into a film otherwise I'm happy making my documentaries.

I've learnt a lot from my documentaries on Ustad Bismillah Khan, Satyajit Ray, the Dalai Lama and K G Subramanyan to name a few.

Talking about Ray, it must have taken a lot of courage to make a sequel to his 1970 cult classic Aranyer Din Ratri.

The idea came to me when after his demise, I was working on the documentary Ray: Life and Work on Satyajit Ray. Since the original cast, with the exception of Rabi Ghosh, were still alive and active then,Abar Aranye seemed like a feasible idea.

More than a sequel, the 2003 film is a tribute to Satyajit Ray, and Sunil Gongopadhyay whose novel I had read much before I watched the film. My film released three decades after the original film and underlined the fact that the ignorance of city dwellers, when it comes to forests, has only increased.

All the senior actors, from Soumitra Chatterjee and Sharmila Tagore to Subhendhu Chatterjee and Samit Bhanja, even the younger ones like Tabu, Jisshu Sengupta and Saswata Chatterjee would tell me whenever we met later to make a third part as Abar Aranye had been one of their most enjoyable outdoors.

Will you?

Why not? Twenty years have passed and so much has changed. Maybe we could go on another journey to the mountains or the desert this time.

There was another journey, Antarjali Yatra, in 1987, perhaps the only film for which Shatrughan Sinha was never late on the sets, even if he was required at 4 am.

I'm so grateful to Shatru, who with great humility and courtesy, has reiterated, time and again, that Antarjali Yatra is the best film of his career and making it was a great experience. Much to my embarrassment, he said this even at a conference he attended as a politician to which I was invited as a friend. I cast him as the chandala Baiju as he is from Bihar and so would get the accent right. Also, we made the film in both Bengali and Hindi, Shatru knows Bengali too.

There is a Hindi version?

Yes, it's lying in the vault.After the Bengali film won the National Award, the Grand Prix Golden Semurg at the Tashkent Film Festival in 1988 and was screened at Cannes, the Hindi version was never released.

Parikrama is another journey film. Why did it take five years to complete?

It's an official Indo-Italian co-production and there were agreements to be signed between the two countries. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. We started the film in Italy in January 2020, leaving the country around February 4.

Within a week, a lockdown was imposed there and slowly spread across the world. After the pandemic, the producers could not financially support the Indian portions which make up 75 percent of the film and I had no choice but to wait.

I made a short film in the interim, but I did not take up another feature because as that would have disheartened the producers. This film has been a test of endurance and today, irrespective of how it fares at the box-office, I'm ecstatic that it is finally releasing.

It will have a staggered limited release, with Mumbai following Kolkata and Delhi soon. We are also in talks for a release overseas.

Since 1985, following the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the Narmada has been in the eye of many storms.

Today, when even the smallest of issues trigger a call for a ban and violence, aren't you apprehensive?

My film has nothing to do with the people's movement in Narmada, it is about how the reservoirs displaced people from their homes, like Lala and his family. It even changed the path of the pilgrims.

But it could not displace faith and the parikrama continues. (Sighs) Violence is our legacy and the product of ignorance. After Independence, we could not give our people a holistic education and this kind of frenzy was tapped for votes. In the 19th century, the Indian renaissance gave us many visionaries and artists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, right up to Satyajit Ray.

But their mix of Western enlightenment and Indian wisdom did not reach the masses. In Italy, even a peasant has heard about Leonardo da Vinci. In The Netherlands, even a worker knows Vincent Van Gogh. But in India, very few have heard of an artist by the name of Jamini Roy which is really sad.

So, Parikrama is not a political film?

My first film, Maa Bhoomi, was a political film, dealing with the peasant uprising during the Nizam rule, which continued even after Independence. Parikrama is about love, compassion and courage.

It is about thousands of boys like Lala who grow into little big men showcasing the indomitable Indian spirit. It is about maya which underlines that neither joy nor suffering is permanent, everything is transient.

Would you say you have changed as a person thanks to your films?

Film-making is an interesting process; you are painting life. Since you don't work alone, some of the actors and technicians are also affected. During Moner Manush, I made Prosenjit Chatterjee prep for four months to play Lalon Fakir and he later confided that the film changed the way he looked at life and cinema.

Charlie Chaplin, whose Tramp made him a huge success across the world, returned after the war with Monsieur Verdoux and King in New York. The films didn't work because people were expecting to see the popular character again, but Chaplin refused to go back to

‘At 70, I’m Excited To Kick Off My 3rd Innings’

‘Even if I had the backing of a big corporate house, which I don’t, in today’s market, I wouldn’t want the responsibility of making a Rs 300 crore-Rs 400 crore film.’

Even today, Tridev’s Tirchi Topiwale and Vishwatma’s Saat Samundar Paar have feet tapping and fingers snapping.

Mohra still reminds one of a ‘blind’ Naseeruddin Shah and among Kajol’s most applauded performances is Gupt, which earned her the distinction of being the first actress to bag a Filmfare Award for ‘Best Actor in a Negative Role’.

Rajiv Rai, the director of these films, along with Yudh, Pyaar Ishq Aur Mohabbat and Asambhav, and his producer-distributor father, Gulshan Rai, were among the biggest names in Bollywood, till he disappeared, following an attack on his life in July 1997.

Now, 20 years later, his name, and that of the family banner, Trimurti Films, film, Zora, lined up for an August 8 release. I Rajiv Rai says, “At 70, I’m excited to kick off my third innings.”

Why haven’t you made a film in 20 years?

When I look back, I realise that till Gupt I led a different life. That changed after the assassination bid and even though I survived and got a second janam, the years that followed were the darkest period in my life. We moved out of India and despite Gupt’s super success, my career hit a roadblock. My mother kept assuring me that nothing would happen to me.

I kept telling myself that everyone goes through ups and downs, I would get through this too.I made two films, Pyaar Ishq Aur Mohabbat in 2001 and Asambhav in 2004, in what I call my second innings. Then I lost my motivation.

What happened?

I’m a Punjabi guy, a family man.
I never had many friends. I would return home from my shoots and share the excitement of making a film with my parents, who, no matter what I did, was confident it would be a hit. Then, my only son was diagnosed as autistic, and my parents fell ill, and life got even more difficult. After I lost my parents, I lost the motivation to make a film. I wasn’t depressed. I travelled around the world, enjoyed meeting new people and soaked in the different experiences. It was in 2016-2017 that I started toying with seven-eight ideas and finally settled on a murder mystery as my comeback film, Zora.

Zorais a unique title for a Hindi film.

I wanted a one-word title, a woman’s name. We played around with around 20 titles, including Julia. Then I remembered the Zorro stories which used to be a favourite when I was studying in boarding school.

Zorro is a fictional character, a vigilante in a black cape, Cordovan hat and a mask covering half his face, who fights for the commoners of California. He appeared not only in books and comic strips, but in over 40 films, 10 TV series, including Disney's Zorro in the late '50s, audio/radio plays, stage productions and video games. From Zorro, I derived Zora, which is not a familiar name in India, but popular in Syria.

And why the tagline 'S(c)ent by the Devil'?

At 13, my hero, Ranjit Singh, is an eyewitness to the murder of his father, a cop who was investigating a money-laundering case. Because it was pitch dark and the killer was wearing a cap, glares and a mask, he didn't see her, in fact, no one ever has. The murder was passed off as suicide, his father's reputation tarnished, and the case closed. Years later, Ranjit, now a cop too, reopens the case, determined to track down the mysterious Zora. The only clue to her identity is the distinctive perfume she wears. (Chuckles) When watching a film, we usually use our eyes and ears, I wanted to activate the

Going by the promotions, Zora brings back memories of your 1997 suspense thriller Gupt...

Comparisons are inevitable because there's a lady in black, a lady with a knife, in Zora too.

But if you take the knife out, there's nothing in common between the films.

When making a murder mystery, people generally tend to borrow from different muses. As a kid, I was hooked on Enid Blyton's mystery series, like Famous Five and Secret Seven before graduating to Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie's investigative cases.

I've read Alfred Alfred Hitchcock's Anthology (a seasonally printed collection of suspenseful and thrilling short stories reprinted from Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine) and watched almost all his films.
I was also hooked to Brian De Palma's crime and suspense thrillers and was completely bowled over by Martin Scorsese's neo noir psychological thriller Shutter Island. But Zora is not a copy of any book or film I've seen or read. It's a completely original story and screenplay I've penned while Raashid Rangrez, Zora's co-producer and associate director, has written the dialogues, lyrics and done the production design.

Why did you choose to return with a murder mystery?

I have always loved the genre and after Gupt I wanted to experiment with crime and suspense again because we don't see many such films in Hindi cinema. It's a good space for me today because a murder mystery doesn't require a big budget, top-ranking stars or visual effects, just a story that plays with the mind and creative treatment.

Even if I had the backing of a big corporate house or a production partner, which I don't, in today's market, I wouldn't want the responsibility of making a Rs 300 crore-Rs 400 crore (Rs 3 billion to Rs 4 billion) film and earning back that investment. I shot Zora in just Rs 2 crore (20 million). Even the landing cost of the film does not exceed Rs 5 crore (Rs 50 million).

That's amazing given that your earlier films were so lavishly mounted. How did you do it?

As a child, I had watched Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho and it has stayed on my mind. It was made on an almost

zero budget by Hollywood standards, yet it was a huge commercial success worldwide. Almost 20 years later, I assisted Manmohan Krishna on the 1979 film, Noorie. It was produced by Yash Chopra production, financed and distributed by my father. A tragic love story starring Poonam Dhillon and Farooque Sheikh, Noorie, made on a budget of Rs 10 lakh, was a surprise hit.

With Psycho and Noorie on my mind, I had actually planned to return with a Rs 50 lakh Hindi film. But Raashid pointed out that the film would then have to be wrapped up in 28 days for it to be commercially viable. Since my script had 57 location changes, this meant we would have to move twice a day which looked difficult because we were shooting in Rajasthan and would be battling external factors like the weather.

Did you just say 57 locations?

(Laughs) Yes, the first draft of the script had 57 location changes. When you are working with a modest budget, jumping from one location to another makes the film look buzzy and interesting. We shot in and around Jaipur, but along with upping the budget and extending the shooting schedule, I had to cut down the locations to 40, with some getting left out while editing the three-hour film to a crisp two-hour narrative.

I know there would be film-makers who would have made films for Rs 10 lakh, but they would probably have used an IPhone camera. I have used five cameras and had to spend a year editing the footage. Fortunately, since I'm the editor, and we did everything in-house, this did not add to the costs.

Kajol was the first actress to win Filmfare's Best Actor in a Negative Role Award for her performance in Gupt.

(Cuts in) They should have given her the award for 'Best Actress' since her character, Isha Diwan, is the heroine of the film. Back then, you saw women killers in Hollywood films, but in Hindi cinema, the villain was usually the man and there were no surprises there.

In Gupt, both my leading ladies, Manisha Koirala and Kajol, are among the many suspects for a string of murders and that gives the film its shock value.

The award got Kajol a lot of publicity. She's a fabulous actress, so spontaneous and assured in front of the camera. She didn't ask any questions about camera angles etc, she just went out there and performed.

Kajol was a top-ranking star then. Didn't she have any second thoughts about accepting a negative role?

I admit before going to her Mumbai residence for the narration, I was really nervous and anxious despite (ex-wife) Sonam assuring me that Kajol would not refuse the role.

Her sister was also present during the narration and both Tanisha and she were bowled over. As soon as I finished the narration, Kajol jumped up, exclaiming, 'There's no way I'm not doing this film!'

At the door, her mother Tanuja caught me, asking worriedly, 'Rajiv, what are you doing with my daughter's career?

By doing your film, uska naam to nahin kharab hoga (her name will not be tarnished)?' My first innings ranged from Yudh in 1985 to Gupt in 1997. Pyaar Ishq Aur Mohabbat in 2001 and Asambhav in 2004 came during my second innings.

Now, 20 years later, I've reinvented myself as a film-maker with Zora and at the age of 70, I am excited to kick off my third innings.

'MELODY IS MAKING A COMEBACK'

Some time back, music was just noise. Producers wrongly think item songs sell better. Audiences are intelligent, they accept whatever you give, but that doesn't mean you can fool them.

Do you know who sang Ae Zindagi Gale Lagale (Sadma), Lagi Aaj Sawan Ki (Chandni), Chhod Aaye Hum (Maachis) and Sapne Mein Milti Hai (Satya)? It's **Suresh Wadkar**, who turned 70 on August 7. "I should have got a National Award for Seene Mein Jalan, Chandni, Prem Rog," "but who knows what the criteria were? But it's okay, I was never in that race."

Tell us about your early years.

My father was a mill worker. He was fond of music and would sing bhajans.

We lived in the mill area for workers, and everyone was culturally aware. If someone had a baby or there was a festival, or someone's anniversary, programmes would be held and bhajans would be sung.

My father would take me with him, so that culture was instilled in me. I have been learning music since the age of four. At nine, I started learning from Guruji Pandit Jialal Vasant and stayed at his home. I studied till the first year of college. After that, I couldn't focus.

I graduated in singing and tabla from the Prayag Sangit Samiti. After that, I took up a job as a teacher at Arya Vidya Mandir school for two-three years. Aishwarya Rai was my student.

In 1976, there was a competition, Sur Singar Samsad. Participants came from all over India, and 40 were selected. They had to sing live. Among those 40, Hariharan, Rani Verma and I won.

I received the Madan Mohan award, Hariharan got the S D Burman award, and Rani got the Vasant Desai award. Ravindra Jainsaab announced on stage that he would

give a break to the winner, which was me. At that time, Rajshri Productions was making Paheli and Ravindra Jain was its composer. I sang Sona Kare Kaise Jhilmil Jhilmil for the film and did a couple of movies with him.

What was your first salary?

My first salary was Rs 500 for Paheli. I gave it to my guruji, but he gave it back. My didi (Guruji's daughter Prem) added some money and bought a gold chain for me. I still have it. I started working with Jaidevji for a year but started getting singing opportunities too. He asked me to stop assisting him, as I was getting too busy. After I started singing full time, he asked me to sing for him once. That's when I sang Seene Main Jalan from Gaman.

Lata Mangeshkar encouraged you a lot.

Lata Mangeshkar gave my career a boost. I first met Lataji and Ashaji (Bhosle) when I was an assistant to Jaidevji. Ravindra Jain was composing for Mera Rakshak and called me to Mumbai's Famous Studio. When I went there, he introduced me to Lataji, saying I was from Kolhapur too, like her.

She made me sit next to her and enquired about my life and family. One day, I went to her house, she heard my songs. She called some well known music composers and said, 'I am sending Suresh Wadkar, listen to his songs and give him an opportunity.'

Ashatai did the same thing; she asked Panchamda (R D Burman) to give me a break, as I had sung my first Marathi song Dhund Dhund Hi Hawa in the film Dhakti Mehuni with her. Panchamda called me for Kudrat and Mela. I was very nervous when I sang my first song with Lataji. It was Chal Chameli Bagh Mein from the film Krodhi.

You were a huge fan of Mohammed Rafi.

Yes. In that competition, I sang his songs Ajhun Aaye Balwan (Sawan Bhadon) and Tu Kahan Yeh Bata (Tere Ghar Ke Saamne). There was a film Anpadh, which had music by Ashatai's late son Hemant. I sang a qawwali with Rafisaab. He showered me with love. His brother-in-law Zaheerbhai used to manage everything for him. On the way, he told Zaheerbhai, 'Suresh Wadkar's voice reminds me of myself when I was young.' It felt amazing!

Any memories about working with Kishore Kumar?

A few months before his death, we were recording together. He asked me if I ran a music school, and I said yes. He said he wanted to see it. I thought he was joking.

But he came at 9 am and stayed till 12:30 pm, watching me teach. He even suggested ragas. He wasn't a trained singer, but he knew how to sing so well.

Did you witness his eccentric ways?

Kishoreda once said, 'I will sing lying down on the carpet.' So the mic was set up low. He was playful and fun. For the song Khaike Paan Banaraswala, he put two paans in his mouth and sang. It's not easy! In Half Ticket, he sang both male and female parts.

We used to laugh so hard during his recordings that our voices would go hoarse. But he would finish in one clean take. He told me once, 'People say I'm a miser, but I'll do shows for your school and raise funds. Just tell me when.' That was his generosity.

Did you ever face any struggle in your career?

Never! I'm struggling now. (laughs). After 1995, new kids came in and my work reduced, so I feel like I'm struggling now. But no complaints, as long as people's love does not decrease.IMAGE: Rishi Kapoor and Padmini Kolhapure in Prem Rog.

You worked with Raj Kapoor in Prem Rog.

In Prem Rog, Ram Teri Ganga Maili and Heena. He had a great musical understanding. He had learned music and believed in simplicity. All credit goes to Laxmikant-Pyarelal. They introduced me to him during Prem Rog. After Mukeshji, he was looking for a new voice.

For Ram Teri Ganga Maili, he told Ravindra Jain, 'As long as I'm alive, Suresh will sing my songs.'

They loved me like family. Krishnaji (Raj Kapoor's wife) treated me like her son. Every time a song was picturised, Rajsaab would call me to see it.

Which song, according to you, was a breakthrough performance for you?

People started knowing me because of the song Sona Kare Kaise Jhilmil Jhilmil, but Seene Mein Jalan was a huge hit in the north. When the Prem Rog album came out, I became popular because everybody knew I was singing for the RK banner.

The song were played on Binaca Geetmala. That gave me respect and more work. Big banners like Subhash Ghai, Yash Chopra and J Om Prakash called me to sing. I did South films also.

Suresh Wadkar sings Aur Kya Ahede Wafa Hote Hai from Sunny.

How did your journey begin in the Marathi music industry? The first Marathi song I recorded was with Ram Kadamsaab. He was a very prominent music director in Marathi cinema.

The National Award came as a big recognition in your life, especially for a Marathi film.

I should have got a National Award for Seene Mein Jalan, Chandni, Prem Rog, but who knows what the criteria were?But it's okay, I was never in that race. I stayed immersed in my work and my academy.

Suresh Wadkar sings Lagi Aaj Sawan from Chandni.

Suresh Wadkar sings Sapne Mein Milti Hai from Satya.

You have worked with many different composers.

Who influenced you the most?

Dadu (Hridaynath Mangeshkar), Laxmikant-Pyarelal, Ravindra Jainsaab, Panchamda, Kalyanji-Anandji. I really admire them.

Singers like Arijit Singh made it due to reality singing shows.

What do you think of reality shows?

Arijit is like a son to me. My wife Padma was his mentor during Fame Gurukul.

He would visit our house and sit in a corner with his guitar. He used to practice quietly while others chased the limelight. He was eliminated in fifth place but look where he has reached now!

It's destiny.
But you also need someone to hold your hand and give you your first break. I think Pritam gave him his first song. Before that, he would be dubbing vocals. The moment that one song from Aashiqui clicked, he overshadowed even the big singers.

What is your take on today's music?

Honestly, some time back, music was just noise. Now, melody is making a comeback. But most songs are in the background, not lip-synced. Producers wrongly think item songs sell better. Audiences are intelligent, they accept whatever you give, but that doesn't mean you can fool them.

Suresh Wadkar sings Hanuman Stuti In the current generation, which singers are super-talented?

Sonu Nigam, Sunidhi Chauhan and Shreya Ghoshal. KK was also talented. They can sing any genre effortlessly.

Arijit is gifted but I feel bad for him. He hasn't got enough variety. It's not his fault, they are typecasting him. He can sing so much more.

Which of the current composers do you admire?

Pritam thinks differently. Vishal Bhardwaj, too. When I was hospitalised with a heart issue, Gulzarsaab and Vishal had come to visit. They said, 'Sureshji, get better soon, we have songs only you can sing.'

One of them was Chappa Chappa from Maachis. Earlier, we had done a private album Bhoode Pahaadon Par. Such beautiful compositions by Vishal!

Suresh Wadkar sings Chappa Chappa from Maachis

Tell us about your music institute.

After my Guruji passed away, I started running his music academy (Suresh Wadkar Ajivasan Music Academy) along with his daughter Prem. It was my duty to keep the tradition alive.

Then we started a music school in New Jersey and a branch in New York. Now, everything is online. In Mumbai, we have about 2,250 students every year.

Rahul Vaidya, Vijay Prakash (who sang Jai Ho), Ravi Tripathi and Swapnil Bandokar are some of the popular singers from my institute.

Throughout The Day, There's Music Playing In My Head

'I played five different versions of Woh Subah Kabhie Toh Aayegi for Raj Kapoor, only to be greeted with a totally blank reaction.'

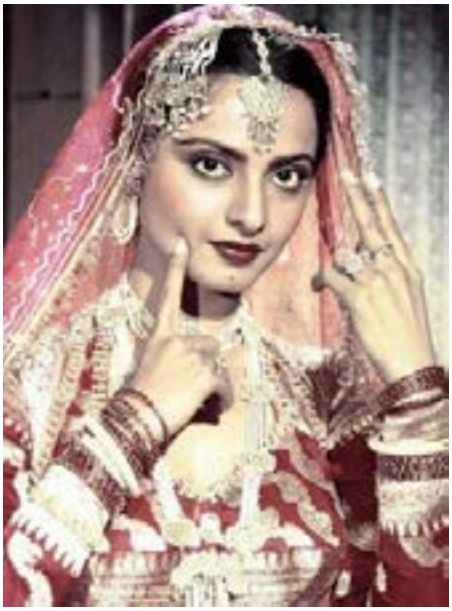
'Thereafter, for 40 minutes, he disappeared, leaving us baffled.'

'But when he emerged, he couldn't stop appreciating our efforts!'

'He said Sahir Ludhianvi's writing was sheer poetry and since all my five tunes were equally wonderful, he would leave it to my discretion to chose the final tune.'

'What could be greater appreciation for an artiste?' Kabhi Kabhi Mere Dil Mein, Dil Cheez Kya Hai, Hazaar Rahen Mud Ke Dekhin, Aaja Re O Mere Dilbar Aaja or Aye Dil-E-Nadan... any of the innumerable gems burnished by Composer Khayyam have a lilting melody and intricate orchestration in common. Revisits a two-decade-old interview with the music maestro on his sixth **death** anniversary on August 19, where the latter said, "Thankfully, the Mumbai film industry has always afforded me the luxury of working on my own terms."

You composed popular songs for Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor in the 1950s as well as for Rekha and Rajesh Khanna in the 1980s. What do you attribute this longevity to?



I came from a small town, Rahon, near Jalandhar in Punjab, but the film industry and the city of Mumbai have showered me with blessings.

I am not talking about material rewards. I am referring to the appreciation of the public and the encouragement of knowledgeable music critics.

Thanks to the supportive public and the press, I have able to stick to my resolve to emphasise quality, and not quantity, throughout my career.

That's true. You have composed music for only 53 films over half a century despite unforgettable music in Kabhi Kabhie, Phir Subah Hogi, Footpath, Trishul, Thodisi Bewafai, Noorie and the unforgettable Umrao Jaan.

I give my assent to compose for a film only when I find that there is some scope for my music in the film. Otherwise, with folded hands, I refuse the offer. Recently, at the age of 77, I have started working on a new film, Bazaar E Husn, based on a literary novel authored by Munshi Premchand. It stars Om Puri and other actors.

I took a year to sign the film because the songs had to be first fitted into the script and the situations worked out for each of them.

I have recorded three regular songs and two folk songs, including a seven minute long duet Anjaani Hoon Mehfil Se, Begaani Hoon Manzil Se in Alka Yagnik and Kavita Krishnamurthy's voices.

Did you come to the film world with the idea of becoming a composer?

I came to Bombay in February 1947, at the age of 21, because I was keen on becoming an actor.

Really! Not many people are aware of that.

I had a full head of hair in those days (laughs). From a young age itself, I was determined to work in what was then known as the 'Bioscope'. At the time, in the film industry, it was a prerequisite for an actor to be a trained singer, so I veered towards music. I started training in music only because I thought it would help me become a hero.

I learnt all about the raag-raaginis from Pandit Husnlal Bhagatram in Delhi at a time when they were working for HMV and had not become film music directors as yet. I also studied under their elder brother Pandit Amarnath. After I had completed a brief stint in the military, my first job was assisting music director Chishti Baba for a film. I learnt a lot from him too.

When I came down to Bombay in the late 1940s, my gurus Husnlal-Bhagatram had emerged as the first music director duo who composed for films together.

Fortunately for me, Pandit Husanlal-Bhagatram were among the top music composers (thanks to their hit scores in Suraiya films like Pyar Ki Jeet and Badi Bahen) and as soon as I arrived in Bombay, they gave me a break as a singer in Nargis's home production, Romeo And Juliet (1947). My acting career didn't take off but they gave me a chance to sing some songs in their films.

Just as you gave up your acting dream, you sidelined singing too for music direction?

Incidentally, I still sing and regularly do my riyaaz. But I grew increasingly interested in composing. Soon, under the name Sharmaji, and along with my partner Rehman, I became part of a composing duo.

As Sharmaji-Vermaji, our screen names, we composed about five-six songs for Heer Ranjha (1948), and then composed music for a few memorable films like Biwi (1950

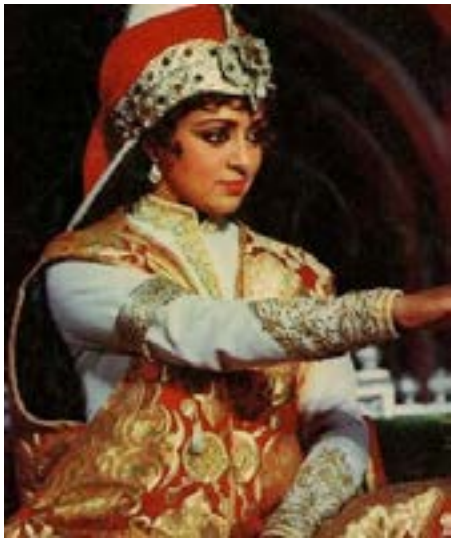
Give us a sense of what recording film music was like in the early days.

For recording a duet in those days, it was imperative that both the male and female playback singers be present at the same time because there was no multi-track system. I remember my early songs were recorded at Famous Studio in the Mahalaxmi neighbourhood of (south) Bombay.

At that time, it was the first centrally air-conditioned recording studio in Asia. Music directors were accorded a lot of respect. When greats like Husnlal-Bhagatram or Naushad entered the studio, the technicians, the director and the producer too would stand up and greet them warmly.

Unlike today, where marketing plays an important role, only genuinely successful tunes made it to the farmaish list of avid radio listeners. Until the 1960s, juke boxes co-existed with record players, especially in Irani restaurants. It was very exciting to enter a restaurant and hear your compositions being played on the juke box.

How did you make the shift to becoming an independent, solo music director? My first major brush with fame came in 1953 when Zia Sarhadysaab was making Footpath with Dilip Kumar and Meena Kumari. Ziasaab tested half-a-dozen music directors. I made it as the finalist, and with Footpath my screen credit read as 'Khayyam'. The film's music was a big hit, especially Sham-E-Gham Ki Kasam, sung by Talat Mahmood and filmed on Dilip Kumar.



After that song, there was no looking back for you.

How did you bag the Raj Kapoor starrer Phir Subah Hogi (1958) considering most of his films by then were tuned by Shankar-Jaikishan?

Renowned lyricist Sahir Ludhianvi was a very good friend of mine. He recommended my name to the film's director Ramesh Saigal.

The film's theme song Woh Subah Kabhie Toh Aayegi is a lustrously written and composed paean to hope in the midst of despair.

Ramesh Saigal agreed to sign me on for Phir Subah Hogi, but added that the final decision would rest with the film's hero, Raj Kapoor.

I played five different versions of Woh Subah Kabhie Toh Aayegi for Rajji, only to be greeted with a totally blank reaction initially.

Thereafter, for 40 minutes, he disappeared into another room, leaving us baffled.

But when he emerged, he couldn't stop appreciating our efforts! He said Sahir's writing was sheer poetry and since all my five tunes were equally wonderful, he would leave it to my discretion to chose the final tune. What could be greater appreciation for an artiste?

A personal favourite from your 1960s repertoire is the song Tum Apna Ranj-O-Gham sung by your wife Jagjit Kaur.

My wife Jagjit Kaur truly lives up to the Indian title ardhangini. She is a well-known singer and is wonderful in the Tum Apna Ranj-o-Gham number from the Waheeda Rehman starrer Shagoon (1964).

In all my composing work, she has contributed 50 per cent. I have often asked her to share the name as well. but she refuses.

I feel our similar interests have kept us young and active.

After your Kabhi Kabhie (1976) songs became the rage, you teamed up for five films with Yash Chopra.

Did he give you a free creative rein?

My association with Yash Chopra from the mid 1970s till the early 1980s with Kabhi Kabhie, Trishul, Noorie, Nakhuda, Sawaal proved especially fruitful. Thankfully, the Mumbai film industry has always afforded me the luxury of working on my own terms.

The ghazals you composed for for Umrao Jaan (1981) made the genre trend.

Tell us about your creative process.

All my compositions have been creations. I think of myself as a music composer rather than a music director because a composer composes keeping the entire subject and theme in mind.

I go deep into the subject before composing for any film.

I read the subject in great detail and try to understand what the characters are thinking. Only when you have internalised the entire subject can great compositions be born.

After Umrao Jaan and Razia Sultan, people associate me with historical subjects and my new film too is set some 90 years ago.

I work hard to ensure that the music reflects the period but is also accessible to the common man.

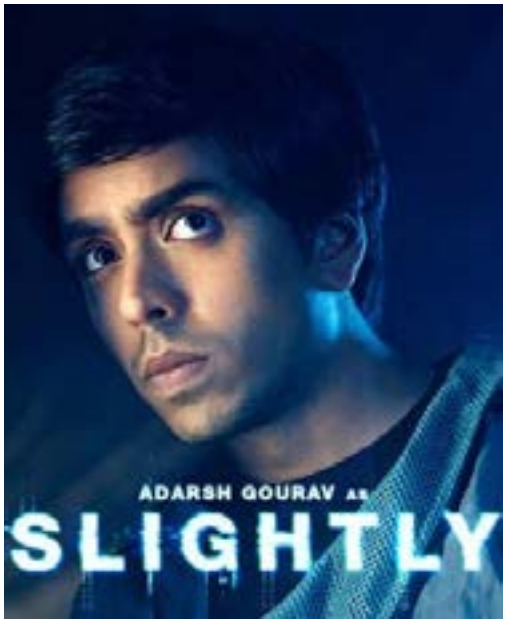
You are that rare composer who has accorded gems to both Lata Mangeshkar as well as Asha Bhosle.

There's no praise high enough for their talents. I am also happy that I got the opportunity to meet and collaborate with thought-provoking poets like Majrooh Sultanpuri, Sahir Ludhianvi and Kaifi Azmi and progressive writers like K A Abbas and Ismat Chugtai.

Throughout the day, there's music playing in my head.

I Don't Want To Box Myself

'Even though I'm just 31, I feel like I've seen a lot in my life, some voluntarily, some involuntarily.'



Adarsh Gourav has landed a prominent part in Alien: Earth, an American science fiction horror television series, created by Noah Hawley. It is the first television series in the Alien franchise.

"It was so cool to be working with people from all over the world and learning about their stories and cultures, why they act, how they even lead their lives,"

How did you bag a pivotal role in Alien: Earth?

A lot of persistence, a lot of failure and then making your resolve stronger. I was just lucky that one of my bigger auditions during the last three years materialised.

I kept auditioning with both my American and London agents and Alien was the first that I eventually cracked.

How did you get into the character's mind?

I observed children.

A couple of channels on YouTube, one of them being HiHo Kids, were instrumental in me understanding the physicality of children.

I also observed my cousins, who would just go to the park in the evening to work out and then sit on the bench. I watched children play, how they would be with their parents, etc.

You got to work with an interesting eclectic cast of Sydney Chandler, Alex Lawther, Essie Davis, Samuel Blenkin, Babou Ceesay and Timothy Olyphant.

Working with my co-actors was a treat. It was so cool to be working with people from all over the world and learning about their stories and cultures, why they act, how they even lead their lives....

I had a co-actor from Tasmania, then there was somebody who's from the Ivory Coast but lives in Denmark... just to understand how different their lives are and how different all our lives are was something else. Also, all of them are extremely good actors, trained actors, who have practiced their craft for a lot of years.

What was the most fun part of the shoot?

For me, it was the two-week schedule in Krabi because we went from shooting in studios in Bangkok for six months to shooting outdoors. The outdoors were beautiful, very lush with the monsoon, actually at the same time around this year.

After The White Tiger, The Superboys Of Malegaon and nowAlien:

Earth, what are you looking for in your career now?

I'm just looking at building a career. I don't want to box or restrict myself. I want to be able to work in any part of the world and be a part of good stories.

Even though I'm just 31, I feel like I've seen a lot in my life, some voluntarily, some involuntarily. That has enriched me as a person and helped me grow, which helps me in my craft.

What next?

I'm shooting for Tu Ya Main with Bejoy Nambiar. It co-stars Shanaya Kapoor. It's a very exciting film.

Do you feel disadvantaged vis-à-vis star kids?

No. I feel everybody has their advantages and disadvantages. My advantage is that life has given me a lot to experience and to understand which gives me a lot of perspective.

'Everyone Wanted To Know Why I Had Killed Off Amitabh'

'I make films which I think have the possibility of being liked by a majority of people, and present them with the right emotions.'

Sholay was a box office behemoth that ran for five years in Mumbai's Minerva cinema house. But its enduring appeal lies in the fact that it is both a crowd-pleaser of gigantic proportions as well as a film for cineastes. Sholay's iconic dialogues are forever quotes and memes, and scenes like the revelation of Thakur's amputated arms can make you feel the emotional impact like a whiplash.

Director **Ramesh Sippy** is a reticent filmmaker, who isn't given to grand proclamations in public. But he flashes back to the classic to commemorate 50 years of Sholay. "I made the film with passion and worked almost like a mad man."

Creative people want to keep polishing their creations. Is there even a single thing you would want to change about Sholay, given the chance today?

Not really. I would not change anything in Sholay. Ultimately, the film was released with my consent, and I decided what was to be retained and what had to be edited. Sholay was released in the year of the Emergency (1975) and we could not argue much with the censors but the final cut I gave was what I wanted. Initially, everyone wanted to know why I had killed off Amitabh Bachchan. But, as a director, you can't keep thinking 'yeh badal do ' or 'woh badal do'. You have to have a certain sense of judgement.

How true is it that Sholay didn't catch on immediately upon its release?

As far as we were concerned, the houses were full everywhere.

I was dazzled when I watched it in the first week with 70 mm and stereophonic sound.

When the coin dropped on screen, I remember looking down to see if I had dropped my change.

In the first week, there was no reaction to the film. I visited Geeta cinema in Worli (south central Mumbai) because the theatre owner called me. At interval time, only two-three people came out into the foyer. He pointed out, 'You see that? Nobody is prepared to come out of the screening at the interval.'

When I asked him what he made of that, he replied, 'They are stunned.' People were not reacting to Sholay because they had not seen a film like this earlier. It's only from the second and third week onwards that the audience started to react. That is why initially there were reports which tried to bring down the film. The reactions from the trade papers were tough for five to six weeks. And the film was very expensive! It had cost Rs 3 crore (Rs 30 million) by the time it was completed.

That was a huge sum 50 years ago. I remember the Rajendra Kumar-Sharmila Tagore film Talaash being hugely hyped as a Rs 1 crore (Rs 10 million) colossus in 1970.

(Laughs) My father (Producer G P Sippy) and I, along with the writers Salim-Javed, did meet when so many negative reactions were coming in, but after discussing, we decided not to change anything. Instead, we waited it out. Sometimes, there are films that you can't form opinions of right away... it takes time.

And what a turnaround there was! As Sholay crosses a landmark 50 years, what is your paramount emotion?

I feel elated. I made the film with passion and worked almost like a mad man. I used my judgement, both during the shooting and in the post-production periods.

Has it been a challenge to match up to Sholay subsequently?

Results cannot be pre-decided. Not every film can be like Sholay, and that was the case with me too. Each film has its own results depending on how much they appeal to the audience.

Classics to run the danger of becoming outdated. Why do you think Sholay has stood the test of time and is still relevant and appeals to the young?

I can only make a guess. The film showcases everlasting emotions that people continue to identify with -- friendship, sacrifice, revenge. But then, some of these emotions are in other films also.

People remember the dialogue, the voice and get-up of Gabbar Singh. His personality had a peculiar appeal; youngsters were in awe of this character. How do you explain that?

Sometimes, everything just falls in place.

Woh bhi hai. You do your best and leave the rest.

What was your directorial vision vis a vis Sholay? What did you want the audience to feel on watching the film?

I don't watch films like that. I make films which I think have the possibility of being liked by a majority of people, and present them with the right emotions. In Sholay, everything was in place.

Sholay changed the trend in Hindi cinema towards grittier, more elaborately scaled action films.

Yet subsequently, you didn't adhere to the new trend you had fostered, and instead explored relationships in Shakti, Saagar, Buniyaad etc. Was it a deliberate choice to break away?

Not deliberate at all. Each film has its own strength and demands. See, the basic elements in a film are always the same; it's how you treat the subject.

It took me 300 days to shoot Sholay and the same number of days to shoot Saagar though there was little action in the latter film. Why is that?

You tell us, since you are the maker.

It's because whatever I wanted portrayed on screen, I wanted it portrayed exactly as I wanted it. When you pursue that kind of perfection, you pay a price.

Your best work, whether it's Seeta aur Geeta or Sholay or Shakti or the television serial Buniyaad, is based on human interactions between strikingly individualistic characters.

I agree. But if you ask me if that was planned, the answer is no.

So what is the most crucial aspect of creating memorable cinema?

You make it well. All good makers like Raj Kapoor, Hrishikesh Mukherji, Mehboob Khan onwards have had the intention to make a good film. They were very passionate about their work.

Do you look back and reminisce about Sholay with the film's stars like Amitabh and Dharmendra?

Yes. We talk about so many moments.

Moments in the film or on the sets?

More about the moments in the film, and then, of course, because we were together while making it, we bring up something or the other. Then we move onto other topics.

The dosti between Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra was the bedrock of the film.

Absolutely.

So how was the camaraderie between the two stars in real life at the shoot? Were they comfortable?

Yes, yes, yes.

Competitive?

Every individual is competitive. They don't like saying that but within themselves, I am sure they have assessed that they want to do their best, they should be remembered, they should stand out. There were certain moments that belonged to one actor, and some that belonged to the other. If he is standing on a tower creating a scene then naturally, it's going to be his highlight. He is an extrovert while Amitabh's character is an introvert.

You were instrumental in making Hema Malini the leading female star of the 1970s with Andaaz, Seeta Aur Geeta and Sholay. How did you bring out the best in her?

Earlier, there were people who said, She is good looking, she is tall but she is not that much of an actress. That was the perception. But a good actor is a good actor, and as a director, you have to work to get the best out of your artiste.

Does Hema acknowledge that?

She never refused me. We worked in Shimla Mirchi recently. She was very happy because it was again a very different role.

The concept of her character Basanti talking at breakneck speed, how was it decided?

All the characters had certain definite traits.

Yes. Including Asrani and Jagdeep.

Exactly. At that time, theatres had to shut down at midnight because of certain rules and regulations, and some distributors said that film was very long. So for those territories, we cut out Asrani and Jagdeep scenes because they had nothing really to do with the main story. But after a few weeks, people started complaining that in Mumbai, people were talking about these scenes but they were not able to see them. We had to put those scenes back in the film.

Have you ever gone back to Sholay's shooting locale, Ramnagar, now a tourist attraction?

Yes, I did go around 25 years ago.
You know, we were supposed to shoot Sholay at a location in North India, where all the dacoit films were shot normally because that's where the dacoit problem existed the most. But I shot in the South because I insisted I wanted a different background.

How did you react to the early deaths of Sanjeev Kumar and Amjad Khan, immortalised as Thakur and Gabbar?

One misses them. They went too early but woh kiske haath mein hai?

Tell us about R D Burman's background score which impressed me even more than his soundtrack.

His innovations for the tanga chase scene gave it a tremendous lift -- he used tabla, dholak and ghungroo with horse hooves.

Pancham's background score was as important as the songs. The music was memorable as well. Anand Bakshi and R D Burman were equally important as Salim-Javed were.

Was Sholay's stereophonic sound first?

Yes, absolutely.

Is it true that the sound recording entailed 18 shifts?

Much more. Some of the sound work was done in London as well.

Remove the sound effects like the coin rolling and the film's impact wouldn't have been as strong.

At the same time, you also effectively used silences: Jaya lighting the lamps, Sachin's death, the massacre of Sanjeev's family.

Silence is as important as sound.
I planned it that way. For the massacre sequence, I used the ominous creaking sounds of the swing while everything else is silent, only to have it broken by the sound of hooves and Gabbar's entry. It's all part of filmmaking.

Would you like your director's son Rohan Sippy to remake Sholay from his perspective today?

That decision is up to him. I personally feel one should not remake it.

I had once written how nobody can better Sholay today, not even Ramesh Sippy.

I don't agree with that. I did my best when I was making it, why do I need to make it again?

When Women Weren't Doormats In Hindi Films

'Madhubala in Kala Pani looks divine and yet, she's not just there for glamour. 'In Do Raaste, the character of Neelambari (played by Bindu) isn't a heroine in the traditional sense but she has such a pivotal role.'
'That Raj Khosla gave a non-heroine such a central role, instead of the heroine, says a lot about how he valued female characters.'

In the early days, Bollywood saw its actresses as 'Indian goddesses' -- women to be revered, placed on a pedestal, respected. The lens was often shaped by the male gaze, and by conservative ideals. In Do Raaste, Rajesh Khanna lectures his girlfriend for wearing western clothes, and she apologises. In Dostana, there's the problematic dialogue from Amitabh Bachchan: 'Aap aise kapde pehen kar niklengi toh seeti nahi, mandir ki ghantiyaan bajengi?' Raj Khosla's cinema saw all this but knew how to give the ladies their due as well.

On the director's birth centenary on May 31, his daughter Anita Khosla, along with author **Amborish Roychoudhury**, released Raj Khosla: The Authorized Biography, which provided remarkable insights into him and his movies.

"For a man with a conservative worldview, Raj Khosla gave his female characters remarkable depth. His cinema wasn't just about worshipping women," "He wasn't entirely comfortable with modernity -- his heroines were meant to be dignified, graceful, and within the boundaries of 'Indian culture' -- but he didn't turn them into doormats either."

1st Part Of The Interview: 'Despite Massive Success, We Know So Little About Him'

Raj Khosla had a distinct way of projecting his heroines.

Yes, especially Sadhana.
In the song Lag Jaa Gale (Woh Kaun Thi), you see her face dappled with the shadow of leaves, singing with a deep, quiet melancholy just beneath the surface. It's not just the visual beauty, it's the emotional depth.

Then, there's Jo Humne Dastaan Apni Sunayi, another evocative song. The sorrow in Lata Mangeshkar's voice is perfectly matched by Sadhana's expression and Manoj Kumar's reaction. That kind of cinematic harmony doesn't happen by accident, it is crafted.

Raj Khosla designed his heroines' look and presence with painstaking detail. There's an anecdote I've included in the book, how he and Sadhana would spend hours discussing something as specific as how she should look away from the camera or smile in a particular scene. This level of attention wasn't just cosmetic, it was integral to how he wanted his women to appear on screen -- elegant, ethereal, and emotionally resonant.

Look at his work with Asha Parekh: Chirag, Main Tulsi Tere Aangan Ki, Do Badan, Mera Gaon Mera Desh. In each film, she plays a woman with range and complexity. Madhubala in Kala Pani looks divine and yet, she's not just there for glamour. Her presence has emotional weight. In Do Raaste, the character of Neelambari (played by Bindu) isn't a heroine in the traditional sense but she has such a pivotal role.

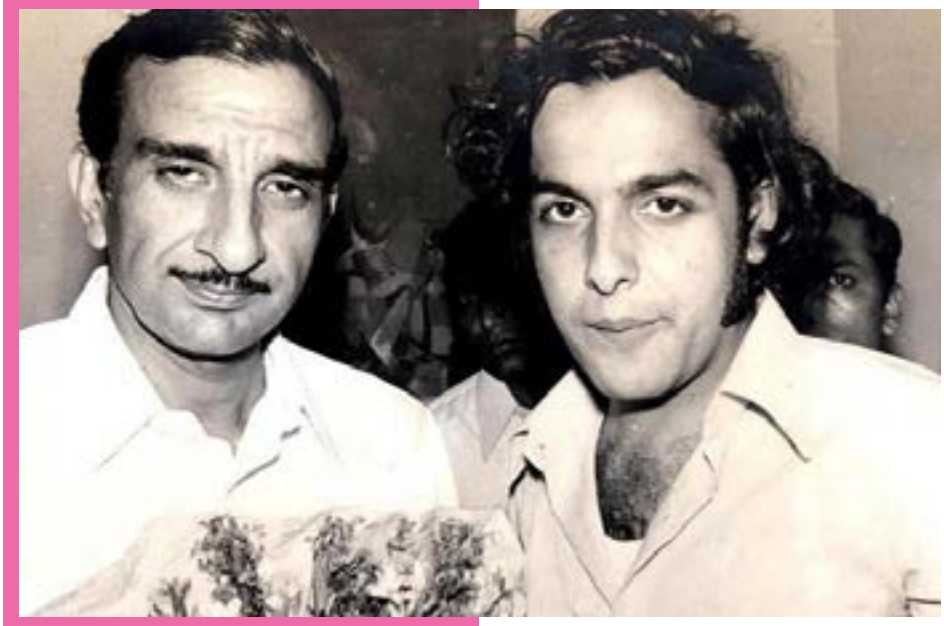
The family falls apart largely because of her character. It was Bindu's breakout, and her role had substance. That Raj Khosla gave a non-heroine such a central role, instead of the heroine, says a lot about how he valued female characters. He seemed to understand the female psyche to a certain extent. But I wouldn't go as far as to call his lens fully feminist; it was still shaped by the male gaze, and often by conservative ideals.

Still, it wasn't simplistic either. His worldview wasn't homogeneous, it was full of contradictions. On one hand, he presented women as goddesses -- beautiful, graceful, idealised figures. But they were Indian goddesses -- women to be revered, placed on a pedestal, respected. Ironically, that also limited them. They weren't always given full agency. You see this contradiction play out in Do Raaste. There's a scene where Rajesh Khanna lectures his girlfriend for wearing western clothes, and she apologises.

In Dostana, there's that problematic song, Bahut Khoobsurat Jawaan Ek Ladki , which defends stalking. There's even a dialogue by Amitabh Bachchan later in the film: ''Aap aise kapde pehen kar niklengi toh seeti nahi, mandir ki ghantiyaan bajengi?'

That worldview -- paternalistic, and regressive -- was present.

But in Do Badan, when Asha Parekh's character marries the villain (Pran), and when he tries to force himself on her, she stands up to him. She delivers a powerful monologue about boundaries, not just for women, but men as well. That scene flips the narrative. It's bold and progressive for its time.



Raj Khosla wasn't making the kind of cinema where women were just caricatures. For example, Sadhana plays a wife in Mera Saya, but the entire film revolves around her identity and her fight to be recognised. In CID, Waheeda Rehman is a femme fatale, complex, mysterious. In Mera Gaon Mera Desh, Lakshmi Chhaya plays a character whose loyalties shift. She's not just a vamp or a stock side character, she's layered. She arguably had more footage than Asha Parekh in that film, despite not being the lead.

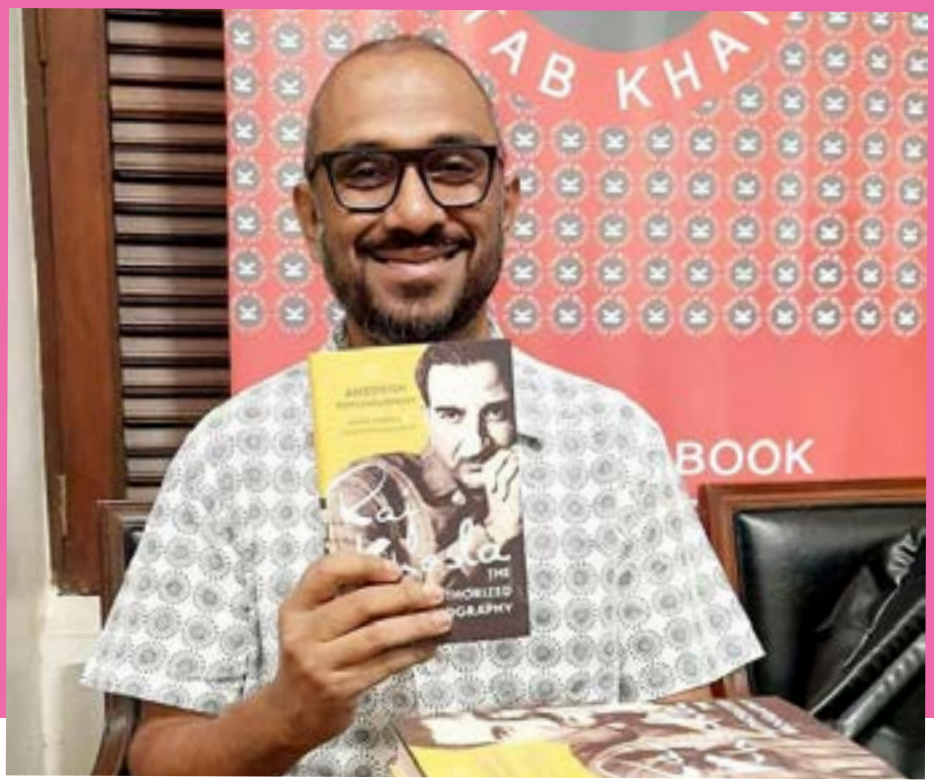
In Chirag, Asha Parekh plays a blind woman, and the film hinges on her character. In Main Tulsi Tere Aangan Ki, she plays the 'other woman' with grace, pain, and quiet dignity. For a man with a conservative worldview, Khosla gave his female characters remarkable depth. His cinema wasn't just about worshipping women. He wasn't entirely comfortable with modernity -- his heroines were meant to be dignified, graceful, and within the boundaries of 'Indian culture' -- but he didn't turn them into doormats either.

These contradictions were present in his personal life too. He did not allow his daughters to join the film industry.

Raj Khosla gave us some fine directors like Bappi Soni, Pramod Chakravarty, Manoj Kumar and Mahesh Bhatt. Yes, they were people who passed through his mentorship at different points.

That doesn't mean they stayed with him long or absorbed everything he had to offer. For instance, Pramod Chakravarty also worked with Guru Dutt. Khosla belonged to a generation of filmmakers who didn't just direct films, they nurtured talent. He influenced a whole bunch of people like Bappi Soni, Mahesh Bhatt, Padmanabh (who later directed Do Chor), and Johnny Bakshi.

Some of that comes from what Khosla himself had received from Guru Dutt, and it was his way of passing on that legacy. It was initially for the benefit of his own films, and eventually, as a gift to the next generation.



In the book, you mention multiple times that Raj Khosla had other women in his life, but you did not go into details.

Was that a request from the family?

The family did not stop me from writing anything. That was actually refreshing for an authorised biography. They gave me full freedom and even helped me reach out to people. Still, I chose not to give names. One reason was emotional sensitivity.

Doing so would have caused pain to people on both sides -- his family and others connected to him. The second reason was privacy. I did reach out to people, and if anyone had given me permission to name them or tell their story, I might have considered it.

But I didn't get that and in their absence, I didn't think I had the right to intrude on anyone's privacy. Also, Raj Khosla is not around to speak for himself. I've spoken about certain relationships only in terms of how they impacted his filmmaking. Beyond that, I wasn't interested in digging into his personal life.

Why was his last film Parda scrapped? There's a story in your book about Vinod Khanna locking himself up and not opening the door for days.

Parda was built around Vinod Khanna. It was an action film, quite different from the kind of films Khosla had been making. But by then, Raj Khosla was already in a fragile state. He wasn't at his peak. He was dealing with health issues, family pressure, and alcoholism. Despite those challenges, he had pulled this project together. Then Vinod Khanna stopped showing up. Eventually, Raj Khosla had to go to his house himself but Vinod Khanna walked out of the film. At that point, Raj Khosla just didn't have the strength to start over. So the project was shelved.

What were Raj Khosla's final years like?

He had seen the heights of success, so experiencing the lows he faced towards the end of his career was a struggle for him. One day, he was at the top of his game, and suddenly, one afternoon, he realised he didn't have it in him anymore.

That was a deeply troubling thought. It began with what seemed like a minor accident. He was returning from the Otters Club (in Bandra, northwest Mumbai), a place he often visited to play chess and socialise, when a cyclist bumped into him. At his age, the injury was severe. He was bedridden for months. The combination of his mental state, the emotional strain, and his deteriorating health kept him confined for a long time. When he did recover, he tried to make a comeback. But his personal struggles, coupled with his professional failures, wore him down.

He couldn't cope. In his final years, he spoke constantly about projects he wanted to make. He launched films that never took off, like Khana Badosh. He managed to make Naqab, but it fared worse than his recent flops. His family made an effort to wean him off the alcohol and he was admitted to hospital. But the treatment did not work. Eventually, he passed away. Those last years weren't easy. Though he did spend quality time with his daughters, they were deeply difficult days.

Meet The Man You Hated!!

"We knew there would be a silence from the audience after watching the film because Dhadak 2 is that kind of a film.'

You know it's a job well done when a performance really makes you hate the actor.

Saad Bilgrami wears a shade of evil in Dhadak 2, where he plays an obstacle in Triptii Dimri-Siddhant Chaturvedi's love story. His character does a lot of awful things to people, but like **the film** itself, the actor is getting positive reactions for his acidic portrayal. "This is very new for me. I feel emotional that I am finally receiving this love and appreciation,"

How has Dhadak 2 brought a change in your career?

From a creative perspective, it's acche din for me. This was unexpected for me.
When they gave me the role, they said you're playing an antagonist.

I told myself let's see what happens. Now, I am getting appreciation from people, who are my idols and inspiration. This film has also brought acche din for those who needed it, for people who felt their voices are not being heard.

This is your first theatre release after years of working on OTT.

I believe in destiny and luck. Things happen at the right time. I have been working since the last seven years but it hasn't been that long.

Some people take 15, 20 years before they start getting things. So I'm very fortunate and grateful.

My show Ghar Wapsi was a turning point for me because after that, people recognised me and started taking me seriously.

Before that, I was doing skits and sketches with TVF; I used to impersonate actors.

What kind of reactions are you getting?

People are hating me because they hated my character, Ronnie. A few days ago, I was watching the film with some of my friends and a girl came to me, saying she liked me in the film, but won&'t shake hands with me.

Another person said after a long time, I saw someone on screen who brought out fear and hatred within me. I got so much support from the industry.

Ishaan Khatterbhai posted a story and mentioned my name. Adarsh Gouravbhai texted me, saying I did a good job in the film. We had worked together in the TVF show Hostel Daze.

Tumhari Sulu Director Suresh Triveni sir appreciated my work. Anurag Kashyap sir hugged me and said I will call you. This is very new for me. I feel emotional that I am finally receiving this love and appreciation.

How was the environment on sets?

Fun! Everybody was positive, right from the assistant directors to our DOP (Director Of Photography). Director Shazia (Iqbal) ma'am is very chill. She did not scold me. She was very sweet. We are lucky to get an opportunity to work with Dharma Productions.

We knew there would be a silence from the audience after watching the film because Dhadak 2 is that kind of a film. But on sets, we didn't feel anything like that.

Tell us about yourself.

I was born and brought up in Khairabad in Uttar Pradesh. Then I went to Bilgram, which is close to Kanpur. My forefathers were from Bilgram and that's why my surname is Bilgrami.

I stayed with my aunt. When I was in high school, I made a film. It was a parody. At that time, YouTube was trending and we were trying to make some good stuff. I wrote a few stories, took my phone, and made some short films.

I got support from my family, but they ssaid they would not be able to help financially.

How did you come to Mumbai?

During my childhood, I would do things to seek attention. When I was in Class 7, I saw some dance and singing reality shows. I got very connected to that world.

Later, I decided that I want to act in films. But I didn't know what to do about it. Thanks to YouTube, I created some stuff online.

I did some odd jobs in Lucknow. I worked as a retail sales officer at Tanishq. Then I worked in a call centre. I taught in schools and gave tuitions. I thought if I get money from here, I will go to Mumbai. But things don't happen as per your plan. Sometimes, better things happen.

I came to Mumbai and just within three months, I got a job in a media firm RVCJ, thanks to Gibran Noorani. I got in touch with him through Instagram.

He is the son of the director Shakeel Noorani, who directed a film called Joru Ka Ghulam with Govinda sir. I worked with them for three years.

Then I joined TVF. I created some gag and sketches. Later, I got an opportunity to work in Gullak and Hostel Daze as an actor. Things started working for me after that.

Do you worry that you might get typecast in villain roles after Dhadak 2?

It's a matter of choice. Recently, someone called me for an antagonist role in their film. I don't have a problem with that.

You can make me play five antagonists. My take would be how different the characters are. Antagonist doesn't just mean a stereotype.

There are a lot of people who are making good films. The industry is exploring characters in a better way.

I really like Hardik Mehta (Roohi), Jai Mehta (Hansal Mehta's son), Karan Sharma (Maharani)...

These new film-makers are making some great films and shows.

What's next for you?

People have started approaching me with better work opportunities, but I am still figuring out what to do next.

SAIYAARA STARS ARE READY TO TAKE OVER BOLLYWOOD

> They were born stars the day they were selected for this film.

Rajesh Kumar is enjoying the success of his latest film, Saiyaara, where he plays leading lady Aneet Padda's father.

"When I go on sets, people still cannot get over Rosesh (in Sarabhai Vs Sarabhai) but the mama's boy has turned into a universal papa," Rajesh tells.

Saiyaara is a blockbuster. How does it feel?

It's a surreal experience.
My 26th year in the film industry, one final blockbuster. We have rhythm in the life of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Da Ni Sa. For me, that was completed with one Sa: Sarabhai vs Sarabhai and Saiyaara. I can't believe the response Saiyaara is getting. I feel this is the best way we can emote when the story is so human. It's believable and entertaining.

So, a complete package of masala Bollywood film and me being part of it, I can only thank the Almighty, and everyone for it.

What was your reaction when Director Mohit Suri offered you the role?

Let me tell you the casting story. I was having lunch with my wife in a restaurant. We came home around 4 pm. I get a call from Yash Raj, saying that we want to test you for the girl's father. I went and gave my audition. I took my wife along because I wanted her to give me the cues. She is also an actor but has been out of the industry for quite a long time. I asked her to help me with the reactions because sometimes, people who give cues do not help your performance. After a week or so, I get a call that Mohit Suri wants to meet you.

When I met him, Mohit Suri said, 'Sir, do you know how you got cast?'

I asked how?
He said, 'You were having lunch with your wife and we all were sitting there.' At that very moment, he got a call from the casting (director) that there is an actor named Rajesh Kumar, can we test him for Aneet's father?

Mohit said he is sitting right in front of me and looks perfect for the role. So I was at the right place at the right time.

I am now relevant and a part of this Gen Z world, in a different role.

What were Ahaan Panday and Aneet Padda like?

They were sweethearts. They did not have any kind of baggage. Plus, the relationship that I tried to build with my (online) daughter Aneet was because she belongs to Amritsar and is fluent in Punjabi. So when we were talking about this character, Mr Batra from Punjab, I said I will have to do a workshop if you want me to be fluent in Punjabi.

So you had to work on the language?

Mohit said I would not have to do any workshop because your daughter is a hardcore Punjabi, she will help you out. So, on the very first day when I met her, I approached her and said, Aneet, help me with my Punjabi, speak the dialogues before I do, so that it's in my ear and the authenticity of being a Punjabi comes out.

Aneet's first shot was with me. Ahaan's first shot was also with me but that was a silent moment. But these kids, they knew what to do. They were also so dependent on Mohit's vision that they never had any doubts.

No one thought anything except what Mohit was thinking. This is his vision and how am I contributing to it?

That's the beauty of this whole film. It's the most inclusive film because everyone was working for it, the reactions, the acting, the insecurities we come with. These two youngsters were secure about what they were doing because they relied on Mohit Suri so much. They were well groomed, and prepared. They are ready to take over Bollywood in a big way. They were born stars the day they were selected for this film.

Do you consider Saiyaara as a game-changer in your career?

This is not my first successful film. Teri Baaton Mein Uljha Jiya was a successful film that I was part of but it was not talked about so much.

So how does it feel to be a part of entertainment for so long?

I am always on my toes because I want to be relevant for all generations. Thankfully, the kind of work I have done in television and now in films and OTTs, keeps me at par with the evolving industry. We used to have very good shows in the early days of television. Then, we had the daily soaps taking over and the writing suffered because we had to cater to it every day. Now, there are a variety of roles. I can be a good father. At the same time, I can also play a negative because with age, a little maturity has come on my face.

Do you feel the entertainment industry has been fair to you?

Absolutely. The industry has been fair to me because of the choice of work I was doing for television. Films happened pretty late for me. Then there was a conscious decision of me farming for four-five years, and not working in films. When I came back, that gap matured and broke whatever I had done on television. I could discover a new Rajesh within me. I have become more human, more spiritual, more emotional. So whatever role is given to me, I am so much a part of it. So instead of saying the industry was not fair to me, I would say that I am a very good product of the industry because it needs you to be patient but not complacent. And it gives you a fair chance.

Which have been your most memorable experiences?

In my second innings, I am having the best memories because I am working with so many debutants as well as A-listed directors. I am experimenting and people are letting me. So I played Liaquat Ali Khan in Nikkhil Advani's Freedom at Midnight, Binny's father in Binny & Family, Aneet's father in Saiyaara and different kinds of roles in Anurag Kashyap's and Amit Rai's films. When I go on sets, people still cannot get over Rosesh (in Sarabhai Vs Sarabhai) but the mama's boy has turned into a universal papa.

He Quit Amazon To Make Films

'You need the drishti, the experience. I am beginning to see things differently.

Delhi-based film-maker **Ankur Singla** is a former lawyer and tech entrepreneur, who sold his start-up to Amazon and launched an indie production house Barsati Films. His debut film Ghich Pich opened in select cities on August 8. A sweet, heart-felt drama about three childhood friends, now in their final year of high school, Ghich Pich explores teenage angst, emotions associated with growing up, falling in love and father-son struggles. Set in the late 1990s, Ghich Pich is also an ode to Chandigarh, the first Indian planned city, designed by the French architect Le Corbusier. The city's beautiful architecture plays a backdrop to the narrative, as does its quiet town mood.

The film's three young actors are Gaurav Arora, Aryan Rana (both first time actors) and Kabir Nanda (who also stars in Kohrra 2). The supporting cast includes Geeta Agarwal Sharma, who has appeared in 12th Fail, Laapataa Ladies and was recently seen in the role of Aneet Padda's mother in Saiyaara.

Ghich Pich is the sign of the emerging film and theatre scene in Chandigarh, independent of the large Punjabi language film industry, based in Amritsar, Ludhiana and Mohali (a suburb of Chandigarh).

Ankur speaks to about the making of the film and what Chandigarh means to him, saying, "Life is so different in small towns of Punjab versus Chandigarh. But they were so proud of living in Chandigarh."

Ankur, are your three protagonists based on real people from your life or an amalgamation which is what a lot of writers do?

Yes, definitely amalgamations. I started writing the script during COVID. A lot of memories came flashing back in my mind. When you have to write a three-character film, you have to make sure that you know they are genuinely different from each other. They shouldn't seem similar -- the way they talk, their personalities. I had prototypes in mind which were based on certain people I knew, friends, etc. And then I combined a few people together since you realise that in real life, all personalities are more complex.

Before you wrote the screenplay, you were trained as a lawyer. You had a startup. How did you learn film-making? It is one thing that people dream of becoming film-makers, and you can read books on basic script writing. But did you work on some films before that with some people?

The love for films came because I attended the National Law School in Bangalore. I started a film club as a hobby and we first watched the

French New Wave films. 400 Blows really blew me away. From there, we watched Italian Neo Realism films. During COVID, I began to feel there was something in me. I had to do something different.

I was still working at Amazon so I couldn't attend a regular film school. So I started attending weekend classes at the Institute of Moving Images. There is no physical campus, but they offer eight-week classes in different cities. It's run by Pankaj Roy. They basically crunch as much information and knowledge as possible. They first ask you to make a one-minute film, with no cut, followed by a three-minute film with 90 cuts.

A five-minute short film, and then a 20-minute diploma film using a hi-definition digital camera. For the three-minute film with 90 cuts, I went to a Blue Tokai outlet and shot the barista making coffee. But I had to cut 90 times because then you understand the nature of continuity editing. After that, I wrote a few short films and even directed them. But they came out quite badly. It's a very tough thing to go through, when slightly later in your life, you realise you have to pay your dues.

This was like a two-three years long journey. I had written a draft of Ghich Pich, but then with a writer friend I seriously began to re-work on it. I read a lot of screenplays. When you are older, you listen to other people and accept their feedback. I began to understand that the ultimate goal of a screenplay is to convince the audience. But reworking on the screenplay, I realised that my protagonists had mixed up goals.

I had left many open endings. Also at the time of casting, I understood that no matter what you write, it eventually depends on the actors. And we lucked out with the casting. Two of the young protagonists made their debuts and were very fresh. At the edit stage, it became clearer. A lot was cut out. And as the cliché goes, editing is rewriting. The film truly kept improving with each phase.

I have been noticing Chandigarh's theatre and film scene has been evolving. I know Neelam Mansingh is a big theatre personality. Even Deepa Mehta has collaborated with her.

And there are young film-makers like Anmol Sidhu (Jaggi) and Kabir Singh Chowdhury (Mehsampur, a docu-drama based on the life of Amar Singh Chamkila) making explosive films dealing with taboo subjects.

At the two editions of the Cinevesture International Film Festival in Chandigarh, organised by Nina Lath Gupta, I saw so many young people with a hunger for acting, making films and learning in the craft.

I also noticed with films like Udta Punjab, and shows like Kohra, Tabbar, even Pataal Lok 1, a lot of actors were found in and around Chandigarh.

So what do you think is happening in Chandigarh?

I live in Delhi, and traveled a lot to Chandigarh for the film. Otherwise, since 2002, I have lived in Bangalore, London and Delhi. From my experience, I can say there are many theatre groups in Chandigarh.

I think film-making is still smaller as compared to theatre. People want to write and direct, but I believe they need more guidance.

There are very few ways for people to learn, and people have to make choices. Many either go towards the Punjabi film industry, much of it is based outside Chandigarh or they move to Bombay. Then there are casting agents like Mukesh Chhabra who go to Chandigarh to cast. I don't think this was true 20 years ago.

So the challenge is that cinema is a very expensive art form, and often financing and then distribution become issues. We still don't have very good answers. But I would say cinema literacy has really shot up in recent years. They have all seen Breaking Bad, classics of world cinema, or some latest great Japanese, Italian and South Korean films.

That is one of the challenges for film-makers, also elsewhere in India, which is that they have to create something worth watching, and is probably under the fraction of the budget of some of the films they are watching.

Tell us about Chandigarh. My impression is on one hand, it is the most modern Indian city in terms of architecture.

It's the capital of two states and yet it has that very quiet, small-town mind.

I was born in 1983 and stayed there till 2002. This will sound odd, but when you grow up in a middle-class household, you have no sense of architecture. You have no sense of a city. You are taught a little bit in school that it is a beautiful, planned city but you don't really feel it in any tangible way.

When I started writing around the time of COVID, I became somewhat interested. I went back and met an architect who is a graduate from NID (National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad).

I asked him to show me around Chandigarh. He took me to various different sectors. He showed me Punjab University, gave me it a tour of the Capitol Complex. I read books by Le Corbusier and understood his thinking.

Why can't we design a home, like a machine, like a car, where everything is super-efficient and there are no superfluous elements? And that was also needed because after World War II, you didn't have extra resources to just make something look nice.

You mentioned that Chandigarh had a small-town mind and that's why I decided to leave to fulfil my dreams. Corbusier designed a modern city, because Lahore went to Pakistan.

But I felt that people were maybe taking time to pick up the ideals of a big city.

Many of these people were uprooted from small towns of Punjab.

My parents came to Chandigarh in 1982-1983 and slowly the city shaped them, and they shaped the city. Life is so different in small towns of Punjab versus Chandigarh.

But they were so proud of living in Chandigarh. I studied in Government Model Senior Secondary School in Sector 16. I shot the film there.
When I was young I used to go to that school every day, but obviously I didn't notice anything.

This time, when I was shooting the film, I began to notice the lines of the architecture. It has been designed with so much love and beauty. You need the drishti, the experience. I am beginning to see things differently.

‘People Do Ridiculous Stuff When They Are Heartbroken’

‘The idea was to not give any morality lessons.’

As someone who brought remarkable intensity to her roles in Sacred Games, Manto, Sexy Durga, Angry Indian Goddesses, and Trial By Fire, you might assume **Rajshri Deshpande** to be a very serious person in real life.

As she walks in for the chat, the very first thing she’s interested in is what the names of her interviewers are. Each name is met with a warm smile that instantly sets an easy vibe around her. Rajshri brings the same lighter side to her latest OTT show Rangeen, co-starring Viineet Kumar Siingh. She plays Naina, a bored housewife who hires a lover to spice up her mundane life, only to be caught red-handed by her husband. “Honestly, people are bored to see these stars playing a character. They want to see a human being there. They want to see a person they can relate to,” Rajshri says.

Rangeen is about the unabashed female desire and the bruised male ego.

What was the genesis of this story for you and your writing partner Amir Rizvi?

Amardeep: All the characters, both genders, were meant to be flawed. They were meant to be in some sort of identity crisis. A lot of it came from research, from a few articles that intrigued us. Then we deep-dived into it. We read about people who are involved in this world, both from the client side and the service side. People do ridiculous stuff when they are heartbroken. The show was a mix of our messiness, our desires, and how we sometimes don’t make perfect choices.

Rajshri, what was your reaction when you first heard the story?

Rajshri: I thought it’s high time. Women have always been labelled in a certain way and when it comes to a subject like this, I have seen how people have handled it.

This subject is very sensitive. Amar (Amardeep) sent me a couple of episodes and I felt she was dealing with it in a very sensible way. I’m glad she had approached the women characters in this show very sensitively. I felt that it’s the right script for me to be part of.

It’s refreshing to see that your character Naina is not apologetic about her desires. But was there ever a concern that the show might veer towards justifying cheating?

Rajshri: Women should not be apologetic about anything. Unless, of course, if you are killing someone. We should choose ourselves, but not at the cost of harming anyone.

Women like Naina don’t choose themselves. They are never the centre of anything. It starts from so many choices a woman has to go through. This is the reality of our society. The whole conditioning which our family system has given us, we are not realising that we are actually putting someone so down that we are forgetting that the person is actually going through a lot of mental trauma in her life. Naina has made the decision because of the emptiness in her life. And when it came out, she chose dignity. She chose grace to reply back to her husband. But what did they do? He took on his ego. He went on another trip, maybe because of his upbringing. We are not here to justify anything; it’s just the situation we are in.

Amardeep: I don't think we can justify any right or wrong here; it's an individual's choice. Like I said before, we did not try to create a perfect character here. We haven't given any right or wrong answers in the show either. The idea was to not give any morality lessons.

Rajshri: You won't believe the kind of responses we are getting. People are writing and are discussing if it is right or wrong, what she has done, what he has done. It's amazing because the whole point of art is to have a conversation. How fun is that! Art should move our society.

You once said that you like to observe people in order to prepare for your characters.

Was there a backstory for Naina in your mind?

Rajshri: A lot, yaar! (I was inspired by) my friends. For me, it's very important to bring in elements from everyone's life.Naina is a manifestation of many, many women. That's why every character has to look different, behave differently, wear a very different set of clothes, because the reactions of human beings are different.

Are you choosy with your work or are good offers hard to come by?

Rajshri: Actually, it's both.
I am choosy about who I want to work with and the kind of project I want to be part of because I completely immerse myself into that. I can't take up five projects and put my foot into each project. If I am doing something, I have to give my 100 per cent to it. Also, there are very few women characters that we normally write. If you see in the past five years, there are just a handful of projects where the women are leading or having a really meaty part.

But if you look at the male characters, there are tons of male characters. Someone was just telling me about Rajkummar (Rao), Gulshan (Devaiah), Vijay (Varma)... we started together but look at the kind of choices my male counterparts have got! And look at the characters we have received. We have hardly anything to do. I feel more women characters should be written. It's unfortunate that the directors and creators stereotype women actors. I have no idea when things will change. There are so many other factors that matter: Like how famous you are, who knows whom, what kind of followers you have, all that starism. If someone wants a craft, that's when they come to us. They are like, 'Okay, we want someone who can go beyond what is just written on paper.' The choices are less and there are tons of amazing actresses out there. Honestly, people are bored to see these stars acting a character. They want to see a human being there. They want to see a person they can relate to.

Rangeen is backed by Kabir Khan with whom you started your creative journey back in 2006 with Kabul Express. What's the story behind this long-standing friendship?

Amardeep: My very first job was assisting Kabir on his documentaries. At that time, he hadn't made feature films yet. This was in 2001. My co-creator Amir and I were assisting Kabir. I love the documentary format. That reality is stranger than fiction and we got to know that very early on in life. After that, Amir and I opened a production house and did a lot of unscripted content, including TV shows, docus. But between Amir, Kabir and I, we always knew that we would work together on some project, and Rangeen happened to be that project.

What do you think about the kind of hyper-masculine, macho men that cinema is projecting these days?

Amardeep: People make stories for various reasons, we have to respect their reasons behind it. There is space for all kinds of stories. As a creator myself, I would like to create raw, real, and honest characters. I don't mind exploring the vulnerability of hyper-masculinity. I would like to still see beyond it.

Rajshri: It is important to have all kinds of vulnerability on screen but it's unfortunate that our industry follows a trend. We have to look beyond that now. We have forgotten about storytelling and the rawness. We need good producers on board who can support such stories, rather than just following a formula and giving wrong messages to society.

Very Few Series Deal With Femal *'Orgasm'*

If a survey were conducted, many people wouldn't understand the concept.
Thanks to Rangeen, a conversation has started.

Known for his powerful performances, **Viineet Kumar Siingh** takes on a bold new role in Amazon Prime Video's Rangeen, playing a gigolo in a story that explores female desire. He talks about breaking taboos, his love for comedy and action, and what's next in his evolving journey as an actor.

Your new series Rangeen has shocked many by addressing female sexuality.

There have been very few films or series that deal with the subject of female orgasm.
Honestly, if a survey were conducted, I feel many people wouldn't even fully understand the concept. But that's okay. Thanks to Rangeen, a conversation has started, people are talking.

And that's important. When discussions begin, taboo subjects start to be understood.

At this stage in your career, what are you looking for in the roles and films you choose?

At this point, I'm mostly looking for variety. I want to explore different shades in characters, their temperaments, their nuances.

I'm always searching for something new in the roles I take on. I also want to step into unexplored spaces as an actor.

And what space is that?

Comedy. I have a strong gut feeling that I can do it really well. I've had the opportunity to try my hand at dark comedy, and I'm genuinely happy about that. But what I really want is to do an out-and-out comedy. Hopefully, I'll get that chance soon. Also, ever since school I've believed that cinema is a mirror of society. That idea is still imprinted in my mind. So I try to take on roles and projects where, through entertainment, I can contribute something meaningful to society. That's always an effort I make as an actor. Even if it's a small message, it should be there. And I also want to explore historical narratives like I did in Chhaava. Let's see what comes my way. It's not entirely in my hands, but that's the intent.

What about action?

Absolutely! I want to do action too. I'd love to do a full-fledged action film like Taken. I'm a big fan of the Taken franchise. There's a lot I want to do. Let's see where life takes me. I don't plan too much now. Whatever comes my way, I want to give it my all and do it with complete sincerity. Now Rangeen is out, and I'm excited for what's coming next.

What's coming up?

I've done a show with TVF -- it's a very good one, but I can't say much about it yet. There's also a film with Anurag Kashyap, and another film of mine called Aadhaar, which is ready and just awaiting release. It's a very strong film, and I'm eager for it to reach audiences. Besides that, I've done something with Aanand L Rai. He produced Mukkabaaz, and this time, he's directed me. It's a very special project. There are also two more projects I can't talk about yet -- it's too early. But yes, those are on the way too. Plus, there are other things in the pipeline. When the time is right, I'll share everything.

Would you say Chhaava was a game-changer for you?

When Chhaava came out, I never expected the kind of impact it would have. I played the historical character Kavi Kalash, something I had never done before in my career. But the love I've received for it has left me speechless. After that, I played a negative role in Jaat. I had never done such a clear hero-villain dynamic before. And again, the audience showed so much love. So whenever I

get the chance to do something new, I try to grab it. It makes me feel like there are still many unexplored possibilities in me.

Many believe you should've played the main lead in Chhaava.

That just tells me that people have faith in my talent and that means a lot. I want to keep my head down and continue doing good work. Quietly and humbly. My character in Rangeen also pulled me in strongly. There were many layers to him that attracted me. I read the script multiple times and had deep discussions with tn writers, understanding how they viewed the character, his journey, his transformation, and how they envisioned the sensitive scenes. Then I began preparing.

How much preparation went into Rangeen?

First, I worked on the external aspects. What is the physicality of this journalist who's lost in his own world? What are his habits? That's where I start, by ticking off those external boxes. Then I move inward -- who is this man on the inside? That's where the script and the writers become immensely helpful. What kind of person is he? What does he think? How does he react? What are his relationships like-professionally and personally? I figured all of that out. He's a common man, so it was easy to relate to the character.

I'm really thankful to my co-stars -- they are all wonderful actors. Whether it's Rajshri, Taruk, Sheeba Chaddha, Meghna Malik, or others -- when your co-actors understand the depth of the scene, something special happens. Working with great actors elevates your own performance. I'm very thankful for that. Now that people are talking about Rangeen, and it's trending at No. 1 on Amazon, I'm genuinely happy. The feedback has been amazing.

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10 STUNNING *Pearl Jewelry* PIECES

Inspired by Hollywood Stars

1. White Pearl Necklace Worn By - Scarlett Johansson

The triple-strand pearl necklace worn by Scarlett Johansson brought out her trendy yet classic style, making it a perfect choice for warm evenings. You can pair this layered design with an off-shoulder gown or a sleek blouse to add depth to your outfit.

2. Freshwater Natural Baroque White Pearl Necklace Worn By - Lady Gaga

Lady Gaga's bold look featured a stunning baroque pearl necklace with irregular shapes that made her stand out. This piece is perfect for adding a unique flair to your wardrobe. Wear it with a solid-coloured dress or jumpsuit to let the necklace be the star of your outfit.

Southsea Baroque Dreamscape Necklace

3. South sea Baroque pearl Necklace Worn By - Jennifer Lawrence

A Southsea baroque pearl necklace elevated Jennifer Lawrence's relaxed yet glamorous style. The varied shapes of these pearls add a playful yet sophisticated touch. Pair this necklace with a flowy maxi dress or a tailored blazer for a versatile look.

4. Customizable 3-Line Choker Necklace Worn By - Rihanna

Rihanna's edgy style was perfectly complemented by a customizable freshwater pearl choker. This adjustable piece can be styled in multiple ways, making it ideal for layering. Match it with a sharp pantsuit or a crop top and skirt for a modern twist.

Customizable Freshwater 3-Line Choker Necklace

Enchanted Tides Tahitian Pearl Necklace

5. Tahitian Pearl Necklace Worn By - Princess Raya

The Enchanted Tides Tahitian Pearl Necklace, inspired by Princess Raya, carries a magical vibe with its dark, shimmering pearls. Perfect for a royal-inspired look, this piece pairs beautifully with jewel-toned sarees or gowns, creating an aura of mystery.

6. Tahitian Pearl Necklace Worn By - Angelina Jolie

Angelina Jolie's love for simple yet powerful designs was reflected in her single-strand Tahitian pearl necklace paired with diamonds. This necklace can add a touch of charm to a cocktail dress or even a crisp black shirt for an effortlessly stylish look.

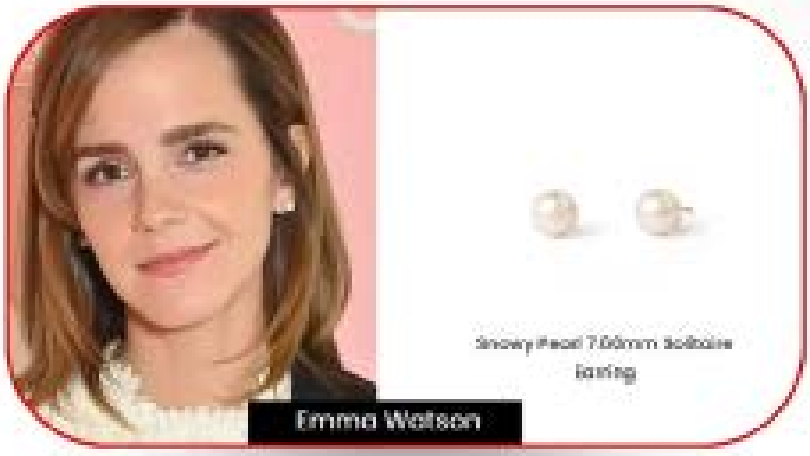
Diamonds Connections Single Strand Tahitian Pearl Necklace

7. Twin Strand Golden Pearl Necklace Worn By - Selena Gomez

Selena Gomez radiated warmth in her twin-strand golden pearl necklace, a piece that adds a soft shine to any outfit. Pair this with light or warm outfits for a soothing, glowing effect that works for both day and evening events.

8. Pink Pearl Necklace Worn By - Justin Bieber

Justin Bieber's fashion-forward choice of a pink freshwater pearl necklace gave his outfit a fresh, youthful vibe. This piece can be worn by anyone looking to add a soft yet trendy touch to their look. It works well with casual shirts or even oversized blazers for a stylish edge.

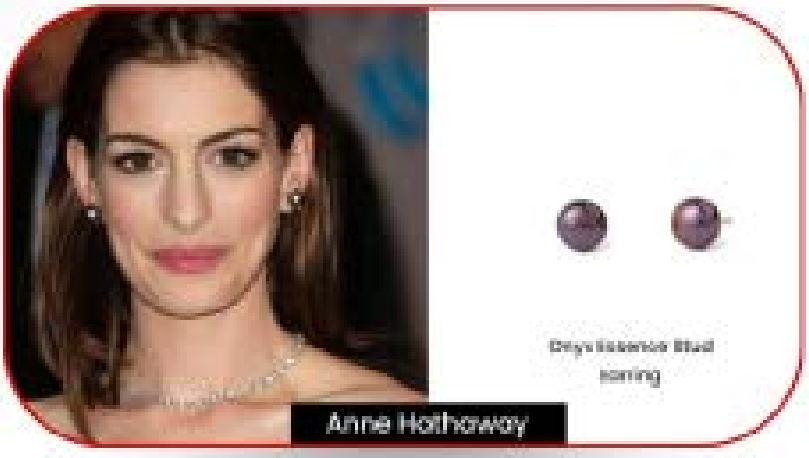


9. Pearl Earring Worn By - Emma Watson

Emma Watson's love for minimalist fashion was beautifully highlighted with Snowy Pearl Solitaire stud earrings. This delicate piece is perfect for everyday wear. Style it with a crisp cotton kurta or a simple sundress for a diminutive, elegant look.

10. Black Pearl Stud Earrings Worn By - Anne Hathaway

Anne Hathaway's onyx and pearl stud earrings added a modern twist to her outfit. These earrings are versatile enough to be paired with both formal and casual wear. Try them with a monochrome jumpsuit or a fitted lehenga for a polished look.



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Skin care: 5 tips for healthy skin

Good skin care can keep your skin healthy and glowing. Get tips on gentle cleansing, sun safety and more.

Don’t have time for intensive skin care? You can still pamper yourself. Basic skin care and healthy lifestyle choices can help prevent early aging and other skin issues. Get started with these five tips.

1. Protect yourself from the sun
One of the most important ways to take care of your skin is to protect it from the sun. A lifetime of sun exposure can cause wrinkles, age spots, and other skin problems. It also can raise the risk of skin cancer.

For the most complete sun protection:

1. Use sunscreen: Use a palm-sized amount of broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30. Put on more sunscreen every two hours or more often if you swim or sweat.

2. Seek shade: Try to stay out of the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. That’s when the sun’s ultraviolet (UV) rays are strongest.

3. Wear protective clothing: Cover your skin with tightly woven long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and wide-brimmed hats. Clothes with dark colors tend to give more protection than do those with light colors. Some sun-protective clothing is made to block UV rays. You also can use laundry additives that give clothing an extra layer of UV protection for a certain number of washings.

2. Don’t smoke
Smoking makes skin look older and plays a part in wrinkles forming. Smoking narrows the tiny blood vessels in the outermost layers of skin. This lessens blood flow and makes skin duller. It also depletes the skin of oxygen and nutrients that are key for skin health.

Smoking damages fibers called collagen and elastin that give skin strength and suppleness. What’s more, the facial expressions that people make over and over while smoking can play a role in wrinkles. These expressions include pursing the lips when breathing smoke in and squinting the eyes to keep out smoke.

Smoking also raises the risk of squamous cell skin cancer, especially on the lips. If you smoke, the best way to protect your skin is to quit. Ask your healthcare professional for tips or treatments to help you stop smoking.

3. Treat your skin gently
Daily cleansing and shaving can be rough on your skin. Follow these tips for gentle skin care:

1. Limit bath time: Some experts say it’s ideal to bathe for no longer than five minutes at a time. Use warm water rather than hot water.
2. Don’t use strong soaps: Strong soaps and detergents can strip oil from the skin. Choose mild cleansers instead.

3. Shave carefully: It’s ideal to shave after bathing when your skin is moist. To help protect your skin, put on shaving cream, lotion, or gel before you start shaving. Use a clean, sharp razor. Shave in the direction the hair grows, not against it. And rinse the razor after each stroke of the blade.

4. Pat dry: After you wash or bathe, gently pat or blot your skin dry with a towel. That way, some moisture stays on your skin.

5. Moisturize dry skin: If your skin is dry, use a moisturizer that fits your skin type. For daily use, try a moisturizer that contains SPF to help protect your skin from the sun.

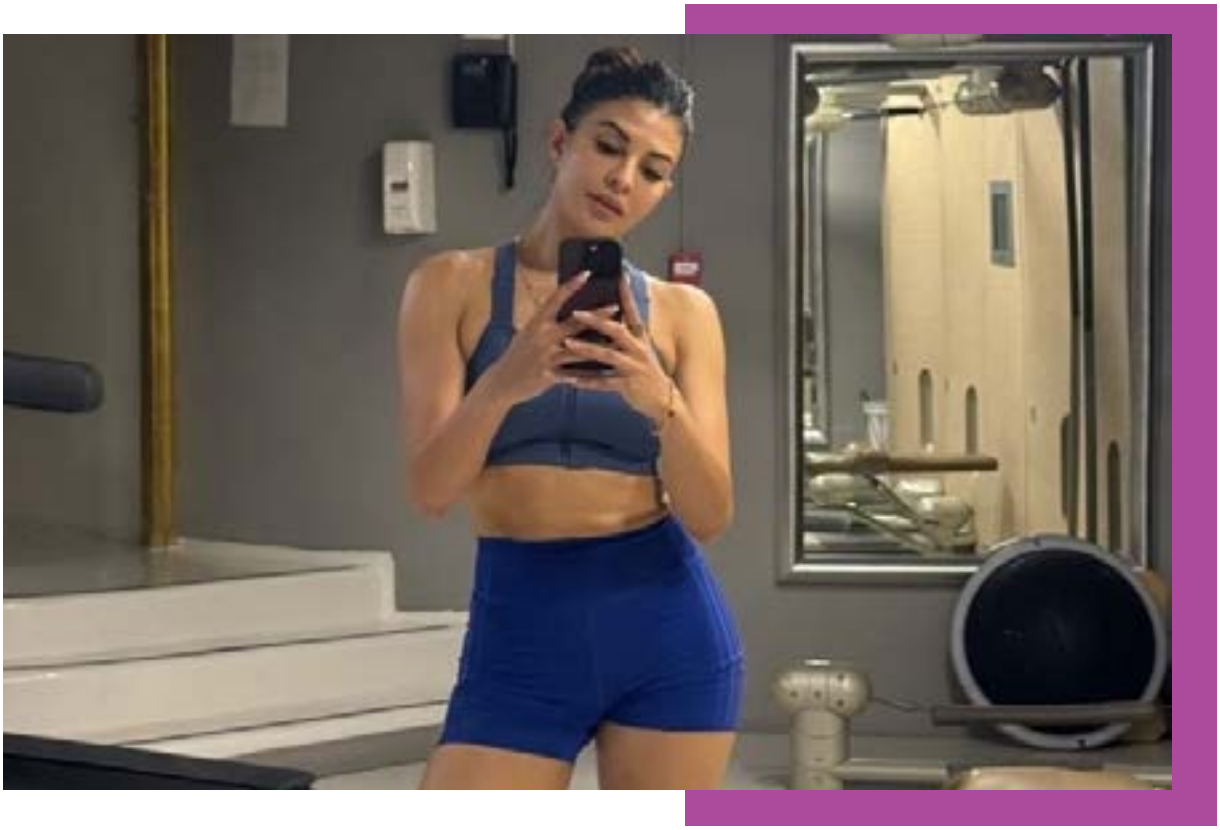
4. Eat a healthy diet

A balanced diet can help you look and feel your best. Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Fresh fruits and vegetables may be especially helpful at preventing damage that can lead to early skin aging. Drink plenty of water to help keep your skin hydrated too. Limit foods and drinks with added sugar, processed snacks, and other refined carbohydrates. Some studies suggest that a diet high in refined carbs stripped of nutrition can speed up aging. The connection between diet and acne isn't clear. But some research links acne with drinking lots of milk or eating lots of processed foods that raise blood sugar quickly. Limited research suggests that nutrients such as fiber and omega-3 fats show promise at helping control acne. But more studies are needed to be sure.

5. Manage stress

Too much stress can make skin more sensitive and trigger acne breakouts and other skin conditions. To boost your chances for healthy skin and a healthy state of mind, take some steps to manage your stress:

1. Get enough sleep.
2. Add more movement into your day, such as taking a brisk walk.
3. Scale back your to-do list.
4. Try meditation or yoga.
5. Make time to do the things you enjoy and see the people you care about.
6.The results for your skin might be more dramatic than you expect.



Jacqueline Fernandez shares her fitness mantra: 'Always do the hardest thing first in the day'

Jacqueline Fernandez recently spoke about the growing importance of mental health and self-care. She took to her Instagram stories to open up about her fitness mantra saying she always does the hardest thing first in the day

Bollywood actress **Jacqueline Fernandez** has revealed her mantra to keep fit and shared that it's doing the hardest thing first in the day. Jacqueline took to Instagram stories, where she shared a glimpse of her Saturday morning. In the image, the actress, who is dressed in blue athleisure, is seen taking a mirror selfie at the gym.Always do the hardest thing first in the day. Work out time," she wrote as the caption. The actress recently spoke about the growing importance of mental health and self-care. Speaking on the sidelines of an event in Bhopal, the 'Kick' actress pointed out that modern life comes with constant pressure.Jacqueline said, "Today's world is very stressful. In such a situation, mindfulness and meditation are very important. Whether you get 5 minutes, 10 minutes or half an hour - you should give it to yourself. This keeps the mind calm and the body healthy." She also spoke about the deeper connection she shares with her body and mind. "Both my body and soul are fit and strong. I am very spiritual." The actress' latest release is **"Housefull 5"**, which also stars Akshay Kumar, Abhishek Bachchan, Riteish Deshmukh, and Sonam Bajwa are just a few of the stars who are set to light up the screen. Also joining the cast are Nargis Fakhri, Sanjay Dutt, Jackie Shroff, Nana Patekar, Chitrangada Singh, Fardeen Khan, Chunky Pandey, Johnny Lever, Shreyas Talpade, Dino Morea, Ranjeet, Soundarya Sharma, Nikitin Dheer, and Akashdeep Sabir. Produced by Sajid Nadiadwala under the banner Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment, "Housefull 5" released on June 6. The film follows multiple imposters who claim to be the son of a recently deceased billionaire as they compete for his fortune while aboard a luxury cruise ship. The first installment of the "Housefull" franchise released in 2010 and was loosely based on the 1998 Tamil film Kaathala Kaathala. The second installment hit the big screens in 2012. Meanwhile, Housefull 3 and Housefull 4 released in 2016 and 2019 respectively.

She will next be seen in **"Welcome To The Jungle"**. Directed by Ahmed Khan, the film boasts a massive budget. It stars Akshay Kumar, Sanjay Dutt, Jackie Shroff, Suniel Shetty, Arshad Warsi, Raveena Tandon, Disha Patani, Lara Dutta, Jacqueliene Fernandez, Shreyas Talpade, Tusshar Kapoor, Aftab Shivdasani, Paresh Rawal, Johnny Lever, Rajpal Yadav, Krushna Abhishek, Kiku Sharda, Daler Mehndi, Mika Singh, Mukesh Tiwari, Zakir Hussain, Yashpal Sharma, and Sayaji Shinde in pivotal roles. Presented by Base Industries Group, 'Welcome to the Jungle' is produced by Firoz A Nadiadwallah and is scheduled for a grand theatrical release in the Christmas week, on December 20.

From Pilates to Gym: 6 Bollywood Actresses Who Are Leading the Fitness Revolution

Bollywood actresses like Alaya F, Disha Patani, and Sara Ali Khan have become fitness icons, inspiring audiences with their dedication to gym, yoga, and pilates. Their disciplined routines and impressive physiques motivate fans to adopt healthier lifestyles. These stars show that hard work and consistency are key to fitness.

Beyond glitz and glamour, Bollywood is known for the stars who are dedicated to fitness. Several actresses of B-town have emerged as fitness icons, who have often inspired audiences with their disciplined routines and impressive physique. Take a look at the top 6 actors who blend a bit of gym, yoga, pilates, and a lot more to achieve a fit body.

Alaya F:

The young trailblazer has made a mark, not only in the films but also in the fitness sphere. Alaya F often indulges in intense workout sessions, pilates, gymnastics, and a lot more, and shares glimpses of her power fitness routines, leaving the internet in awe. From workout fails to successes, Alaya F captures the progress of her fitness journey, and it's nothing short of impressive.

Khushi Kapoor:

Khushi Kapoor is an ardent fitness enthusiast. Her day-to-day routine is filled with a variety of exercises, including pilates. Majorly, the 'Loveyapa' actress is a pilates girl who does not miss out on her fitness sessions.

Triptii Dimri:

Being a morning person, Triptii Dimri likes to go for morning runs, and walks to keep her curves in shape. Beyond this, the 'Animal' actress also likes to indulge in yoga sessions every alternate day. Triptii also prefers to hit the gym in the morning segment, covering intense workouts from cardio to stretching.

Disha Patani:

Over the years, Disha Patani has come a long way in her fitness journey. From gym sessions to yoga, gymnastics, and kickboxing, Disha Patani has proven to be one of the strongest and fittest actresses of B-town, who hits the right spot in pushing the boundaries of fitness..

Sharvari:

Sharvari likes to indulge in high-intensity workouts, often combining barbell row workouts and weight lifting sessions. Be it for routine or getting in shape for her roles, Sharvari dedicates herself to staying disciplined and true to her body.

Janhvi Kapoor:

Janhvi Kapoor likes to rise and grind by staying dedicated to her fitness routine. The actress is a pilates lover and loves spending time at the gym. Each time Janhvi drops bits and pieces of her fitness journey, she inspires her fans to hit the gym.

Sara Ali Khan:

Sara Ali Khan is a fitness freak, and there are no two ways about it. The actress often spends her time sweating out doing pilates, cardio, and boxing, dishing out major fitness goals. Sara often treats her fans with sneak peeks of her workout routines and leaves them mighty impressed with her fitness dedication.

These actresses have proven that there are no shortcuts to achieving a fit body. By maintaining a religious routine, and staying dedicated to workouts, these B-town divas have proven to be the right fitness role models.

Top 10 Places to Visit in India in September 2024

September marks the end of the monsoon season in most of India and also the embarking of a colourful festive season ahead. This is a perfect time for families, solo travellers, and adventure seekers to plan a short and relaxing trip to the location and rejuvenate themselves before a hectic time till Nov. Some people actually take this opportunity to have a trip to themselves to various locations as per their choice of place and season. Here's a guide to the best places to visit in India in September 2024.

01 Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir

Ladakh is often referred to as "India's crown jewel" for its stunning landscapes of rugged mountains, pristine lakes, and clear skies. September is one of the best times to visit Ladakh as the weather is crisp and pleasant, with clear skies making for breathtaking views. The roads are accessible, and the region remains vibrant with festivals like the Ladakh Festival, where you can witness traditional dance performances, polo matches, and local craft exhibitions.

Best Experiences:

1. Visit the surreal Pangong Lake and Tso Moriri Lake.
2. Explore the historic monasteries like Thiksey and Hemis.
3. Embark on thrilling road trips to Khardung La and Nubra Valley.

Travel Tip: Since the nights can get chilly in September, pack warm clothing even if the days are mild.

02 Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh

If you're looking to experience the charm of Northeast India, head to Ziro in Arunachal Pradesh. Known for its sprawling rice fields, dense bamboo groves, and the fascinating culture of the Apatani tribe, Ziro is a scenic destination during September. It's also the month when the famous Ziro Music Festival is held, attracting music lovers from across the country. The festival offers a unique blend of indie music, local culture, and sustainable living practices, all set against the stunning backdrop of Ziro's landscapes.

Best Experiences:

1. Attend the Ziro Music Festival for an unforgettable experience.
2. Explore the Apatani villages and learn about their unique traditions.
3. Hike through the verdant forests and enjoy panoramic views of the valley.

Travel Tip: Book your tickets and accommodation in advance if you're planning to attend the music festival, as it draws a large crowd.

03 Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh

Spiti Valley, known as “Little Tibet,” is an untouched paradise that should be on your travel bucket list. September is an ideal time to visit Spiti as the region remains relatively crowd-free, and the weather is perfect for exploring its stark landscapes. The valley is dotted with ancient monasteries, high-altitude villages, and surreal landscapes. The barren mountains contrasted by the deep blue skies create a mesmerizing experience.

Best Experiences:

1. Visit the ancient Key Monastery and Dhankar Monastery.
2. Explore the high-altitude villages of Komic, Langza, and Hikkim.
3. Drive along the scenic routes to Chandratal Lake and Pin Valley.

Travel Tip: The roads in Spiti can be treacherous, so hiring a local driver or opting for guided tours is recommended.

04 Valley of Flowers, Uttarakhand

The Valley of Flowers in Uttarakhand is a UNESCO World Heritage site and a dream destination for nature lovers. In September, the valley is still in full bloom with a carpet of vibrant flowers, making it one of the most stunning landscapes in India. The monsoon showers have receded by this time, and the trekking route is more manageable. The valley is home to rare species of flora and fauna, including the elusive blue poppy and snow leopard.

Best Experiences:

1. Trek through the flower-filled meadows surrounded by snow-capped peaks.
2. Visit Hemkund Sahib, a revered Sikh pilgrimage site at a high altitude.
3. Marvel at the diverse range of wildflowers and spot rare species like the Brahma Kamal.

Travel Tip: The trek to the Valley of Flowers requires good physical fitness. Ensure you have sturdy footwear and enough stamina for the hike.

05 Coorg, Karnataka

Coorg, also known as the "Scotland of India," is a breathtaking hill station in Karnataka that remains charming throughout the year. In September, Coorg is covered in lush greenery as the monsoon departs, leaving behind misty hills, coffee plantations, and gushing waterfalls. The weather is cool and perfect for outdoor activities like trekking, plantation tours, and sightseeing. Coorg's tranquil environment and scenic beauty make it a popular destination for both adventure seekers and those seeking relaxation.

Best Experiences:

1. Visit the Abbey Falls and Iruppu Falls, which are at their fullest post-monsoon.
2.Explore the coffee plantations and learn about the coffee-making process.
3. Trek to the summit of Tadiandamol, the highest peak in Coorg.

Travel Tip: Coorg is ideal for a leisurely stay in homestays or plantation resorts that offer immersive local experiences.

06 Udaipur, Rajasthan

Udaipur, the "City of Lakes," is one of Rajasthan's most romantic destinations. September is a great time to visit Udaipur as the weather becomes more pleasant, and the city's lakes and palaces are enhanced by the post-monsoon greenery. The iconic Lake Pichola shimmers under the monsoon sky, making boat rides even more magical. The palaces and havelis, with their stunning architecture, provide a glimpse into the royal heritage of Rajasthan.

Best Experiences:
1. Take a sunset boat ride on Lake Pichola.
2. Explore the majestic City Palace and its museums.
3. Visit the Saheliyon Ki Bari garden and Jag Mandir Island Palace.

Travel Tip: Udaipur's streets can be crowded, so plan visits to popular attractions early in the morning or late afternoon for a more relaxed experience.

07 Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh

Rishikesh, known as the "Yoga Capital of the World," is an ideal destination for adventure and spirituality. By September, the river Ganges is in full flow, offering thrilling experiences for river rafting enthusiasts. The monsoon has transformed the surrounding hills into lush green landscapes, making it a perfect time for trekking and nature walks. Rishikesh also hosts several yoga retreats and wellness programs, offering visitors a chance to rejuvenate their mind and body.

Best Experiences:

1. Enjoy white-water rafting in the Ganges.
2. Attend yoga and meditation sessions at ashrams like Parmarth Niketan.
3. Visit the iconic Laxman Jhula and attend the evening Ganga Aarti at Triveni Ghat.

Travel Tip: Rishikesh is a popular destination for both domestic and international tourists, so it's advisable to book your accommodations in advance.

08 Mysore, Karnataka

Mysore is a culturally rich city in Karnataka, known for its royal heritage, majestic palaces, and the grand Dasara festival. September is a great time to visit Mysore as the city gears up for the Dasara celebrations, which are held in October. The weather is pleasant, and the city's attractions, like the Mysore Palace, Chamundi Hills, and Brindavan Gardens, are at their most beautiful. The Dasara festival, celebrated with grandeur, features cultural performances, processions, and illuminated streets.

Best Experiences:

1. Explore the opulent Mysore Palace and its illuminated evening display.
2. Visit the Chamundeshwari Temple atop Chamundi Hills.
3. Watch the musical fountain show at Brindavan Gardens.

Travel Tip: If you're visiting close to the Dasara festival, make sure to book accommodations early, as Mysore gets crowded during this period.

09 Alleppey, Kerala

Alleppey, often referred to as the "Venice of the East," is a must-visit destination in Kerala, especially during September. The backwaters of Alleppey, with their network of canals and lagoons, offer a serene escape as the post-monsoon season enhances the beauty of this region. Staying in a houseboat and cruising through the tranquil waters is a unique experience. September is also when the famous snake boat races take place, adding excitement and cultural vibrancy to your visit.

Best Experiences:

1. Stay overnight on a traditional houseboat and cruise through the backwaters.
2. Witness the excitement of snake boat races, a highlight of Kerala's cultural calendar.
3. Explore the nearby beaches like Marari Beach for a relaxing day by the sea.

Travel Tip: September is a shoulder season in Alleppey, so you can find good deals on houseboat packages and resorts.

10 Shillong, Meghalaya

Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, is a charming hill station known for its pleasant climate, lush landscapes, and vibrant culture. September is an excellent time to visit Shillong as the rains have receded, leaving behind green hills, sparkling lakes, and gushing waterfalls. The region's colonial architecture, bustling markets, and serene parks make it a delightful destination for all kinds of travelers. Nearby attractions like Cherrapunji and Mawlynnong are also accessible, offering more opportunities to explore the beauty of Meghalaya.

Best Experiences:

1. Visit the serene Umiam Lake and take a boat ride.
2. Explore the Elephant Falls and Shillong Peak for panoramic views.
3. Wander through the lively Police Bazaar for local handicrafts and street food.

Travel Tip: Carry light woollen as evenings can be cool, and don't forget your camera to capture Shillong's stunning

August 2025

TAROT

Loveena Crystal Gaze
(Tea and Coffee Cup Reader, Tarot card reader)

ARIES
(March 21- April 19)

New Avenues of income and Opportunities coming your way. Universe is blessing you with your dreams and desires. Relax and let angels bring major changes in your love life and Career.

Angel msg- Angels are helping you with growth in your Career.

TAURUS
(April 20- May 21)

universe is very Happy and your wish is being granted. Allow yourself to glow and receive. Your dreams of your Career are getting manifested. Be positive.

Angel msg- Happiness awaits you now.

GEMINI
(May 22- June 20)

Universe has opened doors of Opportunities for you. Perfect timing for you to move forward. Deals will be Signed. Have faith.

Angel msg- Dreamt of projects will get manifested.

CANCER
(June 21-July 22)

Your wishes have been heard, magical energy is Surrounding you and your family. Abundance in money , new home, all your dreams will be fulfilled. Angels are bestowing blessings on you.

Angel msg- A longed for wish comes true.

LEO
(July 23- Aug 22)

Miracles will happen in your life. Happiness and love surrounds you and your home.Aim high to achieve Success. Welcome the new dawn in your life.

Angel msg- Celebrate. Good period ahead.

VIRGO
(Aug 23- Sept 22)

Angels are blessing you and guiding you in Miraculous ways. Time for changes and new beginnings in your Career. Lucrative deals will be Signed. You will sweep obstacles to one side.

Angel msg- Rough phase is over. Angels are blessing you.

LIBRA
(Sept 23- Oct 22)

Prosperity is coming your way. Spread your wings and make your move forward with Opportunities coming your way. Aura is energized for financial gains. career gains are highlighted.

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

SCORPIO
(Oct 23- Nov 22)

Seize Opportunities that come your way, happy and joyous moments will delight you. Money inflow is encouraging. Take advantage of divine timing, Angels are guiding you in your decision making regarding Career growth.

Angel msg- Universe bestows generosity on you.

SAGITTARIUS
(Nov 23- Dec 21)

All your hard work will bring fruit, investment and Career growth is highlighted You have the power, all doors are opening. Go with the flow.

Angel msg- Parents need your care and attention

CAPRICON
(Dec 22- Jan 20)

Leave your cares and worries to Angels, Timing is right for new venture. Surround yourself with positive people. All your dreams will be fulfilled. Angels are blessing you with financial stability.

Angel msg- your loved ones in heaven are blessing you.

AQUARIUS
(Jan 21- Feb 18)

Your time has come to collect your rewards from Universe. Magical period ahead for business deals to materialize. Be relaxed, leave your doubts to universe. Children will give you happiness.

Angel msg- A new Venture will turn profitable

PISCES
(Feb 19- March 20)

Rejoice, family get together will bring you happiness. Finances are highlighted. Deals will be Signed. All your waiting is now over. Visualise a favorable outcome.

Angel msg- keep charging ahead, Angels are guiding you

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- Motion Graphics
- Production Integration of VFX and Editing
- Advanced VFX Techniques
- Project Work

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