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SONU SOOD
MEET THE NEW SUPERHERO

KATRINA -VICKY
GOING STEADY

NEENA GUPTA
FRANK SPEAK

NEETU KAPOOR
MAKES A COMEBACK

BOLLYWOOD
BATTLES THE VIRUS

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MAKE UP: RAJENDRA BAPU CHAVAN
HAIR: JUNAID SHEIKH (TEAM HAKIM'S AALIM)
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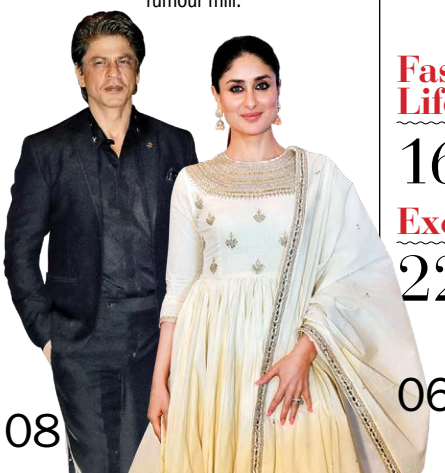
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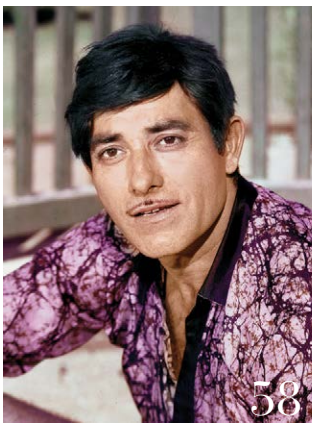












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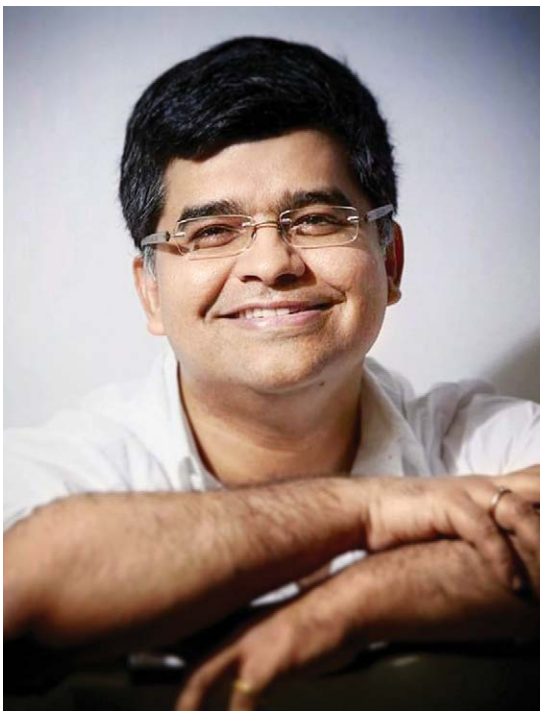
Super Sonu

It's a bird, it's a plane, no it's Superman -- goes a popular comic book trope. While the world is falling around in pieces, the last son of Krypton flies in to save the day. We all take a sigh of relief and go back to our mundane lives, fully knowing that Superman, like Santa Claus, doesn't exist. But what's the harm in imagining a world where they are indeed performing miracles. Well, one actor who came closest to emulating both Superman and Santa last year was Sonu Sood. While the world was reeling under the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the resultant lockdown and as our migrant workers were abandoning the big cities and marching to their native towns and villages under extreme conditions, Sonu came to their succour. Like the great magician David Copperfield, who once made the Statue of Liberty disappear, Sonu made transport appear out of nowhere and also supplied the workers with ration kits. He did it at a time when the governments at both the centre and the state levels were busy passing the buck and largely ignored the problem.

He didn't just stop there but kept helping his fellow citizens in different ways. If road transport couldn't be arranged, he made sure of train and air tickets. If people lost their means of livelihood, he reached out monetarily and helped them set up some new business. He even arranged for shelters for those who were asked to maintain quarantine. And when the second wave struck, he again helped arrange hospital beds, medical supplies, oxygen cylinders et al. His phone was said to be on 24/7. The dedicated helpline number was continuously bombarded with messages and calls.

Sonu has always maintained that while he started out alone initially, friends, well-wishers, fans and social workers joined him later in his crusade. His helpline is said to be maintained by volunteers. He's opened up a foundation to channel the money that individuals donate towards genuine causes. He says he has whatever he has because he loves his country. He has earned much in his life and feels it's time he gave back. And he couldn't think of a better way of doing that than by helping out those affected by the pandemic.

The Good Samaritan is on our cover this month. His greatness lies in the fact that he remains humble despite the adulation. Turn the pages to look at some superhero-themed photos and read his honest and candid answers to our queries.





Jitesh Pillai

For more on tinseltown's news and updates
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a bird's-eye view of show town's happenings

masala fix



GAME ON!

Our stars are major football buffs. They aren't just armchair enthusiasts but like to get down and dirty at a football ground as well. And what's better than the monsoon season to have some good, dirty fun with your buddies. Stars like Tiger Shroff, Disha Patani, Arjun Kapoor, Ranbir Kapoor and Dino Morea were spotted recently at a ground in Bandra playing footy. It was a regular feature for the boys before the pandemic and it seems they're keen to revive the tradition.

Katrina Kaif and Vicky Kaushal are going steady *pg 06*

Yami Gautam to star in *Oh My God 2* *pg 08*

PHOTOGRAPH: YOGEN SHAH

SALMAN KHAN, FARHAN AKHTAR, AND ZOYA AKHTAR TO PRODUCE DOCUMENTARY ON SALIM-JAVED



Salim Khan and **Javed Akhtar** are two of the most celebrated writers of the Hindi film industry. We hear that Javed Akhtar's daughter, filmmaker **Zoya Akhtar** is working on a documentary on the life of Salim-Javed. She wants to pay a tribute to the duo through her documentary. Salim Khan has also confirmed that a documentary is in the making with Zoya working on it for the last two months. The documentary has been reportedly titled *Angry Young Men*. The term Angry Young Man has been long associated with **Amitabh Bachchan** after his portrayal of the angry cop, Vijay Khanna in *Zanjeer* (1973). The film, whose success turned Bachchan into a superstar, was written by Salim-Javed. It's said the documentary will show how the two veteran writers changed the positioning of writers in Bollywood along with real-life footage from the past, some interviews with Salim-Javed's peers. It will also focus on the fallout between the two giants. *Angry Young Men* will be produced by Salman Khan Films, Excel Entertainment, and Tiger Baby. This is the first time that **Salman** will collaborate with the Akhtars.







HARSH VARRDHAN KAPOOR REVEALS KATRINA KAIF AND VICKY KAUSHAL ARE TOGETHER

We've heard about **Katrina Kaif** and **Vicky Kaushal** being in a relationship for the longest time but neither of them have ever confirmed the news. So we've let them be. Recently, however, **Harsh Varrdhan Kapoor** confirmed that the two are seeing each other. The *Mirzya* actor was on the Zoom show *By Invite Only*. He was asked to reveal one Bollywood relationship rumour that he believes is true. The actor quickly mentioned Vicky Kaushal's and Katrina Kaif's names. He even said he might land in trouble for this. He said, "Vicky and Katrina are together, that's true." He continued, "Am I going to get in trouble for saying this? I don't know. I think they're quite open about it." Well, well... we believe Katrina Kaif and Harsh's sister **Sonam Kapoor** are good friends. So there's a possibility of Harsh Varrdhan Kapoor not getting into trouble over this. Meanwhile this news will surely make Katrina and Vicky fans happy and put the rumours to rest. In the past, Katrina Kaif and Vicky Kaushal both have refused to comment about their relationship status. Vicky Kaushal had even said in an interview that this is his personal life and he would like to guard it. Katrina too has not been open about her relationship. We're willing to wait for them to make it official. In the meanwhile, we'll savour this piece of information.

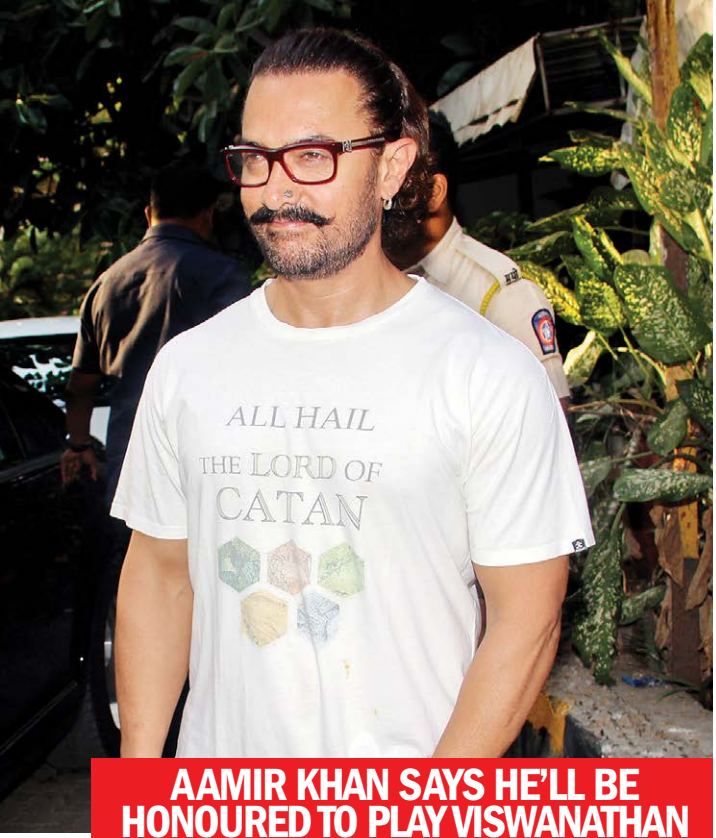
KAREENA KAPOOR KHAN MAKES IT TO THE TIMES SQUARE BILLBOARD IN NYC

KAREENA KAPOOR KHAN TOUCHED ANOTHER MILESTONE WHEN AN AD FEATURING HER GOT SPLASHED ON THE ICONIC TIMES SQUARE BILLBOARD IN NEW YORK. KAREENA RECENTLY SHARED A VIDEO CONFIRMING THE FACT. SHE CAPTIONED THE VIDEO SAYING, "SHINING BRIGHT LIKE DIAMONDS AND GOLD ON A BILLBOARD @MALABARGOLDANDDIAMONDS #TIMESSQUARENYC." HER FANS AND PEERS WERE SUPER PROUD OF HER AND DROPPED LOVE-FILLED COMMENTS. BUT ONE COMMENT WHICH GARNERED ALL THE ATTENTION WAS FROM PRIYANKA CHOPRA JONAS. THE GLOBAL ICON DROPPED A HEART-STRUCK EMOJI AND A HIGH-FIVE EMOTICON, EXPRESSING HER EXCITEMENT FOR KAREENA KAPOOR KHAN. SWEET!



DILIP KUMAR PASSES AWAY

Legendary actor **Dilip Kumar,** who was popularly known as the 'tragedy king', passed away on the morning of July 7. The actor was 98 and is survived by his wife, veteran actor Saira Banu. Doctors treating him said Dilip Kumar suffered from advanced prostate cancer that had spread to other organs of his body. "He had water in pleural cavity, and he suffered kidney failure. He required blood transfusion multiple times. We carried out the last transfusion but it did not help." The actor was bedridden for several months and had become unresponsive in the last few days. With a career that spanned over five decades, he's considered as one of the greatest actors that India has ever seen. Some of his best films include *Devdas* (1955), *Naya Daur* (1957), *Madhumati* (1958), *Mughal-e-Azam, Gunga Jumna* (1961), *Ram Aur Shyam* (1967), and *Shakti* (1982) to name a few. Our condolences are with the family.



AAMIR KHAN SAYS HE'LL BE HONOURED TO PLAY VISWANATHAN ANAND IN HIS BIOPIC

Aamir Khan shared that he would be honoured to play the lead in the much anticipated biopic on the Indian chess prodigy **Vishwanathan Anand**, which is currently in the works and will be jointly produced by **Aanand L Rai** and **Mahaveer Jain**. Aamir and Vishwanathan Anand recently came together for an online event to play chess and raise funds for members of the chess community affected by COVID-19. Their exciting game and conversation traversed various topics that kept the audience glued. The conversation soon drifted to the upcoming biopic and Aamir was asked if he was interested in playing Anand in it, if offered. "Is that even a question?" the actor asked. "It would not only be an honour and pleasure to play Vishy but it would also be highly exciting to get into his mind. Whenever I am playing a character, I try to understand the person's mind. With Vishy being a real person, I would spend a lot of time with him to understand his mind and how his mind works. I would also understand from his wife and his family how his mind works. And hopefully, I will surprise Vishy when I play him on screen. If and when that happens, I would look forward to that," added Aamir. Fingers crossed.

AKSHAY KUMAR MAKES A BIG REVELATION ON *KHILADIYON KA KHILADI'S* 25TH ANNIVERSARY



Akshay Kumar is known as the 'Khiladi' Kumar as he's done several films with *Khiladi* in the title and all of them were superhits. One such film, *Khiladiyon Ka Khiladi* marked 25 years of its release recently and the actor made a big revelation about the film on its anniversary. Akshay shared a meme on his Twitter profile, which featured several top wrestlers who've defeated **The Undertaker** – the world famous wrestling champ. Akshay made it to this list because of The Undertaker vs AK match in *Khiladiyon Ka Khiladi*. Akshay shared this meme and confessed that the scene actually featured **Brian Lee**. He said, "A hilarious note to mark 25 years to the release of #KhiladiyonKaKhiladi tomorrow! A fun fact though: it was wrestler Brian Lee who played The Undertaker in the film." Some days later, the meme caught the attention of the real Undertaker, who challenged Akshay Kumar to a 'real rematch'. To which Akhay wittily replied, "Let me check on my insurance and get back, bro!" Hilarious indeed.



SALMAN KHAN ALL SET TO REPRISE THALAPATHY VIJAY'S ROLE IN THE *MASTER* REMAKE

Salman Khan has reportedly bought the rights for the official Hindi remake of *Master*. The film which starred **Thalapathy Vijay** and **Vijay Sethupathi** was a big hit at the Tamil box-office. It's said that while Salman will reprise Thalpathy Vijay's role, another senior actor is being sought to play Vijay Sethupathi's role. Salman reportedly doesn't want to do a frame-by-frame remake and has requested a rewrite of the film to suit the Hindi belt better. The actor is one of the busiest superstars around. While he will step into his *Tiger* shoes for YRF's *Tiger* franchise, he will go back to playing the sweet Prem for Sooraj Barjatya's next. He has Farhad Samji's drama *Kabhi Eid Kabhi Diwali,* which is now titled *Bhaijaan*. Salman will reportedly play big brother to three younger brothers, who conspire to get him married so that they too can marry without any guilt. He also has *Kick 2* and will reportedly announce two more films next month. Phew!



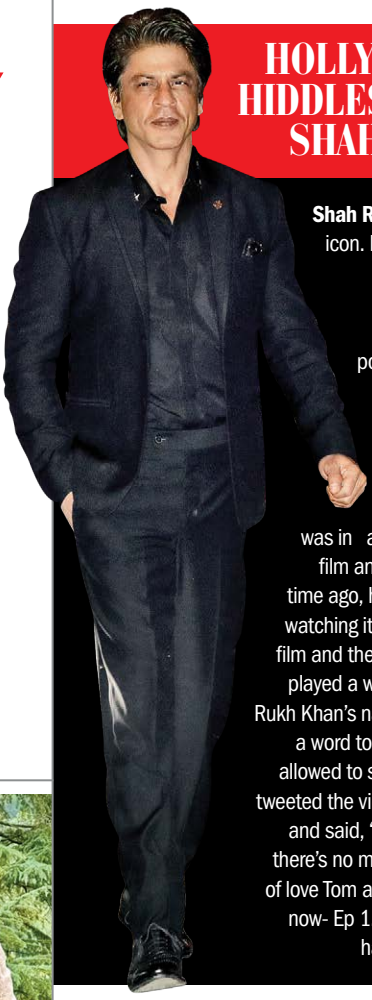
KARTIK AARYAN TO TEAM UP WITH SAJID NADIADWALA FOR AN EPIC LOVE STORY

KARTIK AARYAN IS ALL SET TO TEAM UP WITH PRODUCER **SAJID NADIADWALA** FOR AN EPIC LOVE STORY CALLED *SATYANARAYAN KI KATHA*. THE FILM WILL BE DIRECTED BY NATIONAL AWARD WINNING MARATHI DIRECTOR, **SAMEER VIDHWANS** OF *ANANDI GOPAL* FAME. IT WILL GO ON FLOORS TOWARDS THE END OF THIS YEAR. AS PER REPORTS, SAJID NADIADWALA HAS BEEN DISCUSSING A POTENTIAL COLLABORATION WITH KARTIK FOR A WHILE NOW AND THEY HAVE FOUND A SCRIPT THAT MAKES FOR A PERFECT UNION. IT'S SAID SAMEER VIDHWANS IS PLANNING SOMETHING BIG IN THE ROMANTIC GENRE ON THE LINES OF SLB'S GRAND VENTURES. WE HEAR THAT THE MAKERS ARE IN TALKS WITH **SHRADDHA KAPOOR** AS THEY ARE PLANNING TO BRING A FRESH PAIR ON THE BIG SCREEN.



YAMI GAUTAM TO STAR IN *OH MY GOD 2* ALONGSIDE AKSHAY KUMAR

Akshay Kumar starrer *Oh My God* is soon going to get a sequel and now we hear that the cast has been decided as well. The film will feature **Yami Gautam** and **Pankaj Tripathy** as Akshay's co-stars. Akshay is expected to play God again in the film. *Oh My God 2* will be directed by **Amit Rai** who has earlier directed *Road To Sangam* and a short film on sanitary pads titled *IPad*. With such an interesting cast in place and an entertaining story in hand, this one is something to look forward to. Yami Gautam and Akshay Kumar will work together for the first time on the big screen. Yami Gautam who recently tied the knot to *Uri* director **Aditya Dhar** is looking forward to the film.



HOLLYWOOD STAR TOM HIDDLESTON PRAISES SHAH RUKH KHAN



Shah Rukh Khan is truly a global icon. His fans are spread across the world and they include celebs as well. Recently in an interview with an entertainment portal, **Tom Hiddleston,** who plays Loki in the Marvel films and who currently has his own series on Disney Plus, talked about *Devdas* (2002) and how he was mesmerised by the film. The Hollywood star said he was in awe of the **Sanjay Leela Bhansali** film and said that though he'd seen it a long time ago, he still remembered the experience of watching it in a local cinema hall. He termed the film and the experience as extraordinary. He then played a word association game and took Shah Rukh Khan's name when he was asked to associate a word to Bollywood. The *Loki* actor said, "Am I allowed to say Shah Rukh Khan again? " SRK re-tweeted the video and showered the actor with love and said, "You are kind, God of Mischief... hope there's no mischief behind this claim though. Lots of love Tom and can't wait to binge Loki!!! Starting now- Ep 1." We love this mutual admiration that has developed across the seven seas.

Did you know? Yami Gautam and Aditya Dhar's wedding planner just got one day to plan their wedding



Yami Gautam and **Aditya Dhar** tied the knot on June 4 and the actress broke the news through her instagram account, where she was looking drop-dead gorgeous. While we were caught unawares by this big news, it looks like her wedding planner survived a bigger surprise. Yami and Aditya's wedding planner apparently was informed just a day before the wedding festivities began that he had been hired for the big day. **Gitesh Sharma** said that Yami's father contacted him just a day before the wedding ceremonies began. He further revealed that the couple asked him to keep things simple. "They didn't want anything lavish and wanted a simple décor as they were anyway having the beautiful backdrop of Himachal for the wedding. The *mandap* was decorated with banana leaves and marigold flowers and I had a basic and yet elegant gold-and-white theme running across the décor. The *mehndi* was held in the courtyard and they got married in front of a Deodar tree." The *shaadi* was followed by an elaborate lunch or *Mandi dham*, a traditional feast prepared in Himachali style and served during joyous ceremonies. It comprised the *sepu badi* (*urad dal* dumplings in spinach gravy), *kaddu aur chana khatta*, and *badana* for dessert. Mouthwatering from the looks of it.



SUSHANT SINGH RAJPUT'S SEA-VIEW APARTMENT IN BANDRA UP FOR RENT

SUSHANT SINGH RAJPUT HAD LEASED A SPACIOUS HOUSE IN BANDRA IN DECEMBER 2019. THIS SEA-VIEW APARTMENT IN BANDRA WAS SUPREMELY STYLISH AND SPACIOUS. THE ACTOR LIVED THERE FOR SOME MONTHS AND HAD RENTED IT FOR RS 4.5 LAKHS A MONTH. ACCORDING TO REPORTS, THE APARTMENT IS NOW UP FOR RENT. A CELEBRITY BROKER CONFIRMED THE NEWS. "THE APARTMENT HAS BEEN PUT UP FOR LEASE BUT HAS YET TO GET A TENANT." JUNE 14 MARKED THE FIRST DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF SUSHANT SINGH RAJPUT. THE ACTOR WAS REMEMBERED BY HIS PEERS FROM THE TV AND FILM INDUSTRY, WHO TOOK TO SOCIAL MEDIA TO TALK ABOUT HIM. **KRITI SANON, ANKITA LOKHANDE, PARINEETI CHOPRA, KARTIK AARYAN, PRIYANKA CHOPRA JONAS** AND MANY OTHER CELEBRITIES EXPRESSED THEIR GRIEF THROUGH EMOTIONAL POSTS.

preview

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



ARTISTIC FERVOUR

ALOK KUMAR

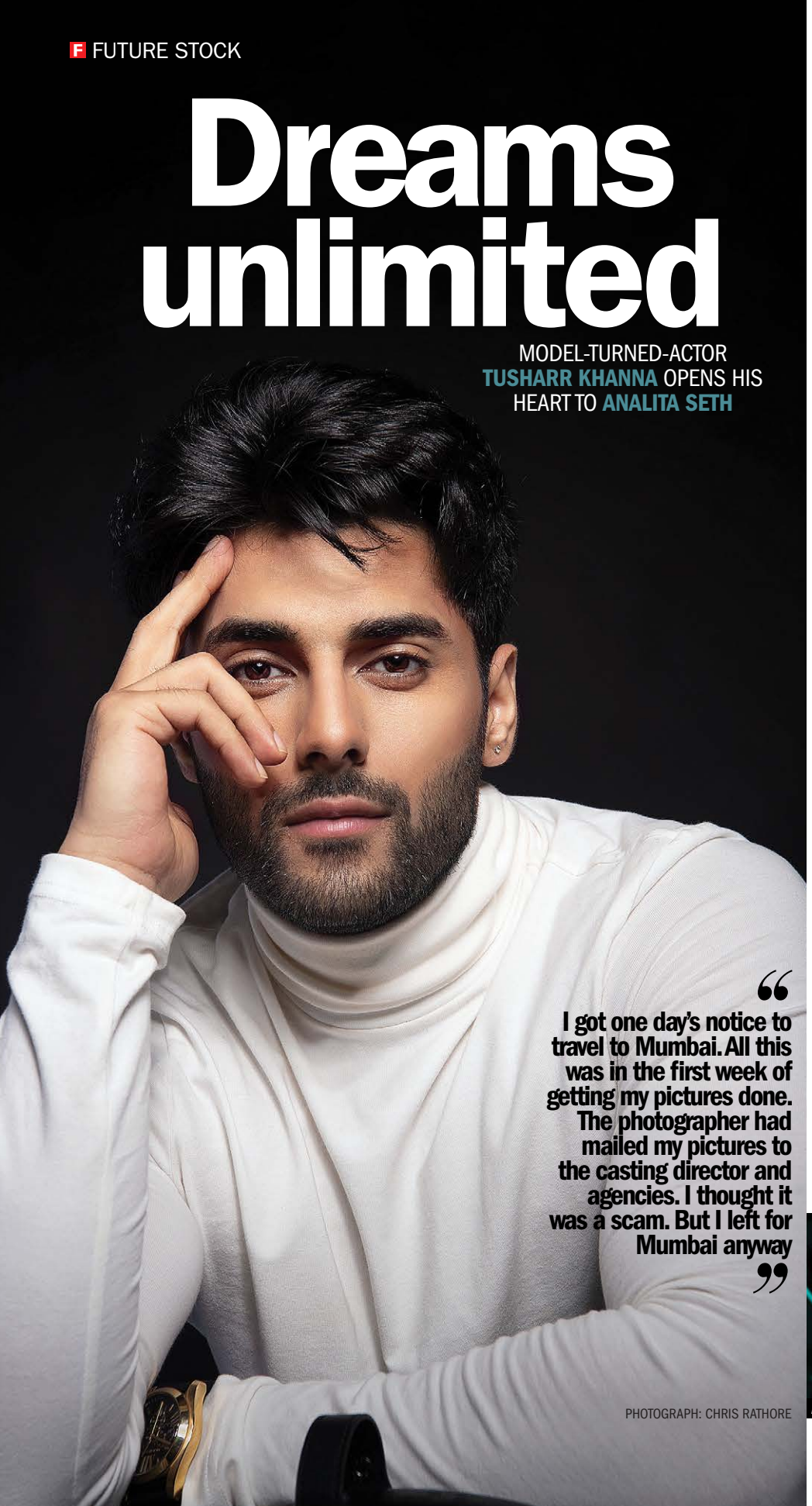
X FACTOR: PASSION FOR THE CRAFT

Both his parents are commercial artists working for the publishing industry in Delhi but Alok Kumar wasn't interested in paints and brushes. His dream was to become an aeronautical engineer. He soon realised that he doesn't have the aptitude for studies and quit academics after the 12th standard. He got into graphic design and was soon working with a jewellery brand. A visit to Mandi House changed the course of his life. He started working in theatre, doing backstage jobs and later took to acting. Theatre made him come in contact with like-minded individuals and he ended up getting a starring role in the independent film *Shuttlecock Boys* (2012), which garnered rave reviews on the festival circuit. His more recent works include series like *MTV Abhineta, Final Solutions, Flesh* and a TVC for *Amazon Apni Dukaan.* He was also a part of the play *Lassanwala* that opened at Prithvi Theatre and was in 13 productions of the show. He performed at the 12th META in Delhi where he received a META for Best acting in supporting role in 2017. An avid reader, Alok loves to read biographies in his free time and watch movies.

Actors Tusharr Khanna and Avinash Tiwary reveal their hopes and desires *pg 10*

Dreams unlimited

MODEL-TURNED-ACTOR **TUSHARR KHANNA** OPENS HIS HEART TO **ANALITA SETH**



"I got one day's notice to travel to Mumbai. All this was in the first week of getting my pictures done. The photographer had mailed my pictures to the casting director and agencies. I thought it was a scam. But I left for Mumbai anyway"

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS RATHORE

Handsome hunk Tusharr Khanna was born in Amritsar. Since his father had a transferable job, he ended up changing schools a lot. From Amritsar, the family moved to Delhi and then to Noida and hence he found it difficult to make friends and sustain friendships. That led to him to have imaginary friends. Films and comics fuelled his hyperactive imagination. As he grew older, he realised that he can live all these characters and more if he became an actor. Ever since he had that epiphany, he devoted his energies into becoming an actor. "I did a filmmaking course from Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication in Pune and I've been involved with theatre all my life. I've been on stage since the age of three. So the acting bug had bitten me quite early," he smiles.

Like many other outsiders keen for a break on the silver screen, Tusharr too started as a model. His first assignment was a TVC for Cafe Coffee Day while he was still in school. They were auditioning for the ad in his school and he got the part. "I received a cheque of fifteen thousand rupees for it," he recalls. "I gave that



Bekaaboo Season 2.



“Like me, SRK is from Delhi and has a theatre background. He didn’t have his mother and father around him to give him the support when he came here. He didn’t have that luxury and privilege so it must have been much more difficult for him”

to my mother.” Mumbai is known as the mecca for all young actors and Tusharr wasn’t immune to the city’s charms. He desperately wanted to pack his bags and move here but lacked the means to do so. At 21, after completing an acting workshop with Barry John, he got some photos clicked and sent them to a modelling agency in Mumbai. To his surprise, he got called for an ad with Sonakshi Sinha. “I got one day’s notice to travel to Mumbai. All this was in the first week of getting my pictures done. The photographer had mailed my pictures to the casting director and agencies. I thought it was a scam. But I left for Mumbai anyway. The person who was coordinating the ad told me to audition for several more and I ended up bagging them all. It was a dream beginning of sorts,” he reveals.

He slowly made contacts, did workshops and got his first television show, *Piya Albela*, produced by Rajshri Productions. The show proved to be a hit and he got sucked into the daily grind of working in a Hindi soap, shooting 2-3 episodes a day and literally living on the sets. They say the burnout rate is the highest among daily soap actors and Tusharr felt it too. He took a long sabbatical and returned with a web show for AltBalaji, called *Bekaaboo Season 2.* His popularity soared even further with the bold show and people started calling him OTT”s greek god. “That’s my journey so far in a gist. I’ve been offered two films but haven’t started shooting for them because of the pandemic. I hope the shooting starts soon as I’m raring to begin my innings on the big screen,” he confides.

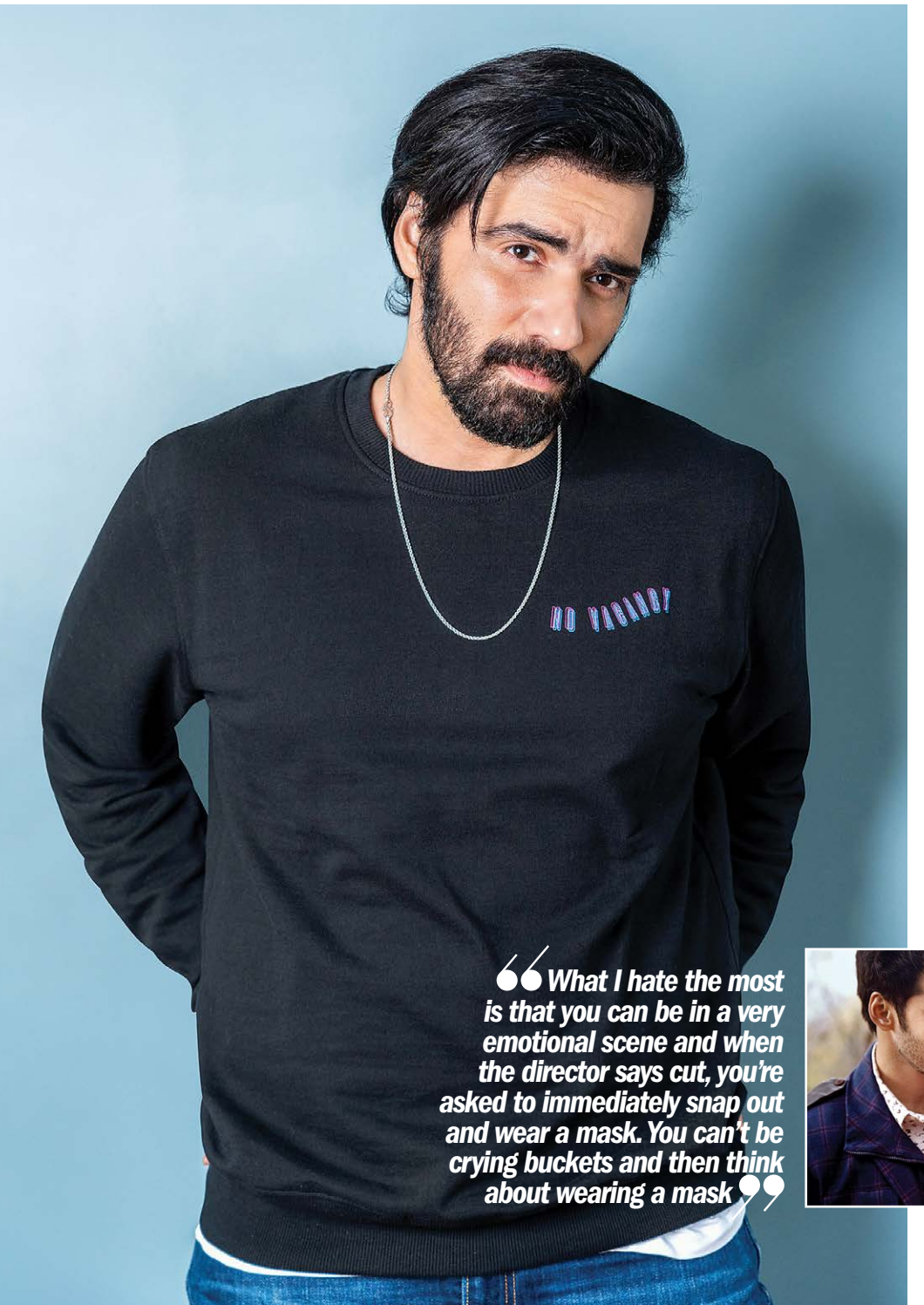
The actor has had his share of setbacks but instead of calling them setbacks he calls them learnings. He’s made a practice of reassessing a negative situation and tries to draw something positive out of it so that he can do better if faced with the same set of circumstances later in life. He’s a firm believer in the fact that hard work and dedication can take you places in this industry, and gives the example of his idol Shah Rukh Khan, who made it to the top despite being a complete outsider. “Like me, SRK is from Delhi and has a theatre background. He didn’t have his mother and father around him to give him the support when he came here. He didn’t have that luxury and privilege so it must have been much more difficult for him. So I feel very inspired by his journey. He didn’t just go on to become one of the best actors, but he’s also the number one star, the king. He’s a great actor, a brilliant businessman and the fittest man in the industry,” gushes the actor.

Tusharr wants to similarly carve his own legacy and inspire other newcomers through his work. He believes in the law of the Universe and says if the Universe has given him so much then it becomes his duty to give back that much more. Besides SRK, he’s inspired by Ranbir Kapoor and Deepika Padukone, whom he considers to be the best in Bollywood. His Hollywood idols are Tom Hanks and Natalie Portman. Besides acting, he loves to play sports like football and basketball. He’s a complete movie buff and watches at least one movie a day. He’s also into music and knows how to play both the guitar and the violin. He’s a spiritual person at heart and hence reads books on spiritualism as well as biographies of successful people in order to learn from them. He’s happy the song video he shot for T series with singer Ipsitaa is going to release soon. “I’d love to talk about my two film projects but I’ve been ordered not to. I can’t break such rules right now as my journey has just begun. I don’t want to jinx anything at this stage. I’ve miles to go and I want the voyage to be a memorable one. Wish me luck,” says he, before signing off.

Here’s hoping his dreams are fulfilled. ■

ACTS OF FAITH

AVINASH TIWARY CONFESSES TO ANALITA SETH THAT IT'S HIS LOVE FOR ART WHICH FUELS THE ACTOR IN HIM



"What I hate the most is that you can be in a very emotional scene and when the director says cut, you're asked to immediately snap out and wear a mask. You can't be crying buckets and then think about wearing a mask"

Making the most of the new normal as they call it, a virtual meet with this talented actor was the only way to find out what he's been upto. When asked what his life has been like in 2021, he smiles, "Aren't we still living in 2020," and you can't help but agree.

Avinash Tiwary started out doing TV serials like *Ek Aangan Ke Ho Gaye Do* and *Bikhri Aas Nikhri Preet* which came on DD National and later he also did *Yudh* with Amitabh Bachchan. He made his feature film debut in 2017 with *Tu Hai Mera Sunday* which won him a lot of critical acclaim. His claim to fame was *Laila Majnu* (2018), which was directed by Imtiaz Ali's brother Sajid Ali. He reunited with his *Laila Majnu* co-star, Tripti Dimri in Anushka Sharma's production, *Bulbbul* (2020) and won a nomination for the FLYX Filmfare OTT Awards. His last release was *The Girl On The Train* (2021)



Laila Majnu

with Parineeti Chopra and Aditi Rao Hydari, where he played the antagonist. He was praised for the ease with which he essayed his negative character. Avinash has no qualms about his films releasing on OTT as according to him, that means more and more people are watching them. He says he received messages from people thanking him as web shows and movies were the only things that kept them busy during the lockdown.



"When I first saw the trailer of Rockstar, I was so envious of Ranbir Kapoor. Laila Majnu was closer to Rockstar so that feeling was taken care of. When I started off, I used to envy Abhay Deol for the roles he was doing and Farhan Akhtar"



Bulbbul

Sharing his experience of going back to set briefly during the last unlock, Avinash says "I started work and that was the only normal thing in life. But the way we were shooting with masks and PPE kits was a little awkward. But kudos to the team for pulling it off. We were being tested twice a week during the whole shoot," he reveals. While prevention seems to be the only cure for the coronavirus, Avinash shares that for an actor, shooting with protocols has its pros and cons, "What I hate the most is that you can be in an emotional scene and when the director says cut, you're asked to immediately snap out and wear a mask. You can't be crying buckets and then think about wearing a mask. As for the good things, we know people have become more focused. The efficiency rate has really gone up."

Avinash's work so far can be seen as being part of the middle-of-the road cinema. It's neither pure art nor purely commercial. He agrees with the fact that commercial cinema has a certain charm to it but says he never saw himself doing it. He says he chooses his roles based on his likes and dislikes. "I've always been the audience. There is a certain kind of cinema you like and that doesn't mean I don't like escapist cinema but I never saw myself doing that." Then he contradicts himself by saying *Laila Majnu* was a commercial subject. "It was a film made by Imtiaz Ali. For some reason it didn't reach out to the world but that doesn't mean that it wasn't a commercial idea." His next is a series called *Dongri To Dubai,* which co-stars Kay Kay Menon, Amyra Dastur and Kritika Kamra. He plays 'the biggest gangster in the world' in it and calls it a hugely commercial idea. He never goes by the banner or the director alone but wants to know every aspect of it. "My choices are defined by the people associated with it, the writer, the director, actors, and composers. I want to know the story in detail." He adds that these parameters haven't limited his choices. "You will be surprised by the variety of roles I'm doing. I don't think many actors around me have the same versatility that I have to offer."

Avinash grew up wanting to do a PhD in physics. He took admission in engineering only to drop out in the first year and take admission in Barry John's school of acting. Later, he went to New York Film Academy to study cinema there. "Everyday I go on sets and wonder why I took up this profession. Why did I choose to be an actor? I never thank my stars, I rather question my choices because it's not an easy job. But I love it." He doesn't find any role to be impossible. For him, the mark of an actor is that he should make his role look effortless. Talking of actors who inspire him, he mentions Ranbir Kapoor. "When I first saw the trailer of *Rockstar,* I was so envious of Ranbir Kapoor. *Laila Majnu* was closer to *Rockstar* so that feeling was taken care of. When I started off, I used to envy Abhay Deol for the roles he was doing and Farhan Akhtar. They were both doing very interesting films back then. It's a regular thing now but they were doing niche content back then."

He has a philosophical bent of mind and has always been putting Sufi-esque stuff on his Instagram. Ask him where it all comes from and he gives an enigmatic smile and says he writes whatever comes to his mind. He ends with a favourite quote of his -- "Do not dream...they limit you... life is infinite." ■

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SAREE JAHAN SE ACCHA

VIDYA BALAN

WHERE: FOR *SHERNI* PROMOTIONS

THE X FACTOR: NO ONE DOES SAREE BETTER THAN VIDYA. PERIOD.

Vidya Balan has redefined the way Indian women look at sarees. She has draped the nine yards quite often but has never been known to repeat her look. Wearing a Baise Gaba creative for *Sherni* promotions, Vidya, styled by Shounak Amonkar and Pranay Jaitly of Who Wore What When fame, looked like a monsoon dream come alive. Without any frills, sequins or accessories, Vidya made this traditional weave in the beautiful earthy colour look perfect for any outing. Minimal jewellery and a sleek hairdo, there was nothing we didn't love about this look.

Earrings ahoy! *pg 16*

Neon hues *pg 17*

Keeping it short *pg 18*

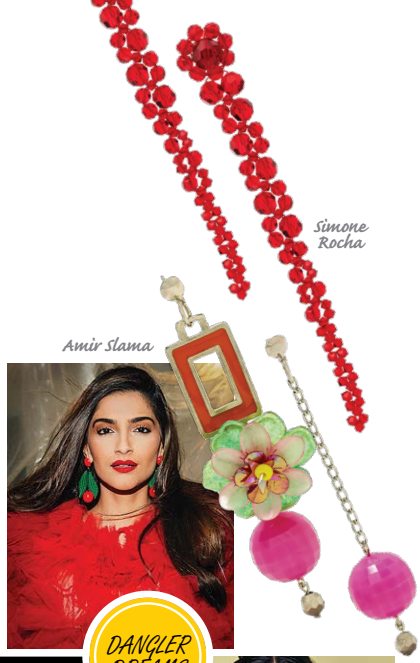
COMPILED BY: ANALITA SETH
PHOTOGRAPHS: YOGEN SHAH





EARS TOGETHER

Sonam Kapoor Ahuja and her eternal romance with statement earrings



Simone Rocha

Amir Slama

DANGLER DREAMS





SONAM KAPOOR AHUJA

Saint Laurent





Roxanne Assoulin





Amir Slama2



Saint Laurent

You can never have enough jewellery. Especially statement earrings that hold the enchanting power to elevate any simple look. One style icon who has proved the importance of a simple piece of jewellery in a glamorous ensemble is Sonam Kapoor. We've seen her try abstract metallic designs, funky '70s styles, heavy intricate Indian danglers and even the simple stud and hoop trends. With Sonam, it's not just the choice of accessory, it's also how she pairs it with an entire outfit. She's tried heavy earrings on a busy look and made it work, she's tried minimal jewellery with a simple saree, and made a fashon statement. So if you're looking at investing in an accessory then go for earrings and Sonam Kapoor's collection is your reference point.



"Jewelry is like the perfect spice - it always complements what's already there."
Diane Von Furstenberg

HIGH NEON

Neon is the new black



ANANYA PANDAY



Paris Texas



Ground Zero



MALAIKA ARORA



Mulberry

We've seen neon on the runway, we've seen it in couture. Now, since casual is the new big thing, neon is sliding into our wardrobes in the casual wear section too. It's one of the most universal colours to stand out even in a simple outfit. While summers are for lighter shades, this bright colour seems to be a constant for fashionistas around B-town.

A unisex trend, we've seen neon in active wear and summery ensembles. If you want to elevate your look, you can opt for a co-ordinated ensemble or simply pair with denims or a dull colour to balance out the hue.



Roxanne Assoulin



Philipp Plein2

"I feel like my style's always been influenced by 'less is more.' The coolest styles are kind of simple and classic." Chris Evans



MALAVIKA MOHANAN

BRIGHT BOOK



TIGER SHROFF



VeeCollective

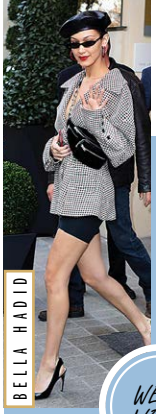


Philippe Model Paris

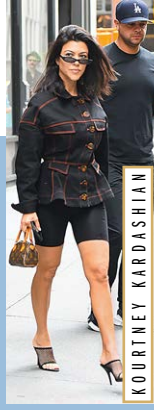
Philipp Plein



Polo Ralph Lauren

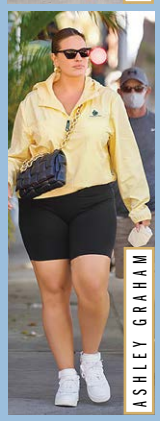

BELLA HADID


GIGI HADID

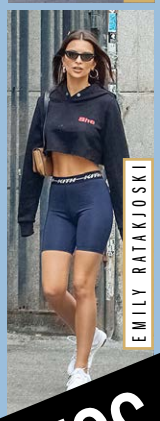

KOURTNEY KARDASHIAN

WEST-WORLD


HAILEY BEIBER


ASHLEY GRAHAM

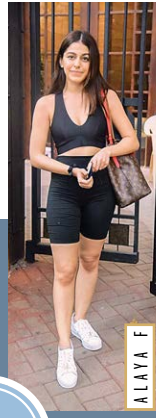

KIM KARDASHIAN


EMILY RATAKJOSKI

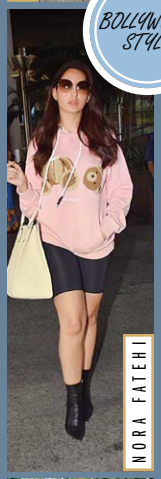

PRIYANKA CHOPRA

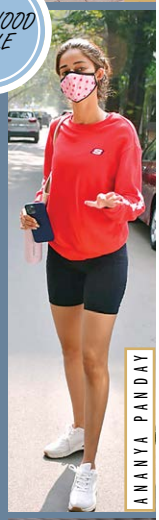

PRINCESS DIANA

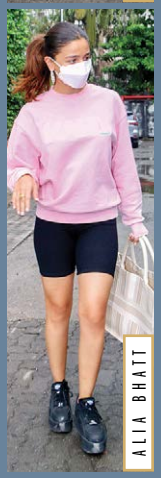

DEEPIKA PADUKONE


ALAYA F

BOLLYWOOD STYLE


NORA FATEHI


ANANYA PANDAY


ALIA BHATT


RAKUL PREET SINGH

PRINCESS DIARIES

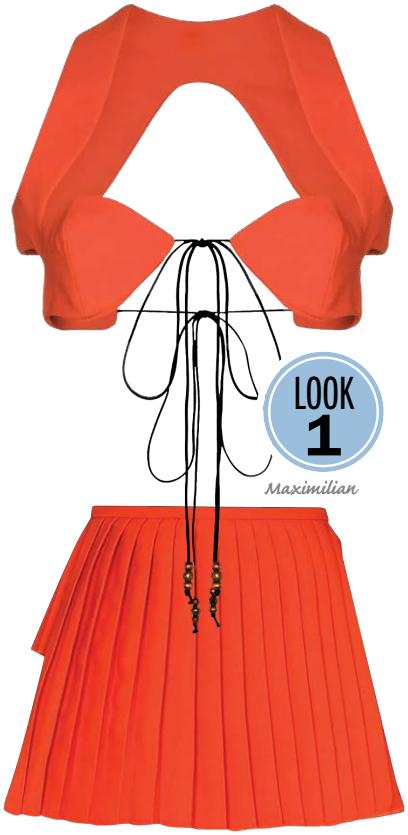
Lady Di did it first...

The year 2020 will be known for the resurgence of comfort clothing. We've spent so much time in baggy sweatshirts and yoga pants in the lockdown that materials like denims and velvet seem suffocating now. Couture has been temporarily replaced with a comfort-first wardrobe. With the rise of active wear and breathable dressing, the biker shorts have become a rage once again. When you look at this piece of clothing, you are instantly reminded of the image of Princess Diana, walking in a parking lot with a bag in one hand and her keys in another, pairing her biker shorts with an oversized sweatshirt. We've seen several recreations of this outfit over the years and now it's more than just a rendition, it's the year's most spotted trend. So if you've not tried it yet, please do it pronto. Move away from the dreams of princess gowns and opt for princess biker shorts instead.

"Stick to the classics, and you can't ever go wrong. I see old ladies on the street who have fabulous style and realize it's because they are probably wearing really classic items that they've had for years and years. I think if you find something that suits you, you should just stick to it." Alexa Chung

SUMMER COOLERS

Tara Sutaria's polka dotted co-ords are the perfect way to juggle between summer and monsoon



LOOK 1

Maximilian



We are aware of Tara Sutaria's love for mini skirts. Her entire wardrobe during the promotions of *Student Of The Year 2* was an inspired take on millennial fashion and she's continued to serve us with cooler looks since. Stepping out in style, Tara was snapped in a cotton polka dotted separates and we couldn't help but fall in love with how well she pulled it off. She finished off the look with a beige bag and matching slippers. A bit retro with a touch of millennial style, the matching printed separates are a trendy way to get through summer. You accessorise this look with the perfect jewellery, a pair of hoops or a chic pendant and you can turn this casual look into a formal number.



LoveShackFancy

LOOK 2



LoveShackFancy



Honorine

LOOK 3





A.P.C.

LOOK 4



Dsquared2

"Style is knowing who you are, what you want to say, and not giving a damn." Gore Vidal

FEAST FOR EYES

Shilpa Shetty's look for her birthday is perfect for a casual lunch date


Nanushka


Forte Forte


Etro

LOOK 1


Wandler


Bottega Veneta


Stella McCartney


Gianvito Rossi


SHILPA SHETTY KUNDRA

LOOK 2






Rosie Assoulin

Missing You Already

Prada


Pinko

LOOK 3

Shilpa Shetty's personal style is quite quirky. She constantly experiments with silhouettes, funky designs and prints. She's tried some of the most unconventional sarees, suits, dresses and more. For her birthday this year, Shilpa stepped out for a casual lunch and her outfit caught our attention. The ensemble swung between minimalism and maximalism and we loved the balance it maintained. She opted for a tropical print jumpsuit that she layered with a plain white blazer and a tan clenching belt. She finished off the look with Tangerine heels, a leather strap watch, a sleek sling and golden hoops. While the look sounds busy, Shilpa's choice of colours and prints elevated all the elements in the ensemble. So if you're feeling bold and want to give your summer look a twist, this layering technique is one to try for sure.

exclusives



POWER OF ONE

I just helped 10 lakh migrants. The number 90 lakhs includes all the people who approached me for help. Yes, almost a crore people connected with me for different reasons like employment, education, medical help...

Sonu Sood talks about how a single act of charity led him to become a one-man army whose reach impacted thousands affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

PHOTOGRAPHS: ROHAN SHRESTHA

IS IT A BIRD?

IS IT A PLANE?

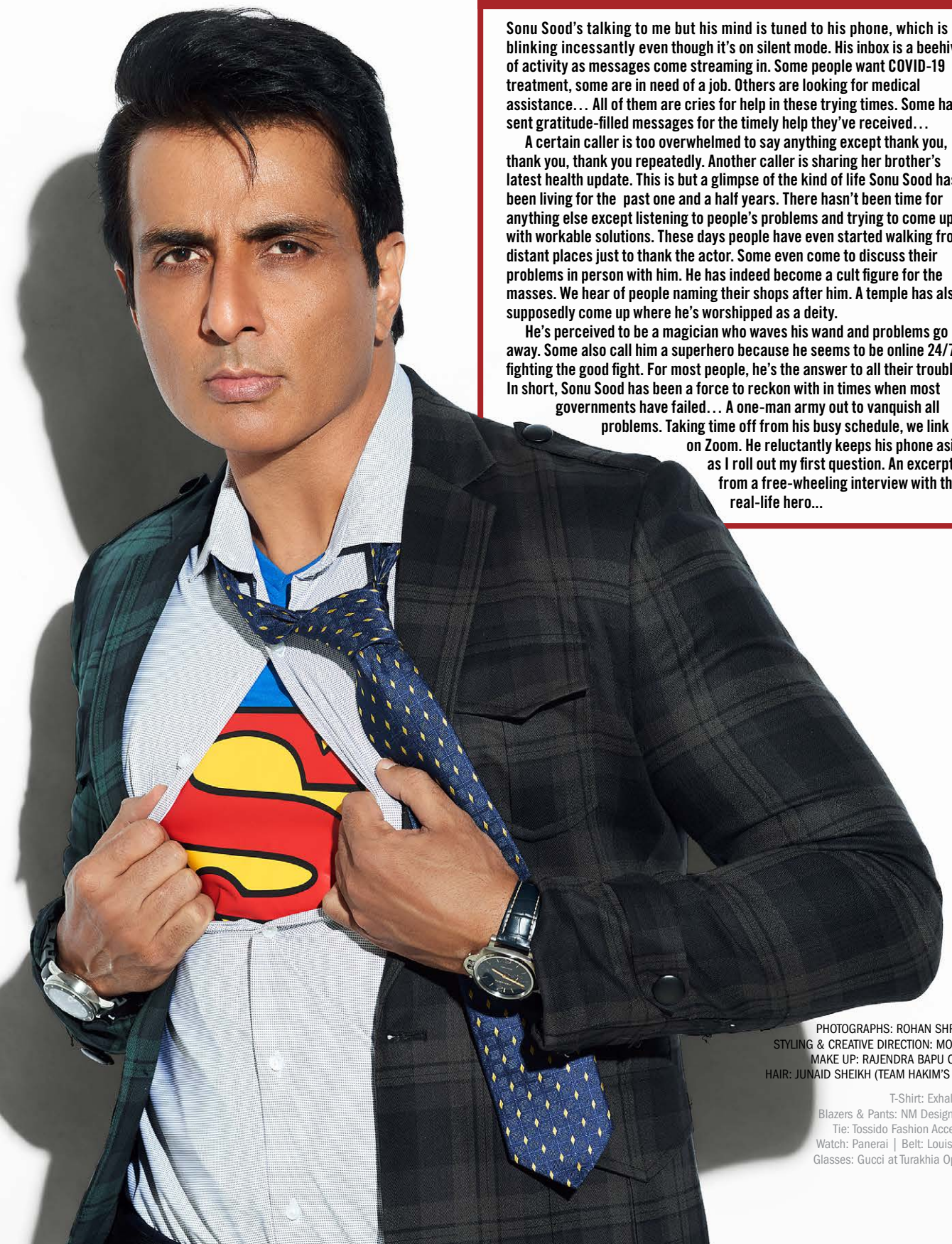
NO IT'S SUPERMAN?

SONU SOOD TELLS ANURADHA CHOUDHARY THAT HELPING OTHERS HAS GIVEN HIM A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE

Sonu Sood's talking to me but his mind is tuned to his phone, which is blinking incessantly even though it's on silent mode. His inbox is a beehive of activity as messages come streaming in. Some people want COVID-19 treatment, some are in need of a job. Others are looking for medical assistance… All of them are cries for help in these trying times. Some have sent gratitude-filled messages for the timely help they've received…

A certain caller is too overwhelmed to say anything except thank you, thank you, thank you repeatedly. Another caller is sharing her brother's latest health update. This is but a glimpse of the kind of life Sonu Sood has been living for the past one and a half years. There hasn't been time for anything else except listening to people's problems and trying to come up with workable solutions. These days people have even started walking from distant places just to thank the actor. Some even come to discuss their problems in person with him. He has indeed become a cult figure for the masses. We hear of people naming their shops after him. A temple has also supposedly come up where he's worshipped as a deity.

He's perceived to be a magician who waves his wand and problems go away. Some also call him a superhero because he seems to be online 24/7, fighting the good fight. For most people, he's the answer to all their troubles. In short, Sonu Sood has been a force to reckon with in times when most governments have failed… A one-man army out to vanquish all problems. Taking time off from his busy schedule, we link up on Zoom. He reluctantly keeps his phone aside as I roll out my first question. An excerpt from a free-wheeling interview with the real-life hero...



PHOTOGRAPHS: ROHAN SHRESTHA
STYLING & CREATIVE DIRECTION: MOHIT RAI
MAKE UP: RAJENDRA BAPU CHAVAN
HAIR: JUNAID SHEIKH (TEAM HAKIM'S AALIM)

T-Shirt: Exhale Label
Blazers & Pants: NM Design Studio
Tie: Tossido Fashion Accessories
Watch: Panerai | Belt: Louis Vuitton
Glasses: Gucci at Turakhia Opticians

> PEOPLE COME TO MUMBAI AND TELL THE AUTORICKSHAW DRIVERS AT THE RAILWAY STATIONS *KI* SONU *KE GHAR JANA HAI* (DROP US AT SONU SOOD'S HOUSE) AND THEY GET DROPPED AT MY PLACE WITHOUT FAIL



EARLIER, PEOPLE USED TO REACH OUT TO YOU VIA CALL OR TEXT. NOW, THEY'VE STARTED COMING TO YOUR GATES...

Yes. Now, they've started coming to my house. People come to Mumbai and tell the autorickshaw drivers at the railway stations *ki Sonu ke ghar jana hai* (drop us at Sonu Sood's house) and they get dropped at my place without fail. They sometimes reach at 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. and wait the whole day to meet me. Earlier, I used to come out to meet them multiple times but then I wasn't able to do any work because of the frequency. So, now I come out just once a day and till that time, my people take the details about who wants what kind of help. Many want funds to further their education, while others need medical help and so on...

YOU MEET THEM ALL?

Yes. They say that, for us, hope means Sonu Sood. A lot of girls who come to meet me get stuck because there are no trains or buses available for them to go back. So I make sure they get a safe place to stay till transport can be arranged.

Co ord Track suit: Custom | Socks: Sock Stellar



HOW DO YOU REACT WHEN PEOPLE CALL YOU A SUPERHERO?

I'm no superhero. I just feel connected to the masses. There's some kind of a chord I've stuck with them. They feel I can solve their problems. In that way, I feel blessed.

HOW DID IT ALL START?

It started last year when I thought of sending a family back to Karnataka and the 'family' turned out to be 350 people. Those were the first buses that I sent from Mumbai to Karnataka. The journey of sending the migrant labourers through trains, buses and bikes got started from there. I vowed I won't stop till the last person reaches his home safely. It took a few months because people stranded in such faraway places as Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Philippines and Russia reached out to me as they wanted to come back home. There were some kids from the Philippines whose liver transplant surgeries were scheduled in the Max Hospital and the Apollo Hospital in Delhi. They were stuck because of the lockdown. The local Filipino people heard that there is an Indian who is helping people reach home so they approached me. I helped 39 such kids. There were 41 kids actually but two passed away before I could get the necessary permissions.

YOUR ONLY REWARD IS THE PEOPLE'S BLESSINGS...

It's a different feeling altogether. You know, all these years when I was

> **I'M NO SUPERHERO. I JUST FEEL CONNECTED TO THE MASSES. THERE'S SOME KIND OF A CHORD I'VE STUCK WITH THEM. THEY FEEL I CAN SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS. IN THAT WAY, I FEEL BLESSED**

Shirt: The Souled Store | Blazers & Pants: Prima Czar | Tie & Pocket Square: The Tie Hub
Mask: The Souled Store | Ring: Amyr | Watch: GC watches | Belt: Louis Vuitton

> I'VE GOTTEN SO MANY SCRIPTS IN THE LAST ONE-AND-A-HALF YEARS BUT I HAVEN'T HAD THE TIME TO READ ANY OF THEM. THE GOAL NOW IS TO SAVE LIVES. I FEEL BLESSED WHEN AN UNKNOWN PERSON GETS SAVED



doing films, it all came to an end when the director called "cut". But for what I'm doing now, there is no "cut". God is the director and I'm playing a real role which I always wanted to play in my life.

DID YOU EVER IMAGINE THAT THE MAGNITUDE OF WHAT YOU ARE DOING WOULD GROW SO BIG?

No. When the lockdown started, nobody knew how long it would last. We were all lighting candles back then. However, the situation went from bad to worse. I realised that I would do my bit and won't wait for anyone. I can say that I've rediscovered myself. I've gotten so many scripts in the last one-and-a-half years but I haven't had the time to read any of them. The goal now is to save lives. I feel blessed when an unknown person gets saved.

WHAT WERE THE OBSTACLES YOU FACED WHEN YOU STARTED OUT?

Like everyone else, I didn't know how bad the situation was or how long the lockdown would last. It took me a while to realise the magnitude of the problem. It's not just about sending people home safely. It's about taking care of their employment, their education and their needs later on. I've created about two-and-a-half lakh jobs by now. Last year, I helped more than 2400 students with educational scholarships. This time we're going to do ten times more than that. We've added IAS coaching, chartered accountant coaching and many other fields in our sphere.

YOU HAVE DONE WHAT GOVERNMENTS HAVE FAILED TO DO IN THIS COUNTRY.

I don't know. I didn't follow any protocols but just followed my heart. I connected one-on-one with every single individual. And that connection was not based on caste, colour, creed or state. I've spent days on the phone with them and I was living their pain, literally. I feel they are my family.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO REPLY TO EVERYONE?

Trench: Pawan Sachdeva | Shirt & Pant: Dhruv Kapoor
Glasses: Tom Ford at Turakhia Opticians Shoes: Christian Louboutin



Blazer, Shirt and Pants: Sahil Aneja
Tie: Tossido | Watch: GC watches
Fashion Pocket square: The Tie Hub
Socks: Sock Stellar | Ring: Amyr

YOU KNOW, ALL THESE YEARS WHEN I WAS DOING FILMS, IT ALL CAME TO AN END WHEN THE DIRECTOR CALLED "CUT". BUT FOR WHAT I'M DOING NOW, THERE IS NO "CUT". GOD IS THE DIRECTOR AND I'M PLAYING A REAL ROLE WHICH I ALWAYS WANTED TO PLAY IN MY LIFE

I REMEMBER I'D MESSAGED YOU FOR A HOSPITAL BED FOR A FRIEND'S MOTHER. YOU REPLIED TO ME WITHIN A MINUTE...

Really? You'd messaged me? I don't remember that. I get so many messages... I have diaries all around me labelled priority, urgent, important etc. Then there are diaries and pages with names of states on them. I have teams on the ground in different states and there too, there are subsections where there are teams for oxygen, for medicine, for ventilators, for hospital beds... They update me every 30 minutes. I've instructed them to reach out to everyone who reaches out to us because there are a lot of hopes vested in this.

HOW DO YOU REACT TO PEOPLE NAMING THEIR SHOPS AFTER YOU AND BUILDING TEMPLES IN YOUR HONOUR?

I feel humbled. I miss my parents and I wish they were here to see the love that people are showering on me. Many people have walked all the way from Tirupati, from Andhra, from Telangana and different places to meet me. I call them and request them to not to make the journey on foot and take a bus or something. They reply that when they go to temples, they don't cheat God by taking a bus but make the pilgrimage on foot. It's their way of saying thank you. This is the emotion they ride on. Even as we are talking, there are three people I know of who have already reached half way from AP. In the morning, we again requested them not to walk further and take some transport but they're continuing on foot.

WAS THE SECOND WAVE TOUGHER THAN THE FIRST ONE WHEN IT CAME TO HELPING PEOPLE?

Yes, it was tougher because we were losing lives. I must have lost almost 270 people whom I was

trying to help. I have all their details - the people who died and who survived. There were times I got them beds or whatever they needed but I still couldn't save them. But leaving aside these 270 people, there are thousands I was able to save. Thousands. I'm happy that I jumped into the fray during the second wave. I keep thinking that if I didn't have that awareness or awakening, maybe thousands more would have lost their lives. I thank God for what I'm doing today. I get messages from people everyday thanking me and saying that they're with their families because of me. I still get messages from people I've helped last year. There are some who message me every day. And it's not a forward, it's a personalised message that they send. This is very precious.

WHICH HAS BEEN YOUR HAPPIEST MEMORY OF SAVING A LIFE AND WHICH HAS BEEN THE SADDEST?

There was a girl from Nagpur who was air-lifted to Mumbai. She was the daughter of a railway employee who used to get only Rs 15,000 as pension. I got her the best of hospitals. She needed a lung transplant. A lung transplant is very expensive, it costs around a crore if I'm not mistaken. I called the hospital in Nagpur and said that I need your help as well.

> **MANY PEOPLE HAVE WALKED ALL THE WAY FROM TIRUPATI, FROM ANDHRA, FROM TELANGANA AND DIFFERENT PLACES TO MEET ME. I CALL THEM AND REQUEST THEM TO NOT TO MAKE THE JOURNEY ON FOOT AND TAKE A BUS OR SOMETHING**

Let's try and save her together. I remember she had to be airlifted and was on an ECMO machine. An ECMO machine is very expensive. The machine costs almost 2.5 lakh rupees per day and the doctor said that there is only a 15 percent chance of survival. She was just a young girl of 25. She came on that air ambulance and was here for 25 days and was showing improvement but then we lost her. That day, I was totally heartbroken. I hadn't met her ever in my life but I used to get images every single day from the hospital. I just wish the family had connected with me a week earlier. Perhaps we could have saved her. There are many more cases like this. There are also many happy memories. Yesterday, I heard about a 13-year-old girl who had a successful bone-marrow transplant. The treatment had been going on for almost 11 months. I felt very happy when I heard that she has recovered now. There was a boy from Telangana whose lungs were 100 per cent damaged. The

Co ord Track suit: Custom | Socks: Sock Stellar

> IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT SENDING PEOPLE HOME SAFELY. IT'S ABOUT TAKING CARE OF THEIR EMPLOYMENT, THEIR EDUCATION AND THEIR NEEDS LATER ON. I'VE CREATED ABOUT TWO-AND-A-HALF LAKH JOBS BY NOW



doctors said that there is no chance of survival. He is the only brother to three sisters. I took a chance on him and shifted him from one hospital to another and he recovered in 20 days. I felt very happy that day. He called me up and said "Sir, I'm looking forward to working out with you."

HOW DOES IT FEEL WHEN THE UN AWARDS YOU WITH THE SPECIAL PRESTIGIOUS HUMANITARIAN AWARD?

It feels nice but if you ask me, I feel happy when we solve these cases everyday. For instance, a guy from Telangana came today. He'd lost one arm in an accident. I asked him if he wanted to get a prosthetic hand and he said that that'd be nice. In two days, he'll be going back with a new prosthetic hand and can do everything he wants to. This is my award.

THERE'S TALKS ABOUT A THIRD WAVE, ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THAT?

You know, even when the first wave got over, it didn't actually get over as people were still suffering. *Logon ki takleefein khatam nahi hui thi. (P*eople's troubles didn't get over*)* When the second wave gets over, it'll mean the cases of COVID-19 have gone down. But the problems won't vanish. People still won't have jobs, won't have money for admissions or for medicines. So my work will continue.

WILL YOU CONTINUE WITH THIS WORK EVEN AFTER COVID-19 GETS OVER?

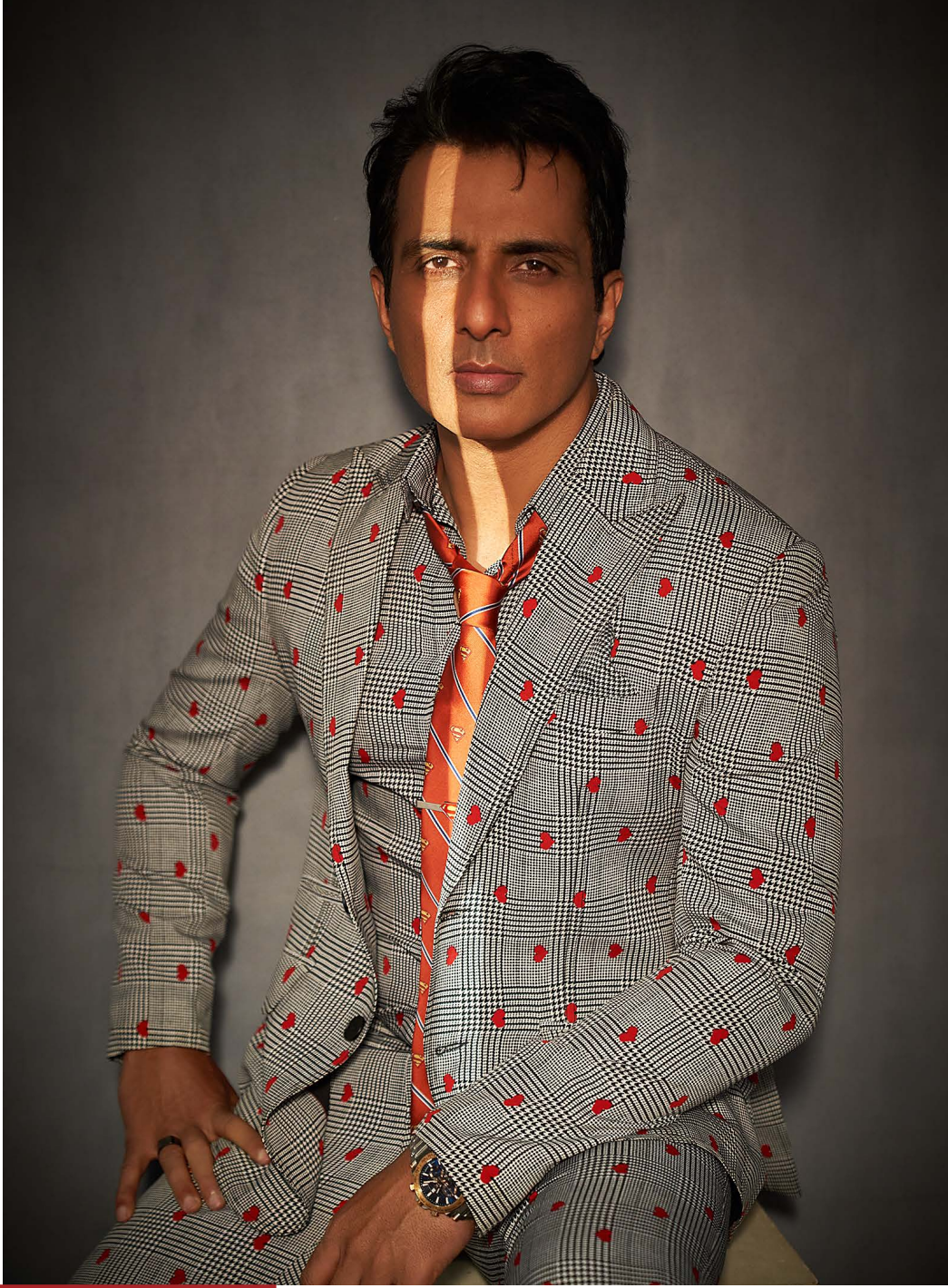
All my life. This is part of my life now. Sonu *rahe na rahe,* Sonu *ki* future generations will continue to do this work. (My children and their children will continue this work). My kids are very inspired with what they're witnessing. And I asked them to promise that no matter how busy they get in life, they wouldn't stop this movement that we've started and it should pass from one generation to the other. We started this journey during these COVID-19 times and it will continue.

ARE PEOPLE COMING FORWARD TO DONATE? BECAUSE I BELIEVE YOU STARTED OUT WITH YOUR OWN MONEY...

Apart from the money that comes in, your faith in people is restored. You feel that people are standing with you. People tell me that we should give you an award and I tell them,

Trench: Pawan Sachdeva
Shirt & Pant: Dhruv Kapoor
Glasses: Tom Ford at Turakhia Opticians
Shoes: Christian Louboutin

"What will I do with this trophy in my house? Instead of that, please go ahead and get two surgeries done for someone in need. That will be my award." I signed almost 57 to 60 brands in the last one and a half years. *Maine unko bhi kaam par laga diya.* (I've put them all to work) *Koi* light *ka* brand *aata tha toh main kehta hoon ke chalo, kisi gaon mai bijli lagayenge.* (If a lightbulb brand signs me up for endorsement I tell them to provide electricity to a village). I would listen to their pitch and come up with ways to help people. You know, we've been working with big ad agencies for years but we never thought we could use our reach to help the masses in this manner. People tell me that working with me has opened their eyes to new possibilities. They feel blessed that they can provide help to the needy. And it's no longer just about the brand or the money coming in but concerns the welfare of the society at large.



YOU ALSO BATTLED COVID-19. WHAT WAS YOUR PERSONAL BATTLE LIKE?

> **I MUST HAVE LOST ALMOST 270 PEOPLE WHOM I WAS TRYING TO HELP. I HAVE ALL THEIR DETAILS – THE PEOPLE WHO DIED AND WHO SURVIVED. THERE WERE TIMES I GOT THEM BEDS OR WHATEVER THEY NEEDED BUT I STILL COULDN'T SAVE THEM**

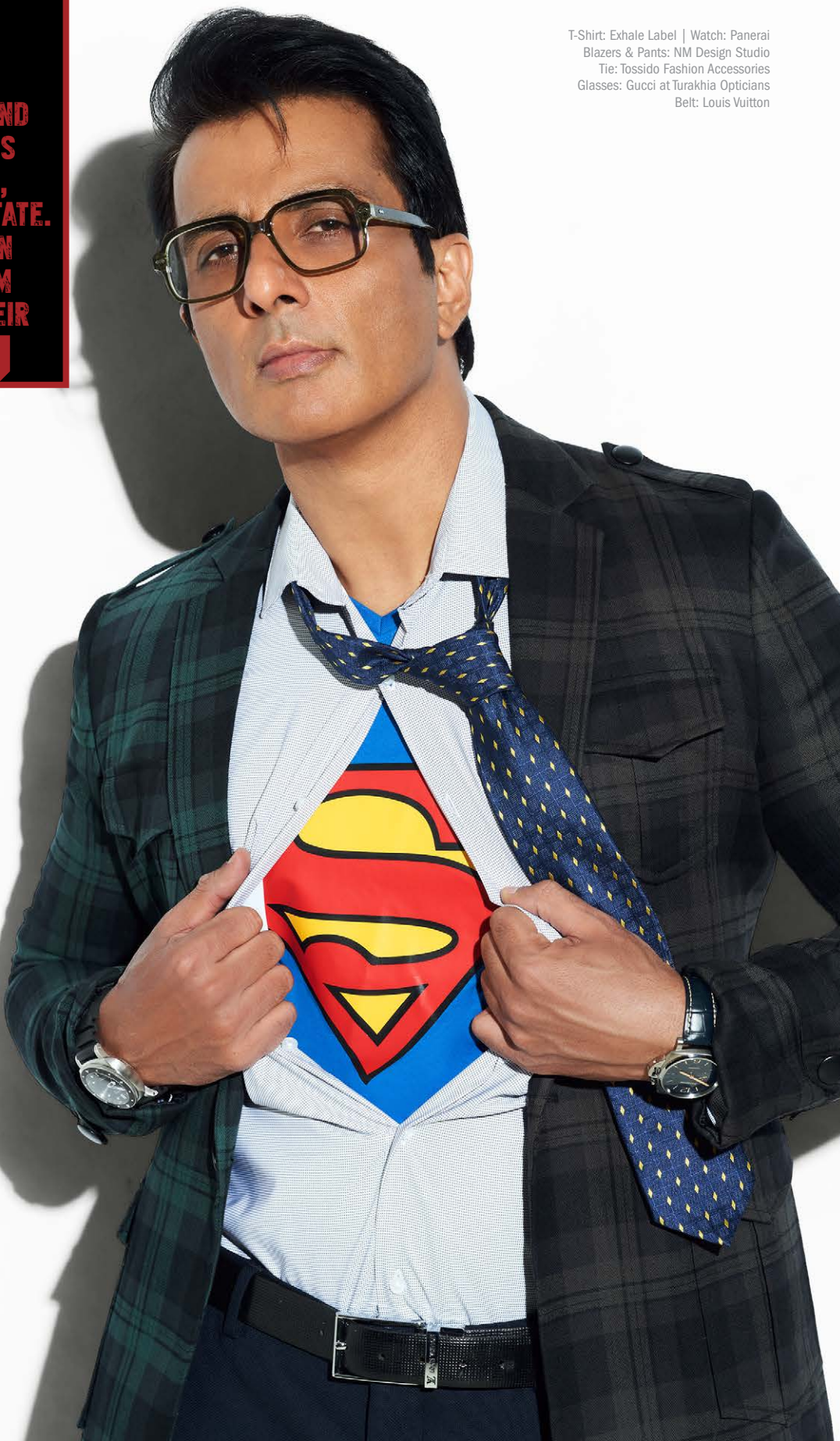
I was more busy than ever. I would be working for 22 to 23 hours. I was shut inside one room and since I couldn't meet anyone in quarantine, I'd use my phone to help people out.

A LOT OF PEOPLE WANT TO HELP BUT THEY DON'T KNOW HOW TO...

(Laughs) Aap unhe mere paas bhej do, mai unhe kaam pe laga dunga. (Send them to me. I'll put them to work). I have a friend called Abhishek who's from Bangkok and he is a party animal. I asked him to join my cause. He has helped save 20-30 lives till now. He tells me that he'll not party anymore. He is only thinking about helping people these days.

Blazer, Shirt and Pants: Sahil Aneja | Tie: Tossido | Watch: GC watches
Fashion Pocket square: The Tie Hub Socks: Sock Stellar | Ring: Amyr

> I CONNECTED ONE-ON-ONE WITH EVERY SINGLE INDIVIDUAL. AND THAT CONNECTION WAS NOT BASED ON CASTE, COLOUR, CREED OR STATE. I HAVE SPENT DAYS ON THE PHONE WITH THEM AND I WAS LIVING THEIR PAIN, LITERALLY



T-Shirt: Exhale Label | Watch: Panerai
Blazers & Pants: NM Design Studio
Tie: Tossido Fashion Accessories
Glasses: Gucci at Turakhia Opticians
Belt: Louis Vuitton

HOW DID THIS AWAKENING COME TO YOU?

My parents were humanitarians. They would organise *langars* and I would join them in their endeavours. I would notice the joy in someone's eyes when I served them *halwa. Jab mai kisiko puri, chhole deta tha toh main dekhta that uske chehre par ek* smile *aa jati thi. Mujhe pata nahi chalta tha ki kya khaas baat hai. Thoda halwa de diya, kya khaas baat hai? Lekin us halwe mai jo khushi thi, woh koi aur duniya mein nahi ho sakti. Woh mujhe ab jakar pata chala ke jab ek anjaan aadmi aapki madad karta hai to ek alag kism ki khushi mehsoos hoti hai* (When I used to serve them *puri* or *halwa,* their eyes used to light up. I used to wonder why they're so happy with so little. But now I've come to realise you experience a different kind of happiness when a total stranger helps you). The kind of happiness that you get, you can't put in words. My mother taught students free of cost all her life. If someone dropped out of college, she would travel all the way to his village to

I CAN'T GET FRUSTRATED BECAUSE *TAKLEEF BAHUT ZYADA HAI* (BECAUSE THE SUFFERING IS IMMENSE). BUT YES, I DO FEEL THAT MORE PEOPLE NEED TO COME FORWARD. *YEH JUNG AKELE NAHI JEETI JA SAKTI* (ONE CAN'T WIN THIS WAR ALONE)



convince him to get back to college because education is important. That is the kind of environment I was raised in.

WHAT IS YOUR NORMAL DAY LIKE?

In the past 16 months, my life has changed. I already have 60 missed calls since I've started speaking to you. There are 5414 unread messages *jo sirf* reports *aur* help *ke hain* (I have 5414 messages which are just reports or help requests). I know that when I keep my phone aside, there is someone who is hoping that I'll pick up their phone and someone's life will get saved.

DO YOU GET TIME FOR YOURSELF?

In the last few months? No. I may be physically present with my family but my mind is elsewhere. I'm always trying to get things organised. Usually, NGOs deal with just one cause. But I take on everything. And NGOs aren't well-known among the masses. For me, it's a national thing because people ask for help from across the country.

WILL YOU GET BACK TO ACTING AFTER THIS?

Of course, I'll get back to acting. When I was shooting last year, there were hundreds of people who would come to the sets to meet me. Even the people on the set would spread the word that I'd be on set that day. I would listen to their problems for around two to three hours each day.

DOES IT FRUSTRATE YOU SOMETIMES?

I can't get frustrated because *takleef bahut zyada hai* (because the suffering is immense). But yes, I do feel that more people need to come forward. *Yeh jung akele nahi jeeti ja sakti (*one can't win this war alone). I need more people to come forward and take responsibility. People often ask how I manage to do all this and I tell them that I don't think twice before calling someone I don't know for someone I don't know. I'll even call the PM's office if I need to.

PEOPLE SAY YOU'RE PLANNING TO GET INTO POLITICS. IS THAT TRUE?

I have a lot of regards for politics but *mera* mindset *abhi uss taraf nahi hai* (I don't have a mindset for that right now). I feel that when you get into politics, you have to follow a lot of rules and regulations. *Maine koi* protocol follow *nahi*

Co ord Track suit: Custom | Socks: Sock Stellar

> I ALREADY HAVE 60 MISSED CALLS SINCE I'VE STARTED SPEAKING TO YOU. THERE ARE 5414 UNREAD MESSAGES *JO SIRF* REPORTS *AUR* HELP *KE HAIN* (I HAVE 5414 MESSAGES WHICH ARE JUST REPORTS OR HELP REQUESTS)

kiye. Kis state *mai kiski sarkar hai, mujhe kuch farak nahi parta* (I haven't followed any protocol. It doesn't matter to me which party rules in which state). I never checked who called me from which state. I'd directly call up foreign ambassadors and embassies. I stepped out to help people and I'd tell them that let's do it together. It used to surprise them initially and also make things happen.

ARE PEOPLE HELPFUL? OR DO YOU STILL FACE OBSTACLES?

In the beginning, it was difficult. Now, they have heard and seen things. So when I call, they know I'm helping people out so they help out. When I used to mail DMs, I would tell the ADMs to send me a screenshot to show me that the mail had arrived. I would then message the DM that *dekho* Sir, a*apke paas* mail *aa chuka hai* (I used to inform DMs that the mail has reached them). That's how I used to follow up - *aisa nahi ki* mail *kar diya toh ho gaya* (Just sending the mail isn't enough). Every minute counts.

I'VE HEARD THAT YOU'VE HELPED SOME 90 LAKH MIGRANTS. IS THAT TRUE?

No, I just helped 10 lakh migrants. The number 90 lakhs includes all the people who approached me for help. Yes, almost a crore people connected with me for different reasons like employment, education, medical help etc.

HOW HAS ALL THE WORK YOU'VE BEEN DOING AFFECTED YOUR CAREER?

Like I said, I'm signing all the top brands now. I'm getting many movies and roles that are larger than life. That of a superhero, messiah. Big budgets and good directors . Everything has changed, *logon ka nazariya badal gaya hai* (People look at me with a different perspective). ■

Trench: Pawan Sachdeva | Shirt & Pant: Dhruv Kapoor
Glasses: Tom Ford at Turakhia Opticians | Shoes: Christian Louboutin

WE SHALL OVERCOME...

OUR CELEBRITIES STOOD UP AS ONE TO BATTLE THE SECOND WAVE OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC. ANALITA SETH LAUDS THEIR EFFORTS AND LISTS THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS



WHEN THE WORLD TURNS DARK, SOME GET LOST, WHILE SOME SHINE BRIGHT TO BRING HOPE AND POSITIVITY AND SET THINGS RIGHT. WHEN THE SECOND WAVE OF COVID-19 BOMBARDED THE COUNTRY WITH DEATH, HUNGER, POVERTY AND HELPLESSNESS, MANY FROM THE FILM FRATERNITY ROSE TO THE OCCASION AND EXTENDED A HELPING HAND TO THOSE IN NEED. AS THE MEDICAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE COUNTRY COLLAPSED IN THE WAKE OF THE RAPIDLY MUTATING VIRUS, MEN AND WOMEN OF POWER FROM THE HINDI FILM INDUSTRY LED BY EXAMPLE AND OPENED UP THEIR HEARTS AS WELL AS THEIR PURSE STRINGS. ANSWERING SOS CALLS, ARRANGING MEDICAL RESOURCES, DONATING MONEY, DISTRIBUTING FOOD... YOU NAME IT AND THE INFLUENTIAL LOT USED THEIR CULT FOLLOWING FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE MASSES. AS WE CONTINUE TO FIGHT THE GRIM WAR, HERE ARE SOME HEROES WHO DESERVE A MOMENT OF GLORY AND GRATITUDE FOR THEIR RELENTLESS EFFORTS DURING THESE DESPERATE DAYS.



SONU SOOD

They don't call him the messiah of the masses for nothing. The relentless work that Sonu Sood has put in helping people in the last one year has been unmatched and has made him the go-to man for the people in need. Last year, he helped migrant workers go back home during the lockdown when there was no mode of transport available for them. He continued to help people throughout the year and with the second wave, he extended his helping hand to procure COVID-19 relief resources for those in need. Setting up the Sonu Sood Foundation, he has a battery of volunteers helping him reach out to people who require immediate medical help. Not only this, he has managed to set up tele-consultation for people isolating at home and now has a functional line for free oxygen across Delhi that one can receive by simply making a phone call. Sonu has also been taking requests from the government to help out children who have been orphaned due to COVID-19 with education funds. Also, he wants the cremation of the people lost to the virus to be done free of cost. Kudos to the man for leaving no stone unturned to help the masses when they felt hopeless during the second wave.

BHUMI PEDNEKAR

Bhumi Pednekar has always been vocal about social causes and led from the front when the storm increased its fury. Bhumi started out when she tested positive for COVID-19 and brought forth an initiative, Plasma Warriors to spread awareness about Plasma therapy. She was one of the very first celebrities to use her social media to not only amplify SOS calls but also put together a team of volunteers, COVID warriors to get verified leads on resources and help them reach the people in need. Her latest initiative toward battling the pandemic is Mission Zindagi, a COVID Relief Seva. With this Bhumi, in association with Art of Living will raise funds to ensure there is availability of beds in hospitals, oxygen concentrators, ambulances, on-call doctors, immunity kits and a program for mental health, yoga and meditation.

BHUMI'S LATEST INITIATIVE TOWARD BATTLING THE PANDEMIC IS MISSION ZINDAGI, A COVID RELIEF SEVA



PRIYANKA CHOPRA

Being away from home did not stop Priyanka Chopra from doing her best to help out in the crisis. The international star used her social media clout to start a fundraiser for $ 1million with which she procured resources like oxygen concentrators, vaccines and medicines for the affected people in India. A total of 14,000 people donated to her Give India fundraiser and the actor received immense support from eminent celebrities like Hugh Jackman, Irina Shayk, Zoya Akhtar, Lilly Singh and more. The target set was achieved in a couple of weeks and she decided to take it further and extend the fundraiser to $ 3million. Priyanka also actively amplified verified contacts for resources in India and was vocal about the vaccine shortage in the country. She even tweeted to POTUS requesting Joe Biden to send vaccines to India as the USA had procured three times as much as they needed to vaccinate the entire population. Priyanka has been an advocate for mental health and wellbeing in these tough times and has shared details of people you can get in touch with to cope up with the COVID-19 crisis.



TWINKLE KHANNA AND AKSHAY KUMAR

Akshay Kumar had donated a whopping INR 25 crores to the PM CARES Fund last year. He along with Twinkle Khanna continued to help with resources even during the second wave. When the news of the shortage of oxygen in several hospitals surfaced, Twinkle announced that she and Akshay have managed to acquire 100 oxygen concentrators that they would be sending to the hospitals that required them. Twinkle along with Daivik Foundation donated another 120 concentrators to the same cause. She recently joined hands with the foundation to help raise funds and procure more oxygen concentrators for hospitals across the country. The first lot of concentrators was distributed in Delhi and later, NGOs like Khalsa Aid and Hemkunt Foundation helped in distributing in Punjab and Mumbai. Twinkle's efforts to raise more funds continue as she actively speaks about how every contribution will result in a life saved.





ANUSHKA SHARMA AND VIRAT KOHLI

Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli announced their fundraiser with a target of INR 7 crores and were able to reach the target within a week. The couple themselves donated the first INR 2 crores to the fundraiser. They ended up raising INR 11,39,11,820 with the help of a huge INR 5 crores donation from Mobile Premier League and directed all the money to ACTGrants, a startup ecosystem working towards procurement of medical resources, oxygen concentrators, ventilators and more to hospitals working at the ground level in the country. Speaking of the incredible support they received in achieving the target for the fundraiser, Anushka said, "Our hearts are filled with gratitude after witnessing the kind of help we have received from you."

ANUSHKA SHARMA AND VIRAT KOHLI ANNOUNCED THEIR FUNDRAISER WITH A TARGET OF INR 7 CRORES AND WERE ABLE TO REACH THE TARGET WITHIN A WEEK

SALMAN KHAN

Right when the second wave hit, Salman Khan relaunched one of his initiatives from last year where a truck would go around Mumbai distributing food kits to front line workers. Salman himself went on a quality check for the food being served to the workers through this initiative. Salman also kept his promise of a theatrical release for his film *Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai.* All the revenue from which went to COVID relief work across India. Apart from this, he procured 500 oxygen concentrators in collaboration with Baba and Zeeshan Siddiqui that were distributed to hospitals facing shortage. The actor further decided to directly credit INR 1500 to around 25,000 daily wagers in the film industry who lost their jobs due to the lockdown and the postponement of shoots.





ALIA BHATT

Like many of us, Alia Bhatt found herself looking for ways to help people when the second wave hit the country. Acting on it, she joined hands with independent journalist Faye D'Souza to compile a verified list of COVID helplines for states and cities across the country. She also started an initiative, laying emphasis on NGOs that are working toward various causes to help people in these bleak times. Circle of Hope, her fundraiser with Give India was another platform to raise money for resources. She also spread the word about education in the rural areas in association with Salaam Bombay Foundation that is helping kids get resources to attend online classes as schooling has gone digital.

ALIA JOINED HANDS WITH INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST FAYE D'SOUZA TO COMPILE A VERIFIED LIST OF COVID HELPLINES ACROSS THE COUNTRY



AJAY DEVGN

Ajay Devgn helped the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation to set up an emergency COVID facility in several public spots in Mumbai. Converting parks and marriage halls into well-equipped facilities, BMC officials informed that these will hold upto 20 beds and will have supplies equal to the famous Hinduja hospital in the city. He also started a COVID helpline in association with SS Rajamouli and the team of *RRR* which includes Ram Charan, Jr. NTR and Alia Bhatt.



AMITABH BACHCHAN

Amitabh Bachchan joined hands with Anand Pandit to set up a 25-bed facility in Juhu in Mumbai. The centre will have all resources to treat the affected and will be supplied with equipment that the initiative has received as donation. He also donated INR 2 crores to the Delhi Gurdwara Body to set up a COVID centre in the capital. Despite the efforts, many said he was not doing enough, to which Bachchan replied saying he'd spent around INR 15 crores already and had donated to various organisations that needed the funds.

SHILPA SHETTY KUNDRA

Taking up the heart-wrenching cause of people dying of hunger during the pandemic, Shilpa Shetty Kundra joined hands with Khaana Chahiye, a movement that is run on funds donated by the citizens to provide meals to people in and around Mumbai. Shilpa urged everyone to contribute in their capacity so that no one goes hungry during the pandemic. With this movement, the associated people are distributing over a lakh meals per day.





RAVEENA TANDON

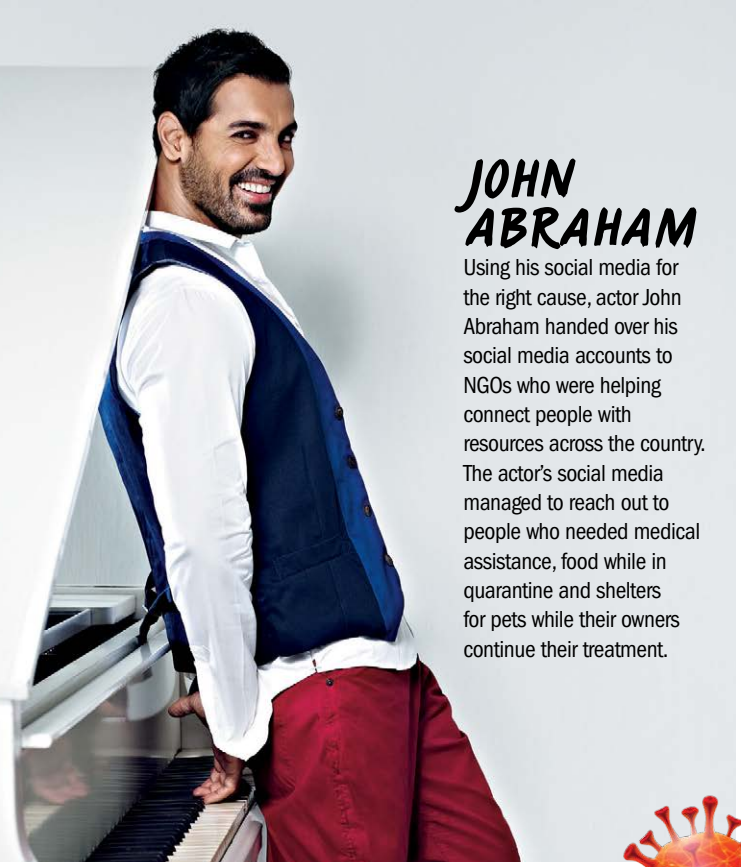
As Delhi faced a major shortage of oxygen and its storage, Raveena Tandon, in association with Rudra Foundation started Oxygen Seva on wheels, from Mumbai to Delhi. With this, the actor sent across 300 oxygen cylinders to Delhi so far and to avoid storage issues, they were delivered to and fro in trucks. She also requested people to donate to the cause so more supplies could be arranged for the people getting treated in the capital.



SUNIEL SHETTY

Coming together with FeedMyCity, Suneil Shetty started the initiative Mission MillionAir to help provide free oxygen to individuals and families that are Below Poverty Line. The movement is running in full swing in Mumbai and Bangalore.

RAVEENA, IN ASSOCIATION WITH RUDRA FOUNDATION STARTED OXYGEN SEVA ON WHEELS, FROM MUMBAI TO DELHI. WITH THIS, THE ACTOR SENT ACROSS 300 OXYGEN CYLINDERS TO DELHI SO FAR



JOHN ABRAHAM

Using his social media for the right cause, actor John Abraham handed over his social media accounts to NGOs who were helping connect people with resources across the country. The actor's social media managed to reach out to people who needed medical assistance, food while in quarantine and shelters for pets while their owners continue their treatment.



ADITYA CHOPRA

Producer Aditya Chopra announced Yash Raj Foundation's Saathi initiative with which he helped out 30,000 women and senior citizen daily wagers from the industry with INR 5000 and ration kits during the lockdown. He also revealed that the entire budget that was being saved for a grand celebration for 50 years of YRF was used to help out these people and also procure supplies for those in need. The YRF studio also started a free vaccination drive for the daily wage workers belonging to the film industry.

SUSHMITA SEN

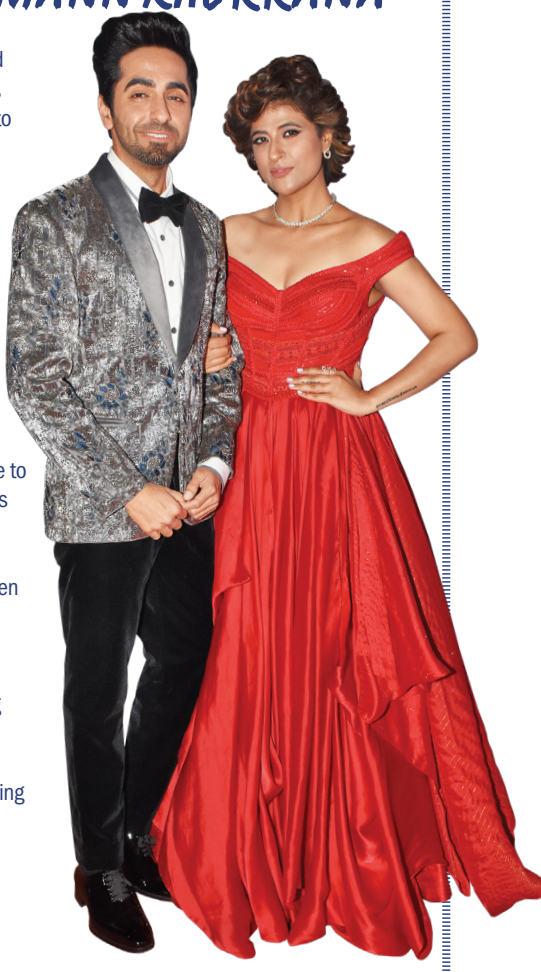
When Sunil Saggar, CEO of Shanti Mukund Hospital in Delhi took to social media to announce that there was a massive shortage of oxygen in the hospital, Sushmita immediately answered the call and said that she'd managed to arrange for a few cylinders that she'd like to send to Delhi but found that transporting them was a problem. Within a few hours, she shared on social media that the cylinders were on their way to the hospital in Delhi.



THE YRF STUDIO STARTED A FREE VACCINATION DRIVE FOR THE DAILY WAGE WORKERS BELONGING TO THE FILM INDUSTRY

TAHIRA KASHYAP AND AYUSHMANN KHURRANA

When the second wave hit its peak, states struggled to procure medical supplies and equipment for treatment of the affected people. Following the choked medical infrastructure, Tahira Kashyap and Ayushmann Khurrana came forward to donate to the Maharashtra's Chief Minister's Relief Funds. The two have also been using their social media to amplify SOS calls and have been strong advocates of mental health and self-care during the pandemic.



No fullstops allowed

Neetu Kapoor is on a comeback trail. She shares her hopes and apprehensions with **Vedanshi Pathak** and also recollects what it feels like to be a mother to Riddhima and Ranbir

Neetu Kapoor is all set to make a comeback as an actor in Raj Mehta's *Jug Jugg Jeeyo.* She started life as a child actor, graduated to doing lead roles in films but left acting after marriage to be the emotional anchor to her husband, the late Rishi Kapoor. Later, she became a helicopter mom of sorts to Riddhima and Ranbir. Her children became her life. Her world revolved around them, making sure her kids were being brought up properly. Her routine changed somewhat after they grew up and started their own lives. Rishi Kapoor got diagnosed with cancer a few years back and she was there with him every inch of the way, helping him battle the disease. She lost him last year and then decided that one way to deal with her sorrow was to put on the greasepaint and face the arc lights again. In a straight-from the-heart interview, she narrates her struggles of becoming a full-time actor once more and also shares glimpses of what life was as a hands-on mother in an actors' household.

You are starting life again as an actor with *Jug Jugg Jeeyo.* What difference did you find between then and now when you landed on the sets?

When I did those 70-80 movies, I was young and my mother used to accompany me. And then I did those two movies (*Do Dooni Chaar* and *Besharam)* with my husband. For me to agree to *Jug Jugg Jeeyo* took a lot because for the first time I didn't have anyone with me. It was quite an experience. Also, my husband had passed away recently, so I was a bit shaken up inside. I needed something to make me feel stronger. I was anxious initially but gradually became used to the routine. And everybody made me feel better on the sets. Anil Kapoor, director Raj Mehta, Kiara (Advani), Varun (Dhawan), everyone was a pillar of strength. So, I relaxed after a few



With husband Rishi Kapoor and kids Riddhima and Ranbir

> *"I was so obsessed with my kids that I forgot about the world for the first 10 years.* I had to drop my children to school, pick them up myself – I was that crazy. I had to be home when they were there"



days. I'm glad I did the film.

How has your decision to come back to films changed your equation with your son Ranbir?

Actually, it has strengthened our bond. We've always discussed movies, actors, performances... We've always had that sort of a relationship. That's our passion. I'm a total movie buff. I can watch the worst movies. Now, I also discuss my forthcoming projects with him. It's a better bond now, because now I am discussing myself. Earlier we were discussing other people. He also discusses his films with me when he wants to, though he makes his own decisions. But once in a while he also wants my take on the script. So, we have that relationship of movies, scripts, performances and now it's become even better.

Are you spending more time with your children currently?

I want them to be busy with their lives. I say *mere dil mein raho, mere sar pe mat chadho* (stay in my heart, don't sit on my head). When Riddhima was with me during the lockdown, I was so stressed for one year because she couldn't go back. I used to

get restless and tell her, "Go back, Bharat is alone." I was literally pushing her away. I like my privacy. I'm used to this way of life. I remember when Riddhima was going to London to study I used to howl for days. If someone came to meet her to say goodbye, I'd start crying. But when later Ranbir went abroad to study, I didn't cry. He told me, "Mom, you don't love me." But it isn't that. It was just that I had gotten used to living away from a child. So when it happened again, I was prepared. I think those times when they were abroad made me stronger and made me feel that I'm okay being alone. Also, they have to get on with their lives. I'm happy when they come, but I want them to go back to their homes and be settled. I just say one thing -- don't meet me every day, but stay connected. I don't want them to be around me all the time. I'm independent that way. I love my life the way it is.

How different are Riddhima and Ranbir from each other?

Riddhima is a hands-on daughter. She goes crazy worrying over me even if I cough a little or if I say I am tired. She will send *hazaar* messages, she will give me all her home-made cures, she will chew my head because she wants her mother to be okay. Ranbir is different, he is more on the quieter side. He will be worried, but he'll just ask me, "How are you doing mom, are you okay?" Ranbir's one call or message just makes me feel better, whatever I am going through. They all have their own things to make me feel good.

> *Riddhima is a hands-on daughter. She goes crazy worrying over me even if I cough a little or if I say I am tired.* She will send *hazaar* messages, she will give me all her home-made cures, she will chew my head because she wants her mother to be okay

What's your fondest memory of Riddhima and Ranbir from their childhood?

For a mother, her children are her world. For me every day is a memory. Ranbir had just started earning.He was an assistant director in *Black* and he had made some money. It was Mother's Day and he took me to a restaurant called Just Around the Corner. It served lunch for Rs 100. So that was my best Mother's Day memory as we stood in a line with a plate and I saw everyone was piling up their plate with food as you could fill it only once. And I was the proudest mother that day, as that was the first ever lunch my son had taken me out for. Riddhima was studying in London and she started doing some part-time jobs. I went to meet her during one of her vacations and when I landed at Heathrow, a limousine met me. It had flowers and champagne and she had arranged it all with her own money. I called her up and said, "Riddhima, are you crazy, such a big champagne bottle at 11 am?" She said, "I just wanted to do the best for you." I stayed with her in her apartment and she had all these beautiful cards all over with 'welcome to my home' written on them. They always asked me as children -- "Whom do you love more?" I used to say I love Riddhima two years more because she is older. Both are special to me, but because she came earlier, I loved her two years more.

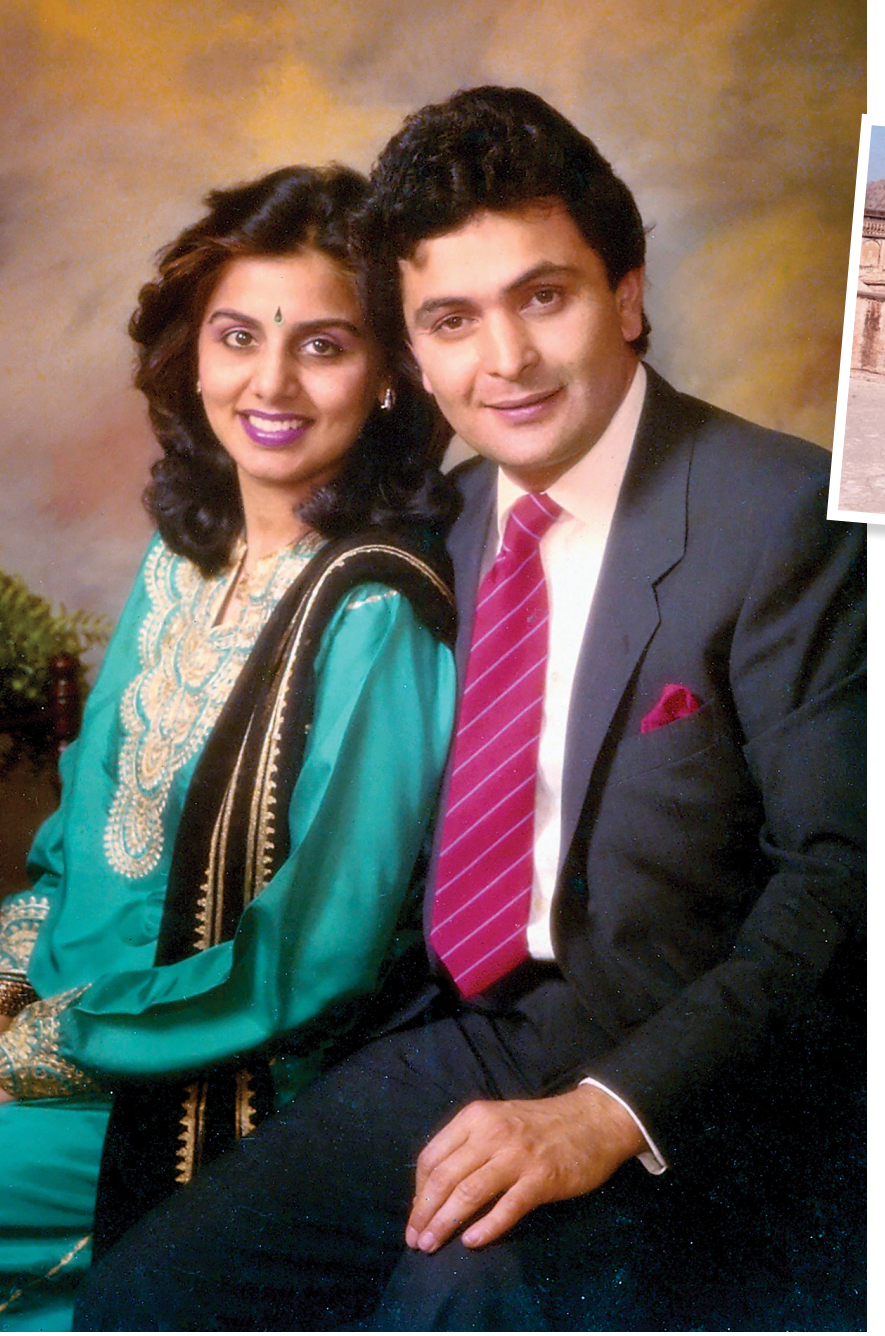

With Riddhima

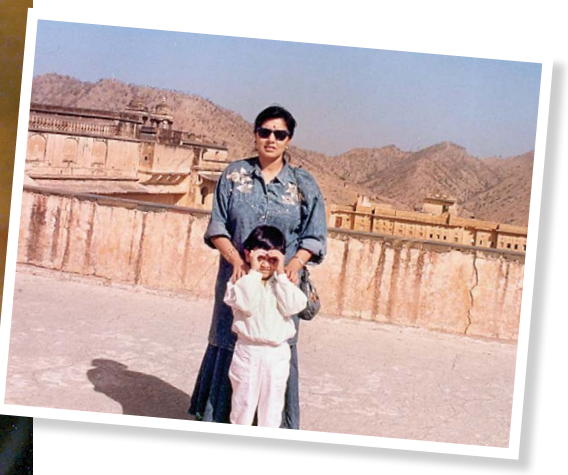

With Rishi Kapoor


With Riddhima

What were the changes that came into your life when you became a mother?

I was so obsessed with my kids that I forgot about the world for the first 10 years. I used to drop my children to school, pick them up myself -- I was that crazy. I had to be home when they were there. I had to make something special for them. Ranbir loved butter chicken, so I made sure that my butter chicken was the best. In the process I lost a lot of friends, but then I reconnected with them later on, of course. Once a year we would go to Kashmir or somewhere for vacation. Or when Rishi was shooting on some hill station, we used to accompany him. Those days Switzerland was very much in fashion. Everyone was shooting songs





↑ With Ranbir

or movies there. And every time we went for dinners, my husband would play a game with them, like fastest finger first. He was busy doing films but whenever he was free, his time was devoted to his children.

Star kids supposedly get everything on a platter. Were you a strict mom or did you give in to their every demand?

Ranbir was obsessed with GI Joe toys. When he became a little older, he wanted a bike, then a car. My husband said no to the car, because he did not want to spoil the children. He finally got a car when he was 18 or 19. Riddhima wanted to highlight her hair at one point and I said no way. She was also about 15 or 16. She wrote me a long letter, saying mom this is the only thing I want in life, I will never ask for anything ever. I did not believe in highlights, because I thought it'll spoil her hair. Many times when they wanted something and because I did not want to spoil them or my husband did not want to spoil them, we would say no. When Ranbir was an assistant director on *Black,* his father told him to go to work by an auto or a bus as that's what other ADs would do. I never bought Riddhima a designer bag. Because how will they value what they get in life or from their partners, if you spoil them when they are children. Today she values it when Bharat buys her something. Ranbir had to go to America on these long flights travelling economy. He used to say, "Mom, my legs go numb." The only thing I used to make sure then was to buy him an aisle seat. So at least he could stretch his legs. I think these things are important. We wanted them to learn the value of life, value of money. That helped them in the way they are today.

> ***Everybody made me feel better on the sets.*** Anil Kapoor, director Raj Mehta, Kiara (Advani), Varun (Dhawan), everyone was a pillar of strength. So, I relaxed after a few days. I'm glad I did the film (*Jug Jugg Jeeyo*)

One thing you wish you would have done differently as a mother...

I became a mother at 22. Sometimes I screamed at them when I was angry. I now understand that if a child is behaving in a different way there has to be an issue. Don't scream, get to the bottom of it. I analyse things now. I don't get upset or don't get angry with them. I feel one should have children at a later stage, when you are more calm. ■

NO HOLDS BARRED

MAYUKH MAJUMDAR FINDS OUT THAT **POOJA BHATT** REMAINS UNAPOLOGETIC ABOUT HER LIFE CHOICES



The Bombay Begums

In an ever changing world, if there's somethng that can be said with certainity about Pooja Bhatt, it's that she marches to her own tune. She has a hugely independent streak and she lives her life on her own terms. She doesn't need anyone's validation and she doesn't care about criticism either. In a career spanning almost three decades, she has acted, produced and even directed movies. And she's been fairly successful in all of them. She's made movies the way she wanted to, not bowing down to market forces. After a hiatus of several years, Pooja has come back to acting in a big way. She is the central pillar of the series, *Bombay Begums*. Fans are raving about her performance and she's basking in the praise with a smile, knowing that shadows are never far away. In a no-holds-barred interview, the star tells us about her upbringing, her alcoholism and and her digital debut. Presenting the inimitable Pooja Bhatt...

I THINK THERE'D BE SO MUCH LESS PAIN IN THE WORLD IF WE KIND OF LEVELLED WITH EACH OTHER INSTEAD OF TALKING DOWN TO EACH OTHER. I'VE ALWAYS HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF PARENTS WHO'VE TREATED ME AS AN EQUAL. IF YOU LOOK AT MY CHARACTER IN *BOMBAY BEGUMS*, SHE'S SOMEONE WHO'S NEVER HAD THAT LIFE, SHE'S HAD TO SUPPRESS SO MANY SECRETS

YOUR DIGITAL DEBUT IS WINNING PLAUDITS FROM EVERYWHERE...

I'm delighted and humbled by the reception that *Bombay Begums* has received. Women from across the country have reached out to say that finally, we can see stories about real women and how it plays out in the real world. Spring has arrived in the backyard and I'm exulting in it. I've also been moved by messages from within the fraternity, who've reached out to me and showered me with so much love.

DID YOU RELATE TO YOUR CHARACTER IN *BOMBAY BEGUMS*

I think there'd be so much less pain in the world if we kind of levelled with each other instead of talking down to each other. I've always had the privilege of parents who've treated me as an equal. If you look at my character in *Bombay Begums,* she's someone who's never had that life, she's had



EVEN RANI WHO HAS TO WEAR A SAREE AND SLAP ON MAKEUP LIKE A MASK, ALMOST LIKE SHE HAS TO COVER UP ANY INSECURITIES LIKE AM I BEING JUDGED? AM I BEING LOOKED UPON IN A CERTAIN WAY? DO THEY KNOW I'VE GOT MENOPAUSE? AGING IS A REALITY. WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHICH IS SO OBSESSED WITH AGING

to suppress so many secrets. Someone had asked me what drew me to this role? Was it the fact that she was a lady boss and in charge of the workplace? I said, yes, that world was fascinating but I think my greatest privilege is to be cast as someone playing my age.

WHAT MADE YOU TAKE UP THE ROLE OF RANI IRANI?

It's a show where human beings are flawed. We all have our sides that aren't perfectly curated. Even Rani who has to wear a saree and slap on makeup like a mask, almost like she has to cover up any insecurities like am I being judged? Am I being looked upon in a certain way? Do they know I've got menopause? Aging is a reality. We live in a world which is so obsessed with aging. I'm just glad I got to play this part at this stage of my life. *Bombay Begums* was, in so many ways, a win-win situation for me. It was a great part, a great platform. They say that actors are emotional athletes. So I was glad that I could reach inside and touch a chord within myself. There is a lot about Rani that I could relate to and a lot that I couldn't. That is why I took up the part. Rani has gone



NO MATTER WHAT WE WOMEN ACHIEVE IN THE WORLD, A LOT OF US COME HOME AND OUR ACHIEVEMENTS ARE REDUCED TO '*HAAN, THEEK HAI NA, TUMNE* NOBEL PRIZE *JEET LIYA MAGAR ABHI KHAANE MEIN KYA HAI*

through sexual abuse. I don't think I'd have been able to bottle it down like she does. That's what drew me to her. How does she manage to suppress so much and still be so calm? You see her in control in the boardroom and then she goes home and one comment from the kids makes her feel so unworthy. When I was approached for this, I said, "Hey, life is banging on my door and I can't shut the door on this. I need to let life take me along."It was also an amazing cast, full of wonderful actors. When you're able to sit in a room and be vulnerable with your co-stars, it makes life so easy and that's what helped here. An actor is like an animal and an animal knows where it's safe and where it's not. For me, it's mportant, in my private life and in my professional life, to be around people who I know have got my back.

BOLLYWOOD IS SUDDENLY GIVING PRECEDENCE TO CONTENT-DRIVEN FILMS RATHER THAN FOLLOWING A SET FORMULA..

All of my work which has sustained and all of my father's work which has sustained, have been stories which have been dug out from his heart. Commercial success is important but think about those songs that are on the charts for six weeks and then you can't remember that tune after five years. You play the songs of *Dil Hai Ki Manta Nahin, Aashiqui* and *Kalank* today and it still touches people's cores. If I impress you, you won't remember that very well but if I move you, you'll carry that memory for life.

DO YOU FEEL THE FILM INDUSTRY HAS BECOME AN EASY TARGET THESE LAST FEW YEARS?

Oh, it certainly has! Everytime the world needs a target, they point towards the film industry. And all of us are not forthright about defending ourselves or to counter them. I think it's obvious that, in the world we live in today, there is a tendency to provoke a response. While I believe that you have a right to say what you want to say, I have the right to respond when I want to respond. And I'm not going to respond to everything that provokes a response.

UNLIKE OTHER STARS, YOU'VE NEVER HID YOUR FAULTS. IN FACT YOU'VE BEEN QUITE OPEN ABOUT YOUR DRINKING ISSUES.

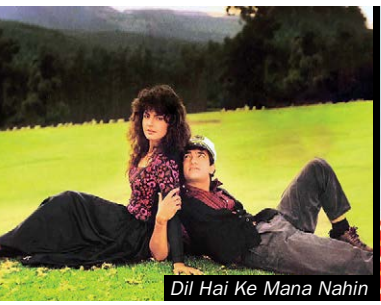
We try to cover up many things. But four years ago when I decided to quit drinking, I decided to be open about it. I began my career with a film like *Daddy,* which was about a young girl getting her father who's an alcoholic to stop drinking. And there I was dealing with the same problem. I reached out to people to let them know that it's something that could happen to anyone. Women especially need to be a little bit more open about that. And I was overwhelmed by the response that I got from random strangers.

IS BEING HAPPILY MARRIED A MYTH, ESPECIALLY FOR A WOMAN?

No matter what we women achieve in the world, a lot of us come home and our achievements are reduced to '*haan, theek hai na, tumne* Nobel Prize *jeet liya magar abhi khaane mein kya hai?*' (Good, you've won the Nobel Prize but what's for dinner?) Are you a mother? Are you not? Are you married? Are you not? I've been asked by so many people why aren't you getting married again. And I tell them that I've grown up from thinking 'and they lived happily ever after' to 'and she lived happily ever after'. I've been there, done that, tried it and recommended it to people too. But my life is not incomplete because I choose to live the way I do.

WHAT'S A USUAL DINNER TABLE CONVERSATION AT THE BHATT HOUSE?

Rocking, in every way! The conversations range from world affairs, plants, thunderstorms to the best cheesecake - it's a riot! You'd enjoy being a fly on the wall or, in our case, a lizard on the wall because we love lizards in our household. Between my father, me, Soni, Shaheen and Alia, we have different interests and strong opinions and ways of putting those opinions across.


Dil Hai Ke Mana Nahin


Daddy


Sadak 2


Sadak

SPRING HAS ARRIVED IN THE BACKYARD AND I'M EXULTING IN IT. I'VE ALSO BEEN MOVED BY MESSAGES FROM WITHIN THE FRATERNITY WHO'VE REACHED OUT TO ME AND SHOWERED ME WITH SO MUCH LOVE



“A SIXTY YEAR OLD MAN MARRIES A TWENTY YEAR OLD. BUT TURN THE ROLES AND TELL ME, CAN A SIXTY YEAR OLD WOMAN MARRY A TWENTY YEAR OLD MAN? IT DOESN’T HAPPEN. AT LEAST, I HAVEN’T HEARD OF SUCH A THING”

A new dawn

NEENA GUPTA IS ENJOYING A SECOND SPELL OF STARDOM IN HER MIDDLE AGE. SHE SHARES HER EUPHORIA WITH **ANALITA SETH**


Sardar Ka Grandson

Age is just a number. Or rather, it should be. But more often than not, this doesn't apply to our heroines. While a 50-plus hero is seen to be entering his golden age, for a heroine it's the reverse. She's said to be leaving her golden years behind and is expected to gracefully fade into the woodwork. Times are changing and thankfully today good roles are being written for mature actresses as well. One such beneficiary of this change is Neena Gupta. Thanks to her performances in films like *Badhaai Ho, Shubh Mangal Saavdhan* and series like *Panchayat,* she's finding herself flush with offers. Neena appeared as a 90-year-old grandma in *Sardar Ka Grandson* recently and her bravura performance won hearts. She's also revelling in the joy of her well-received autobiography *Sach Kahun Toh*. Excerpts from a free-flowing interview with the actress who has always lived life on her own terms...

What motivated you to write *Sach Kahun Toh?*
It was the time of the first lockdown. I had time to reflect and someone suggested that I should write. Fortunately, it all flowed smoothly this time around. I've tried before but I couldn't write for long.

Did you at any moment feel like maybe it's a bad idea?
I never felt it was a bad idea. It's strange but it was like I took a road and I didn't want to turn back. I just wanted to get somewhere and I kept going. The road was difficult but I never lost heart.

It's got great reviews and the reception has been great...
I was nervous that people might not like it. I've written from the beginning so I'd wonder who'd want to read about my childhood days in Karolbagh and NDA. I felt people only wanted juicier stuff and that's very little in the book. I had my doubts. But the praise and reception I've received, it's unbelievable. I'm ecstatic about the way people's received it.

Do you think it'll put a rest to the recurring questions about your past or will it raise new ones?
I don't care about whether it changes the false image the media had created of me. I've reached a point in my career and life where all of this doesn't matter. I have a feeling that people will think differently of me as a person but if they don't, it doesn't matter. I've suffered, I've taken it in my stride, I lost a lot but now it's all in the past and doesn't matter.

There is a certain credibility attached to your name now. What does that feel like?
It is a big responsibility. It's like how I watch Hollywood films because it stars a certain actor. It's the same thing. My approach to accepting roles hasn't changed. I always see it from the point of



> **“EARLIER I USED TO DO FILMS THAT I PRAYED WOULD NEVER SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY. I PLAYED BADLY-WRITTEN CHARACTERS BECAUSE I HAD NO WORK. IN TELEVISION I’VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING THAT I’VE NOT LIKED”**

view of a lay person. If I’m not convinced that I would enjoy watching my character on screen, I wont do it. Earlier I used to do films that I prayed would never see the light of day. I played badly-written characters because I had no work. In television, I’ve never done anything that I’ve not liked. But there I could choose. With films, I needed the money so I had to do such rubbish work, you can’t imagine. There is this one film that comes a lot on TV and I cringe when I see myself in it. So yes, now I have a responsibility and I’m quite clear in my head about what I like and what I don’t want to portray. It can be correct to you, but it’s not correct to me.

How has work from home been for you?

I miss going out for promotions to different cities. I miss meeting people, having fun with them, eating and drinking together. But I do thank the almighty that even in this scenario we can work virtually. God knows when all of this will end, so whatever we’ve got, I’m grateful.

From your initial films like *Mandi* and *Utsav* to now *Badhaai Ho* and *Sardar Ka Grandson*, how much have you evolved as an artiste and how much has the industry evolved in your view?

With every show, film or play I did, I found out more of my flaws. I realised what I lacked and what I had to work on. For example, on the screen, in a close up, you look double your size. So, I realised I can’t put on weight. Over the years, I’ve become my best critic. I know where I have gone wrong. As for the industry, it’s in a great phase for cinema currently. I’m thankful that I’m still getting work. I have a lot of good work lined up. It’s a great phase for everyone, writers, producers, directors, etc. The audience is accepting newer subjects so people are making better content. OTT has also helped a lot. You can make a low-budget film and masses will get to see it on streaming platforms.

What’s your take on the age gap that’s increasing between the male and the female leads? Does it mean there’s a shelf life to a female actor but not one for her male counterpart?

There is no problem here. In our society it’s the same. A sixty year old man marries a twenty year old. But turn the roles and tell me, can a sixty year old woman marry a twenty year old man? It doesn’t happen. At least, I haven’t heard of such a thing. So in our society, a man can be with a younger woman but not so often the other way round. If it doesn’t happen in reality, how can you show it on screen? So one is used to it. Initially, I would say that yes, the actor is way older than me but then the other choice was to sit at home and not work.

Meryl Steep was seen romancing Keegan-Michael Key who is twenty years younger than her, in *The Prom*. You see something like that happening here?

No, it can’t happen here. I think it doesn’t happen a lot in the West either. Even if it does, it’s usually on the lines that the man will find a younger girl and will leave the older woman. That’s the mindset.

You played Kanwaljit Singh’s mother in *Sardar Ka Grandon*. You’ve often played his lover in both films and TV. Did you find it odd to see him cast as your son?

We are professionals and hence it doesn’t matter. I have played Feroze Khan’s older sister, for that matter. I have also played mother to actors who are just ten years younger than me. Maybe one day the audience will see Kanwaljit and me again, playing our real age in a drama. My role was

so good that nothing else mattered.

What was your first reaction when you heard the story of *Sardar Ka Grandson?*

When I learnt that I'd be playing a 90-year-old in the film, I told my manager that I am not even going to listen to the story and it was a no from me. But he told me to hear the narration and then decide. Kaashvi (Nair), the director narrated the script to me and when she finished I told her I'm game. I did have queries about the process of moving an entire house like it's shown in the film, so I asked her about it and she said she's done her research. In fact, the other day someone commented on my Instagram post that they have seen this happen in Germany. So it happens, though rarely. Also, I don't feel the love between a grandchild and a grandparent has been explored a lot in our films. It is something else. It touches your heart.



Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan

What was the most difficult part of playing a nonagenarian?

I received so many pictures of people's grandmothers and they tell me I look exactly like them. One of my friends sent me a picture of her grandmother in the winters with the same cap and scarf and she said I looked like her. So I knew we passed the look test. But initially we had a few issues. We experimented a lot. We made a mould and it was scary. I then tried many things and different people worked on the prosthetics. We had to keep in mind that it cannot hamper my performance. They wanted a full thing but I wasn't able to emote. So we decided on patches around my cheeks. It took me two hours to get ready everyday. The worst part was that we'd work till late and after packing up while everyone would rush to their rooms, I was stuck there to remove the make up for a good hour and a half.

What was it like working with an ensemble cast?

It was great fun. We shot in Patiala at the end of December. It was so cold, I used to wear two warmers on top and on my legs and then wear my costume, two pairs of socks and then a cap. We shot around a farm so the place was beautiful. The weather was nice and food in Patiala was fabulous. We were living in a beautiful old palace. We got to know each other so well and Arjun (Kapoor) was so much fun. He would keep cracking jokes. He's a very hardworking boy. We rarely met him in the night for dinner because he was doing intermittent fasting so he would eat early. He was disciplined and would do his workouts diligently. But on the set, we had a great time. Kaashvi is also a cool cat, we would always keep goofing around on the sets.



"WHEN I LEARNT THAT I'D BE PLAYING A 90-YEAR-OLD IN *SARDAR KA GRANDSON*, I TOLD MY MANAGER THAT I AM NOT EVEN GOING TO LISTEN TO THE STORY AND IT WAS A NO FROM ME"

The film revolves around your character's memories of her past. What's your strongest memory of your life before you became an actor?

I'm from Delhi so when I came to Mumbai in 1981, it was difficult. I didn't have a godfather and I had no idea about the rules of the game. So after every two months, I would want to go back but something always came up. Although I still miss Delhi, Mumbai is my home now. But when I go back and visit places that I used to go to during school and college, sometimes it hurts a little. It's a sweet pain that will always remain and those are my most nostalgic moments in life. ■

Hungry *for* more

LIKE STEVE JOBS, SHRIYA PILGAONKAR TOO BELIEVES IN STAYING HUNGRY, STAYING FOOLISH. ANALITA SETH CHATS WITH THE LEVEL-HEADED ACTRESS

She's the daughter of two talented artistes, Sachin and Supriya Pilgaonkar. One can say that Shriya Pilgaonkar was born to act. Like her father Sachin, who made a name for himself as a child artiste in both Hindi and Marathi cinema and then stretched that streak into adulthood, Shriya too started off when she was quite young. She appeared in the hit serial *Tu Tu Main Main*, playing a character named Bittu, when she was just five. She made her big screen debut with the Marathi film *Ekulti Ek* (2013), which was directed by Sachin. She won the Maharashtra State Film Award in the Best Debut Actress category for that. She then landed a French film called *Un plus une* (2015), which was much celebrated on the festival circuit. Her Hindi film debut happened with *Fan* (2016), where she was paired opposite Shah Rukh Khan. It's to her credit that she stood shoulder-to-shoulder with him in the film and didn't give off any newbie vibes. OTT beckoned in the form of the hugely successful *Mirzapur* (2018), she was even part of Gurinder Chaddha's period piece *Beecham House* (2019). Her last release was the multilingual *Kaadan* (2021), whose Hindi version *Haathi Mere Saathi*, has been put on hold because of the spike in the COVID-19 cases and a partial lockdown in Maharashtra. Excerpts from a free-flowing interview with the actress who likes to work across genres, platforms and languages…



Mirzapur

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE ACTORS NEED TO HAVE. THERE'S NO WAY OUT. I DON'T SEE MY CAREER LASTING JUST 10 YEARS, I WANT IT TO LAST 50 YEARS OR EVEN MORE. SO THE QUALITY OF THE WORK I DO IS MORE IMPORTANT TO ME

FAN RECENTLY COMPLETED FIVE YEARS OF ITS RELEASE. WHAT MEMORIES DO YOU HAVE OF YOUR HINDI FILM DEBUT?

Fan will always have a special place in my heart. To share screen space with Shah Rukh Khan feels surreal even now. It tried to tell a different story in a different way. Kudos to Shah Rukh Khan for taking that risk and playing a double role in the film. Both the characters he played were poles apart from each other. It taught me that one should never be afraid to take risks. I'm proud of the film and proud of my work in the film.

DID SHAH RUKH KHAN GIVE YOU ANY ACTING TIPS?

I loved interacting with him as he's an intelligent man. He's insightful and we had many interesting conversations. I shared with him that I wasn't just interested in being an actor but wanted to be a filmmaker someday as well. I told him I've already made a short film and a documentary. He was very supportive



I LOVED INTERACTING WITH SHAH RUKH KHAN (DURING THE SHOOTING OF *FAN*) AS HE'S AN INTELLIGENT MAN. HE'S INSIGHTFUL AND WE HAD MANY INTERESTING CONVERSATIONS

of that and recommended a book on screenplay writing called *Save The Cat,* which I bought later.

WHAT ARE THE THINGS YOU'VE LEARNT FROM YOUR PARENTS THAT MAKE YOU A BETTER PROFESSIONAL?

I've seen the grace with which my parents have always carried themselves and that's what I aspire to be. The goodwill they have is a result of not just their contribution and talent but their demeanour as people. They've always told me that no work is too big or too small and that the best way to be different is to be yourself. The legacy I want to leave behind is of being a solid human being who was kind to people and good at her craft.

DO YOU EVER GET IMPATIENT IF WORK IS SLOW?

Patience is a virtue actors need to have. There's no way out. I don't see my career lasting just 10 years, I want it to last 50 years or even more. So the quality of the work I do is more important to me. There will be a good phase and a not-so-good phase but the point is to be consistent and keep moving ahead. When I feel like I have some free time, I take off and travel or learn something and prep myself for what's to come.

YOU'RE A SWIMMER, A KATHAK DANCER, A THEATRE ACTOR... WHAT'S SOMETHING NEW YOU'VE INDULGED YOURSELF IN OVER THE PAST YEAR?

I'm an explorer at heart and there are so many things that interest me. The best part of being an actor is that you can use all kinds of skills and experiences to build your characters. I love the process of filmmaking as well and this past year I've started writing a lot. When I feel ready and more prepared for it, I'd love to direct. But I'll never stop acting. I love it too much.

WHAT LESSONS DID YOU LEARN IN 2020, WHEN THE WHOLE WORLD WAS LOCKED UP?

To truly cherish and live in the present moment - as simple as that. I think I've learnt how to live a better life and not just be caught up with my desires. We spend too much time living in the past or the future. In 2020, I personally felt such a heightened sense of gratitude for existence and life in general with everything that the world was going through. I definitely got to know myself better and a lot was put into perspective. It's the little everyday things that bring me joy that I now value so much more. Everything else is fleeting.

DID YOU REFLECT A LOT ON YOUR LIFE DURING THE LOCKDOWN?

I've come to realise that as an actor, the only thing in my control is the process of filming. The journey is what I can hold on to. In the lockdown, I got the opportunity to be part of a virtual play called *Lockdown Love* which we performed online. And I also shot a thriller series at home called *The Gone Game* which all actors self-shot, and we were directed via Zoom. People really enjoyed watching it and it was empowering in a way to do everything on your own.

HAS THE PANDEMIC AND THE LOCKDOWN CHANGED THINGS





With parents Sachin and Supriya

I'VE SEEN THE GRACE WITH WHICH MY PARENTS HAVE ALWAYS CARRIED THEMSELVES AND THAT'S HOW I ALWAYS STRIVE AND ASPIRE TO BE. THE GOODWILL THEY HAVE IS A RESULT OF NOT JUST THEIR CONTRIBUTION AND TALENT BUT THEIR DEMEANOUR AS PEOPLE

AROUND FOR ACTORS?
It's the best time to be an actor today as there are so many more mediums of storytelling. Good writing is getting its due and as a result, diverse characters are being written, especially strong female parts. The female gaze is being noted. The traditional star system is gradually changing. It doesn't matter anymore if you're not headlining parts. If you stand out in a scene, people will notice. The gravitas of the character and the story is important. I have built a solid sense of self that is not easily defeated. It's important to have a strong EQ and mental well-being is always a priority which just helps me overall as a person and makes my journey all the more enjoyable.

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FROM 2021?
I just hope that the pandemic is under control and things don't get worse. I have work lined up and some travel which I'm looking forward to. But as we all learned from the past year, just being in the present moment and making the most of it seems to be a better plan than excessively planning things.

WHAT ARE SOME NEW THINGS YOU WISH TO TRY AS AN ACTOR?
I haven't had a chance to do an out-and-out *masala* Bollywood film as we call it. I would love to do that. I recently did action for the first time which was so cool to try. I want to be able to surprise myself and the audience with the parts I play and stories I chose to be part of. I really want to work with Zoya Akhtar, Sriram Raghavan, Anurag Basu, Shoojit Sircar to name a few.

NAME ONE ACTOR WHOSE CAREER GRAPH YOU ADMIRE?
One is hard to pick. Different aspects of different actors' careers have been inspiring but Alia Bhatt, Priyanka Chopra and Radhika Apte come to my mind. These wonderful actors have managed to do films in different genres and have surprised the audience with their range and versatility with each character. I like that they haven't allowed themselves to be stereotyped and have made strong choices. Also, Priyanka Chopra is a powerhouse and has definitely paved the way for Indian actors internationally.■



WE SPEND TOO MUCH TIME LIVING IN THE PAST AND FUTURE. IN 2020, I PERSONALLY FELT SUCH A HEIGHTENED SENSE OF GRATITUDE FOR EXISTENCE AND LIFE IN GENERAL WITH EVERYTHING THAT THE WORLD WAS GOING THROUGH

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR UPCOMING PROJECTS...
My upcoming projects haven't been officially announced yet but I'm super excited for what's coming up. There are two series and a film in the pipeline. They are from genres that I haven't done before so I'm crazy excited. I'm currently wrapping up a shoot for one of them. I want to maintain a balance of doing film work and series as both the mediums are fun and fulfilling in their own right.

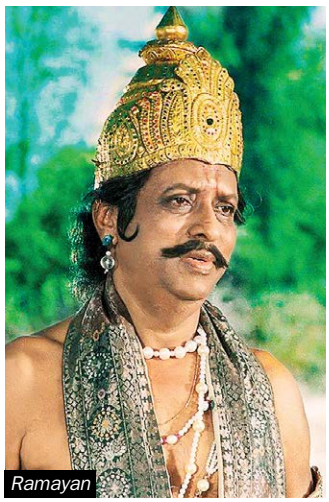
FAREWELL, CHANDRASHEKHAR

VETERAN ACTOR **CHANDRASHEKHAR** PASSED AWAY RECENTLY. **DEVESH SHARMA** OFFERS A SHORT PROFILE OF HIS LIFE AND TIMES

(JULY 7, 1922-JUNE 16, 2021)

They say Mumbai is a city of dreams. Sometimes, those who dream have to sleep on the footpath. One such person was the veteran actor Chandrashekhar. He started life in the movies as an 'ordinary' extra, who were paid 1.50 rupees per day in the 40s. The 'decent' extras were paid Rs 8. From ordinary extra he soon became a decent extra. He preferred working in Devika Rani's Bombay Studios, which paid Rs 10 and whose canteen offered subsidised food. In his initial years, he spent the days working in the studios and used to sleep on the footpath as accommodation was too costly in Mumbai.

Chandrashekhar was born as Chandrashekhar Vaidya in Hyderabad on July 7, 1922. He got married when he was just a teenager. Hard times befell his family and he left schooling and started doing odd jobs. He left for Bangalore at the age of 18 and worked in a factory pushing trolleys for a meagre wage. Later, he came to Mumbai to try his luck in the film industry. Life in Mumbai didn't prove to be easy. As said earlier, he was sleeping on the footpath, which wasn't safe. He decided to shift to Pune as the cost of living was much lower in Pune. It's said singer Shamshad Begum helped him get a job with a fixed salary at a studio in Pune. He was able to afford a house in a chawl and called his wife to live with him there.



Ramayan

Chandrashekhar became an assistant director to Gulzar, as he wasn't getting work as an actor. He assisted Gulzar in films like like *Parichay* (1972), *Koshish* (1972), *Achanak* (1973), *Aandhi* (1975) and *Khushboo* (1975)

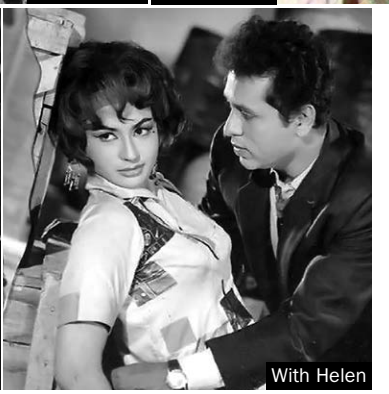
He had to shift base again to Mumbai, after the owner of the studio he was working in migrated to Pakistan after Independence. He got his first role as a character artiste in *Bebus* (1950), which was made by Bharat Bhushan's brother Ramesh Chandra, who owned a studio in Lucknow. Bharat Bhushan was the hero and Chandrashekhar got to play a character role in the film. He also became an assistant director in it. Incidentally, later in his life, Chandrashekhar became an assistant director to Gulzar, as he wasn't getting work as an actor. He assisted Gulzar in films like like *Parichay* (1972), *Koshish* (1972), *Achanak* (1973), *Aandhi* (1975), *Khushboo* (1975) and *Mausam* (1975).




Hum Diwane


With his fans


With Bharat Bhushan


With Helen

It's said he named his grandson Shakti Arora, who is a TV actor, after Shakti Samanta. Likewise, his friendship with Ashok Kumar led him to name his elder son Ashok, who is a businessman

V Shantaram cast him as a second lead in *Surang* (1953). The film depicted the plight of the quarry workers and Chandrashekhar's role of a miner brought him plaudits. Better work started coming his way. And with that, better pay. He started getting Rs 15,000 per film. His films from that era include *Mastana* (1954), *Bara Dari* (1955), *Basant Bahar* (1956), *Gateway Of India* (1957), *Kali Topi Lal Rumal* (1959), where he played the lead role, and many more. He had a versatile 'face' as casting directors say, it could fit into any role, be it an inspector, a doctor, or lawyer. He played everybody from a prince to a pauper in his long career.

By the '60s, he had saved enough money to turn producer. He produced and directed a dance film called *Cha Cha Cha* (1964), casting himself as the hero and taking talented dancer Helen as the heroine. It was her first lead role. The film became famous for its songs like *Subah na aayi, Woh tum na the* -- sung by Mohammed Rafi and the romantic duet *Ek chameli ke mandwe tale*, sung by Mohammed Rafi and Asha Bhosle. The film's music was given by Iqbal Qureshi, one of the unsung heroes of Hindi film music. The film became a super hit and that prompted Chandrashekhar to make another musical called *Street Singer* (1966). It had music by Shankar-Jaikishan and though the songs became popular at the time, the film didn't perform well at the box office. He quit filmmaking after that.

He was friends with Shakti Samanta, who cast him in many films like *Kati Patang* (1971), *Ajnabee* (1974), *Mehbooba* (1976) and *Alag Alag* (1985). It's said he named his grandson Shakti Arora, who is a TV actor, after Shakti Samanta. Likewise, his friendship with Ashok Kumar led him to name his elder son Ashok, who is a businessman. From early 70s to the late 80s, Chandrashekhar played minor characters in films like *Hum Tum Aur Woh* (1971), *Gehri Chaal* (1973), *Charitraheen* (1974), *Shakti* (1982), *Namak Halaal* (1982), *Nikaah* (1982), *Disco Dancer* (1982), *Sharaabi* (1985), *Sansar* (1987), *Hukumat* (1987) and many more.

The mythological serial *Ramayan*, produced by Ramanand Sagar, brought him fame later in life as his character Arya Sumant, was well-received.

He had come up the hard way and was well-versed with the life of cinema workers. He was instrumental in the formation of the Cine Artiste Association in 1958. He was involved with various film trade unions throughout his life. He served as President of the Cine Artistes Association (CINTAA) from 1985 to 1996. He was also the President of the Federation of Western India Cine Employees, All India Film Employees Confederation, trustee of Cine Artistes Welfare Fund of India and Cine Artiste Welfare Trust, Vice-President of Indian Film Directors Association, associated as Member with Film Writers Association, and Indian Motion Pictures Producers Association.

He died of age-related illness at the age of 98 on June 16, 2021. ■

Remembering Raaj Kumar

Devesh Sharma offers a short profile on the life and career of veteran actor **Raaj Kumar**, whose death anniversary falls on July 3

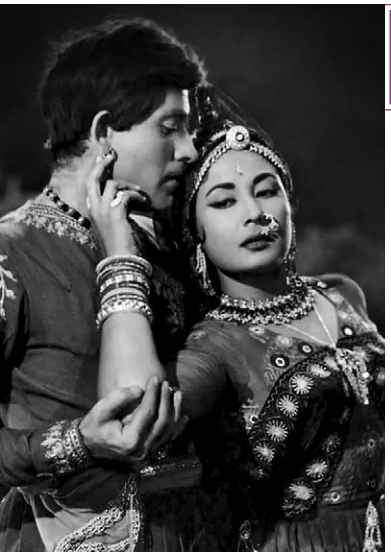
Raaj Kumar was born as Kulbhushan Nath Pandit in Loralai, Balochistan, in a Kashmiri Pandit family on October 8, 1926. Not much is known about his childhood or pre-movie days except that he joined the Mumbai police as a sub-inspector in the '40s. It's said that noted filmmaker Sohrab Modi once saw him in Metro theatre where they were both watching a film and impressed by his dashing personality, offered to launch him as a hero. He said no to Modi then but eventually did the costume action drama *Nausherwan-E-Adil* (1957) with him, which turned him into a star. He made his acting debut with the 1952 film *Rangili. Mother India* (1957), where he played Nargis' husband, further added to his fame.

Raaj Kumar was known as an stylised actor and was famous for his dialogue delivery but that wasn't the case in the '50s. Back then, he was known more for his realistic portrayals and understated performances. *Paigham* (1959) where he played Dilip Kumar's elder brother, is a case in point. He matched Dilip Kumar in every frame and some even said he bested the thespian in the film. Whatever the case may be, the duo never worked together again, till Subhash Ghai managed to bring them together for his *Saudagar* (1991), which was touted as the coming together of titans.

He reportedly changed his style and became a more stylised actor with the Yash Chopra multi-starrer *Waqt* (1965). The success of the film, where he played a loveable rake, made writers write grey-shaded roles for him, in which he excelled. Also, his command over both Hindi and Urdu got noted and he was offered flamboyant dialogue, which he pulled off with ease. Somehow, when he said them, those bombastic lines didn't sound cheesy. He excelled in romantic roles as well. And was well-suited to play the stoic lover in such films as *Dil Apna Aur Preet Parai* (1960), *Dil Ek Mandir* (1963), *Kaajal* (1965) and his best romantic film till date, *Pakeezah* (1972). Incidentally, Raaj Kumar wasn't the only choice for the role in *Pakeezah*. Sunil Dutt, Rajendra Kumar and Dharmendra were all considered before Raaj Kumar got chosen. The film was initially launched in 1956 but took 16 year to get completed. But this gap did nothing to dilute its magic. It's still an immensely watchable film and its songs, composed by Ghulam Mohammed, remain immortal.

He lived life king-size, preferring to have the best of everything, be it cars, whiskeys or clothes. And he was eccentric enough to tailor shirts out of curtains if the colour or the design caught his eye. There are many stories about his acerbic wit. He once reportedly told Zeenat Aman, a top actor in the '70s, "You have a pretty face. You should try acting." And he even supposedly told Zeenat after *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* it was difficult to recognise her with her clothes on. Then, another story goes that he once told a gold-laden Bappi Lahri that the only thing missing was a *mangalsutra*. He was offered *Zanjeer* but allegedly turned it down as he didn't like Prakash Mehra's face. He's even said to have told Mani Kaul, the maker of the seminal art film *Uski Roti* (1969) – *Jaani, hamare saath aao,* commercial film *banate hain, Apna Halwa.*

From the '70s till his death in the '90s, he mostly worked in supporting roles. But such was his aura that he made those roles his own and had the masses rooting for his character more than the hero. After working in 70-plus films in his illustrious career, he succumbed to throat cancer on July 3, 1996. He was 69 at the time and is survived by his sons Puru Raaj Kumar, Panini Raajkumar and daughter Vastavikta Pandit. He was a very private person and respecting his wishes, the film industry was informed of his death only after the cremation. We take a look at some of his best roles down the years.



↓ BEST FILMS OF **RAAJ KUMAR**

DIL APNA AUR PREET PARAI (1960)

DIRECTOR: KISHORE SAHU
CAST: RAAJ KUMAR, MEENA KUMARI, NADIRA

This was a typical nurse-doctor romance known today for its evergreen songs like *Ajeeb dastan hai yeh* and the title song. Karuna (Meena Kumari) joins a hospital as a nurse and comes into contact with Dr Sushil Varma (Raaj Kumar). Love blossoms between them and they seem right for each other. However, Dr Sushil has to marry Kusum (Naadira) due to the obligations of her father upon him and his family. Kusum is the jealous sort who wreaks havoc in her marriage because of her nature. After much melodrama, the film veers towards a happy ending. Raaj Kumar was impressive as the doctor and so was Meena Kumari as the heartbroken nurse. Nadira too stood out as the overtly jealous wife.





GHARANA (1961)

DIRECTOR: S S VASAN
CAST: RAAJ KUMAR, RAJENDRA KUMAR, ASHA PAREKH

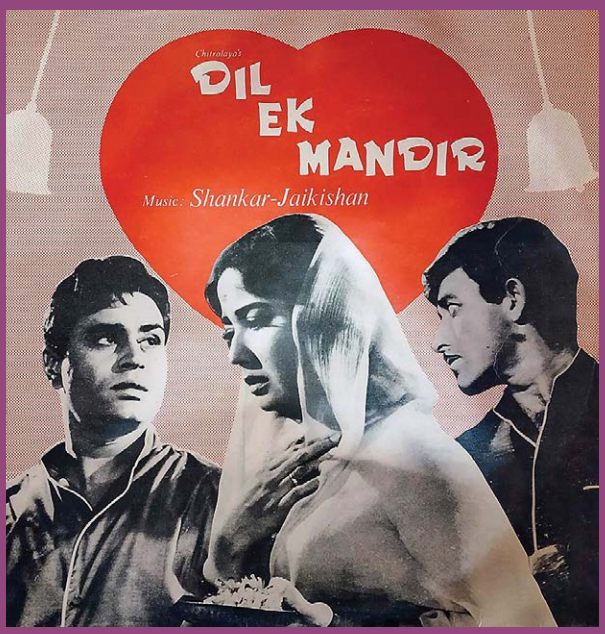
The film was a remake of the 1960 Telugu film *Shanthi Nivasam* and remade in 1988 as *Ghar Ghar Ki Kahani*. Shanta (Lalita Pawar) is a tyrant. Her husband Ramdas (Bipin Gupta) is a very religious, meek man. Her middle son Kailash (Raaj Kumar), is married to a loving woman Sita (Devika). Youngest son is Kamal (Rajendra Kumar), a college student, who falls in love with another student Usha (Asha Parekh). Her married daughter Bhairavi (Shubha Khote), has now moved back home for a trivial reason. Shanta has completely spoiled her daughter. One day, Bhairavi plants a suspicion in Kailash's head that Sita is having an affair with Kamal. The peace in the family is destroyed with that suspicion as acrimony develops between the brothers. However, circumstances lead them to unite, leading to a happy ending for everyone.



WAQT (1961)

DIRECTOR: YASH CHOPRA
CAST: SUNIL DUTT, RAAJ KUMAR, SHASHI KAPOOR, SADHANA, BALRAJ SAHNI, SHARMILA TAGORE, ACHALA SACHDEV AND REHMAN

Waqt is often said to be Hindi cinema's first multistarrer. It utilised the lost-and-found formula as its basic plot, something which has become an often-used trope in Hindi films. Its grand production values, an A-list cast and fabulous music ensured good box-office returns as well. Yash Chopra, who wanted the three Kapoor brothers – Raj, Shammi and Shashi – to play the roles of long-lost brothers, settled for Raaj Kumar, Sunil Dutt as the elder and middle brother, with only Shashi retained from the original cast. He cast Sadhana and Sharmila Tagore, both known as style icons, as the love interest. The lost-and-found formula didn't look like a cliche and we sat engrossed as the brothers unknowingly crossed each other's paths. Raaj Kumar played a grey-shaded character in the film and was said to have overshadowed his other co-stars, thanks to his suave acting and the author-backed dialogue. He won his second Filmfare Best Actor In A Supporting Role trophy for this film.



DIL EK MANDIR (1963)

DIRECTOR: C. V. SRIDHAR
CAST: RAJENDRA KUMAR, MEENA KUMARI, RAAJ KUMAR

The film was a remake of the Tamil film *Nenjil Or Aalayam* (1962), also directed by Sridhar. This was another love triangle between a doctor, his lover and the man she eventually marries. Dr Dharmesh (Rajendra Kumar) only lives to serve his patients. He's nursing a broken heart because the love of his life Sita (Meena Kumari) has married a rich businessman Ram (Raaj Kumar). Ram gets cancer and comes to Dharmesh's hospital for treatment. Sita isn't sure Ram is the right doctor for her husband as his feelings might come in the way. To prove to her that his zeal for curing patients is bigger than his feelings for her, he dedicatedly works day and night to find a line of treatment and even suffers a heart attack in the process. He successfully operates on Ram but later dies out of exhaustion. Ram and Sita later erect a hospital in his memory. Raaj Kumar won the Filmfare Best Actor In A Supporting Role trophy for his role in the film.



KAAJAL(1965)

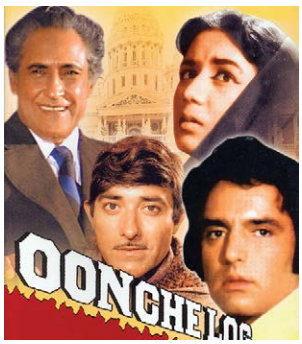
DIRECTOR: RAM MAHESHWARI
CAST: MEENA KUMARI, DHARMENDRA, RAAJ KUMAR

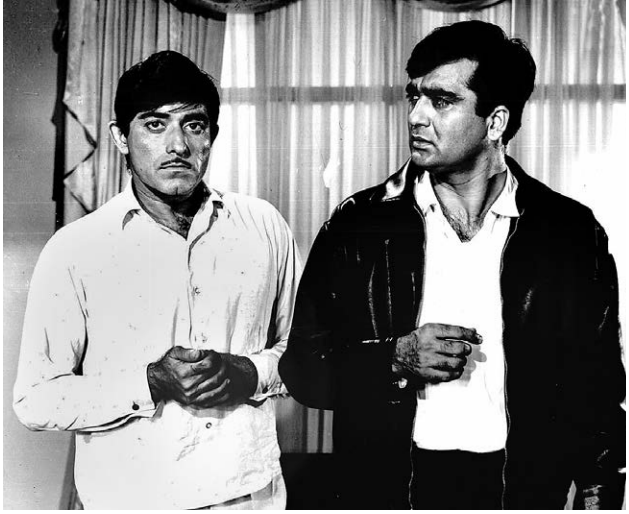
The film is adapted from Gulshan Nanda's novel *Maadhavi.* After her munim passes away, Ranimaa brings up both his children as her own, along with her only son, Rajesh (Dharmendra). Years later, Rajesh has grown up and is of marriageable age. Munim's son Kaushal passes away, leaving behind a devastated Madhavi (Meena Kumari). Rajesh blames himself for Kaushal's death. A few months later, Rajesh gets married to Bhanu (Padmini), who is extremely jealous of Madhavi. She even accuses Madhavi of having an affair with Rajesh. Madhavi wants to commit suicide and is rescued by Moti (Raaj Kumar), She gets married to Moti but it looks like he has his own agenda for marrying her. The film is known for its fab songs like *Choo lene do nazuk hoton ko, Yeh zulf agar khul ke,* and the evergreen rakhi song, *Mere bhaiyya, mere chanda.*

OONCHE LOG (1965)

DIRECTOR: PHANI MAJUMDAR
CAST: ASHOK KUMAR, RAAJ KUMAR, FEROZ KHAN, KANHAIYA LAL, DEVEN VERMA, TARUN BOSE, KUMUD TRIPATHI

It is based on the play *Major Chandrakanth*, by K. Balachander. Widower Chandrakant (Ashok Kumar) is a blind retired army Major living with his two sons Shrikant (Raaj Kumar), a police inspector and Rajnikant (Feroz Khan), a collegian. While Shri is an honest police officer, Rajjo is a spoilt brat. Rajjo gets a girl pregnant and her brother kills him in retaliation. As fate would have it, the killer comes and hides in the Major's house and the wise Major puts the two and two together. Shri is after the killer and the Major does his utmost to hide him from the police, knowing that his younger son deserved to be killed. All three actors, Ashok Kumar, Raaj Kumar and Feroz Khan were a match for each other and the film got known for the macho chemistry





HAMRAAZ (1967)

DIRECTOR: BR CHOPRA
CAST: SUNIL DUTT, RAAJ KUMAR, BALRAJ SAHNI, VIMI, MUMTAZ

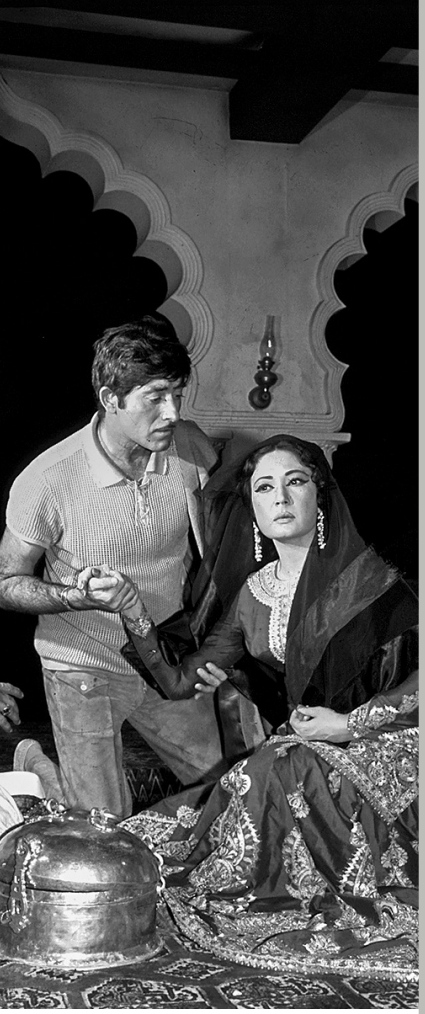
Hamraaz was a Hitchcockian film made by BR Chopra. Ravi provided the music and songs like *Neele gagan ke tale, Tum agar saath dene ka,* and *Na moonh chhupa ke jiyo* written by Sahir remain popular even today. Kumar (Sunil Dutt) is a well-known stage actor who performs plays along with his assistant Shabnam (Mumtaz), who is a little in love with him. While on a trip to Darjeeling, he falls in love with Meena (Vimi). Her behaviour changes after his father's death and Kumar begins to feel she's having an affair. He means to investigate and disguises himself with the intention of following her but finds her dead. Soon, inspector Ashok (Balraj Sahni) starts suspecting him. In order to escape the murder charge, Kumar starts a parallel investigation of his own.His enquiries lead him to Captain Rajesh (Raaj Kumar), who confesses to being Meena's first husband. He also tells him that they have a daughter who was given for adoption. The man who killed Meena now has the child and the duo come together to find out the truth about the mysterious happenings.



NEEL KAMAL (1968)

DIRECTOR: RAM MAHESHWARI
CAST: WAHEEDA REHMAN, MANOJ KUMAR, RAAJ KUMAR

Neel Kamal is a reincarnation drama where Waheeda Rehman, playing the titular role sleepwalks in the night because she's haunted by the ghost of her lover in a past life. How she's cured of her illness forms the crux of the film. Raaj Kumar played a rather suave ghost in the film. It has the evergreen marriage song, *Babul ki duayein leti ja,* sung by Mohammed Rafi.



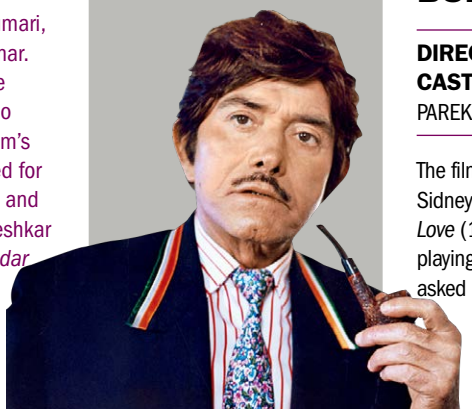
PAKEEZAH (1972)

DIRECTOR: KAMAL AMROHI
CAST: MEENA KUMARI, RAAJ KUMAR, ASHOK KUMAR, NADIRA, D.K. SAPRU

A man from a *nawabi* family falls in love with a *tawaif* but circumstances don't permit him to marry her. History gets repeated twenty years later when his nephew falls for her daughter. Thankfully, this time there is a happy ending. Aeons in the making, this Kamal Amrohi masterpiece had sparkling performances by Meena Kumari, Ashok Kumar and Raaj Kumar. It also had a fantastic score by Ghulam Mohammed, who tragically died before the film's release. It's still remembered for such gems as *Inhi logon ne* and *Thare rahiyo* by Lata Mangeshkar and the epic duet *Chalo dildar chalo* by Rafi and Lata.

RAAJ KUMAR'S BEST DIALOGUE

- *"Chinai Seth, chhuri bachchon ke khelne kee cheez nahin hoti, haath kat jaye to khoon nikal aata hai."* ***Waqt (1965)***
- *"Aap ke paon dekhe, bahut haseen hain, inhen zameen par mat utaryega maile ho jayenge."* ***Pakeezah (1972)***
- *"Billie ke daant gire nahin aur chala sher ke munh mein haath daalane. Ye badtameez harakate apne baap ke samne ghar ke aangan mein karana, sadkon par nahin."* ***Bulundi (1981)***
- *"Aapke liye main jahar ko doodh ki tarah pi sakta hoon, lekin apne khoon mein aapake liye dushmani ke keede nahin paal sakta."* ***Raaj Tilak (1984)***
- *"Is duniya ke tum pehle aur aakhri badnaseeb kamine honge, jiski na to arthi uthegee aur na kisee ke kandhe ka sahaara, seedhe chita jalegee."* ***Marte Dam Tak (1987)***
- *"Ham woh collector nahin jinka phoonk maarkar tabadala kiya ja sakta hai. Collectori to hum shauq ke liye karte hain, rozee-rotee ke liye nahin."* ***Suryaa (1989)***

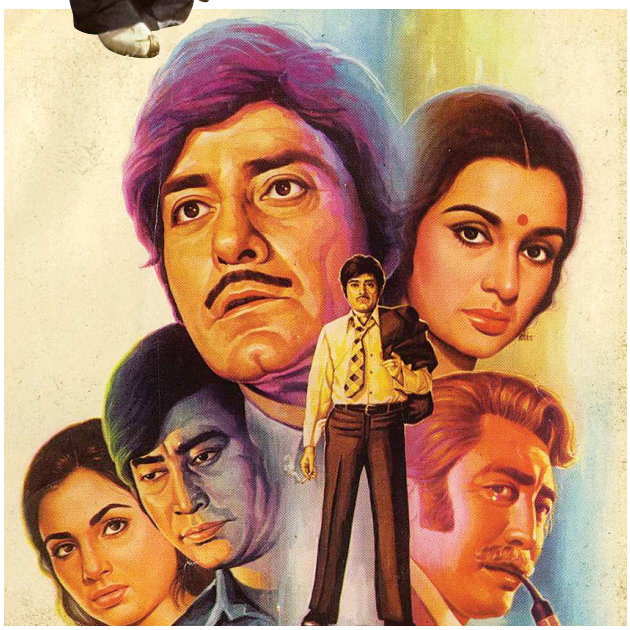




HEER RAANJHA (1970)

DIRECTOR: CHETAN ANAND
CAST: RAAJ KUMAR, PRIYA RAJVANSH

The film is based on the legend of *Heer Ranjha*, the epic poem *Heer* by Punjabi poet, Waris Shah, written in 1766. The film is unique in the fact that the entire film and its dialogue is in verse, Kaifi Azmi writing the verse dialogue. Chetan Anand's unusual decision of setting the dialogue in verse paid off because of Raaj Kumar's impeccable dialogue delivery. Jal Mistry's cinematography and Madan Mohan's music were its other redeeming points.



BULUNDI (1981)

DIRECTOR: ESMAYEEL SHROFF
CAST: RAAJ KUMAR, ASHA PAREKH, DANNY DENZONGPA

The film was hugely inspired by the Sidney Poiter classic, *To Sir With Love* (1967). It had Raaj Kumar playing a college professor who's asked by a don and his cronies to teach discipline to their wayward sons. How the professor's humanitarian approach brings a change in the brats, turning them into men with integrity, forms the crux of the story. The film's highlight were the confrontation scenes between Raaj Kumar and Danny Denzongpa, who played the dual role of the don and his son in the film.

your say

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

INSTA LIKE

Medley of moments

Check out the best Instagram posts of the stars from recent times



@shahidkapoor: Mane man..

This photo is giving us major **Kabir Singh** *vibes. What say, people?*



@priyanka chopra: The only appropriate way to celebrate #NationalSelfie Day

Priyanka Chopra sure knows how to click lovely selfies. Everyday is selfie day for her. We don't mind.



@aliaabhatt: spot the difference

You can always dress up for the mirror, even if you can't go out.



@kareenakapoor khan: Gucci bffs forever

The OG Gucci Gang is here, make way.



@janhvikapoor: Maybe half the beauty of every blurred sunset is that it is fleeting

Is Janhvi Kapoor audtioning for a Bond film by any chance?

Readers send in their feedback *pg 64*

Shatrughan Sinha's racy rejoinders *pg 66*



IN THE MAIL

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



1st Prize ₹1500

Disco delight: Mithun Chakraborty

ECSTATIC ABOUT *DISCO DANCER'S* PLAY VERSION

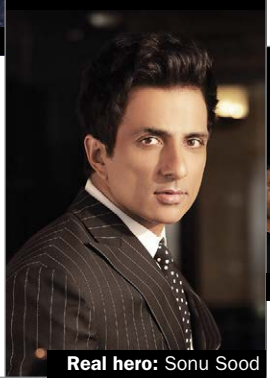
Mithun Chakraborty is my favourite Hindi film hero and when I read that a play is going to be made on his famous film *Disco Dancer* in your last issue (June), I couldn't contain my happiness. Even though I am excited to watch the adaptation, I just hope they don't ruin the original because old is gold for sure. *Koi shaq?*

Dharmapal Tambe, Solapur

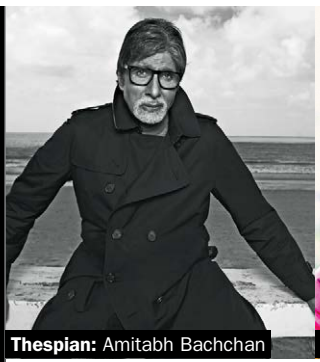
SONU THE SAVIOUR

We know that Sonu Sood is busy helping people as we see videos about it on *Filmfare's* social media posts almost everyday. It just makes me respect the actor more. It's truly awesome to watch a film celebrity getting down to the grassroots in these trying times. Kudos to Sonu for his humanitarian efforts.

Simran Ahuja, Amritsar



Real hero: Sonu Sood



Thespian: Amitabh Bachchan



Her own woman: Neena Gupta

NEENA GUPTA AND BIG B'S COLLABORATION

Can't believe that Neena Gupta will be pairing up with Amitabh Bachchan in *Goodbye*. I read about it in your last issue (June) and it really made me feel good for her as I believe she's a superb actress and deserves so much more. It's surely a fresh pairing to look forward to.

Harsh Wadhwabi, New Delhi



No piracy allowed: Salman Khan

MADHURI DIXIT AND SLB REUNITE?

I couldn't believe my eyes when I read in your last issue (June) that Madhuri Dixit Nene has beencc approached by Sanjay Leela Bhansali for an OTT show called *Heera Mandi*. Can't wait to watch these two collaborate again and for Bhansali to take over the digital space with his opulent vision.

Naresh Dutta, Kolkata

SALMAN KHAN PROVES HE IS THE BOSS

In your last issue (June), I read about Salman Khan's production company catching the people selling a pirated version of their film *Radhe: Your Most Wanted Bhai*. Hats off to Salman and his team for being so diligent and making sure the pirates don't have a field day

Vineeta Iyer, Bangalore



Up and away: Parineeti Chopra

2nd Prize ₹1000

PARINEETI CHOPRA'S SUCCESSFUL LEAP

Parineeti has been around for a while now. I never thought she would shine the way she has this year. I've watched all three of her films which released this year, she was just too good in all of them. I read in your last issue (June) that she is trying her best to do roles that not only have her doing something substantial but also are inspirational for other actresses in Bollywood. She truly deserves a pat on her back.

Neha Pendse, Jabalpur



Still so hot: Madhuri Dixit

SHOUTOUT TO BHUMI PEDNEKAR FOR BRINGING COVID-19 RELIEF

I have been reading a lot about Bhumi Pednekar going out of her way to help those in need during the pandemic. People like these are a godsend. We really appreciate her efforts to help the people amidst these trying times.

Mangala Nair, Trivandrum



Fighting for lives: Bhumi Pednekar

AWESOME PRAJAKTA KOLI

Prajakta Koli is someone I have been following since I was a teenager. To read her interview in your last issue (June) came as a big happy surprise. She truly deserves it. Thank you *Filmfare* for acknowledging talent from all across the country. You guys rock.

Meetu Aggarwal, Ranchi



Burning bright: Adarsh Gourav

Just one Point

ADARSH GOURAV IS HERE TO STAY

Adarsh Gourav's performance in The *White Tiger* was super impressive. I mostly see A-list actors being covered by your magazine but to watch this newcomer shining in your June issue made me beam with joy. He made India proud by getting nominated at the BAFTAs. This is only the beginning for this young actor. He's sure to go places.

Rohan Kapoor, Gurugram



True entertainer: Ranveer Singh

I read in your magazine that Ranveer Singh's *Cirkus* will have Russian performers in it. Can't wait for this one.

Rohit Kandpal, Munsiari

Filmfare's twitter has perked up in the last one year. Keep the B-town updates coming.

Rini Mathur, Varanasi

Taapsee Pannu is a woman of steel and your interview with her (June) further instilled my faith in her

Khushboo Patnaik, Rourkela

I love how *Filmfare*'s Instagram is the perfect blend of classy and massy.

Tanya Sehgal, Mussoorie

Just a big shoutout to all of you at *Filmfare* for relentlessly entertaining us throughout the lockdown when everything was gloomy.

Ritika Kumar, Jabalpur

TAAPSEE PANNU IS A RARE GEM

In a world where we keep hearing stories about people pulling each other down, your last issue (June) had Taapsee talking about lifting women up and I salute it. It is the need of the hour for the women to stand up and appreciate each other. It's only then that a positive change can come in the society. Keep soaring, Taapsee.

Kripa Bansal, Noida

Your last issue (June) had a wonderful interview with Taapsee Pannu. Insightful and well written, the details about the actress were gripping for sure. The way she candidly spoke about her career graph, women empowerment and nullifying negativity was commendable.

Aparna Rai, Mangalore



Best of the best: Alia Bhatt

ALIA BHATT'S AN ALL-ROUNDER

Alia Bhatt was seen on the *Filmfare* cover (June) after a long time and I loved it to bits. Details about how Alia does her bit for the environment in the issue raised my respect and love for her further. It was a delightful read indeed.

Sunaina Shankar, Chennai

IMPRESSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL WARRIORS

The cover story in the June issue focused on those stars who are doing all they can for the good of the environment. I loved reading about all their efforts. I realised that there's more to our stars than just glamour and glitz. They have the power to do much good and most of them don't hesitate to exercise it. The article really made my day.

Harsh Godbole, Pune

RAAM LAXMAN WILL LIVE ON

The tribute piece on the late music director Raam Laxman in your last issue (June) was written in great detail and gave an insight into his glorious career. It made me feel nostalgic about the '90s and also made me remember all the film industry folks we've lost in the past one year. May their souls rest in peace.

Samir Garg, Meerut

COVID-19'S HEARTBREAKING IMPACT ON BOLLYWOOD

It saddened me to read in your last issue (June) about how many movies have been postponed due to the pandemic. It is shocking to know about the adverse effects of the pandemic on Bollywood and the people working in it. Let's hope things head back to normal soon.

Prashant Tamang, Guwahati

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PHOTOGRAPH: MEETESH TANEJA

Shatrughan Sinha's Rapid fire



Majestic: Prithviraj Kapoor

When an actor plays a dark role in a movie, does it leave any impact on his real life?

Amit Mishra, via email

It depends on the actor. To be more accurate, It depends on the intensity of the role and the intensity of the actor. Professional actors know when to let go. They bounce back with new roles, new films.

If classics like *Mother India, Pyaasa, Mera Naam Joker, Mughal-e-Azam* had been remade during your active acting career and you were offered a role, which film would you have preferred?

Anil R Torne, Pune

I'd have loved to play our dearest Prithviraj Kapoor's role in *Mughal-e-Azam.* And though you haven't named it in the question, I feel I'd have done full justice to legend Dilip Kumar's role in *Gunga Jumna.*

Please name two legendary movies of the Indian film industry.

Amit Jain, New Delhi

Mother India, Mughal-e-Azam and *Gunga Jumna* as a close third.

Describe life in one word?

Subhash Chand, Chandigarh

Life is 'beautiful'.

Pakistan is exporting donkeys to China. Comment.

JP Singh Kaka, Bhopal

That's the donkey's problem, why are you worried?

Since there is an "end to life," Is there an "end to death" also?

Md Salim, Kolkata

The beginning of life begins with an end to death.

Red is the colour of love. It's also the colour of danger... anything more to this?

Mohammad Salim, Kolkata

Men shouldn't forget that just like they stop at the red light, they should look out for the accurate signal in relationships as well. And should stop in their tracks on the correct signal.

What is the most memorable event and embarrassing moment in your life?

Dr C Janardhan Singh, Hyderabad

Too embarrassed to remember. Too many embarrassing moments in life. Most memorable – quite a few, like getting selected at FTII, passing out with flying colours, the struggle period, the rise of my stardom in films, my rise in politics, becoming a cabinet minister – which is a record for a film star. And of course, my marriage and the birth of my beautiful children.

From black and white, colour films, multiplexes to OTT, I think Hindi films are losing their value day-by-day. What do you think?

Atul Tankha, Ratlam

Our films aren't losing their value, it's just the pandemic effect you're witnessing. OTT platforms are helping people to express their creativity in unique ways. It's the best thing that could have happened for both

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COVID-19 pandemic took lakhs of human lives all over the world in the last fourteen months. Surprisingly none of the renowned astrologers were able to predict this calamity before it struck. How come?

Anil R Torne, Pune

Astrology is not an accurate science. Astrologers aren't infallible. Even the most renowned ones aren't 100 per cent accurate. And why blame them when the governments the world over failed to tackle the pandemic.



Truly magical: *Mother India*

1st Prize

For protection from COVID-19, would you take Baba Ramdev's Coronil or Serum Institute's Covidshield?

Deepak Kapoor, Mumbai

Though I'm not in the ad business, I'll never take or endorse the so-called Baba's medicine. He has hurt, humiliated and angered the whole medical community, maligned our doctors and frontline warriors and has shown an uncalled for disdain towards allopathy. To further clarify your query, I've already taken the tried, tested and recommended Covidshield.

2nd Prize

As Aldous Huxley supposedly said, "Maybe this world is another planet's hell." Can we agree with it seeing the helplessness of people in the recent COVID-19 situation?

Arafat Alam, New Delhi

Our world is a hell we human beings have been creating since eons. The pandemic has nothing to do with it. But there's much good in the world as well. The pandemic shouldn't make us forget the positive aspects of the world we live in.

the creative people and the audience.

Which is your favourite North Indian and South Indian dish?

C. R. Hariharan, Aluva

Being a true-blue Indian, I prefer the tasty North Indian dishes and also the healthy South Indian food. I love the cuisine from the West and the East too, for that matter. Why settle for a single dish when you have such a huge variety in our country?

Does one give, in order to receive or does one have to receive in order to give?

Md Salim, Kolkata

It should never be the criteria. Someone has to start somewhere. The pleasure of giving is unparalleled and far more gratifying than receiving.

Would the world be better off without borders?

Subhash Chand, Chandigarh

It's the most wonderful and beautiful idea. But the point is, is it possible in today's time?

Where are we headed as a nation after months and months of farmers' protest?

Amit Jain, New Delhi

As a nation, we have evolved tremendously since 1947, and that applies to the future as well. With time, farmers will learn better farming, distribution and marketing techniques and those in power will see the folly of their ways and repeal laws which are harmful for the farmers. The sooner, the better.

Your 41st wedding anniversary falls on July 9. What gift are you giving your wife in times of this tension, crisis and discomfort?

Abhijit Ghosh, 24 Parganas (North)

Besides my time and love, the precious gifts that I'll continue to give is patience and understanding. It's not just for one day but a lifelong commitment.

What are some of your biggest dreams?

Santosh Bhatia, Panchkula

To be alive to see a peaceful, progressive and a prosperous world brimming with communal harmony.

(Feature co-ordinated by DEVESH SHARMA)

Please note: The column doesn't reflect Shatrughan Sinha's political or personal views. His answers are given in jest and humour.

Win!
CASH PRIZES

1st prize ₹3000

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

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ALL-INDIA PERMIT

Pan-Indian content is king. IMDB regularly puts up India-centric lists on what the viewers want to watch. Some of the top names that emerge from the lot are films like Yash starrer *KGF: Chapter 2,* whose cracker of a teaser had the viewers salivating for more. Another top favourite is the Allu Arjun starrer *Pushpa.* The film has him in a rough and tough avatar and again, not only his fans down South but people from all over are looking forward to the release. Thanks to the popularity of his dance numbers like *Butta bomma*, Allu Arjun has found a new fan-following in the Hindi belt as well. People want to see him in action and *Pushpa* has come just at the right time. *Radhe Shyam*, starring Prabhas and Pooja Hegde, is another top choice. Prabhas became a crowd favourite thanks to the success of the *Baahubali* series. His next film after that, *Saaho,* might not have done as well as anticipated but that doesn't mean that his popularity has dimmed. Hindi viewers, in particular, haven't seen him in a romantic role. The publicity material released so far makes it out to be a love story shot in lavish locations abroad. Prabhas is playing Ram in the upcoming *Adipurush.* What more proof does one need of his Pan-Indian popularity? The film is being shot in multiple languages. Rajamouli's *RRR* will see Ajay Devgn and Alia Bhatt making their debuts in a film which is again shot in different languages and will have a simultaneous release in all regions.


Vikram Vedha


Radhe Shyam


The Family Man

This begs the questions as to what has led to this sea-change in the mind of the viewers. Well, Pan-Indian content was always an eventuality but the pandemic and the resultant lockdown has fast-tracked its growth. Also, viewership of OTT channels got optimised, as theatres got shot down. In the initial months last year, when people were scared enough to remain at home, they had ample time on their hands and as a result, started surfing the OTT channels on a more regular basis. They started sampling content from different countries and also from downSouth.

Every film on OTT mostly comes embedded with subtitles. And most popular content comes dubbed as well. While Bollywood is still formulaic, South filmmakers have taken the next step forward and have been pushing the envelope both in terms of story and treatment. Films like *Super Deluxe* and *Vikram Vedha,* for instance, found dedicated viewers outside the South belt as well. Today, Vijay Sethupathi, who starred in the above mentioned films, gets to romance Katrina Kaif in Sriram Raghavan's *Merry Christmas.* He'll also be seen in Raj and DK's upcoming web series starring Shahid Kapoor and Raashi Khanna. Samantha Akkineni changed her good girl image with the web series *The Family Man* and wowed the viewers with her smashing performance. She was an unknown entity for Hindi viewers but now they can't have enough of her.

It's time for change. While the South has adjusted to it, it's time Bollywood makes the change too and starts investing in Pan-Indian projects. That's definitely the way forward and key to survival.

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