

PORTRAITS FROM THE PAST

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1000

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JANUARY 6, 2017

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ALIA BHATT
Rank **Nº 42**

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Welcome to the
Forbes^{INDIA}
Tablet Edition

Today's movie stars and sporting heroes are aware of the business side and their value as brands

Celebrity100[★]

Celebrity Inc

India loves its heroes. And nowhere are heroes more visible than in the larger-than-life world of cinema and in the sports arena. It's hardly surprising then that the Forbes India Celebrity 100 List generates the kind of interest it does, consistently since it first made its debut in 2012. Over the years, as the Indian movie business has evolved, structures have been built through greater corporatisation and with the stars setting up their own ventures to ensure they have a bigger say in the process of making a movie. Whether it is Shah Rukh Khan's Red Chillies Entertainment or Akshay Kumar's association with three production houses, megastars today are deeply immersed not just in acting but also in the making of that blockbuster which they work so hard for.

Kumar, 49, who features on one of our five covers this year, follows a simple process. He gets the actual production of his films outsourced before they are sold to the big studios. This allows him to keep his own end simple, with a lean team focussed on striking the best deals. Even relatively younger stars like current hot property Ranveer Singh, 31, are clear that they are not just actors, but also big brands. Singh, who has shot up in the Celebrity List ranks to number 12 this year from the 30th spot in 2015, admits to keeping a part of his work day aside to nurture "Brand Ranveer".

Not just movies, the world of sport is also dominated by

sportsmen with a keen business sense; Virat Kohli being a great example. Celebrities know, and are increasingly cashing in on, their brand value.

This year's List has some interesting takeaways. Salman Khan, the Sultan of Bollywood, has wrested the top slot back from friend and rival Shah Rukh Khan on the back of two giant hits—*Prem Ratan Dhan Payo* and *Sultan*. Shah Rukh slips one slot to number two, while Kohli's string of good performances sees him at third place.

Kumar, who has had a dream year with three huge hits, moves up two places to number 4. Two women—Deepika Padukone and Priyanka Chopra—come into the top 10 with ranks 6 and 8, respectively. Chopra and Padukone are now known names in Hollywood as well.

A lot of effort went into bringing you this issue. *Forbes India's* Salil Panchal, Neeraj Gangal and Pramod Mathew sifted through enormous amounts of data, aided by our process validators Ernst & Young, to bring you estimates of how the top 100 have fared. Design Director Anjan Das and Chief Photo Editor Vikas Khot collaborated to ensure that the visual look and feel of the issue is in keeping with the theme.

All this will, of course, be worth it if you enjoy this issue as much as we did putting it together.

Happy reading, and here's wishing you a very happy and prosperous 2017!



Best,

SOURAV MAJUMDAR
Editor, *Forbes India*

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Unapologetically aggressive and supremely skillful, Virat Kohli is changing the game in India

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Cover photograph by: **Jatin Kampani** (Akshay Kumar);

Colston Julian (Virat Kohli); **Abhay Singh** (Ranveer Singh & Sonam Kapoor),

Rohan Shrestha (Alia Bhatt)

This page: **Colston Julian** (Virat Kohli); **Abhay Singh** (Ranveer Singh);

Jatin Kampani (Akshay Kumar)

Location Courtesy: **Grand Hyatt, Mumbai** (Ranveer Singh & Sonam Kapoor)

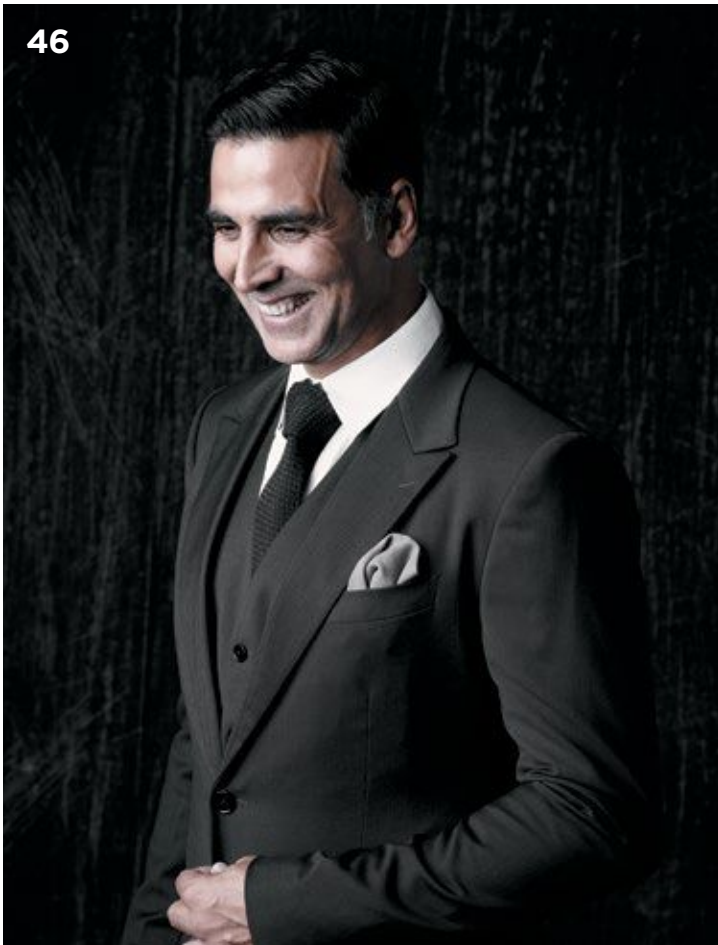
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India's Test captain Virat Kohli has been in ominous form with the bat

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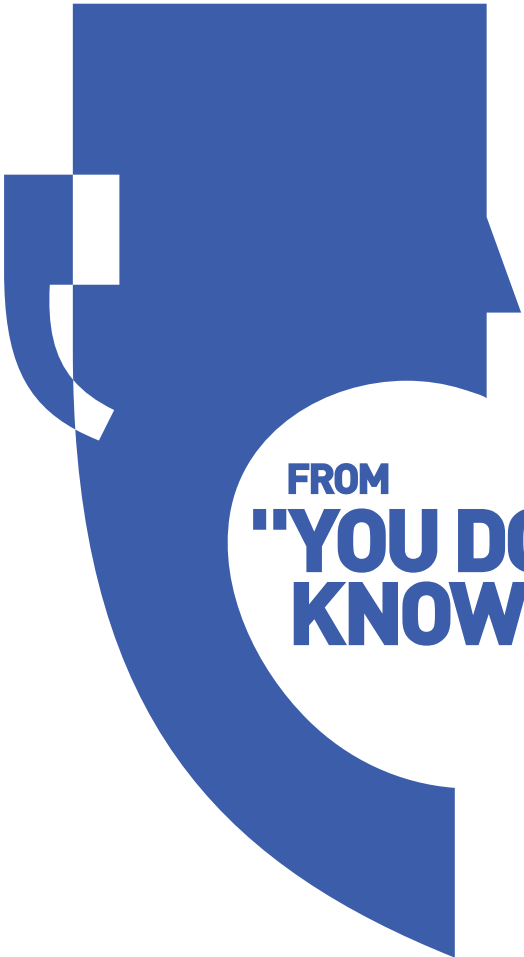


Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar has delivered a string of hits in 2016

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Ranveer Singh has proved his mettle as an actor since his debut in 2010



FROM
**"YOU DON'T
KNOW A THING."**



TO
**"I TAUGHT HIM
EVERYTHING
HE KNOWS."**

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Sonam Kapoor is ready to soar higher after her fine act in *Neerja*



Alia Bhatt has evolved into one of the finest actors of recent times

On the cover: Ranveer Singh: Styling by Nitasha Gaurav;

Suit: Hugo Boss at The Collective; Sweater: Ermenegildo Zegna;
Pocket square: Hackett London

Sonam Kapoor: Photograph by Abhay Singh; Styling by Nitasha Gaurav;
Dress: Burberry; Rings: Eina Ahluwalia

Previous page: Ranveer Singh: Styling by: Nitasha Gaurav; Suit & Shirt: Raison
D'Etre by Govinda Mehta; Tie: Jack & Jones; Pocket square: Stylist's own

This page: Sonam Kapoor: Photograph by Abhay Singh;
Styling by: Nitasha Gaurav; Dress: Burberry; Rings: Eina Ahluwalia;
Alia Bhatt: Photograph by Rohan Shrestha;
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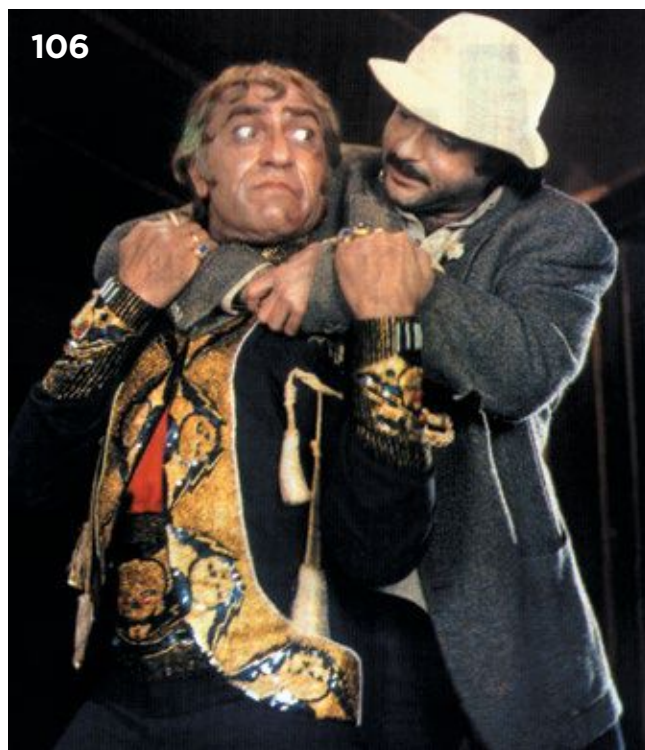
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Amrish Puri is immortal as Mogambo from *Mr India* (1987)

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Readers Say

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MONEY-MAKING INDIANS

Refer to 'The Top 50' (Issue dated December 23, 2016). It is heartening to know that Indian clans make up over a third of the 2016 Asia's Richest Families list. The number of millionaires and billionaires is rising in India. There would be many more Indians on the list if all the unaccounted money kept in foreign banks is taken into consideration. *Mahesh Kumar, via email*

THE FINAL WORLD

Refer to 'Online Self-Publishing Goes Desi' (Issue dated December 23, 2016). This article offers a detailed perspective on the opportunities for Indian literature creators and consumers. These platforms should grow big with the help of a startup

ecosystem in India. *Mahendra, on the web*

Corrections & Clarifications**Issue dated December 23, 2016**

On page 28 — In 'Mega Year For Equity Market Fund Raisings', the trading price of L&T Infotech for the date under consideration (November 22, 2016) was Rs 598.75 and not as mentioned.

On page 49 — In 'Civil War', we stated that Madhu Kannan was hired by Cyrus Mistry. However, the decision to hire Kannan was announced by Tata Sons in April 2012 before Mistry formally took charge as chairman in December 2012. Mistry was vice chairman and chairman-designate at the time. The errors are regretted.

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**2016 FORBES INDIA
CELEBRITY 100**

By Salil Panchal
& Neeraj Gangal

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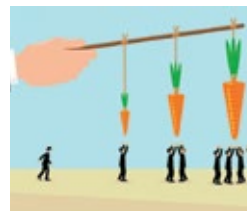
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The future of cyber crime investigation is bound to become more complex, confidential and challenging

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LIMITING EFFICIENCY
OF INDIA'S PSUs?**

PSUs have tremendous potential in India—they sit on some of the best intellectual and physical capital—and if the 'Make In India' aspiration has to fructify, these organisations need to be given a strong boost

DIGITAL LOCKERS AND FLASH STORAGE

A digital India needs a strong and secure foundation to capitalise on

**DRIVING CHANGE IN TIMES OF
ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFORMATION**

The key is in understanding that change needs adoption to sustain. So you need a framework that drives adoption and interestingly applying key product adoption principles during transformation actually works

The Newcomers

An interesting mix of celebrities finds its way into the list

BY KUNAL PURANDARE



PV SINDHU (62)

The 21-year-old shuttler united the nation during the 2016 Rio Olympics where she became the youngest and the first Indian woman to win a silver medal. PV Sindhu, who makes her debut on the Forbes India Celebrity 100 List at rank 62, followed this feat by clinching her maiden Super Series Premier title at the China Open in November. Her dream run has upped her fame quotient and marquee brands are queuing up to sign on the badminton star for endorsements. Fellow Olympic medallist, wrestler Sakshi Malik, is also a new entrant on the list at No 80.



BADSHAH (81)

The rapper ruled the popularity charts this year because of three massive hits—‘Kala Chashma’ (*Baar Baar Dekho*), ‘Kar Gayi Chull’ (*Kapoor & Sons*) and ‘Baby Ko Bass Pasand Hai’ (*Sultan*). Badshah, or Aditya Prateek Singh Sisodia, 30, is also immensely popular at concerts in India and abroad. He enters the Forbes India Celebrity 100 list this year at rank 81.



BHARTI SINGH (98)

One of the most popular faces on television, comedian Bharti Singh found a place on the 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List at rank 98 for hosting shows like *Comedy Nights Bachao*. She also starred in the Bollywood film *Sanam Re* and was roped in by the beauty brand Joy for an advertisement that addresses the issue of body shaming.



NEERAJ PANDEY (96)

Known to make movies of substance, Neeraj Pandey, 43, debuts at rank 96 thanks to the success of his two ventures—*Rustom* and *MS Dhoni: The Untold Story*. Both movies crossed the coveted Rs 100 crore-mark at the box office, his biopic on the Indian Test captain earning over Rs 132 crore. His next is titled *Naam Shabana*, a sequel to his 2015 hit *Baby*.



DILJIT DOSANJH (79)

The Punjabi actor-singer made his Bollywood debut in 2016 with *Udta Punjab* and was widely appreciated for his performance as a cop. Diljit Dosanjh, 32, who is also associated with brands like Coca-Cola and Flipkart, enters the list at No 79. He has been shooting for actor Anushka Sharma’s next production, *Phillauri*, which is expected to hit screens in March 2017.

OTHER NEW FACES IN THE LIST

ANIL KUMBLE (65)

SANJEEV KAPOOR (73)

SIDHARTH MALHOTRA (74)

SAKSHI MALIK (80)

ASHUTOSH GOWARIKER (92)

DEVDUTT PATTANAIAK (93)

ARBAAZ KHAN (97)

SONALI BENDRE BEHL (99)

KRUSHNA ABHISHEK (100)

SINDHU, BADSHAH, NEERAJ, DILJIT: GETTY IMAGES; BHARTI: GANESH LAD / FOTOCORP

The Dropouts

Those who failed to make it to the list this year on account of a quiet 2016

BY ANSHUL DHAMIJA

SALIM-SULAIMAN (2015 RANK: 86)

The duo debuted on our list in 2015, but does not feature this year. They did, however, release in 2016 a documentary titled *Shukranallah* that captures their musical journey over the last 25 years. They also composed 'Ek India Happy Wala', the official theme song for the IPL, and stayed busy with concerts. There's a lot more to look forward to in 2017: Salim-Sulaiman are composing the background score for *Kaabil* among other projects.



RAJKUMAR HIRANI (2015 RANK: 67)

The phenomenal success of *PK* (2014), which raked in over Rs 300 at the box office, propelled filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani to No 67 on the 2015 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List. This year, however, with no film releases, he finds himself out of the list. His next project is the biopic on actor Sanjay Dutt.

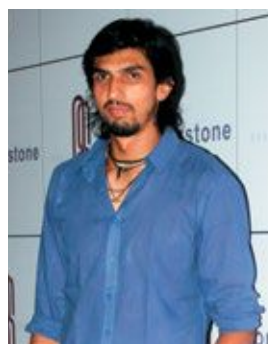


AISHWARYA RAI BACHCHAN (2015 RANK: 34)

Rai Bachchan had two releases within our time frame: *Jazbaa* (2015) and *Sarbjit* (2016), both of which had average runs at the box office. Her latest release, *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil*, earned over Rs 100 crore but does not fall within our time frame.

YO YO HONEY SINGH (2015 RANK: 29)

The singer made his acting debut in 2016 with *Zorawar*, one of the top-grossing Punjabi films of the year. But he sang very little in 2016, after making a comeback from a long break to recover from what he said was bipolar disorder.



ISHANT SHARMA (2015 RANK: 48)

Ishant Sharma finds himself out of the list despite being bought for Rs 3.8 crore by Rising Pune Supergiants at the 2016 IPL auction. The cricketer suffered injuries and played just 7 Tests and 4 ODIs within our time frame. In late 2016, he married basketball player Pratima Singh.

OTHER DROPOUTS

N SANTHANAM (52)
KABIR KHAN (70)
RAVI TEJA (74)
PRABHAS (77)
ARYA (80)

FARAH KHAN (81)
AJAY-ATUL (82)
PREITY ZINTA (84)
PURI JAGANNADH (89)
SUNIL CHHETRI (92)

ROHAN BOPANNA (93)
KIRRON KHER (95)
ROHIT SHETTY (96)
AMISH TRIPATHI (97)
MITHUN CHAKRABORTY (98)



SS RAJAMOULI (2015 RANK: 72)

There was a lull for SS Rajamouli after his monster hit, *Baahubali: The Beginning*. The filmmaker did not direct any films during the year under review and is now busy with the sequel to his 2015 blockbuster, titled *Baahubali: The Conclusion*, which is expected to release in April next year. His fame quotient remains high as he was honoured with the Padma Shri in 2016.

Celebrity100[★]

On The Fame-And-Fortune Train

BY SALIL PANCHAL & NEERAJ GANGAL

CELEB 100 LIST COMPILED BY ANGAD SINGH THAKUR, ANSHUL DHAMIJA, DEBOJYOTI GHOSH, HARICHANDAN ARAKALI, KATHAKALI CHANDA, KUNAL PURANDARE, MONICA BATHIJA, NEERAJ GANGAL, N MADHAVAN, PARAMITA CHATTERJEE, PRAMOD MATHEW, PRAVIN PALANDE, SALIL PANCHAL & SHRUTI VENKATESH

Sultan ruled in 2016. Both, the Aditya Chopra-produced movie, and the man who played the title role in it. It is hardly surprising then that the 51-year-old Salman Khan wrested back the top spot on the 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100

List—from fellow superstar Shah Rukh Khan—with the highest revenue for the year under review at an impressive Rs 270.33 crore. Salman Khan's strong year was led by the commercial success of the Sooraj Barjatya-directed *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo* in late 2015 and *Sultan* in 2016. His total earnings constituted 9.84

percent of the total wealth—Rs 2,745 crore—of all the top 100 celebrities for the year.

In fact, there has not been a single year when either Shah Rukh or Salman has not been No 1 on our Celebrity 100 List (the former thrice and the latter twice). The third in the trinity, Aamir Khan, who did not have a single movie release or brand endorsement in our time frame under consideration, has dropped out of the top 10 for the first time since 2012, when he was ranked 12.

When it comes to the fame ranking, however, while the three Khans have always been popular in our entertainment-crazy country, it is India's Test cricket captain Virat Kohli who is the most popular celebrity. Add to that his consistent performances across all formats—Tests, ODIs and T20s—and his earnings, and his leading spot among sports personalities was a given, as was his ascension to No 3 from No 7 last year.

Actor Ranveer Singh too steadily continues to march up the Forbes India Celebrity List, led by the box office success of the historical epic *Bajirao Mastani*, directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, also back on the list—at No 75—after a one-year gap. Akshay Kumar, a constant challenger to the Khans, has also moved up to No 4, thanks to the commercial successes of movies like *Airlift*, *Rustom* and *Housefull 3*, besides a growing list of brand endorsements.

For only the second time since the list came into being have two woman actors broken into the top 10. Deepika Padukone is at No 6 and Priyanka Chopra at No 8. In 2012, it was Kareena Kapoor Khan (now No 38) and Katrina Kaif (No 25). Both Chopra and Padukone starred in *Bajirao Mastani*, but what they also have in common is their growing international presence. Chopra headlines the American television series *Quantico* and has the Hollywood movie *Baywatch* lined up for release in 2017; Padukone stars in the movie *xXx: Return of Xander Cage*, scheduled to hit screens in January 2017.

Hrithik Roshan, who starred in the box office failure *Mohenjo Daro*, maintained his position at No 10 reaffirming the point that the commercial performance of a movie may not necessarily impact the earnings and fame of a celebrity.

The highest gainers this year were singer Arijit Singh (up 50 spots to No 15 in our list), superstar Rajinikanth (up 39 places to No 30) and author Chetan Bhagat (up 26 spots to No 40). Singh has had a busy and fruitful 2016—he sang 48 songs in 31 films, including for movies such as *Airlift*, *Dilwale*, *Talvar*, *Mohenjo Daro*, *MS Dhoni: The Untold Story*, *Akira* and *Baaghi*. Rajinikanth, too, was back in the reckoning thanks to the Tamil gangster-drama *Kabali*.

The ranking of most celebrities went up due to higher revenues in the 12 months under review, but for some it was their fame quotient that helped them rise in the ranks. Besides Aamir Khan, who maintains a high position on the list on the

basis of his popularity, former opening batsman Virender Sehwag too did not fall drastically in the rankings despite his retirement from international cricket in October 2015, thanks to his No 25 fame rank—this, of course, can be attributed to his lively Twitter presence. Actor Bipasha Basu's ranking, at No 71 (as against No 79 in 2015), was led by a high fame rank of 44, to a large part due to the buzz surrounding her marriage to actor Karan Singh Grover.

This year there were eight returnees to the list, prominent among which are Bhansali and the musical trio of Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, who are back (at No 83) thanks to more live shows and Bollywood compositions.

There are also 14 newcomers (full list on page 24), including a range of personalities such as celebrity chef Sanjeev Kapoor (at No 73), who has become a formidable brand in the food world. Twenty one-year-old badminton star PV Sindhu debuts at No 62, thanks to her revenue and fame after her silver medal at the Rio Olympics. Rapper Badshah also makes an impressive entry (at No 81), propelled by popular hits such as 'Kaala Chashma' (*Baar Baar Dekho*) and 'Baby Ko Bass Pasand Hai' (*Sultan*).

Among those who didn't make the cut this year were music composers Salim-Sulaiman, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, singer Yo Yo Honey Singh and Ishant Sharma (full list on page 26).

The highs and lows of celebritydom are all too well-known, and this list attempts to chronicle this rollercoaster ride. It is significant to note that the pool of celebrities has expanded to include those who have made their name in previously under-the-radar categories like food and, increasingly, from television. And, with media convergence and the internet producing new stars every day, there may be the emergence of web series stars too in the future. After all, as more and more people move towards content on their smartphones, you might literally be holding celebritydom in your hand. 🌈





TOP 100

1. Salman Khan

EARNINGS: Rs 270.33 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 2

Salman Khan climbed back to the No 1 rank on the 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List, riding on the commercial success of his two big releases: *Sultan* and *Prem Ratan Dhan Paayo*. The former was the biggest hit of 2016 with a net India collection of Rs 300.45 crore while the latter earned Rs 200 crore at the box office. Khan continues to command a strong fan following and boosted his earnings with 12 brand endorsements.

FAST FACT: Salman Khan will be the civic body's face for its 'Clean Mumbai' drive.



 UP  DOWN  NEW  EVEN  RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)



2. Shah Rukh Khan ↓

EARNINGS: Rs 221.75 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 3

Shah Rukh Khan lost his perch at the top in what was a mixed year for him both in terms of box office success and brands endorsed. He paired up with popular co-star Kajol in *Dilwale* (2015) and followed this up with *Fan* (2016) in which he played a double role. The movie opened well at the box office, but failed to match expectations. Khan also lost a bit of ground with fewer endorsements compared to last year.

FAST FACT: Shah Rukh Khan has been 'reborn' on screen twice—in *Karan Arjun* and *Om Shanti Om*.

↑ UP ↓ DOWN ★ NEW = EVEN ♻️ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)



3. Virat Kohli 

EARNINGS: Rs 134.44 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: **1**

This has been a stellar year for India's Test captain, both in terms of his batting and the team's success.

For the first time in his career, he amassed over 1,000 Test runs in a calendar year, including three double centuries. He has been in ominous form in one-dayers and T20s as well. The resultant success and his rising popularity have made him No 1 on our fame list. The skipper's aggression and leadership skills have also propelled India to the highest ranked Test team. Kohli remains a favourite in the advertising world, with 17 brand endorsements.

FAST FACT: Kohli is the first Indian cricketer to score a century on World Cup debut.

 UP  DOWN  NEW  EVEN  RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

4. Akshay Kumar

EARNINGS: Rs 203.03 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: **11**

The superstar who continues to challenge the might of the three Khans (Salman, Shah Rukh and Aamir) had an impressive run in the year under review. Three of his five releases—*Airlift*, *Rustom* and *Housefull 3*—were successes, while *Dishoom* and *Singh is Bliing* did average business. He is currently busy with sci-fi thriller *2.0* in which he co-stars with superstar Rajinikanth, and *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* opposite Bhumi Pednekar.

FAST FACT: Akshay Kumar is said to have more pairs of footwear than wife Twinkle.



 UP  DOWN  NEW  EVEN  RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

5. Mahendra Singh Dhoni ↓

EARNINGS: Rs 122.48 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 4

Though MS Dhoni retired from Tests in December 2014, his fame quotient shot up this year because of a biopic on him titled *MS Dhoni: The Untold Story* (2016). The movie, with Sushant Singh Rajput in the lead, earned more than Rs 130 crore in India. In the period under review, Dhoni also played 18 ODIs for 490 runs (average 35), drawing 28 dismissals as a wicketkeeper, and 23 T20 games, making 263 runs (average 43) with 27 dismissals behind the stumps.

FAST FACT: Dhoni was conferred the honorary rank of Lt Colonel by the Indian Territorial Army in November 2011.



↑ UP ↓ DOWN ★ NEW = EVEN ♻️ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

6. Deepika Padukone ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 69.75 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 8

For the third successive year, Deepika Padukone remains the highest-ranked female actor on the list, thanks to an impressive year at the box office and a slew of brand endorsements. Her movie *Tamasha* (2015) with former beau Ranbir Kapoor did average business, but Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) was a hit, earning more than Rs 180 crore at the box office. She will make her Hollywood debut in 2017 in the action film *xXx: Return of Xander Cage*, which is a Vin Diesel production, apart from teaming up again with Bhansali for *Padmavati*.

FAST FACT: She was offered a role in *Fast and Furious 7* which she refused as it clashed with the shooting dates for *Ram-Leela*.

7. Sachin Tendulkar ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 58 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 6

It has been over three years since the Master Blaster retired from international cricket, but his popularity has not diminished since his playing days. He spends most of his time campaigning for social causes apart from endorsing the several brands in his kitty. In 2016, he adopted Donja village in Osmanabad district of Maharashtra for rural development under the government's Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojna programme. His biopic *Sachin: A Billion Dreams*, directed by James Erskine, is expected to release soon.

FAST FACT: Tendulkar has purchased a stake in Bengaluru Blasters, one of the teams in the Premier Badminton League.

9. Amitabh Bachchan ↓

EARNINGS: Rs 32.62 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 5

Bollywood's most enduring superstar slid to his lowest rank in five years, thanks to a mixed box office performance and limited television presence. Two of Bachchan's releases *Te3n* and *Wazir* could not create the expected buzz at the box office, but *Pink*—highlighting women's rights and dignity—was a hit. A television show *Aaj Ki Raat Hai Zindagi* on Star Plus performed averagely in terms of viewership.

FAST FACT: Bachchan wore an elevation training mask for the first time while shooting for *Pink* in Delhi. The mask improves oxygen intake and increases overall lung capacity.



8. Priyanka Chopra ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 76 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 9

Priyanka Chopra breaks into the top 10 on our list for the first time this year. She had an eventful past 12 months with her two film releases *Jai Gangaajal* (2016) and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) winning acclaim. Internationally, she continues to attract attention with a strong television presence. *Quantico*, in which Chopra plays the role of FBI agent Alex Parrish, is in its second season. She is now looking forward to the launch of her film *Baywatch*, scheduled for release in mid-2017. Earlier this year, Chopra lent her voice to the character of Kaa the python in the Hindi version of Disney's *The Jungle Book*. She also lent her voice to the video game *Marvel Avengers Academy*.

FAST FACT: Priyanka Chopra was one of the presenters at the 88th Academy Awards in 2016.

↑ UP ↓ DOWN ★ NEW = EVEN ♻️ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

10. Hrithik Roshan ↔

EARNINGS: Rs 90.25 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 12

Hrithik Roshan had a quiet year at the box office. His only release, the much-awaited romantic epic drama *Mohenjo Daro* (2016), was a disaster, with a collection of just Rs 58 crore. The film was made on a budget of more than Rs 100 crore. He now has high hopes from his next *Kaabil*, an emotional story of a blind couple. Roshan, however, continues to be active and popular on social media and in endorsing brands.

FAST FACT: Roshan, in 2016, sold a majority stake of his lifestyle brand HRX to online fashion store Myntra for an undisclosed amount.

11. Kapil Sharma ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 30.17 crore

CATEGORY: Comedian

FAME RANK: 7

For Kapil Sharma, 2016 was a year of high drama. On one hand, he moved on from his Colors show *Comedy Nights with Kapil* to *The Kapil Sharma Show* on Sony TV. On the other hand, he courted controversy when he claimed on social media that an official of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation had asked him for a bribe. The civic body in turn accused him of illegal construction at his properties and flouting environmental norms. His popularity, however, remains unaffected. He is now working on two films, *13 August 1947* and *Firangi*.

FAST FACT: Sharma was a theatre artiste for over 10 years in Amritsar and Delhi before making it big on television.

12. Ranveer Singh ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 67.42 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 38

Ranveer Singh moved up 18 places on our list from No 30 last year, thanks to a strong performance in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Bajirao Mastani*, which was a hit. The actor, who has been

popular on social media, has also become a favourite in the corporate world, with a wide range of brand endorsements which have added to his revenues. His next, *Padmavati*, sees him collaborate with the successful team of Bhansali and Deepika Padukone.

FAST FACT: Ranveer did not do any advertisements or music videos before making his Bollywood debut.

13. AR Rahman ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 37.50 crore

CATEGORY: Singer/Musician

FAME RANK: 14

Known as the Mozart of Madras, AR Rahman moves up one place from last year. This year saw him give music to a whole range of genres—from Bollywood movies (*Tamasha*, *Mohenjo Daro*) and a South Indian film (*24*) to international movies (*Pele: Birth of a Legend*). In 2015, he had composed an Arabic soundtrack for the movie *Muhammad: The Messenger of God*. He has composed the music for the Karan Johar- and Mani Ratnam-produced *OK Jaanu*, and Sachin Tendulkar's biopic *Sachin: A Billion Dreams*.

FAST FACT: Rahman sang 'Vande Mataram' along with Chris Martin of Coldplay at a concert in Mumbai.

14. Aamir Khan ↓

EARNINGS: —

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 10

Superstar Aamir Khan slipped out of the top 10 for the first time since 2013, as this was possibly the quietest year he had in recent times. He had no movie releases in our period under review nor did he endorse any brand. His co-production *Dangal*, a biographical movie about wrestler Mahavir Singh Phogat, directed by Nitesh Tiwari (of *Kill/Dil* fame), releases on December 23.

FAST FACT: Aamir ran into controversy last year after he made remarks of rising intolerance in the country. He later clarified that India is not an intolerant country.

15. Arijit Singh ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 60.15 crore

CATEGORY: Singer/Musician

FAME RANK: 42

Arijit Singh is the biggest gainer in our list, jumping 50 spots from Rank 65 last year. His rise can be attributed to an extremely successful and busy season in which he sang 48 songs in 31 films, including *Airlift*, *Dilwale*, *Talvar*, *Mohenjo Daro*, *MS Dhoni: The Untold Story*, *Akira* and *Baaghi*. Apart from this, he also sang for *Ae Dil hai Mushkil* and *Kahaani 2*, which do not fall within the period under review.

FAST FACT: Arijit Singh sang nine Bengali songs in 2016, most of them composed by Indraadip Das Gupta.



16. Rohit Sharma ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 24.17 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 17

Rohit Sharma remains an enigma to Indian cricket, three years after making his debut in the longest form of the game. At the Test level, he underperformed with just 263 runs in six Tests (average 29.22/two 50s) during the period under review. A thigh injury forced the batsman to miss the home series against England. Sharma, however, did well in the shorter formats, scoring 696 runs in 10 ODIs (average 77.33), with three 100s and two 50s.

FAST FACT: He started playing cricket as an off-spinner, when representing his school.

17. Yuvraj Singh ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 16 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 13

Yuvraj Singh made a comeback to the Indian T20 team this year, nearly two years after he played his last international match in 2014, but hobbled out of the T20 World Cup with an ankle injury. In the IPL, he was snapped up by Sunrisers Hyderabad for Rs 7 crore, half of what Delhi Daredevils paid for him in 2015, but steep enough to be one of the costliest buys in this year's auction. He ended the tournament with an under-par performance, an average of 26.22 from 10 matches. On the personal front, he began a new innings in November, getting married to actor Hazel Keech.

FAST FACT: Yuvraj was the national under-14 roller skating champion before his father forced him to focus on cricket.

18. Sonam Kapoor ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 20.7 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 16

Sonam Kapoor shot up by eight places in our rankings. She had two hits to her credit—Sooraj Barjatya's *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo* and Ram Madhvani's *Neerja* for which she garnered immense praise from audiences and critics alike. Outside of films, Kapoor appeared in two music

videos—'The Shine Song' featuring Arjun Kanungo and Coldplay's 'Hymn for the Weekend'. The style diva also launched her own app to allow fans to stay connected. Next year, she will be seen in *Veerey Di Wedding* with Kareena Kapoor-Khan and Swara Bhaskar.

FAST FACT: Actor Ranveer Singh is her maternal cousin.

19. Ranbir Kapoor ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 55.5 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 60

Ranbir Kapoor slid eight spots to 19th on the list. After last year's debacle with Karan Johar's *Bombay Velvet*, Ranbir was seen on screen with former girlfriend Deepika Padukone in Imtiaz Ali's *Tamasha*. The movie earned Rs 65 crore in collections, against a budget of around Rs 60 crore. Towards the end of the year, he roared back to success with Karan Johar's romantic story *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* (this was not within our time frame).

FAST FACT: Ranbir is the vice captain of the All Stars Football Club, a celebrity football club that raises money for charity.

21. Shahid Kapoor ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 16.25 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 18

Shahid Kapoor continued to impress at the box office with his fine portrayal as a substance-abusing rock musician in *Udta Punjab*. The Abhishek Chaubey-directed film ended up becoming the biggest opening of his career, collecting Rs 33.8 crore over the first three days. This gave him a new lease of life after *Shaandaar* (2015) failed to draw people to the theatres. His next two films—*Rangoon* (2017) with Saif Ali Khan and Kangana Ranaut, and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Padmavati*—could break new ground for the actor. On the personal front, Kapoor became father to a baby girl in August 2016.

FAST FACT: Kapoor went to drop a friend to an audition for a soft drink commercial. He ended up doing the ad after the makers found his looks interesting.

22. Madhuri Dixit-Nene ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 17.2 crore

CATEGORY: TV Personality

FAME RANK: 20

Bollywood's most popular heroine of the 1990s is rarely seen in movies these

20. Sonakshi Sinha ⬆️

EARNINGS: 16.37 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 15

Sonakshi Sinha edged up two places in our rankings despite an average year at the box office. Her action thriller *Akira*, made on a budget of approximately Rs 30 crore, earned around Rs 27.5 crore at the box office. After an equally disappointing 2015 in which her film *Tevan* tanked miserably, this came as another blow to the actor. Her November release, *Force 2*, opened well, but could not sustain the momentum.

FAST FACT: Sonakshi learnt mixed martial arts from experts in Thailand for *Akira*.



SACHIN GOKHALE

⬆️ UP ⬇️ DOWN ⬆️ NEW ⚡ EVEN ⬆️ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

days. But she continues to be active on television, appearing as a judge in the 2016 season of *So You Think You Can Dance* (India). Despite her absence from films, she maintains a high rank, as revenues have been aided by several brand endorsements.

FAST FACT: The only Hindi movie her husband Shriram Nene ever watched before marriage was the 1977 Amitabh Bachchan-starrer *Amar Akbar Anthony*.

23. Shikhar Dhawan ↓

EARNINGS: Rs 17.73 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 21

Dhawan, one of India's more aggressive opening batsmen, had an average year, which saw him slip out of the top 20 in the rankings. He suffered a thumb injury during the series versus New Zealand, which eventually cost him his place in the team. Dhawan scored 306 runs in eight Tests (average 25.5/two 50s) and 413 in 10 ODIs (average 41.3) in the period under consideration.

FAST FACT: Dhawan was introduced to his wife Ayesha on Facebook through teammate Harbhajan Singh.

24. Jacqueline Fernandez ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 19.13 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 23

Jacqueline Fernandez jumped up 23 ranks in our list from No 47 last year, led by higher revenues from films, television and brand endorsements. Her comic film *Housefull 3* was a hit, while *Dishoom* did average business. *A Flying Jatt*, however, failed to set the cash registers ringing. She was seen on television as one of the judges for the popular dance show *Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa* (season 9).

FAST FACT: Jacqueline forayed into the restaurant business with Kaema Sutra in 2014 in Colombo.

25. Katrina Kaif ↓

EARNINGS: Rs 33.5 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 41

The Hong Kong-born actress had a poor run at the box office in 2016 with her two major releases—*Fitoor* and *Baar Baar Dekho*—ending up being

commercial duds. It didn't help that her private life remained under the scanner with her much-publicised break-up with actor Ranbir Kapoor (Rank 19) becoming fodder for the gossip mills. Her next, the already-delayed *Jagga Jasoos* with Kapoor, is scheduled for release in April 2017. But the big project that could revive her career is a sequel to *Ek Tha Tiger* with Salman Khan called *Tiger Zinda Hai* that will be released on Christmas in 2017.

FAST FACT: In 2010 and 2011, Mattel released two sets of Barbie dolls inspired by Kaif.

26. Suresh Raina ↓

EARNINGS: Rs 12.21 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 22

This talented left-hander has had a patchy year, being a constant feature in only the shortest format of the game. In 2016, in 16 T20 matches, he scored 220 runs at an average of 22 and a highest score of 49 (not out). His performance in domestic cricket has not been good enough to win him a place back in the ODI team.

FAST FACT: Raina is the first Indian cricketer to score a century in all three formats of the game.



↑ UP ↓ DOWN ✪ NEW = EVEN ♫ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

27. Ravichandran Ashwin ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 15.55 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 24

Ravichandran Ashwin emerged as the highest wicket-taker in Tests for the second consecutive year, scalping 59 wickets in 10 Tests (as of November 26). The off-spinner who moved up four places in our rankings also confirmed his status as one of the world's premier all-rounders by taking over 50 wickets and scoring 500+ runs in Tests in one calendar year, the only Indian cricketer to do so besides Kapil Dev. He is the second fastest ever to take 200 Test wickets (in 37 Tests, at a strike rate of 50.7). He also has seven Man of the Series awards in Tests, the most by any Indian cricketer.

FAST FACT: Ashwin aspired to be a footballer, but stopped playing when, during a class match in 1997, he botched a penalty to save his leather shoes; he had forgotten to bring his soccer boots for the match.

28. Shreya Ghoshal ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 9.78 crore

CATEGORY: Singer/Musician

FAME RANK: 19

The National Award-winning singer received high praise for her vocals in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) which also fetched her the Filmfare Award for Best Singer (female). Though she has cut down on her singing, she sang soulful numbers in films such as *Wazir*, *Ki & Ka* and *Rustom* in 2016. Apart from playback singing, Ghoshal continued serenading audiences with her stage performances in India and abroad. The singer also teamed up with Gulzar for *In Conversation With Tagore*, a seven-track album in 2016.

FAST FACT: In 2010, Ted Strickland, governor of Ohio, declared June 26 as Shreya Ghoshal Day.

29. Sania Mirza ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 14.58 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 28

India's most famous women's tennis player, Mirza ended 2015 by winning the WTA finals with doubles partner Martina Hingis. The pair carried on

their good run at the beginning of the year by winning the Australian Open as well. But a series of subsequent losses led them to split in August. They reunited for one last time to defend their WTA title in 2016, but crashed out of the semifinals. Mirza had a disappointing outing at the Rio Olympics too, losing in the mixed doubles semifinals and the first round of the ladies doubles. In July, she launched her autobiography *Ace Against Odds*.

FAST FACT: The Mirza family had migrated to the US in 1990 and returned within two years.

30. Rajinikanth ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 35 crore
CATEGORY: Film Actor
FAME RANK: 53

The Tamil superstar has lived up to his moniker of *Thalaivar*—the boss. His film *Kabali*, which released in July 2016, went on to report a whopping global box office collection of more than Rs 600 crore worldwide. About 43 percent of the film's total earnings came

from overseas markets, an unheard of accomplishment by any Indian film. *Kabali* had an opening day collection of Rs 39-40 crore, the highest first-day earnings by any Indian film in 2016, beating the record of Salman Khan's *Sultan*.

FAST FACTS: When Rajinikanth debuted on social networking platform Twitter, he gained 1.5 lakh followers on the first day.

32. Sunny Leone ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 10.7 crore
CATEGORY: Film Actor
FAME RANK: 27

Sunny Leone's films this year, including *Mastizaade*, *Kya Kool Hain Hum 3*, *Beimaan Love* and *One Night Stand*, may not have made much of an impact on the box office, but she has risen to Rank 32 from Rank 45 last year. Early this year, she launched *Lust by Sunny Leone*, a range of perfumes. And through a partnership with gaming studio Gamiana, Leone has built and appeared in a mobile game called *Teen*

Patti with Sunny Leone. She's set to make an appearance in a song in Shah Rukh Khan's upcoming film, *Raees*, and continues with her recurring role as host of the reality TV show, *Splitsvilla*.

FAST FACT: Leone turned writer for a series of erotic short stories earlier this year for the digital publisher, Juggernaut.

33. Mahesh Babu ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 42 crore
CATEGORY: Film Actor
FAME RANK: 74

The Telugu superstar burst onto the South Indian silver screen with his blockbuster movie *Pokiri* almost 10 years ago. In the year under review, he starred and co-produced a drama film *Brahmotsavam*, which collected Rs 63 crore at the box office worldwide. Last year, he was the highest earner among the 13 South Indian celebrities on our list. There is speculation that he will star opposite actor Deepika Padukone in a movie that will see her in the role of Sanghamitra, emperor Ashoka's daughter. The high-budget movie will be made in Tamil, Hindi and Telugu.

FAST FACT: Babu-starrers *Dookudu* and *Business Man*, in 2011 and 2012 respectively, set box office collection records in the history of Telugu cinema at the time.

34. Ajinkya Rahane ↓

EARNINGS: Rs 11.68 crore
CATEGORY: Sports
FAME RANK: 30

With three Test centuries within the period under consideration, (not counting the stellar 188-run knock against New Zealand in October) the Indian vice captain continues to be one of India's top performing batsmen. The diminutive Mumbai boy also had a good run at the Indian Premier League this year, averaging 43.63 in the 14 matches that he played for the Rising Pune Supergiants. However, his decidedly less impressive performances in one-day internationals have meant that his

31. Saina Nehwal ↑

EARNINGS: Rs 20.18 crore
CATEGORY: Sports
FAME RANK: 31

India's top-ranked shuttler and the former world No 1 ended her year-long title drought in June, winning the Australian Open Super Series and raising hopes about her medal prospects at the Rio Olympics a few months later. But a knee injury that she picked up during training a week before the Games led to the shock exit of the London Olympics bronze medallist from the group stage. She returned to the international circuit a surgery and three months later, with the China Open in November, and has been limping back to her winning ways.

FAST FACT: As a child, Nehwal was trained in karate, but it came to a stop when the instructor prepared to run a bike over the hands of the students.



↑ UP ↓ DOWN ★ NEW ▬ EVEN ↺ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

appearance in the ODI squad has been sporadic.

FAST FACT: Rahane received the Arjuna Award, for outstanding achievement in sport, this year.

35. Ravindra Jadeja ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 7.53 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 26

After missing the action for most of 2015, 'Sir' Jadeja—as he is popularly known in the dressing room—made a comeback with the ball in Tests this year. In the seven Test matches that he played within the period considered, the slow left-arm orthodox bowler had three 5-wicket and two 4-wicket hauls. His performance in ODIs though was unimpressive. Early in 2016, Jadeja married Reeva Solanki, a Rajkot-based mechanical engineer. Jadeja, for whom the now-defunct Chennai Super Kings had paid \$2 million in 2012, played for the Gujarat Lions in 2016.

FAST FACT: Jadeja has three triple centuries to his credit in first-class cricket.

37. Sonu Nigam ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 10 crore

CATEGORY: Singer/Musician

FAME RANK: 29

This singer who churned out mega hits such as 'Abhi mujh mein kahi' from *Agneepath* in 2012 and 'Tere bin' from *Wazir* (2016) is now enhancing his career as a composer-singer rather than just a singer. In 2016, he was busy composing music for five films, such as *Tum Jo Mil Gaye*, *Dil 2* and *Band of Maharajas*. Nigam is set to make a comeback as a judge on the popular reality TV show *Indian Idol* in its seventh season. His popularity remains intact at his various live concerts.

FAST FACTS: In May, he created a buzz on the internet after his six-minute video, 'The Roadside Ustaad', registered 3.3 million views on YouTube in less than a week.

38. Kareena Kapoor-Khan ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 35.67 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 65

The actor dropped from No 17 in 2015 to No 38 on our list in 2016. A major development during the year was on the personal front: Her pregnancy. Professionally, she delivered a hit with

with R Balki's *Ki & Ka*, and another impressive performance in the much-acclaimed *Uda Punjab*, despite playing a character that was almost created as an aside. Scotching rumours of giving up her career post motherhood, Kapoor-Khan has worked extensively through her pregnancy and shot for magazines, commercials and attended public events. She is expected to start shooting for her next movie, Rhea Kapoor's *Veerey di Wedding*, after the birth of her child.

FAST FACT: Kapoor-Khan wore a lehenga weighing 32 kg while shooting a song in *Ki & Ka*.

39. Gautam Gambhir ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 11.69 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 32

Like in the previous year, Gautam Gambhir played no international matches within the period under review. He did make a couple of appearances in October against New Zealand and England, but was subsequently dropped from the team. He does, however, continue to captain the Kolkata Knight Riders at the IPL. The franchise had paid a record \$2.5 million for him in 2011. Gambhir scored an impressive 501 runs in 15 matches in this IPL season.

36. Anushka Sharma ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 15.25 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 33

The success of *Sultan* (2016) underscored her mettle as an actor of substance, but she fell from Rank 19 last year to No 36 on our list this year. Anushka Sharma's performance as a state-level wrestler, who gives up the sport after becoming pregnant, earned her critical acclaim. She followed this up with another strong performance in *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil* (2016)—outside of our time frame. She is now focusing on her next home production, *Phillauri*, where she plays the female lead opposite Diljit Dosanjh. She is co-producing the film with Fox Star Studios.

FAST FACT: Anushka Sharma is the sister of film producer Kamlesh Sharma, who was a former under 19-Ranji player representing Bengaluru.



⬆️ UP ⬇️ DOWN ⬆️ NEW ⬆️ EVEN ⬆️ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

40. Chetan Bhagat ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 22.75 crore

CATEGORY: Author

FAME RANK: 46

Though Chetan Bhagat's new book *One Indian Girl* was published outside of our period under consideration, it started garnering attention way back in January, when the author started tweeting about it, and reportedly broke previous pre-order records when it came up for pre-order in August. He's seen a meteoric rise on our list, from No 66 last year to No 40 in 2016. Bhagat has also been working on the screenplay of *Half Girlfriend*, based on his book of the same name, which came out in 2014. The movie, which stars Arjun Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor, is set to release in May 2017.

FAST FACT: To understand women better and as part of research for his latest book, which is written from the point of view of a girl, Bhagat even got waxing done.



FAST FACT: Gambhir was adopted by his grandparents when he was 18 days old.

41. Virender Sehwag ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 2.95 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 25

At his peak, Virender Sehwag was among the world's most formidable batsmen. He retired from international cricket in October 2015 and has since acquired a significant following on an unlikely pitch: Twitter. With over 7.5 million followers, Sehwag uses his faux bully pulpit to troll fellow cricketers and dish out advice on issues both social and political, all with the characteristic wit that audiences saw glimpses of even during his cricketering career. He is now starring in a web series titled *Viru Ke Funde* on Vuclip's video streaming platform, Viu.

FAST FACT: Sehwag was handed a one-match ban on his Test debut by match referee Mike Denness.

42. Alia Bhatt ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 17.83 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 40

Since her debut in 2012, in Karan Johar's romantic comedy *Student of the Year*, the

young actress has portrayed a mix of complex and light-hearted characters. This year, Bhatt had two releases: *Kapoor & Sons (Since 1921)* and *Udta Punjab*. Both the films were profitable and received positive reviews. She has already earned rave reviews for her performance in Gauri Shinde's *Dear Zindagi*, which stars Shah Rukh Khan. Currently one of Bollywood's most bankable actors, Bhatt endorses multiple brands such as Garnier, Maybelline, Caprese, and Coca-Cola.

FAST FACTS: Actor Emraan Hashmi and director Mohit Suri are Alia's maternal cousins.

43. Allu Arjun ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 27 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 59

Allu Arjun comes from a family of film actors, producers and directors. He counts actor Chiranjeevi as his maternal uncle, and has himself recently become a father again. The 33-year old Telugu actor has done five films, which have all been well received by fans, contributing to their commercial success.

FAST FACT: His nickname is Bunny.

44. Harbhajan Singh ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 10.29 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 35

Harbhajan Singh had a quiet year professionally and represented India in just four ODIs and two T20 games. His performances, though, were mostly lacklustre and a sustained presence in the team appears unlikely at a time when R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja and Ashish Mishra are playing across most formats. In the ninth season of the IPL, Singh took nine wickets in 14 matches for the Mumbai Indians, at an average of 43.55. It was, however, the birth of his first child that made headlines this year.

FAST FACT: He has been roped in to judge the new season of *Roadies*.

45. Shraddha Kapoor ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 10.91 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 36

Shraddha Kapoor continued her dream run from last year with *Baaghi* (2016) which grossed Rs 76 crore at the box office. The Tiger Shroff-starrer helped her flaunt her action skills in her only success in the period under review.

⬆️ UP ⬇️ DOWN ⬆️ NEW = EVEN ⬆️ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

She also starred in *Rock On II*, (which is outside our time period) as a rock singer, but it failed to ignite interest at the box office. Kapoor, however, remains a brand favourite, endorsing top names such as Veet and Lipton Green Tea. Shraddha has a busy 2017 lined up, with movies like *OK Jaanu*, *Half Girlfriend* and a biopic on underworld fugitive Dawood Ibrahim's sister Haseena Parkar in her kitty.

FAST FACT: Kapoor turned designer and launched her fashion label Imara in 2015.

46. Shruti Haasan ⬆

EARNINGS: Rs 6.90 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 34

It's been an action-packed year at the box office for Shruti Haasan, daughter of Tamil film star Kamal Haasan and actor Sarika. She acted in the Tamil films *Puli* (2015) and *Vedalam* (2015) and a Bollywood movie *Rocky Handsome* (2016). But her success continues to come from Telugu films. This year, Shruti won the award for Best Actress (Telugu) at the South Indian International Movie Awards for her role in the 2015 super hit Telugu film *Srimanthudu*. Her Telugu film *Premam* (2016), which released in October, was a super hit and Shruti's performance has been widely praised.

FAST FACTS: Haasan started her career as a singer, making her debut at the age of six in the film *Thevar Magan*.

47. Dhanush ⬇

EARNINGS: Rs 28 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 66

His slim frame belies his dancing prowess. The actor was busy with the Tamil film *Thanga Magan* (2015) and *Thodari* (2016) during the period under consideration. One of his biggest hits for the year was *Kodi*, his latest film, and its title song '*Kodi parakkudha*' received frenzied fan reception.

FAST FACT: His successful 2015

science-fantasy film *Anegan* featured him in four distinctive characters, each of them appearing in a different era.

48. Karan Johar ⬇

EARNINGS: Rs 16.8 crore

CATEGORY: TV Personalities

FAME RANK: 49

Karan Johar continued to make his presence felt through his co-productions (*Kapoor & Sons...*, *Baar Baar Dekho* and his directorial venture *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil*). The first more than recovered its cost, while *Baar Baar Dekho* bombed miserably at the box office. Johar, known for his popular talk show *Koffee With Karan*, now in its fifth season, was also a judge on two television shows in 2016, *India's Got Talent* and *Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa*.

FAST FACT: He was an assistant director in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*.

49. Kamal Haasan ⬇

EARNINGS: Rs 32 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 78

The Tamil supertar had a rather sedate year, resulting in him dropping three places on our list. An injury and a month-long stay in hospital kept him out of action for a prolonged period. He remained in the news in 2016 for his split with partner Gautami after 13 years of living together. The 61-year-old actor was awarded the Chevalier de L'Ordre Arts et Lettres (The Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters) by the French government. He has started working on *Sabash Naidu*, a comedy which will be simultaneously made in Tamil, Telugu and Hindi.

FAST FACT: He has starred in the highest number of films submitted by India for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

50. Varun Dhawan ⬆

EARNINGS: Rs 25 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 63

The star of 2012's romantic comedy *Student of the Year* had a mixed year. The Rohit Shetty-directed *Dilwale* (2015), with Shah Rukh Khan in the lead, fared better at the box office overseas than in India. Dhawan's solo release this year, Rohit Dhawan's action drama *Dishoom* (2016), which also starred John Abraham and Jacqueline Fernandez, grossed Rs 110 crore worldwide.

FAST FACT: The actor shares his birthday (April 24) with cricketer Sachin Tendulkar.



51. Suriya ⬆

EARNINGS: Rs 38.5 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 93

The Tamil star, known for his roles in *Ghajini* and *Vaaranam Aayiram*, had a single release this year, but has moved up 20 places in our rankings. The science-fiction thriller *24* grossed Rs 100 crore at the box office worldwide. The versatile actor is also the brand ambassador for TVS Motors, Aircel, Sunfeast biscuits, Bharathi Cement, Navratna products, Nescafe, Zandu Balm and also Close-Up toothpaste.

FAST FACT: Before becoming an actor, he worked as a merchandising manager in a garment factory.

52. Farhan Akhtar ⬇

EARNINGS: Rs 15.61 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 52

Farhan Akhtar delivered an average hit in *Wazir* at the beginning of 2016, but things got worse as the year progressed. His co-production *Baar Baar Dekho* flopped at the box office

while his next release *Rock On 2* was a non-starter. His separation with Adhuna, his wife of 15 years, also made news in 2016.

FAST FACT: Farhan Akhtar worked as an assistant director on actor Akshaye Khanna's debut film, *Himalay Putra*.

54. John Abraham ⬇

EARNINGS: Rs 18.63 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 57

John Abraham had two releases during our period under review, the action thriller *Dishoom* and *Rocky Handsome*. The former did average business, garnering close to Rs 70 crore at the box office while the latter was a disappointment. Abraham, however, ended 2016 on a positive note with his action thriller *Force 2* getting good reviews. It garnered Rs 20 crore in its first weekend and close to Rs 58 crore worldwide.

FAST FACT: John Abraham worked as a media planner for an ad agency before becoming a model and then an actor.

55. Junior NTR ⬆

EARNINGS: Rs 36 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 89

Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao Jr, known to his fans as Junior NTR, is the grandson of the late NT Rama Rao, who founded the Telugu Desam Party. *Janatha Garage*, his latest Telugu movie, raked in over Rs 50 crore at the box office in the first four days of screening in early September. That made the film the fastest Telugu grosser after *Baahubali: The Beginning*. The film went on to add another Rs 82 crore over the next five weeks, taking the total to Rs 132 crore.

FAST FACT: Junior NTR is also a trained Kuchipudi dancer.

56. Mika Singh ⬆

EARNINGS: Rs 23.77 crore

CATEGORY: Singer/Musician

FAME RANK: 67

Mika Singh sang eight songs in seven Bollywood movies in the period under consideration, including *Sultan*'s '440 Volt' and 'Taang Uthake' from *Housefull 3*. Like several other singers, he focuses more on performing at live concerts than singing for films.

FAST FACT: He acted in the 2010 film *Mitti*.

57. Parineeti Chopra ⬇

EARNINGS: Rs 6.13 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 39

For someone who has been in the industry for over half a decade with a slew of appreciated performances, Parineeti Chopra had a very quiet past year with no releases to her name. She, however, remained in the news for her physical transformation and featured in a song in *Dishoom*. Her next, *Meri Pyaari Bindu*, opposite Ayushmann Khurrana, releases in May 2017.

FAST FACT: She worked part-time for the Manchester United Football Club as the team leader of the catering department.

53. Kajal Aggarwal ⬆

EARNINGS: Rs 6 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 37

The actor had a busy year with three releases in three languages: Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. And as a singer, she made her debut in Puneeth Rajkumar's Kannada movie *Chakravyuha*. While she had a mixed bag in terms of varying box office returns for *Sardaar Gabbar Singh*, *Brahmotsavam* and *Do Lafzon Ki Kahani*, she was uniformly praised for her performances. She also made brief appearances in *Size Zero (Inji Iduppazhagi* in Tamil) and *Janatha Garage*.

FAST FACT: In her final year of college, she interned with L'Oréal, where she was spotted by a photographer who suggested she become a model.



⬆ UP ⬇ DOWN ⬆ NEW = EVEN ⬆ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

58. Kangana Ranaut* ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 26.25 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 76

Kangana Ranaut did not have a film release in the period under consideration, but she ended up winning her third National Award—for Best Actress for her double role in *Tanu Weds Manu Returns*—in May 2016. The honour was her second in successive years after she had won it for *Queen* in 2014. However, it was Ranaut's fiery and acrimonious public battle with actor Hrithik Roshan that overshadowed everything else. Her brand value remained unaffected despite the controversy and she has interesting projects lined up for 2017—notably Vishal Bhardwaj's *Rangoon* and Hansal Mehta's *Simran*.

FAST FACT: To play Rani Lakshmi Bai in one of her upcoming films, Ranaut has signed up for a crash course in horse riding in Germany.

59. Sunidhi Chauhan ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 9.03 crore

CATEGORY: Singer/Musician

FAME RANK: 47

Acclaimed as one of the most versatile singers of her generation, Sunidhi Chauhan had a relatively quiet 2016, having consciously decided to be 'selective' with her songs. Despite

that, she managed to croon romantic tracks like 'Tere Liye' in *Fitoor* and the touching 'Maa' in *Neerja*. The singer promises to entertain the audience with memorable songs in films like *Rangoon* in 2017. Her main source of revenue continued to be her concerts and live shows.

FAST FACT: She acted in a short film called *Playing Priya* in 2016 which has done well on YouTube.

60. Vishal-Shekhar ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 23.85 crore

CATEGORY: Singer/Musician

FAME RANK: 77

The musical duo of Vishal Dadlani and Shekhar Ravjani composed scores for movies such as *Fan*, *Akira*, *Sultan* and *Banjo*. They also performed at live concerts at IIM-Bangalore, Pune and Sri Lanka. Dadlani's biggest hit of 2016 was 'Baby Ko Bass Pasand Hai' from *Sultan*. He was also the judge on *Indian Idol Junior* in 2015.

FAST FACT: Dadlani was in the news for mocking a Jain monk and had to apologise for it on Twitter.

61. Vijay ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 24 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 81

Vijay's action thriller *Theri* was one

of the highest grossing Tamil films of this year raking in over Rs 150 crore at the global box office. This year, Vijay completed 24 years in the industry since his debut in *Naalaiya Theerpu*. The actor's 60th film (*Bairavaa*) is expected to release in early 2017.

FAST FACT: The actor has helped launch about 20 new directors.

62. PV Sindhu ⬆️

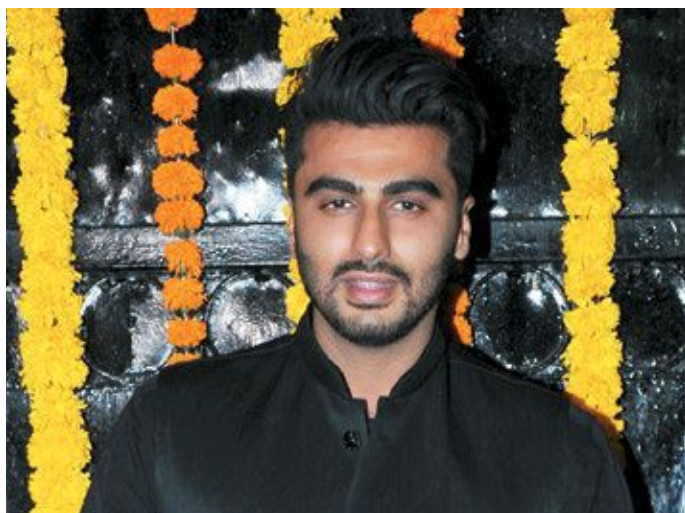
EARNINGS: Rs 3.42 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 43

PV Sindhu took Indian badminton to a new high at the Rio Olympics when she became the first Indian woman to win a silver medal at the competition. With her podium finish, she not only did one better than Saina Nehwal's bronze feat in 2012, but also stepped out of the shadows of her senior colleague. She continued her purple patch by winning the China Open Super Series Premier and ending up as the runner-up in the Hong Kong Open immediately afterwards. Her inspired run earned her a place in the BWF World Superseries finals in Dubai and a rank in the Top 10 to end the year with.

FAST FACT: Sindhu's father PV Ramana was a member of the Indian volleyball team that won the bronze medal in the 1986 Asian Games.



63. Arjun Kapoor ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 13.25 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 58

Arjun Kapoor delighted critics and the box office with his portrayal of a stay-at-home husband in R Balki's breezy romantic comedy, *Ki & Ka*. He also hosted *Khatron Ke Khiladi-Kabhi Peeda Kabhi Keeda*, an action-adventure show, which was shot in Argentina. Kapoor has much to look forward to, with two of his releases scheduled in 2017: *Half Girlfriend* with Shraddha Kapoor, and Anees Bazmee's film *Mubarakan*, in which he has a double role.

FAST FACT: Arjun Kapoor is distantly related to Ranveer Singh. Arjun's cousin, Sonam, is Ranveer's second cousin.

65. Anil Kumble ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 7.55 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 50

The former Indian cricket captain was appointed coach of the national team for a year in January 2016. His application for the job came as a surprise to many. He had never expressed interest previously though he was earlier chief mentor for the Royal Challengers Bangalore and Mumbai Indians teams in the Indian Premier League. His stint as coach has yielded fruitful results thus far with series wins against the West Indies, New Zealand and England.

FAST FACT: Anil Kumble was inducted to the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame in 2015.



64. Riteish Deshmukh ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 6.35 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 48

Riteish Deshmukh starred in a string of flops like *Kya Kool Hain Hum 3*, *Mastizaade*, *Great Grand Masti* and *Banjo* during the period under review. Only *Housefull 3* was a silver lining, crossing Rs 100 crore at the box office. It was all good news on the personal front though: Deshmukh became a father for the second time in June 2016.

FAST FACT: He has designed the office premises of Shah Rukh Khan and wife Gauri's film production company, Red Chillies Entertainments.

66. Abhishek Bachchan ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 4.48 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 45

Abhishek Bachchan had just one release this year—*Housefull 3*, which was received well at the box office. But his earnings have dipped despite much of his revenues coming in through brand endorsements. He is the face for luxury timepiece brand Omega and also endorses Videocon DTH, Motorola mobiles and Ford Fiesta. Apart from that Abhishek, a known sports lover, has bought the Pro Kabaddi League team Jaipur Pink Panthers and co-owns the Indian Super League football team Chennaiyin FC.

Fast fact: Abhishek worked as an LIC agent before joining films. He also loves to collect boarding cards.

67. Ram Charan ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 26 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 86

Ram Charan, one of the highest paid Telugu actors in the country, launched his production house, Konidela Production Company, this year. One of its first film projects would be Chiranjeevi's 150th film (*Khaidi No. 150*), which is expected to release early next year. Charan is the owner of the polo team Hyderabad Polo Riding Club and is also the promoter of Turbo Megha Airways Pvt Ltd. In 2016, he had only one release, *Dhruva*, which hit the screens in December.

FAST FACT: Ram Charan's second film *Magadheera* directed by SS Rajamouli ran for over 700 days at a theatre in Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh.

68. Anupam Kher ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 6.08 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 51

Anupam Kher scored two big hits in our period under consideration: *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo* and *MS Dhoni: The Untold Story*. His socio-political drama *Buddha in a Traffic Jam*,

however, failed to excite movie goers. While Kher has been popular on social media, he faced flak at a book launch in Delhi, where disgruntled investors of realtor Vigneshwara Developers heckled him for the brand he endorsed many years back.

FAST FACT: The actor recently shed 14 kilos and credited actors Akshay Kumar, Salman Khan, Anil Kapoor and nutritionist Rujuta Diwekar for inspiring him.

69. Saif Ali Khan ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 20.13 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 80

The year 2016 was a quiet one for Saif Ali Khan which explains why he's one of the top losers in rank in our list. He dropped 41 places from a rank of 28 last year. His revenues slid as he did not have any film releases this year and endorsements were few. He, however, does have a couple of films in the works, including *Rangoon* and *Chef*.

FAST FACT: *Parampara* was supposed to be Khan's debut, but *Aashik Aawara* became his first Bollywood release in 1993.

70. Ajay Devgn ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 8.10 crore

CATEGORY: Film Actor

FAME RANK: 56

The lack of a movie release this year saw Ajay Devgn slide 46 ranks from his position (24) last year. All he had was a cameo in *Fitoor*. His directorial venture *Shivaay* hit theatres in October-end and was largely discussed for its clash with Karan Johar's *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil*, which released on the same day. The next two years will ensure that the audience gets to see a lot more of Devgn with films such as *Baadshaho*, *Son of Sardaar 2* and *Golmaal 4* in the offing. The actor has only a few endorsements, which affected his revenue figures adversely.

FAST FACT: *Shivaay*, Ajay Devgn's second directorial venture after his 2008 *U Me Aur Hum*, stars Polish actor Erika Kaar.

⬆️ UP ⬇️ DOWN ⬆️ NEW ⚖️ EVEN ⬆️ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

71. Bipasha Basu ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 0.50 crore
CATEGORY: Film Actor
FAME RANK: 44

Bipasha Basu did not have a movie release in our year under review but she made her television debut in late 2015, with *Darr Sabko Lagta Hai*, a horror fiction serial. She hosted the show which was broadcast on &TV. Basu married television star Karan Singh Grover in early 2016.

FAST FACT: She decided to learn swimming after a near-death experience during the filming of *Shikhar* in 2005.

72. Vikram 📈

EARNINGS: Rs 32 crore
CATEGORY: Film Actor
FAME RANK: 98

Vikram's latest movie *Iru Mugan* grossed over Rs 100 crore in the three weeks to September 24, 2016, becoming the biggest Tamil film of the year after Rajinikanth's *Kabali* and the Vijay-starrer *Theri*.

FAST FACT: Vikram has worked as a youth envoy for the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

73. Sanjeev Kapoor 📈

EARNINGS: Rs 21.50 crore
CATEGORY: TV Personalities
FAME RANK: 83

Well-known Indian chef Sanjeev Kapoor is a newcomer on the 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List. He co-owns a food and lifestyle channel, Food Food, owns restaurants chains Signature, Khazana and The Yellow Chilli and has also launched his own lifestyle and kitchenware brand SK Brands. Kapoor also hosts a show called *Sanjeev Kapoor's Kitchen* on Food Food channel. He was recently approached by the Ministry of Railways to curate a menu for food to be served on trains.

FAST FACT: Sanjeev Kapoor was flown to Abu Dhabi to cook a royal vegetarian fare for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at a dinner hosted by the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority.

74. Sidharth Malhotra 📈

EARNINGS: Rs 9.63 crore
CATEGORY: Film Actor
FAME RANK: 62

It took a nuanced performance in Shakun Batra's *Kapoor & Sons* for the audience and the film industry to wake up to Sidharth Malhotra's promise as an actor. The success, however, was short-lived as his next, debutant Nitya Mehra's *Baar Baar Dekho*, failed miserably at the box office. The actor says he has no regrets about its failure and will continue to experiment with his roles. His lineup of films indicates just that: An action movie with director Krishna DK, the remake of *Ittefaq* (1969) and the third installment of romantic love story *Aashiqui*.

FAST FACT: Malhotra is the first Indian ambassador for Tourism New Zealand.



75. Sanjay Leela Bhansali 📈

EARNINGS: Rs 17.83 crore
CATEGORY: Directors
FAME RANK: 82

Sanjay Leela Bhansali had a fabulous year as a director-producer, music composer and screenplay contributor, with his dream project *Bajirao Mastani* earning Rs 360 crore worldwide. Apart from critical acclaim and several other recognitions, Bhansali also won the prestigious Golden Lotus Award (Swarna Kamal) for Best Direction at the 63rd National Film Awards. He is now busy with his next period drama *Padmavati*, which is scheduled to release in November 2017.

FAST FACT: Bhansali had composed the 'Deewani Mastani' song from *Bajirao Mastani*, almost 12 years back, when he had first conceived the idea of the film.

76. Nargis Fakhri 📈

EARNINGS: Rs 3.83 crore
CATEGORY: Film Actor
FAME RANK: 54

2016 has been a busy year for US-born actor Nargis Fakhri. Apart from *Azhar*, the biopic on former Indian cricket captain Mohammad Azharuddin, Fakhri also acted in the comedy *Housefull 3*, which fared well at the box office, and romantic drama *Banjo*, which tanked. She also had a cameo in the adventure comedy *Dishoom*. Currently, she is working on her second Hollywood film, *5 Weddings*.

FAST FACT: In 2004, Fakhri had auditioned for *America's Next Top Model*.

77. Navjot Singh Sidhu ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 6.30 crore
CATEGORY: TV Personalities
FAME RANK: 61

Ever since his TV debut on *The Great Indian Laughter Challenge*, Navjot Singh Sidhu has made his mark in the industry, climbing 16 spots in the rankings this year. With the gift of the gab, this former cricketer-turned-politician and TV star has become a permanent feature on *The Kapil Sharma Show*, a comedy show hosted by Kapil Sharma. He created ripples in political circles as

⬆️ UP ⬇️ DOWN 📈 NEW 🟡 EVEN 📉 RETURNEE
 (In overall ranking)

well when he quit from his Rajya Sabha membership and then from the BJP. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Sidhu were in talks about a possible tie-up in Punjab, but talks are said to have come to nought over the lack of consensus about the chief ministerial candidate for the 2017 polls in the state.

FAST FACT: Sidhu recently launched a forum called the Awaaz-e-Punjab for the betterment of Punjab.

alongside Anushka Sharma.

FAST FACT: Dosanjh will join Shankar Mahadevan as a judge in a forthcoming reality show, *Rising Star*.

80. Sakshi Malik ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 0.3 crore

CATEGORY: Sports

FAME RANK: 55

Sakshi Malik became the first Indian female grappler to win a medal at the

a backseat briefly owing to his illness, Bollywood found a new talent in Aditya Prateek Singh Sisodia, aka Badshah. The rapper had begun his musical career as a part of the band, Mafia Mundeer, in 2006. Since then, he has carved his niche as a rapper in Haryanvi, Punjabi and Hindi songs. Among his popular numbers are 'Abhi Toh Party Shuru Hui Hai', 'Baby Ko Bass Pasand Hai', 'Kar Gayi Chull', 'Kaala Chashma' and his hit single, 'DJ Wale Babu'.

FAST FACT: If not a rapper, Badshah wanted to be an IAS officer.

78. Shilpa Shetty ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 11.80 crore

CATEGORY: TV Personalities

FAME RANK: 70

This former Bollywood diva stayed under the radar for a while after she and her husband gave up their stake in IPL team Rajasthan Royals, which was suspended for two years following a spot-fixing scandal and Kundra was accused of being part of it. She last did a film two years ago. Yet Shetty managed to jump five spots in this year's rankings thanks to her revenues from TV shows and endorsements. This year, she appeared as a judge on dance reality show *Super Dancer* on Sony Entertainment TV.

FAST FACT: Shetty is a trained Bharatanatyam dancer.



82. All India Bakchod (AIB) ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 9 crore

CATEGORY: Comedian

FAME RANK: 73

For a few years now, All India Bakchod (AIB), the Mumbai-based comedy collective, has garnered a legion of followers thanks to their YouTube channel and live performances. In early 2015, the AIB Roast and its subsequent fallout placed the group in the middle of a national conversation about free speech. Later that year, AIB landed a deal for a comedy news show with Star India, in the vein of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and the many satirical shows that it gave life to. The show, titled *On Air with AIB*, was telecast across Star's multiple digital and television properties and has contributed to AIB's revenue tally this year.

FAST FACT: AIB co-founder Gursimran Khamba was part of a students' collective that met then President APJ Abdul Kalam in 2006 demanding remediation of the reservation system in Indian education.

79. Diljit Dosanjh ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 10.58 crore

CATEGORY: Singer-Musician

FAME RANK: 71

This is the Punjabi singer's debut on our list. In the tradition of several Punjabi film stars before him, Dosanjh, too, was a prolific singer before he entered the local film industry. Prior to 2016, his popularity was largely limited to Punjabi-speaking audiences, though his music was more widely known. This year, though, the release of *Uda Punjab*, with Dosanjh as its protagonist, propelled him to the national stage. He has continued to appear in Punjabi films, with *Sardaarji 2* as his latest offering. 2017 will see Dosanjh continue his dalliance with Bollywood, with the release of *Phillaari*, in which he stars

Olympics. The 24-year-old from Rohtak, who had won a silver and a bronze in the 2014 Commonwealth and Asian Games respectively, clinched the bronze in Rio in the 58-kg category through repechage. Her rise in fame and stature from Haryana—notorious for female foeticide—is significant and has made her the brand ambassador for the state's *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* campaign.

FAST FACT: Malik recently got engaged to her wrestler boyfriend Satyawart Kadian.

81. Badshah ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 19.45 crore

CATEGORY: Singer-Musician

FAME RANK: 90

With Yo Yo Honey Singh's career taking

83. Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 5.75 crore

CATEGORY: Singer-Musician

FAME RANK: 68

After dropping out of the list in 2015, the trio has made a comeback this year despite a mixed-bag performance. They shone with *Mirzya*, *Rock On 2* did average business, while *Ghayal Once*

⬆️ UP ⬇️ DOWN ⬆️ NEW = EVEN ⬆️ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

Again flopped. The group, which completed 20 years together this year, also earned well from the concert circuit, where they brought their acclaimed energy to the stage and played for causes close to their hearts.

FAST FACT: The three have diverse tastes in music: While Shankar likes to listen to folk and Carnatic music, Ehsaan has a preference for Blues and Loy is into Jazz.

84. Shaan ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 8.27 crore
CATEGORY: Singer-Musician
FAME RANK: 75

Shaan, who started with pop music and is known for his melodious voice, had a relatively better year this year, edging up seven spots from last year. He sang three songs in the Sooraj Barjatya's *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo*, followed by *1920 London* and Pakistani movie *Sawal 700 Crore Dollar Ka*. He also sang in some Kannada and Bengali movies. Besides, he had several concerts to his name and was one of the judges on singing reality show *The Voice India Kids*.

FAST FACT: Shaan is set to release a song on demonetisation, penned by Prasoon Joshi.

85. Leander Paes =

EARNINGS: Rs 1.78 crore
CATEGORY: Sports
FAME RANK: 64

At 43, much after most of his contemporaries had called it a day, Leander Paes completed a career mixed-doubles slam by winning the French Open title with Martina Hingis in June. He then proceeded to play in his seventh Olympics in Rio, a record for any tennis player, despite Rohan Bopanna's initial reluctance to partner him in the doubles category. But the pair's medal hopes were dashed right on the first day, when he and Bopanna crashed out of the first round.

FAST FACT: From his mother's side, Paes is a direct descendant of renowned Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt.

86. Remo D'Souza ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 7.33 crore
CATEGORY: Director
FAME RANK: 79

The director-choreographer gained popularity as a judge on dance shows like *Dance India Dance* and *Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa*. This year, he was also a judge for the second season of *Dance Plus*, which airs on Star TV. D'Souza has been the dance director for top-ticket Bollywood movies like *Bajirao Mastani* and *Dilwale*. He also directed and wrote the story for the superhero action film *A Flying Jatt*. However, the movie starring Tiger Shroff could rake in only Rs 38 crore, just recovering its costs.

FAST FACT: After his debut directorial *ABCD: Any Body Can Dance*, which starred dancers from reality show *Dance India Dance*, D'Souza is making another film, *Nawabzaade*, with the participants of the show.



87. Anurag Kashyap ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 1.06 crore
CATEGORY: Director
FAME RANK: 69

This was a mixed year for Anurag Kashyap. *Raman Raghav 2.0*, a psychological thriller, which he directed and produced, won critical acclaim but it did not fare well at the box office. Another movie, *Akira*, starring Sonakshi Sinha, also lost steam in its second week. *Udta Punjab*, which Kashyap co-produced, won both critical acclaim and performed well at the box office. He is producing and acting in his upcoming venture *Ghoomketu*.

FAST FACT: Kashyap has a feature film, *Zoo*, lined up that is to be shot completely on iPhone 6S.

88. MC Mary Kom ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 2.85 crore
CATEGORY: Sports
FAME RANK: 72

The 2012 Olympic bronze medallist failed to qualify for the Rio Games, and her quiet year saw her slip down the rankings by 26 places. While she wanted to hang up her gloves after Rio, Kom

has now said that she will continue to box and possibly participate in one more Olympics. She has also taken up a mentorship role by training and guiding kids at her Mary Kom-SAI Boxing Academy.

FAST FACT: The International Boxing Association (AIBA) is set to honour Kom with a 'Legends Award'.

89. Anirban Lahiri ⬆️

EARNINGS: Rs 12.85 crore
CATEGORY: Sports
FAME RANK: 92

At No. 77, Anirban Lahiri is the only Indian to be ranked among the world's top 100 golfers. He did not fare as well as he was expected to at the 2016 Rio Olympics, but his performance afterwards has been encouraging. Despite no major wins, he has been seen playing close to his best. Lahiri ended second at the Hero Indian Open and third at the 2016 CIMB Classic.

FAST FACT: Lahiri practices both yoga and vipassana meditation.

90. Prabhudheva ⬇️

EARNINGS: Rs 6.50 crore

CATEGORY: Director

FAME RANK: 84

The choreographer, movie director and actor, labelled India's Michael Jackson, acted in two movies during the period—*Abhinetri* in Telugu and *Tutak Tutak Tutiya* in Hindi. After his directorial venture *Singh is Bliing* in 2015, Prabhudheva is working on his next movie *Lefty* that is likely to feature Abhishek Bachchan.

FAST FACT: Prabhudheva was almost temporarily paralysed due to a severe muscle pull while shooting for a song for his coming trilingual horror spoof.

91. Imtiaz Ali 🗑️

EARNINGS: Rs 8.25 crore

CATEGORY: Director

FAME RANK: 87

The director, who dropped out of the list last year, makes a comeback at No. 91. Ali's film *Tamasha*, starring Ranbir Kapoor and Deepika Padukone, explored the familiar themes of love and journeys, inward and outward, and for a change didn't polarise people—they either liked it or didn't really get it. It had a decent run at the box office and Ali, whom Ranbir recently called the grand-daddy of romance, is on to his next, this time with Shah Rukh Khan and Anushka Sharma.

FAST FACT: Ali played the role of Yakub Memon, the younger brother of 1993 Mumbai blasts prime suspect Tiger Memon, in Anurag Kashyap's *Black Friday*.

92. Ashutosh Gowariker 🌟

EARNINGS: Rs 10.50 crore

CATEGORY: Director

FAME RANK: 95

Ashutosh Gowariker's highly anticipated Hrithik Roshan-starrer *Mohenjo Daro* may have failed to sizzle at the box office but the buzz around the movie kept him in the news. It was selected as the closing film at the 69th Locarno International Film Festival. Besides, his return to the big screen as an actor in Priyanka Chopra's maiden Marathi production *Ventilator* won him accolades from critics and fans alike. It's perhaps no coincidence that, for someone who had never decided to return to acting, he played the role of a filmmaker in the movie. All in all, he had an action-filled year with some hits and misses.

FAST FACT: Gowariker, who started his career as an actor, was part of the hit TV series *Circus*.

93. Devdutt Pattanaik 🌟

EARNINGS: Rs 10.25 crore

CATEGORY: Author

FAME RANK: 96

Originally trained in medicine, Pattanaik later pursued a course in comparative

mythology from Mumbai University. His first book on mythology *Shiva: An Introduction* came out in 1997 and since then he has been prolific, writing over 30 books in all, including a work of fiction (*The Pregnant King*) and several children's books. His list of three books this year has earned him a place in the 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List. He also works on TV shows and is consultant to organisations on culture, diversity and leadership.

FAST FACT: Pattanaik has served in the Future Group as its chief belief officer, a designation created "to draw attention to the value of belief in business".

94. Vir Das 📈

EARNINGS: Rs 3.75 crore

CATEGORY: Comedian

FAME RANK: 85

One of India's earliest stand-up comedians, Das spends nearly half of his time working on movies. The other half he uses to do live gigs, organise comedy festivals and manage upcoming comics through his consultancy WeirDass Comedy. This year, Das returned with the second season of his live comedy tour, *The Unbelievable Tour*, while also appearing in a clutch of Hindi films, including *Mastizaade*, *Shivaay*, *31st October* and *Santa Banta Pvt Ltd*. He is also set to become the first ever Indian comic to get his own Netflix original comedy special.



95. Malaika Arora Khan 📈

EARNINGS: Rs 4.40 crore

CATEGORY: TV Personalities

FAME RANK: 88

Malaika Arora Khan continued to judge the seventh season of *India's Got Talent* on Colors, along with Karan Johar and Kirron Kher. Apart from her glamorous appearances at events, Khan has been in the news for filing for divorce from Arbaaz Khan. She is one of the style editors for The Label Life, a home decor and lifestyle fashion brand launched by Sussanne Khan, Hrithik Roshan's former wife.

FAST FACT: Malaika started training as a dancer since she was four.

📈 UP 📉 DOWN 🌟 NEW 🟡 EVEN 🗑️ RETURNEE
(In overall ranking)

FAST FACT: The first season of *The Unbelievable Tour* reportedly had the highest ticket sales for any comedy tour in India.

96. Neeraj Pandey [★]

EARNINGS: Rs 6.75 crore

CATEGORY: Director

FAME RANK: 94

The Bollywood director, known for his movie *A Wednesday!*, a thriller linked to a terror plot, is a newcomer on the Forbes India Celebrity 100 List, thanks to the success of *MS Dhoni: The Untold Story*. Pandey directed and wrote the screenplay for the biopic on India's cricket captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni. Pandey also produced the Akshay Kumar hit *Rustom* and is now busy with the production of *Naam Shabana*, a prequel to 2015 action spy thriller *Baby*.

FAST FACT: Despite making a movie on MS Dhoni, Pandey has admitted that he's not a fan of the cricketer.

97. Arbaaz Khan [★]

EARNINGS: Rs 5.30 crore

CATEGORY: TV Personalities

FAME RANK: 91

While Arbaaz Khan's appearance in films have been infrequent in the recent past, the *Dabangg* director's role as host of the reality TV show *Power Couple* has landed him on our list for the very first time. While Khan began hosting the show along with his wife, former VJ and model Malaika Arora Khan, the two announced their separation earlier this year. Besides television, Khan is also set to appear opposite Sunny Leone in an upcoming movie titled *Tera Intezaar*.

FAST FACT: Khan played a villain in his debut film, *Daraar* (1996), for which he won a Filmfare award for Best Performance in a Negative Role.

98. Bharti Singh [★]

EARNINGS: Rs 8.80 crore

CATEGORY: TV Personalities

FAME RANK: 99

Singh first rose to prominence with her third spot finish in the fourth season of *The Great Indian Laughter Challenge*. She has since appeared across a whole gamut of reality shows on Indian television, including *Nach Baliye*, *India's Got Talent*, *Bigg Boss*, *Comedy Circus*

and *Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa*. In the past year, Singh has appeared in *Comedy Nights Live*, a replacement for Kapil Sharma's *Comedy Nights with Kapil*, as well as *Comedy Nights Bachao* on Colors. A debutante on our list, she also made her film debut with *Sanam Re* this year.

FAST FACT: Singh is a former national level archer.

99. Sonali Bendre Behl [★]

EARNINGS: Rs 6.50 crore

CATEGORY: TV Personalities

FAME RANK: 97

One of the most glamorous actresses of the 1990s, Sonali Bendre Behl makes her debut on the Forbes India Celebrity 100 List thanks to her television appearances. She hosted *Mission Sapne* on Colors this year and was a judge on *India's Best Dramebaaz*, a reality show on Zee TV. Though there have been talks of the actress being roped in for a TV series, she has denied taking on any new offers.

FAST FACT: She has authored *The Modern Gurukul: My Experiments with Parenting*, which was published in 2015.

100. Krushna Abhishek [★]

EARNINGS: Rs 5.50 crore

CATEGORY: TV Personalities

FAME RANK: 100

Krushna is yet another TV personality who has debuted on the list, driven by the success of *Comedy Nights Bachao*, which he co-hosts with comedian Bharti Singh. He also hosted *OMG! Yeh Mera India*, a factual television show on History TV18 channel and acted in the adult comedy film *Kyaa Kool Hain Hum 3*.

FAST FACT: Krushna had a public spat with his uncle Govinda, the Bollywood star, after the latter appeared on rival Kapil Sharma's show. They have patched up since.

HOW WE CRUNCH THE NUMBERS

The 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List rankings are based on two parameters: Estimates of entertainment-related earnings of celebrities and estimates of their fame. The period under consideration for both was October 1, 2015, to September 30, 2016.

HOW WE CALCULATED EARNINGS

For each celebrity, we got independent estimates from multiple sources—industry insiders, talent management agencies, film and TV production companies, publishers, music industry professionals, sports consultants, advertising agencies, brand marketers, celebrity managers and other relevant experts.

HOW WE CALCULATED FAME

We tracked the media visibility of celebrities across print and television and tabulated their social media reach, via Facebook and Twitter.

Our principal data partners for the 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List, LexisNexis® and TAM-Eikona, helped provide fame data relating to celebrities' print and TV exposure respectively while GroupM ESP, Globosport, Exceed Entertainment and Galatta helped provide data for celebrities' endorsements. We were also supported by indiantelevision.com and tellychakkar.com in the data collection process. The entire process was verified by Ernst & Young, our process advisors.

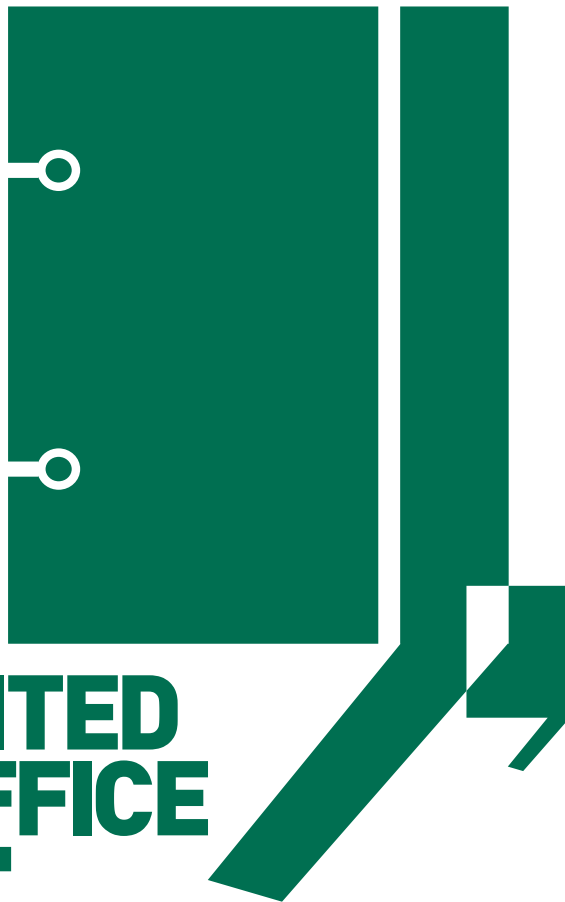
Note: Forbes India has arrived at a fair estimate of the total earnings (front-of-camera appearances in many cases) of each of the persons who figure in this list by using multiple sources in the entertainment and media industry. However, since these estimates are meant for a limited purpose, they may not be accurate or official and cannot be relied upon for any legal or compliance purposes. The ratings given are subjective and may not necessarily reflect the actual financial worth or fame of the persons featured.

The rankings are based on these estimates of earnings and media visibility of each celebrity across print, television and social media from October 1, 2015, to September 30, 2016. The numbers are, therefore, merely indicative. We (at Forbes India magazine, Digital18 Media Limited) have done our best to verify the information published, but do not take any responsibility for the absolute accuracy of the information.

⬆️ UP
⬇️ DOWN
➕ NEW
⚖️ EVEN
⬆️ RETURNEE
 (In overall ranking)



FROM
**"YOU'RE NOT
WHAT WE'RE
LOOKING FOR."**



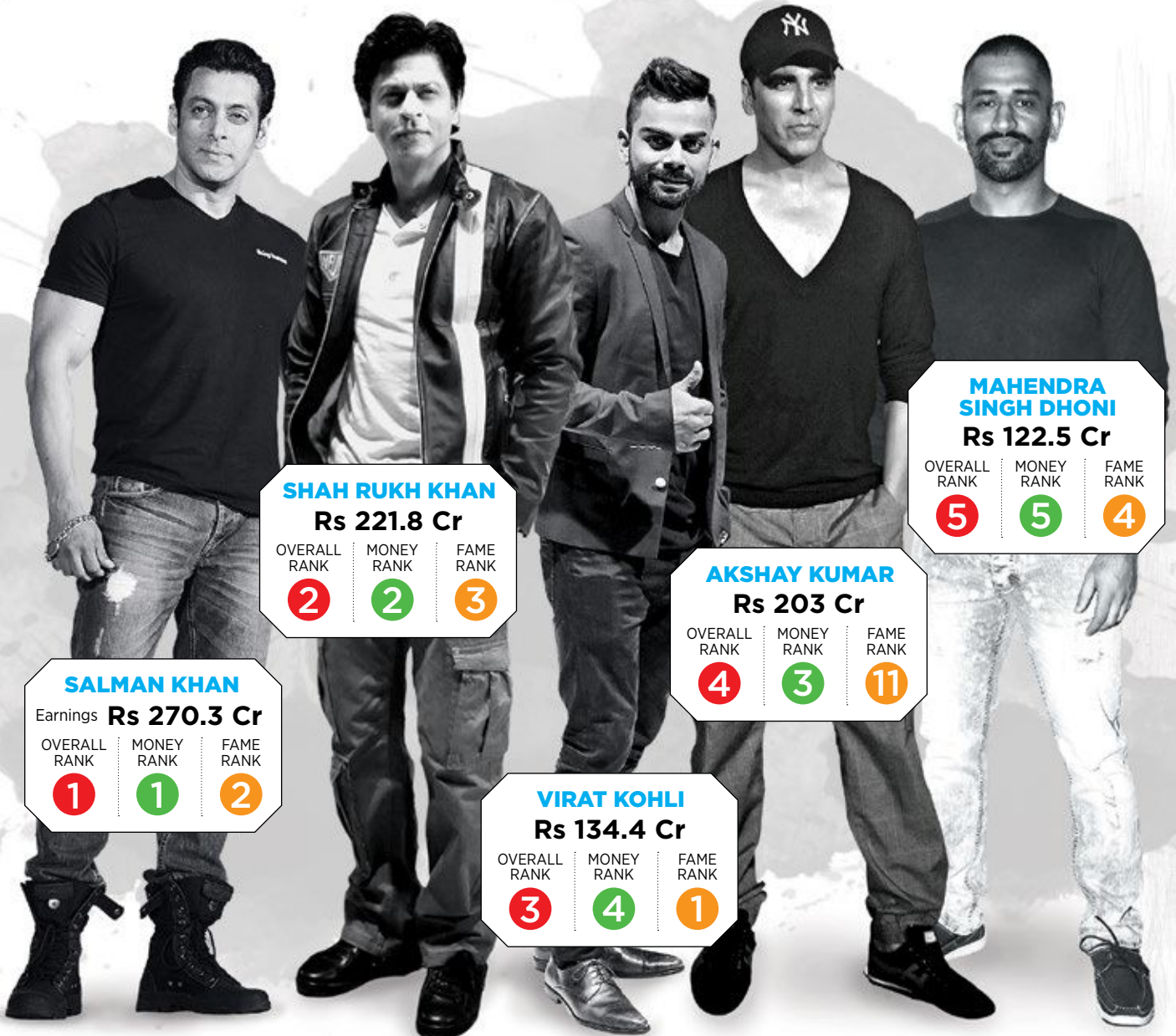
TO
**"HE VISITED
OUR OFFICE
ONCE."**

The Celebrity Scorecard

The zeroes on their pay cheques, their media visibility, the likes and mentions that made them famous and some trivia on India's top celebrities

COMPILED BY PRAMOD MATHEW
INFOGRAPHICS BY PRADEEP BELHE & SAMEER PAWAR

SALMAN, SHAH RUKH, VIRAT, DHONI: GETTY IMAGES; AKSHAY: SACHIN GOKHALE



SALMAN KHAN
Earnings **Rs 270.3 Cr**

OVERALL RANK	MONEY RANK	FAME RANK
1	1	2

SHAH RUKH KHAN
Rs 221.8 Cr

OVERALL RANK	MONEY RANK	FAME RANK
2	2	3

VIRAT KOHLI
Rs 134.4 Cr

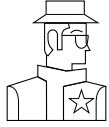
OVERALL RANK	MONEY RANK	FAME RANK
3	4	1

AKSHAY KUMAR
Rs 203 Cr

OVERALL RANK	MONEY RANK	FAME RANK
4	3	11

MAHENDRA SINGH DHONI
Rs 122.5 Cr

OVERALL RANK	MONEY RANK	FAME RANK
5	5	4




ACTOR

RANK	CELEBRITY	EARNINGS (Money Rank)	FAME RANK
6	Deepika Padukone	69.8	8
8	Priyanka Chopra	76.0	7
9	Amitabh Bachchan	32.6	20
10	Hrithik Roshan	90.3	6
12	Ranveer Singh	67.4	9
14	Aamir Khan	-	100
18	Sonam Kapoor	20.7	35
19	Ranbir Kapoor	55.5	12
20	Sonakshi Sinha	16.4	46
21	Shahid Kapoor	16.3	47
24	Jacqueline Fernandez	19.1	39
25	Katrina Kaif	33.5	19
30	Rajinikanth	35.0	18
32	Sunny Leone	10.7	60
33	Mahesh Babu	42.0	13
36	Anushka Sharma	15.3	51
38	Kareena Kapoor-Khan	35.7	17
42	Alia Bhatt	17.8	41
43	Allu Arjun	27.0	25
45	Shraddha Kapoor	10.9	59
46	Shruti Haasan	6.9	77
47	Dhanush	28.0	24
49	Kamal Haasan	32.0	21
50	Varun Dhawan	25.0	28
51	Suriya	38.5	14
52	Farhan Akhtar	15.6	49
53	Kajal Aggarwal	6.0	85
54	John Abraham	18.6	40
55	Junior NTR	36.0	16
57	Parineeti Chopra	6.1	83
58	Kangana Ranaut	26.3	26
61	Vijay	24.0	30
63	Arjun Kapoor	13.3	53
64	Riteish Deshmukh	6.4	81
66	Abhishek Bachchan	4.5	89
67	Ram Charan	26.0	27
68	Anupam Kher	6.1	84
69	Saif Ali Khan	20.1	37
70	Ajay Devgn	8.1	73
71	Bipasha Basu	0.5	98
72	Vikram	32.0	22
74	Sidharth Malhotra	9.6	67
76	Nargis Fakhri	3.8	91

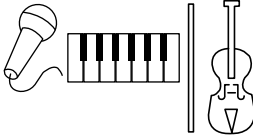
Earnings rounded off to one decimal place

SPORTS



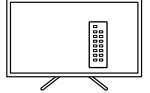
RANK	CELEBRITY	EARNINGS (Money Rank)	FAME RANK
7	Sachin Tendulkar	58.0	11
16	Rohit Sharma	24.2	29
17	Yuvraj Singh	16.0	48
23	Shikhar Dhawan	17.7	43
26	Suresh Raina	12.2	55
27	Ravichandran Ashwin	15.6	50
29	Sania Mirza	14.6	52
31	Saina Nehwal	20.2	36
34	Ajinkya Rahane	11.7	58
35	Ravindra Jadeja	7.5	75
39	Gautam Gambhir	11.7	57
41	Virendra Sehwag	3.0	94
44	Harbhajan Singh	10.3	63
62	PV Sindhu	3.4	93
65	Anil Kumble	7.6	74
80	Sakshi Malik	0.3	99
85	Leander Paes	1.8	96
88	MC Mary Kom	2.9	95
89	Anirban Lahiri	12.9	54

SINGER / MUSICIAN



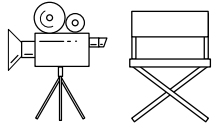
RANK	CELEBRITY	EARNINGS (Money Rank)	FAME RANK
13	AR Rahman	37.5	15
15	Arijit Singh	60.2	10
28	Shreya Ghoshal	9.8	66
37	Sonu Nigam	10	65
56	Mika Singh	23.8	32
59	Sunidhi Chauhan	9	68
60	Vishal-Shekhar	23.9	31
79	Diljit Dosanjh	10.6	61
81	Badshah	19.5	38
83	Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy	5.8	86
84	Shaan	8.3	71

TV PERSONALITIES



RANK	CELEBRITY	EARNINGS (Money Rank)	FAME RANK
11	Kapil Sharma	30.2	23
22	Madhuri Dixit	17.2	44
48	Karan Johar	16.8	45
73	Sanjeev Kapoor	21.5	34
77	Navjot Singh Sidhu	6.3	82
78	Shilpa Shetty	11.8	56
95	Malaika Arora Khan	4.4	90
97	Arbaaz Khan	5.3	88
98	Bharti Singh	8.8	70
99	Sonali Bendre Behl	6.5	79
100	Krushna Abhishek	5.5	87

DIRECTOR

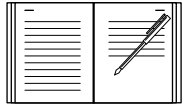


RANK	CELEBRITY	EARNINGS (Money Rank)	FAME RANK
75	Sanjay Leela Bhansali	17.8	42
86	Remo D'Souza	7.3	76
87	Anurag Kashyap	1.1	97
90	Prabhudheva	6.5	80
91	Imtiaz Ali	8.3	72
92	Ashutosh Gowariker	10.5	62
96	Neeraj Pandey	6.8	78

COMEDIAN

RANK	CELEBRITY	EARNINGS (Money Rank)	FAME RANK
82	All India Bakchod	9.0	69
94	Vir Das	3.8	92

AUTHOR



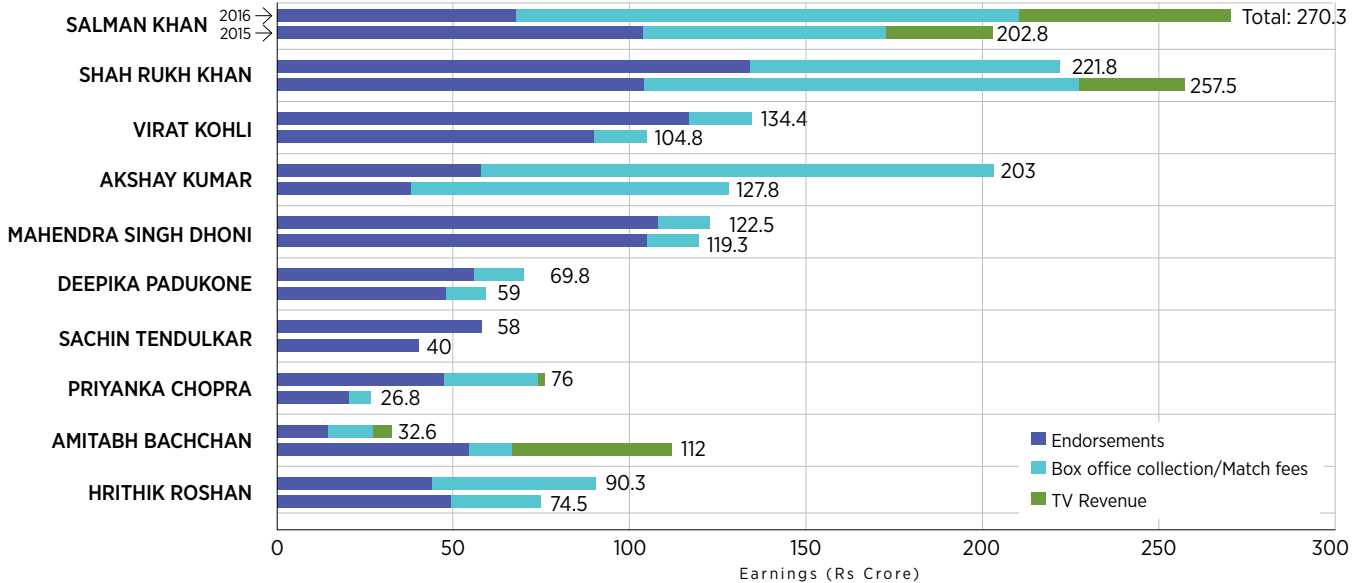
RANK	CELEBRITY	EARNINGS (Money Rank)	FAME RANK
40	Chetan Bhagat	22.8	33
93	Devdutt Pattanaik	10.3	64

Rs 2,745 Cr

TOTAL EARNINGS OF INDIA'S
TOP 100 CELEBRITIES IS DOWN
2.6% FROM LAST YEAR

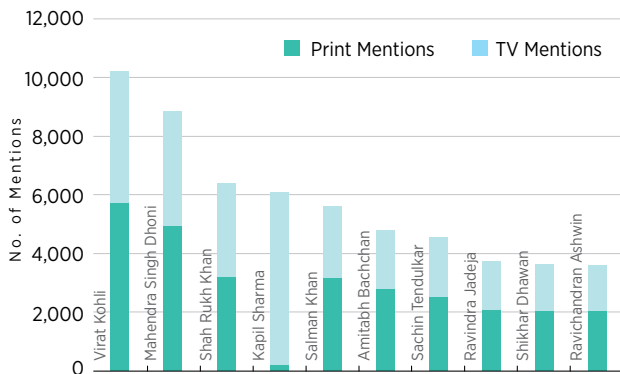
HOW THE TOP TEN FARE IN EARNINGS

Most celebrities in the top order have improved their earnings compared with last year

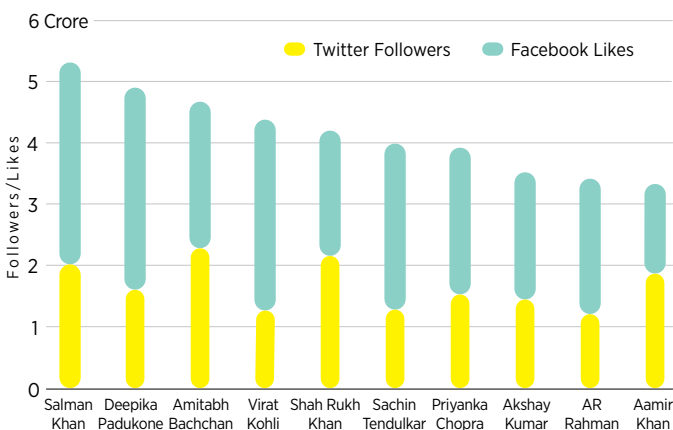


THE FAME BAROMETER

The most mentioned celebrities in print and television



The stars who went viral on Facebook and set Twitter aflutter



17.6% SHARE OF WOMEN CELEBRITIES IN OVERALL EARNINGS

29 THE NUMBER OF WOMEN IN THE LIST IS ONE MORE THAN LAST YEAR. THEY COLLECTIVELY EARNED **Rs 484.2 Cr**, ROUGHLY THE SAME AS LAST YEAR

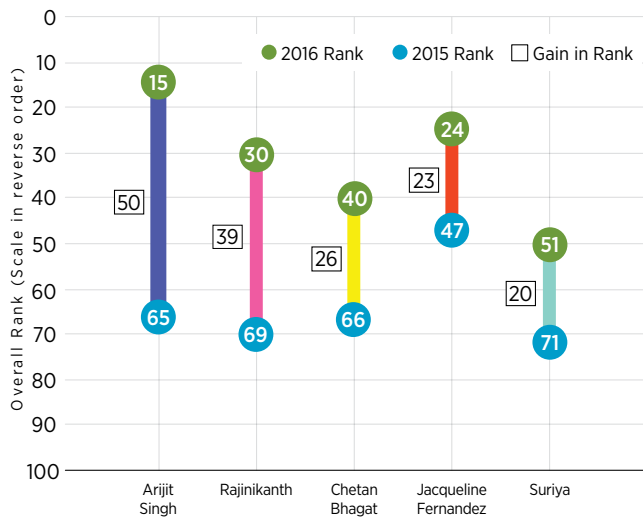
RETURNEES TO THE LIST

These stars are returning to the list after a gap of one or more years

2016 RANK	CELEBRITY	YEAR OF LAST APPEARANCE IN CELEBRITY LIST (Rank in that year)
55	Junior NTR	2012 (66)
61	Vijay	2014 (41)
67	Ram Charan	2013 (69)
72	Vikram	2012 (67)
75	Sanjay Leela Bhansali	2014 (59)
76	Nargis Fakhri	2014 (72)
83	Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy	2014 (82)
91	Imtiaz Ali	2014 (76)

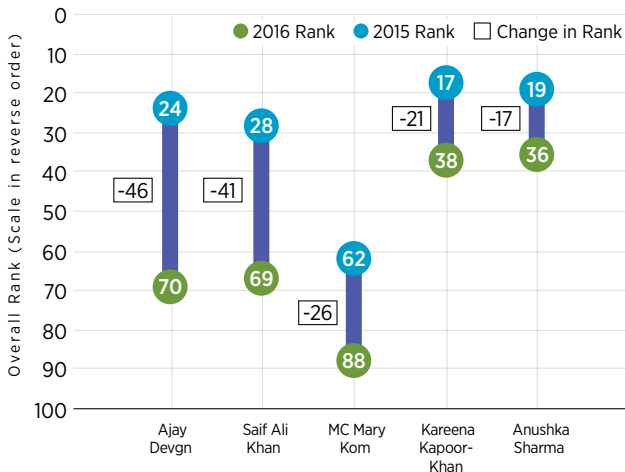
TOP RANK GAINERS

A successful season propels Arijit Singh 50 places



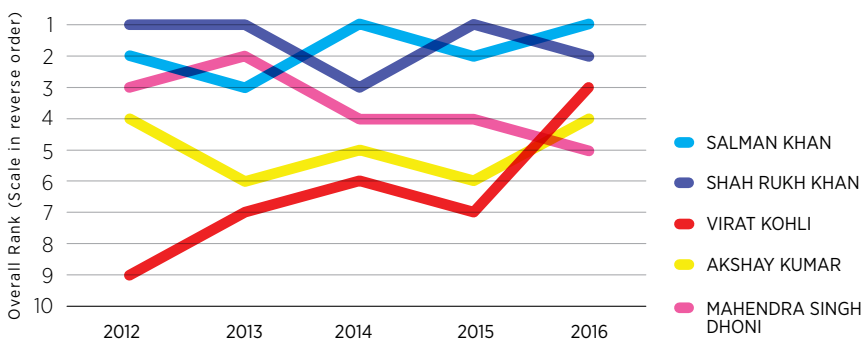
TOP RANK LOSERS

Neither Ajay Devgn nor Saif Ali Khan had a movie



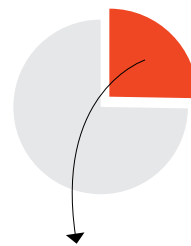
HISTORICAL RANKINGS

It's either been Salman Khan or Shah Rukh Khan in pole position



Rs 38.6 Cr

AVERAGE EARNINGS OF THE 46 ACTORS IN THE LIST. THIS IS THE HIGHEST FOR ANY CATEGORY, FOLLOWED BY SPORTS AT Rs 24.2 Cr



25%

SHARE OF THE TOP THREE HIGHEST-EARNING CELEBRITIES—SALMAN KHAN, SHAH RUKH KHAN AND AKSHAY KUMAR—IN THE OVERALL EARNINGS PIE

Rs 74 Lakh

THAT'S HOW MUCH SALMAN KHAN EARNED PER DAY IN THE YEAR UNDER REVIEW

CELEBRITIES BY AGE

Holding on to stardom, evidently, gets more difficult with age.

● Age Bracket ★ = 1 Celebrity

21-30



31-40



41-50



51-60



61 and above



(Number of celebrities total 105 because wherever a celebrity is more than one person, or a group, individual ages have been considered.)



AAMIR KHAN

DESPITE NOT HAVING A MOVIE IN THE YEAR UNDER REVIEW, AAMIR KHAN IS AT RANK 14 (DOWN NINE PLACES FROM 2015) BECAUSE OF HIS HIGH FAME RANK OF 10

SACHIN GOKHALE

*Celebrity*100[★]

The Hit Machine

The need to 'self-disrupt' and a keen sense of discipline and professionalism have kept **AKSHAY KUMAR** at the top of his game even after 25 years in the movies. And it's getting better

BY **SOURAV MAJUMDAR**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JATIN KAMPANI**

FORBES INDIA
CELEBRITY 100

RANK

No. 4 ★



I

It's around 6.45 am and there's a slight nip in the Mumbai air as the sun rises gently on the horizon and early morning runners on Juhu beach get on with their paces. Emerging from the ground floor of Prime Beach, the apartment complex overlooking the beachfront, Akshay Kumar greets us with a warm handshake and his trademark smile.

Kumar has had a swim and is looking fresh and sharp, sporting a salt-and-pepper moustache, a

enough time for our conversation.

This typifies the concern for those he deals with, an attribute ingrained in Kumar, 49, who has completed 25 years in the hugely competitive, and often fickle, world of Hindi cinema. Kumar rules the box office even after a quarter of a century, and is known as one of the most bankable stars in the business, along with the three Khans—Salman, Shah Rukh and Aamir.

A self-confessed producer's actor, Kumar is clear that the producer, who takes the risk with a film, is the one who he needs to take care of as the lead actor. "In this industry, it's not about how good an actor you are. It's all about how good you are to your producer," explains Kumar. "In my nearly 26 years in this business, I have learnt this. It's how well you protect your producer that matters."

His producers couldn't be happier. 2016 has been a huge high for Kumar, born Rajiv Bhatia, who has

Hollywood A-listers like Leonardo DiCaprio and Matthew McConaughey.

THE PRODUCERS' FAVOURITE

However, in his trademark calm drawl, Kumar underplays his success. "There was a time in my career when I had 14-15 back-to-back flops, and there was no sign of stopping," he smiles. "But I still had at least three to four films in hand, and good films. The producer would think, let's take Akshay as one lead actor, and someone else as another. The acting will be done by the other hero, and Akshay can do the action. That is how it used to work."

Despite his lean patch then, the producers, Kumar says, cast him because he was always punctual on the sets and would help complete the film on time. In an industry where lead actors are notorious for reporting late to the sets—often by several hours—this was one of

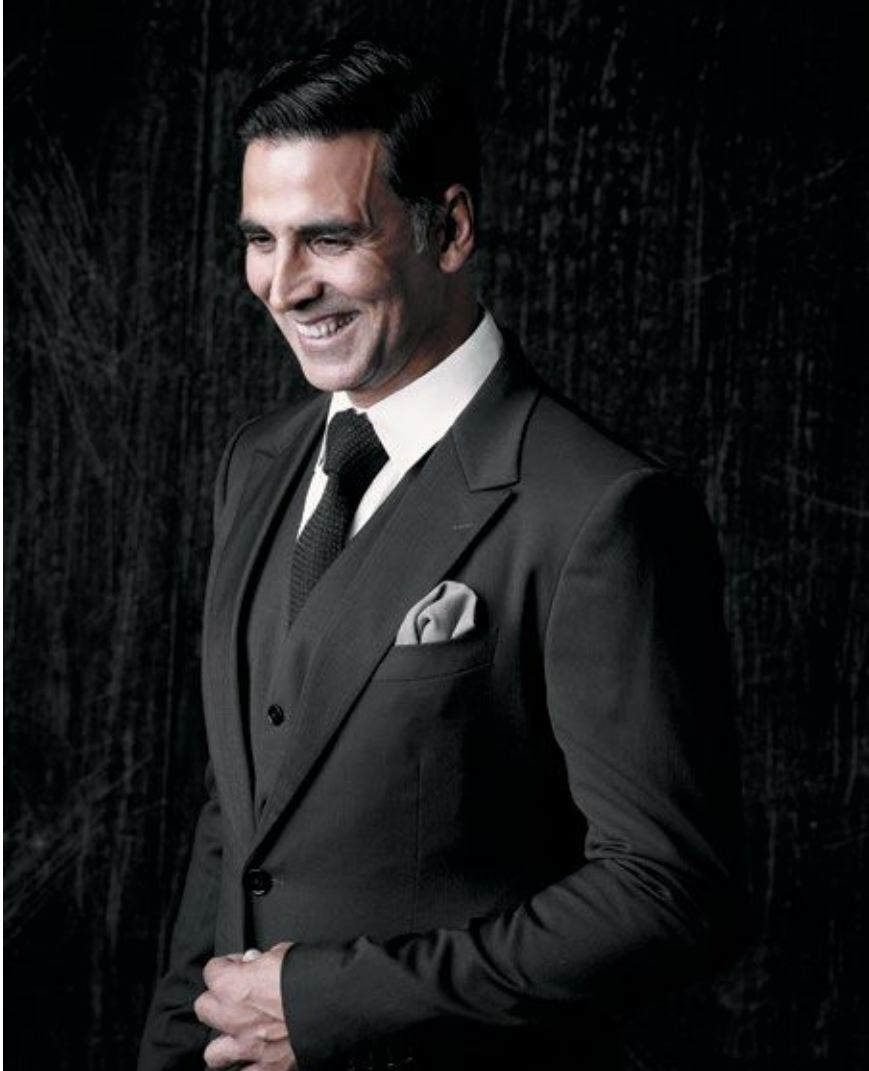
“IT’S NOT ABOUT HOW GOOD AN ACTOR YOU ARE. IT’S ALL ABOUT HOW GOOD YOU ARE TO YOUR PRODUCER.”

Superdry sweatshirt and a GAP cap. He takes a quick look at his Mercedes GL350 SUV and decides he's going to drive it himself to Kamal Amrohi Studio in Jogeshwari, where he is wrapping up the shoot of his forthcoming film *Jolly LLB 2*. His fitness trainer Jennifer, who also trains his 14-year-old son Aarav, is around too. Aarav even comes up and gives her a hug to see her off as she leaves in another car.

Kumar gets into the driver's seat and we're off to the studio. At that time of the morning, traffic is expected to be light, but Kumar takes care to drive slowly, ensuring we have

churned out three mega hits. Movie website boxofficeindia.com lists three of his films—*Rustom*, *Airlift* and *Housefull 3*—among the top 5 box office grossers of 2016 to date on the basis of worldwide collections. Kumar's plate for 2017 is also full, with four films—*Jolly LLB 2*, *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha*, *Crack* and *Robot* sequel *2.0* (where he co-stars with Tamil superstar Rajinikanth and plays a negative role)—slated for release. Not surprising then, that Kumar moves up to No 4 on the 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List and figures at No 12 on the *Forbes* list of the world's highest paid actors for 2016, ahead of

Kumar's most valuable attributes: A keen sense of professionalism and discipline, something which he carries with obvious pride even today despite his huge box office success. "They [the producers] used to think that at least Akshay will come and go on time and the movie will be completed and they won't be hassled. The director won't be crying that the hero isn't coming on time, or not even emerging from the vanity van," Kumar says with a laugh, adding that he's not too affected by the ups and downs in his career. "Something or the other always keeps happening, and in a better way... whether it is



2016, or 2015 or 1996 when I had a slip disc after a number of action hits like *Khiladiyon Ka Khiladi* and *Main Khiladi Tu Anari* (1994). My whole career has been about ups and downs. On the downs too, it's been great."

Real estate billionaire Vikas Oberoi, who has known Kumar for 25 years and is one of his closest friends, says the actor's discipline is one of his biggest plus points. "I know some film directors and they say it's a dream to work with him. Producers love him. Along with Mr [Amitabh] Bachchan, he is one of the most disciplined guys in the industry."

"I only think of the producer and what he must be thinking. This is the only industry where the boss is a *naukar* (servant)," says Kumar. "The producer is standing outside your van which he gave you! How the hell did he land outside? That is one thing I have told Vedant [Bali, his business manager]... never make a producer stand outside. Call him in first."

That, he says with satisfaction, is the reason why over 130 films later, he does not have even a single film in the can and incomplete.

DISRUPTING HIS OWN GAME

Today, Kumar's purple patch has taken a new turn with the kind of roles he's been doing, many of which have redefined him as an actor. Importantly, many of his recent movies—whether it is heist caper *Special 26* (2013), *Airlift* or the recent monster hit *Rustom*—are out-of-the-box storylines or based on real-life events.

Talk about his film choices gets him animated. Kumar says he makes a deliberate attempt to "self-disrupt". "It's a conscious decision [to do different parts]. I just can't be typecast. I need to destruct what I constructed and build something new again. For example, if your company is going smoothly, but it's becoming stagnant, you need to disrupt it completely

and start from scratch. This is what I want to do all the time. I want to disrupt the whole thing and construct it again in a new way," he says.

Kumar's varied parts of today are a result of the stagnation he was faced with in the earlier years of his career when he was called upon to play the action hero most of the time. "I've done 13-14 years of only action. The fight master would come and tell me in Punjabi—you've got two punches and three kicks. If you are lucky, you'll be able to fall down once!"

It is this monotony that he chose to break away from towards the second half of his career, doing comedy with effortless ease with directors like Priyadarshan (*Hera Pheri*, 2000) and goofy roles in films like the *Housefull* franchise. "The process is amazing, but it's also very difficult because you keep on challenging yourself, making yourself and then breaking it. You become good in comedy, then break that whole thing to do something different."

Ajay Bijli, friend and founder of PVR, the country's largest multiplex chain, who was introduced two decades ago to Kumar by Oberoi, says Kumar has remained at the top of the charts because he constantly reinvents himself. Says Bijli: "Whether it is with films like *Special 26*, *Baby* (2015) or *Airlift*, he is always doing different things. He's there for the long run and he changes with the times."

The need to constantly do new things also means Kumar loves to work with newcomers—whether they are directors or his leading ladies. "I always prefer to work with new directors till [such time] they have the greed for doing something different," he says. Whether it is Neeraj Pandey (*Special 26*, *Baby*) with whom he has collaborated several times, or others like director-duo Abbas-Mustan, Guddu Dhanoa, Naresh Malhotra, Sajid Khan or *Rustom* director Tinu Suresh Desai, Kumar enjoys teaming up with people who bring in fresh ideas and perspectives.

He also encourages new music directors and keeps a robust stock of about 350 songs with him, which he buys in raw—or scratch—form first from them. If the director likes some of them, Kumar asks the music director to flesh the songs out. “There are ideas they [newcomers] come up with and have been sitting on them and guarding them like snakes. It’s their best and they keep the best for themselves. Quite a few do go loose and don’t concentrate later. But till your greed is there, you will always excel in whatever you do,” he reasons. “If you’re getting in new talent, it’s also good for you. I like a new idea. I would like to hear new stories. I can’t listen to all the stories, so a lot of the time Vedant or others in my team listen [to them]. They know the movies I’d like to do. I have always said give me a movie which is odd.”

His forthcoming movie *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* is as “odd” as it gets. It is based on a true story about a couple with the socially relevant issue of the need for toilets in rural homes providing the backdrop. “I am so excited about *Toilet*... I can’t tell you. Imagine, 65 percent of India doesn’t have toilets. I thought it was a great subject to make a film on, a powerful message,” Kumar says.

He says audiences internalise social messages better when the medium is entertaining. “Trust me, people don’t want to see a documentary on it [toilets]. When a man spends Rs 150, he internalises the message. But when you watch a documentary on TV, you switch channels. Tell me a story, show me a song, show me some fights and tears. Take

Rs 150 from me, that’s all right. And from that, I will, on my own, take the message. Don’t try to be my dad.”

KEEN BUSINESS BRAIN

Even as he plays the self-disruptor, Kumar is also a very smart businessman, who is associated with three production companies—Hari Om Entertainment (named after his father), Grazing Goat Pictures and Cape of Good Films. But Kumar likes to keep things lean and simple at his own end, and prefers to outsource the nitty-gritty of the actual production work to other production companies which execute his projects before they are sold to the big studios.

“I learnt the art of outsourcing from my friend Vikas Oberoi,” he says. “He tells the construction company: ‘You make the building, I’ve got you the land. I’ll give you more than what you want, but I will test out the quality. I will come on a particular date and take delivery. If you don’t

give [the project] on that date, I will impose a fine’. I do the same. I tell the executing production guys, ‘I will give you Rs 110 instead of Rs 100. I will of course come on time myself. You will have a contract with the studio, so you have to now give it to them’.”

Kumar points out that whatever be the case, the studio which buys the final film should never be made to suffer losses. “The studio should come back and buy your next movie too. These are simple deals and I work with everyone, from studios like Viacom18, Eros and Fox to T-Series, Sajid Nadiadwala and Karan Johar.”

In an industry also known for its intense rivalry, Kumar underscores the fact that he isn’t part of any camp. “I don’t believe in camps. Camps are made of cloth. If there are strong winds, they tend to tear!”

Despite his status in the industry, Kumar says he has just four or five key people as staff. And his outsourcing model allows him to keep his set-up

lean and mean. “I don’t want to complicate things. If things get complicated, I’d rather leave. If I am in a partnership and the person is haggling about money, I’d rather say you take more and let’s finish it off now and think in my mind that I would never want to work with the person again,” he adds.

Oberoi, on his part, cannot over-emphasise Kumar’s business sense. “He has an amazing business brain. Akshay could match an MBA in business, dollar to dollar, and probably beat them because he’s got more than that. He’s got experience, guts and grace. Everything put together, he’s better than many of the trained businessmen I have come across.”

His planning and business sense also extend



Akshay Kumar’s friend of 25 years, realty baron Vikas Oberoi, is all praise for the actor’s acute business sense and his analytical skills

“I CAN’T BE TYPECAST. I NEED TO DESTROY WHAT I CONSTRUCTED AND BUILD SOMETHING NEW AGAIN.”

to the way he gives dates for his films. “I may give block dates of, say, 25 days and then another 12-15 days to someone else. By the time I’m shooting in the second set of dates, the first guy is able to edit the first block and he’s ready for the next phase of shooting,” explains Kumar. It is this meticulous planning that allows him to complete three to four films every year, more than many of his other superstar peers.

Adds Bijli, who has also distributed some Akshay Kumar starrers: “He’s brilliant. His philosophy is that of a diligent person who understands his craft, his forte and the fact that his day job is that of being an actor. And since he is finishing every movie in 60-90 days, he can easily do three to four films a year.” And Bijli, the distributor and exhibitor, is delighted at the prospect of three to four Akshay Kumar releases every year. “Producers and exhibitors want a superstar’s movie coming as often as possible. So if there are four Akshay Kumar productions in a year, we know there’ll be a hit every quarter from him.”

A PEOPLE’S PERSON

Kumar does not allow his superstardom and busy schedule to get in the way of his relationships. His friends and staff swear by him. Says Oberoi: “Nobody around him has ever left him. His friends, his staff... he’s looked after everybody. He’s much more than a friend to me, an older brother, somebody who trusts me immensely. He’s a very good soul.”

Take Vedant Bali, Kumar’s business manager and go-to person, who has known him since he was eight. Bali’s father was also associated with Kumar.

Oberoi first met Kumar 25 years ago when he wasn’t the megastar he is

now and Oberoi Realty wasn’t the top-rung real estate company it is today. That friendship has now extended to their wives—Kumar’s wife Twinkle Khanna and Oberoi’s wife Gayatri are good friends and their families go for holidays together as well, twice a year.

“He is very curious and will ask you relevant and good questions,” says Oberoi. “He’s a good observer and analyses people very well. The thing that really works is the trust factor. He trusts my judgement immensely.”

“All my fitness is completely outsourced to him. He’s my biggest influencer... the gym in my house is literally created by him. If I had a brother, I’d probably not be as close to him as I am to Akshay,” says Oberoi.

A part of the Kumar persona is his clear work-life balance. Kumar works strictly eight hours a day and takes Sundays off to spend time with his wife, son and four-year-old daughter Nitara. “On Saturdays I work from 7-2 pm. If you’re free after 2, it’s almost like getting the Saturday free,” he says. “I love being at home. We watch lots of movies, mainly at PVR Juhu,” he says with a smile.

Though he insists he doesn’t want to get into any business outside films, Kumar has close ties with the world of business. He is also good friends with Rahul Sharma, the founder of mobile handset maker Micromax. Sharma’s wife, actor Asin, was introduced to him by Kumar who starred with her in *Khiladi 786* (2012). His sister Alka is married to real estate baron Surendra Hiranandani.

Kumar says he loves to absorb lessons from the experiences of others, particularly his businessmen friends. “I love learning from my friends and their experiences. Why do you become a guinea pig when you have so many

other stories you can learn from? How did they become successful? Why did they fall?” says Kumar. He says he also draws from the experiences of his late father-in-law, yesteryear superstar Rajesh Khanna. “I learnt a lot from him... how his fall happened. He was the biggest superstar India has ever seen. What happened? Why and how can it go wrong? I learn from Amitabh Bachchan—how he picked himself up from the crisis he faced. The examples are in front of you, the mistakes are in front of you.”

We have reached the studio, and the curious onlookers are waiting to catch a glimpse of Kumar. Also present there is Ganesh Acharya, who will direct the song sequence that Kumar has come to shoot.

Kumar parks his SUV in front of the studio and continues talking.

Where does he see himself ten years later? “Still struggling in this industry,” he says with a smile.

We talk about his fitness even at 49.

“Fitness is important for me. My only prayer to God is to give me good health. Age is catching up. I’ve used and abused my body a lot... jumping from helicopters and buildings. I’ve hurt my back, fallen... it’s not an easy job to be an action hero. I come from an era when there were no mattresses... we had to jump straight on to the ground or on cardboard boxes. There are a lot of effects which are still there on my body. Every day, one has to do physiotherapy, swimming, stretching to keep fit.”

Kumar gets out of his car. It’s time to get into the hustle and bustle of his work schedule. Another firm handshake, and he heads into the dusty studio.

The hit machine has begun whirring again. 🌈

The Real Deal

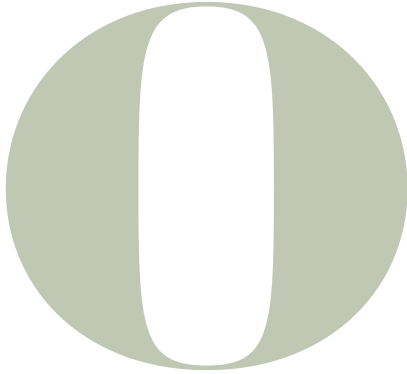
ALIA BHATT's 23 years belie her emotional depth and effortless authenticity as an actor

BY **ABHILASHA KHAITAN**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ROHAN SHRESTHA**

FORBES INDIA
CELEBRITY 100

RANK
No. 42 ★





One more thing,” Imtiaz Ali interjects as we start to wrap up our chat. We have spent about 20 minutes on the phone, the busy sounds of Patna Sahib, the famed gurdwara in Bihar’s capital, forming a backdrop to our conversation. But the filmmaker wants to make his last point. “I have to say this. Today, I woke up with this thought: Where are the Alia jokes now?”

Ali is, of course, referring to Alia Bhatt’s ill-fated 2013 debut on *Koffee With Karan* during which she blithely said that Prithviraj Chavan [then chief minister of Maharashtra] was the president of India. “There were so many jokes about her lack of general knowledge. I really admire how she dealt with that,” says Ali. “She has risen above.”

So much so that the joke is now on them.

Alia, still, may or may not know who the president of India is. But she knows what she has to: Acting. From the time of her 2012 debut in Karan Johar’s *Student Of The Year (SOTY)*, where she played an effervescent young college girl caught in a love tangle, she has been careful about choosing roles that reflect “who I am”. “As actors, we have the liberty to be other people. So I decide who I want to be, like a kid in a candy shop... sometimes you pick the right candy.” Apart from the forgettable *Shaandaar* (2015) with Shahid Kapoor, Alia’s candy-hunting instincts have not failed her.

We meet her on the Monday after her *Dear Zindagi* release weekend. It

is her third triumph of the year, after *Uda Punjab*, in which she played Bauria, a Jharkhandi hockey player dealing with the harsh reality of the drugs-torn north, and a softer part in the family drama *Kapoor & Sons (Since 1921)*. The box office jury on *Dear Zindagi* is still out but the verdict on Alia’s portrayal of a conflicted, complex urban woman, who seeks therapy to find some answers, is in.

Critics can’t stop singing paeans to her authenticity and talent. Her superstar co-actor from *Dear Zindagi*, Shah Rukh Khan, even admitted on national television to having “learnt so much” from his younger colleague while Ranveer Singh, who partnered her in a light-hearted MakeMyTrip ad campaign, took her aside at the Global Citizen concert in Mumbai last month to “express his admiration

for her”. “I had to pour out whatever I felt because I saw *Uda Punjab* and *Kapoor & Sons* pretty late. I felt I owed it to her as a fellow artiste to tell her how much she inspired me,” he tells *Forbes India*. “Her talent blows my mind. She’s so effortless... she’s as natural as breathing. As young as she is, the sky is the limit for her.”

More than that, she is, as Ali puts it, an actor who is a star.

The sniggers have faded and look who’s laughing now.



Back from an overnight trip to London, Alia greets us cheerily outside her new house in Juhu, across the road from her parents’ home. For anyone hiding under a rock for the last five years, one look at Alia and they’d think college kid, fresh, pretty, likeable. Her petite frame



is in workout gear, hair in a loose bun, and she's profusely apologetic about some confusion over where we were to meet. She walks us up to the family apartment—from which she has since moved out—and seats us in father Mahesh Bhatt's den.

Fifteen minutes and a quick shower later, she emerges in pyjamas and a white T-shirt, hair still wet, make-up free and bright-eyed even after an exhausting run of promotions.

She requests her help who has brought us our tea to make her some dahi-chawal, then sits cross-legged on the couch and waits patiently for our first question.

Unfortunately, we bring up age.

"I don't ever look at my age as a point of conversation at all," she says pointedly. "I don't think that just because I am 23—or just because anybody is young—that it's not normal to achieve so much."

But her age *is* a talking point. Even through the course of the 40 minutes we spend with her, there is evidence of a girl-woman, placed suddenly and prominently in a grown-up world, still finding her voice. Also, quietly, perhaps sub-consciously, grappling with the eccentricities of fame.

Alia, the person, is far younger than Alia, the actor.

This is because Alia, the actor, belies her age.

"At 23, to be able to do such diverse roles..." Mahesh Bhatt says wonderingly, while talking to *Forbes India* over the phone from Maldives, a few days after our meeting with Alia. He is on a "much overdue" holiday with wife Soni Razdan, Alia and her sister Shaheen.

While Alia may not consciously plot and plan her career trajectory, she made a concerted decision, soon after her glamorous turn in *SOTY*, to find a role that spoke to and of her. "I felt like with my first film, I was being misunderstood," she says. "I felt people were going to think that I am some baby doll. But I am not. I wanted to break that [misconception]. I didn't know how. But I was clear I wanted to."

She must have wanted to strongly enough because a few nudges from the universe later, Imtiaz Ali and *Highway* (2014) came knocking. Their arrival proved to be a game-changer.

"As luck had it, Imtiaz came to me with *Highway*, and it was honestly a no-brainer for me, because even before reading the script, I wanted to work with him. It was like—I have to work with this director but I have to read the script and I really hope

I like it." Once she read it—and Ali says the drama, where Alia's upper-class Veera Tripathi gets abducted on a Haryana highway, was merely half-written at the time—Alia knew: "This is it. This is my opportunity."

An opportunity she may not have got had it not been for fellow industry insider (and her favourite actor) Ranbir Kapoor. Ali was looking for a slightly older girl—in her mid- to late-20s—in what he considered to be a marriageable age. "But Ranbir told me to meet her anyway because he felt she would be a very good actor. I respect his judgement, but I thought that *bahut chhoti hai, mere kisi bhi role me fit nahi hogi*," he says. After he met her, he realised she wasn't "that small but something between a child and a woman".

He then changed his specifications for the role. "I was very excited about this animal that would fit into the character and give it various dimensions. And that is only possible when somebody has emotional depth—and emotional depth can vary with time but it does not completely change in any person with experience."

This ability to empathise with the human situation has taken her from the rough rides of *Highway* to heroin-trafficking in *Udta Punjab* to the therapist's couch in *Dear Zindagi*. The common thread in these performances has been her authenticity, a realness, that is inherent.

"I will never recover from an incident in 1998," Mahesh Bhatt says, responding to a question about the origins of Alia's emotional awareness. "She was barely 6-7 years old and I had lost the most important person in my life—my mother. I was sitting down at the crack of dawn when she was going to school, dressed in a uniform with her water bottle. She came to me and said you are missing mummy. I told her I was. She said close your eyes, think of her, and you will discover that she is there. And I did exactly that. Then I

Overleaf: (Clockwise from top) Alia Bhatt's stature as an actor has grown since making her debut with *Student Of The Year* in 2012. She has since come up with remarkable performances in diverse films like *Udta Punjab* (2016) and *Highway* (2014). Below: Alia continues to experiment with different roles, like that of a complex woman who opts for therapy in *Dear Zindagi* (2016)



opened my eyes and I saw her face beaming with joy. She had realised that I had inched a little closer to my mother. This was extraordinary.”

Arjun Kapoor, her co-star in 2014's *2 States*—her “first Rs 100 crore hit”—found during their time together on set that Alia had “the brain for understanding every little emotional detail and depth—for someone of her age to have that kind of bandwidth in front of the camera...”

★★★

“Who would know where somebody’s emotional depth comes from?” says Ali. “I always found it in Alia, and I do know it’s not got anything to do with age.”

It isn’t a rags-to-riches story either. How does a girl brought up in an upper-class milieu in Juhu do this, asks a bemused Mahesh Bhatt. And answers his own question. “Not to take away from her own skills, her emotional quotient is part of her DNA.” An actor mother, a filmmaker father and paternal grandfather, an artistic maternal grandmother—the gene pool takes care of the basics.

The rest is all Alia.

“Before I even knew what they [her parents] did, I would act, dance and perform. I became this filmi buff since I was two—since I could walk or talk, or have any understanding of visuals or people,” she says. Alia has often spoken about enjoying the Govinda-Karisma Kapoor brand of cinema as opposed to her father’s serious social films like *Arth* (1982) or *Saaransh* (1984). “Maybe I was subconsciously [influenced] by the atmosphere at home, though,” she says, but her creative pursuit was largely instinctive. “I just knew it [acting] was something in me.”

Alia had planned to go to drama school “because mum did, so I was inspired by that”—and even started filling out applications. But then *SOTY* came her way. At that point, her father even told her not to take her Class 12 board exams. “He said, you are going to be an actor, you don’t need it. I

was like, No! I have worked for this for one-and-a-half years! I will not leave without giving these exams.”

But no school or college can prepare you for planet Bollywood, where the meteors will strike when they will. Alia, however, had years of prep in the unlikeliest of places—her bathroom, car or even a nook of her house where she acted out all manners of scenarios. “As a child, I would play acting-acting with my friends

and randomly have conversations with myself in the bathroom,” she says, bursting out laughing. “I would enact a scene while I was having a shower. There would be real-life things that I wanted in life [grinning even wider]. Like I wanted a boy to talk to me—and I would act that out! I am sounding creepy, but it would be a conversation with real emotion and it would be a moment, and it would make me really happy!”



Real emotions, fittingly, are integral to her performances. In *Dear Zindagi*, Mahesh Bhatt says, “she wasn’t performing. She was just breathing.” He was particularly astounded during a recent trip to the outskirts of Ranchi to inaugurate a tribal art and craft function. “I met the adivasis of Jharkhand and they were marvelling at her performance [in *Udta Punjab*] and were amazed at how she could transport herself into ‘our skins’.”

Alia’s ease with vulnerability cannot be trained—but parental advice plays its part. “My father has always kind of fed me this feeling that an actor has to be vulnerable, an actor has to be imperfect, the emotions have to be real and felt because the camera catches everything,” she says. “All these things were told to me again and again, which is why I have that at the back of my head—that whatever I am doing has to be real, even if I’m picking up a cup.”

Ali believes it is up to the world to “produce jewels” from Alia. “She already has it all,” he says.

He should know. She was barely 20 when he physically lifted her and placed her on a rock and asked her to talk to the stream flowing below. “Alia just started crying and laughing at the same time.” This scene wasn’t planned. Ali simply wanted to see what Alia could do in the setting. This wasn’t usual practice for Ali, but with Alia, he knew he could take a chance. “She used to surprise me in every scene, not because of what she did but because she hadn’t planned it. It was because she just submitted to it.”

Kapoor suggests that Alia isn’t even aware of “her own genius”. “She’s like an accidental genius and that’s the most amazing part about her as an actor,” he says.



There aren’t many shades to Alia’s story. Not yet, anyway. It is a happy, idyllic picture for now. The greys, if any, aren’t allowed in the public eye. “People say honesty is the best policy,” she says, “but of course we

“MY FATHER HAS ALWAYS FED ME THIS FEELING THAT AN ACTOR HAS TO BE VULNERABLE.”

[actors] openly lie about our lives.”

At the same time, her family has never been known to shy away from the truth. For instance, her sister Shaheen recently penned an article about dealing with depression. For Alia, the subject of mental health in *Dear Zindagi* was “a very normal thing, my sister goes to therapy”.

Though she appreciates media attention—“the minute people stop speculating about me, I’m going to wonder why”—she draws the line at intrusions into her family. That, she says firmly, is not okay.

“Whatever it is, it has to be real—true to the moment,” she says. “People should talk about me because they want to talk about me—not because I’m making them talk about me.”

In fact, Alia’s social media presence, too, tends to largely be limited to movie promotions. “I am quite active on Instagram but I don’t tweet too much,” she says. “I won’t tweet a poem because it sounds intelligent. And I’m not one of those people who wants to show that I am having a busy day so take photos and share!”

She is also aware of her own limitations. “I have opinions but I also accept the fact that I don’t have too much information on most things—I only have information on what I’m doing and what work surrounds me. So I’m bendable. Sometimes, though, not being rigid is also not a good thing—because, it’s like, what’re you thinking, bro?” she says, rolling her eyes.

Not that it bothers her. “I believe

ignorance is bliss. My sister is crying every third day about what’s happening in the world—I say, let’s all be ignorant,” she says glibly.

Alia would rather talk about movies. “I want to do a comedy, something nonsensical,” she says, as we close the interview. “The sensible ones should say, ‘Oh, so she is this person also’. I want to go to that extreme.”

She also wants to play a villain. And anyone else she wakes up wanting to be.

The good news: She has time. And she has talent.

Importantly, she has family—“her loved ones”—around her. Not that she admits to needing grounding. “People don’t need to keep telling me that I’m normal. That’s inherent. That’s who I am. And my people are like that,” she says.

A few days after we met, she is surrounded by those people on the beaches of Maldives, their “first family trip together internationally”.

Her father, while on the phone with us, has spotted her outside, and describes her as “lying against the green ocean, under an umbrella, typing into her phone, at times looking into infinity”. The proud father wonders about the “unheard of horizons” she is contemplating. The daughter, on the other hand, is probably lost in one of her numerous day-dreams, which, in her case, seem to come true. 🌈

(With inputs from Angad Singh Thakur and Shruti Venkatesh)



The Talented

He has a quirky dress sense, boundless energy and a very intelligent mind. But above all else, **RANVEER SINGH** is immersed in his craft and constantly yearning to excel himself. And he realises that he is at that stage when the possibilities before him are, in one word, limitless.

BY **SOURAV MAJUMDAR**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ABHAY SINGH**

FORBES INDIA
CELEBRITY 100

RANK
No. 12 ★

*Celebrity*100★

Mr Singh

I

It's December 9, and *Befikre*, the comeback directorial vehicle of Yash Raj Films (YRF) boss Aditya Chopra—who directed the Shah Rukh Khan monster hit *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*—has released.

The film, a romantic comedy,

stars Ranveer Singh and Vani Kapoor and has been the topic of much discussion since it marks Chopra's return to direction after many years.

There's a lot of activity at the YRF studio premises in Mumbai's Andheri suburb. Shah Rukh Khan is in the building, delivering a TED talk, and an episode of *Koffee With Karan*, the chat show hosted by producer-director Karan Johar, with Anushka Sharma and Katrina Kaif as guests, is also being shot.

Amidst all this, Ranveer Singh makes an appearance in the building's lounge. Singh is dressed in something that, to an ordinary person, would defy description: There's a cape equivalent and a kind of a bandana to

go with the ensemble. Sporting a wide smile and the beard he has grown for his latest film *Padmavati*, Singh greets me effervescently with a hug.

"This is an outfit by Hungarian designer Demobaza I am wearing, sir," says Singh, 31, sensing my curiosity. "I researched him for many months and found him online. These are the most difficult clothes to find and I am wearing it from head to toe. I am obsessed with it now. I am in a phase where I only want to wear Demobaza."

Singh goes on about his outfit with an impish smile: "It's like something post-apocalyptic, as if the world has come to an end and these are the only clothes left. It looks like I am from *The Hunger Games*!"



This is quintessential Ranveer Singh: Passionate and immersed in the present, yet articulate and clear about the image he is projecting. But beneath the casual veneer, he admits to being nervous about the release of his latest film, the first in which his mentor Chopra, who gave him his initial break in acting through YRF production *Band Baaja Baaraat* (*BBB*, 2010), is directing him.

Admittedly, *Befikre* is a big deal for Singh. “The film has very special significance. It’s a collaboration with a man who means the world to me, someone who had conviction in my talent and picked me up from pretty much nowhere, gave me a chance of a lifetime and made my childhood dream of becoming an actor in mainstream Hindi films come true.”

And Singh is indeed living his dream. Since he burst onto the scene

fiercely loyal to Chopra. “I will be loyal to him till my last breath. A lot of people say ‘you’ve paid your dues to Adi, you should move on, you’ve grown out of Yash Raj’. That’s not how I view it at all. It’s really not about the first break. His support, his contribution to my career is invaluable and immense. Everything I do in my life is to make him proud.”

And in many ways, Singh still remains the boy YRF launched six years ago, comfortable and very much at home in the YRF premises as he waves and winks at people passing us by, or cuddles a baby whose mother is visiting the studio. An attendant at the coffee shop in the YRF lounge comes up as we speak and Singh gives him a hug. “I want to wish you all the best for the new release,” the man says. “My wife has also wished you luck.”



says he still feels happiest when people compliment him for the hard work he puts into his parts. “Acting is a talent and talent I believe is God-given. I cannot take any credit for it. So when people compliment me on something tangible, my hard work, that really resonates with me. I really love what I do so it doesn’t feel like hard work. But I have seen my father work round the clock, not sleep for days, and have understood work ethics and values. I’ve understood from him that doggedness, persistence and resilience are the main things.”

The freedom his parents gave him to choose his career also helped Singh find his groove. “The reason I was ever able to pursue my dream of being an actor is because my parents supported it. When I called my father at the age of 19 from [Indiana] University saying I don’t want to continue with media

“I’LL BE LOYAL TO CHOPRA TILL MY LAST BREATH. EVERYTHING I DO IS TO MAKE HIM PROUD.”

with the sleeper hit *BBB*, Singh has done a variety of parts—a flirty conman in *Ladies vs Ricky Bahl* (2011), an intense lover in *Lootera* (2013), the don with a swagger in *Gunday* (2014), and, more recently, the confused urbane kid in *Dil Dhadakne Do* (2015) and Peshwa Bajirao in Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s lavishly mounted megahit *Bajirao Mastani* the same year. With *Bajirao*, Singh has now broken into the top rung of actors in Hindi films, and many believe he is within kissing distance of being the next big superstar in Bollywood. Evidence of his meteoric rise: Singh has shot up from No 66 in the 2013 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List to No 37 in 2014, making it to No 30 in 2015 and finishing at No 12 in the 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List.

Despite his current status and the attention he is getting, Singh remains

In his growing-up years Singh saw his businessman father Jugjeet Singh Bhavnani go through huge highs and difficult lows but keep his family—his mother, sister and him—insulated from the vagaries he faced in his business.

“As a businessman, things weren’t always rosy for him and there were many factors which affected his business which he wasn’t responsible for,” recalls Singh, adding that his father was the sole breadwinner till Singh started working at the age of 25. “In passing he would tell me things which have stuck with me from a very tender age. He would say there are so many things that aren’t in your control. The only thing is what you put in, your hard work. That’s all you have and that’s what you should concern yourself with.”

That lesson stuck with Singh who

studies and want to try and become an actor, it didn’t take him a minute to say ‘do what your heart says,’ he says.

In the early years, after signing up to study commerce in junior college, a decision he now says was wrong since he was always inclined towards the arts, Singh thought he would become a copywriter. He also did internships with advertising agencies like O&M and J Walter Thompson. But he soon realised that acting was where his heart was and decided to give it a serious shot.

Once he got the go-ahead from his parents, Singh, who credits his grandmother and her love of films as another influence which egged him towards the performing arts, decided to get some formal training in acting. He opted for it as a minor in university and enrolled in the acting department.

“I REALISE I HAD A HUGE ADVANTAGE BEING BORN AND RAISED IN MUMBAI.”



Back home, he signed up at Kishore Namit Kapoor's acting school and also joined Theatre Professionals Pvt Ltd. "I undertook training because I wanted to stay in the groove and needed that validation to keep me going. If I was topping every class then I knew I could do it. I didn't want to be on some deluded chase," he says. He recalls that his father also did some "side checks" with people to understand whether his son had what it took. "He got good feedback," Singh says with a smile.

He says he understands only too well that getting the support of his parents and being raised in Mumbai gave him a huge advantage. "Though my dad was in a phase where he was struggling in his business, he was like a rock for me. He got me the best photographer [Abhay Singh, who also did the photoshoot for this story] to shoot my portfolio. He used some contacts to get me the best printing facility for my portfolio. He got me the best trainer. Whatever he could contribute he did, not knowing whether it would pay off at all."

The other big advantage was being a Mumbai boy, and not an outsider. "I used to meet strugglers at the acting institute. I also meet them now and I realise I had a huge advantage being born and raised in Mumbai. The big bad city can eat you up in a matter of time. The rent, the difficulties... it's a difficult city to come from outside and make your career in and I understand that all too well."

★★★

Cut to 2016. Despite the success he's enjoying, Singh says he's far from satisfied. "Yes, it's been a stupendous year with *Dil Dhadakne Do* and *Bajirao*, but for me it's a very fine line between satisfaction and complacency.

So I am not satisfied. I have a ravenous appetite. You'd think after successful films and some milestones you'd be satisfied but for me the opposite has happened. I have become hungrier. *Bajirao* was a landmark but I feel like the same guy who was doing *BBB*."

Singh says he realises how fortunate he is to be in his current position. "Over a period of time I have grown and matured a bit. But I will give myself some credit that I put myself in a position where I could get lucky. And *that* I worked very hard for. Now I want to see where this can go. For me now the possibilities are limitless. So I want to keep my focus on the craft, I want to let the rest follow."

He says he wants to follow in the footsteps of his two big influences, Michael Jackson and Sachin Tendulkar, who focussed on what they needed to do and "the rest just followed".

"This whole gamut is limitless," Singh says of acting as a craft. "If I work on something hard enough there's no telling what I can transform into. I feel after six years, even after movies like *Lootera* and *Bajirao*, I have not even scratched the surface."

This constant yearning to do more, do better, is evident through our conversation. Ranveer Singh is fidgety, restless as he sits on the sofa, his eyes constantly scanning the surroundings, his eyes sparkling and his mind ticking away as he speaks. This boundless energy that he embodies, and the ability to transform himself for the part he plays, has earned him high praise from some of Hindi cinema's biggest names.

Says Bhansali, who is now directing Singh for the third time in a row, after *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela* (2013) and *Bajirao*: "I find in him a certain understanding of my slightly abstract and slightly zonal performances,



which are a little stylised; sometimes over-the-top, sometimes very measured. He understands all that, then translates it beautifully, and he works very hard. In him I have found a friend and a great actor."

Adds mentor Chopra: "From the very first day that I directed Ranveer, he was Shah Rukh for me. The same energy, the same brilliance, the same intellect. I knew I was in safe hands... I know that for Ranveer it's a very big deal to be directed by me but honestly, I would not have made *Befikre* if an actor called Ranveer Singh did not exist."

Singh, who admits to being extremely nervous earlier, to the point where he would even hyperventilate out of nervousness, says he now has learnt to keep it under control. But there is a constant effort to do different things and test his own abilities. With Bhansali's period film *Padmavati*, Singh has come up with a fresh new challenge for himself: Playing Alauddin Khilji, a dark, negative character. "I

want to do different things every single time. I have been very fortunate, but I understand that I make very risky choices. In *Padmavati* I am playing a negative character, an anti-hero. It's possibly the riskiest decision I've ever taken. But it's an opportunity."

Singh says playing the anti-hero will also have another effect. "I can let all the darkness that has built up over the years inside me out on the big screen. I feel playing this character will be a catharsis. I will come out of it a better person."

A lot of this risk-taking has come from Bhansali, Singh says. A high-stakes player who makes bold choices in his movies, Bhansali has taught him to be "daring". "I am doing my third film with him and

he still surprises me every day on the set. He surprises me, I surprise him, we surprise each other and that is the beauty of our collaboration," he says.

★ ★ ★

Singh's "daring" nature also translates to his quirky dress sense: He is comfortable being seen in Dali-esque moustaches and printed suits and is unapologetic about it. While his critics speculate that this could be a part of an intelligently crafted persona which distinguishes himself from the rest of the pack, Singh laughs off the notion.

"First of all, thanks to everyone who believes this because you agree that I stand out. But in my line things that are calculated and then done don't last very long. It would be giving me too much credit because to do something like this by design and calculation with conviction would need superhuman effort," he says. "I assure you it is me being me. Me having removed the filter. Me having been liberated from the fear of judgment."

Singh says this "liberation"

happened around the time he started getting validation for his work. That came in the form of critical acclaim for *Lootera* and *Ram-Leela*.

“With that validation I became more comfortable with myself, wearing what I want, not bothering about whether people will like it. Regardless of what I wear some will like it and some not. I may as well wear what I like. I am doing it for my own amusement. You may like it, others may think it’s bizarre but I don’t care because I am very happy wearing it. #Nofilter and #Nofear! You do you, as they say,” he says with a laugh.

Under his devil-may-care exterior, however, resides a sharp business side which understands that he is at that

that he endorses too many brands. “I completely disagree. Certain celebrities have 20, 25, 35 [brands]. Some of my peers have 17 or 18. I am very selective. Not a single campaign of mine looks like the other.”

But those whose brands he endorses couldn’t be happier with Singh. Says RS Kalsi, executive director (marketing and sales), Maruti Suzuki India Ltd, who deals with Singh for the endorsement of the successful car brand Ciaz: “We are very happy with our association with him. Ciaz came in as a challenger when it was launched. That’s why we came up with the tagline ‘Make Way’. When we selected Ranveer for Ciaz two years ago, he was also a challenger with no roots in

Spielberg, Tom Hanks, among others and music directors like Hans Zimmer. “When I watch them, the only word that comes to my mind is disbelief. Their work is so incredible,” he says.

But even as he absorbs the finest in cinema from the world over, Singh has his eye firmly on the prize at home: Superstardom.

“I think the next few years are important. I am not 25, I am 31. In the next few years I hope to achieve superstardom. My definition of that is that a mass audience will come on the first day to fill all the seats in the theatre to watch a film if my face is on it, regardless of the title, packaging, and the trailer. If it’s my movie, they’re coming. It’s

“I HOPE TO ACHIEVE SUPER-STARDOM... SO IF IT’S MY MOVIE, AUDIENCES WILL COME.”

stage where a Brand Ranveer is also taking shape and needs to be nurtured. Singh currently endorses about 14 top brands, including Maruti Suzuki’s Ciaz, Kellogg’s, Adidas, Colgate, Royal Stag, MakeMyTrip and Jack & Jones.

He says he has created a system where, despite the fact that he often needs to get into a “rabbit hole” to play some intense parts, he knows there’s also the enterprise called Brand Ranveer that’s constantly at work. “So from morning till evening I can do my creative work. Then I devote a certain amount of time to the enterprise because there are so many endorsements. That requires my attention and like a good professional I give it time during the day. If I know a difficult scene is coming up, I give my people a heads-up so they know I am not available for two or three days,” he says.

The only time Singh lets a little anger show is when I ask him about a newspaper article which said

the industry. He is also versatile and multifaceted, which is also what we wanted to convey as brand attributes.”

Maruti Suzuki, typically, does not opt for celebrity endorsements and Singh is an exception. Kalsi adds that the car maker, which signed on Ranveer when it launched Ciaz in October 2014, has just renewed his contract for another two years. He says unlike other celebrities who charge extra for additional work, Singh happily goes the extra mile without seeking extra payment. In just two years, Ciaz has achieved market leadership and is selling over 5,000 units every month. “I often tell Ranveer he is our lucky mascot,” Kalsi adds.



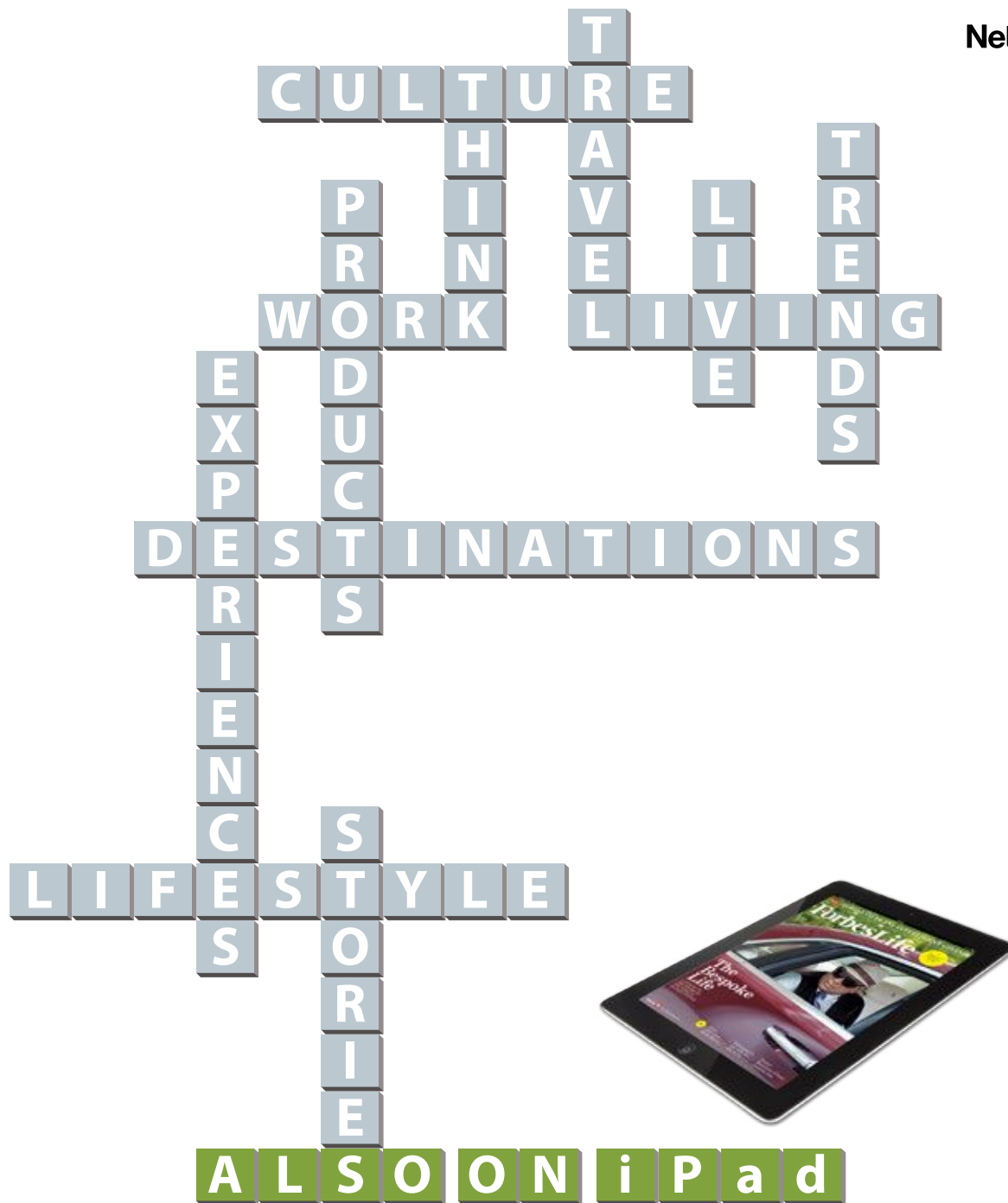
A keen observer of Hollywood cinema (Singh has just turned down what he says was an exciting Hollywood offer to do *Padmavati*), Singh is influenced by the works of Woody Allen, Daniel Day-Lewis, Robert DeNiro, Martin Scorsese, Stanley Kubrick, Steven

simple,” says Singh. He says while he would love to be a writer-director like Allen, who he thinks is a “true auteur”, at this point he is not ready to put a part of his soul out there for public scrutiny and judgment. He says he wants to focus on mass entertainers, movies that do not alienate any section of the audience.

How does he react to the highs and lows in the unpredictable world of Hindi cinema?

“I have a simple philosophy, a Buddhist way of being. I don’t get too carried away with success and don’t get too bogged down by failure. Just like the success is not just because of you, you also can’t beat yourself up if a film fails. You did your best. I do feel disappointed on behalf of the entire team. I feel bad, but I don’t wallow in it.”

For now, wallowing should be farthest from Ranveer Singh’s mind. The script just got a great deal more interesting. 🌈



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Rebel With A Cause

SONAM KAPOOR is playing
Bollywood on her own terms.
And she's doing it well—really well

BY **SHRUTI VENKATESH**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ABHAY SINGH**

FORBES INDIA
CELEBRITY 100

RANK
No. 18 ★



“MY FORAY INTO BOLLYWOOD HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH BEING AN ACTOR. IT HAD EVERYTHING TO DO WITH TELLING AMAZING STORIES.”

Location Courtesy: **Grand Hyatt, Mumbai**. Styling By: **Nitasha Gaurav**; Make-Up: **Divya Chhablani**; Hair: **Alpa Khimani**; (Opening Page) Dress: Salvatore Ferragamo; Shoes: Fendi (This Page) Dress: Burberry; Rings: Eina Ahluwalia

D

Dressed in grey track pants, a matching sweatshirt and a purple top, Sonam Kapoor flops down on the couch, her hair tied loosely in a bun. She looks nothing like the fashionista for which she's earned a name for herself in Bollywood, but if you want to put a face to a recent *Buzzfeed* post titled 'I Didn't Wake Up Like This', which rips apart conventional notions of beauty, this could be it. It's no mere coincidence, for, the author of the viral post with the self-explanatory title is the 31-year-old Bollywood actor herself. And she continues to hammer home her derision for skin-deep stereotypes by saying, "I have never consciously thought of style. I just wear what's comfortable. And I am most comfortable in my pyjamas."

In a way, Sonam's penchant for making non-conformist, offbeat choices off screen is symptomatic of those she has made on it. She might have acted in over 14 films and three music videos—Coldplay's 'Hymn For The Weekend' alongside Beyonce among them—but her nearly-decade-long stint in the film industry can't be plotted to a pattern. Her repertoire isn't voluminous, but is varied and on her own terms: It includes the wildly successful, over-the-top *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo* (2016) to the muted *Neerja* (2016) and the comic drama, *Khoobsurat* (2014). And Sonam is adamant that she wants to keep it that way. Which is why she is willing to sit out a year and wait for the right movie instead of doing something "with two songs and three scenes" merely to add volume to her body of work. "I live in this

beautiful house [her three-storeyed parental bungalow in Juhu], I don't have to pay my bills, and I have more luxury of choice than a regular girl joining this industry. So it is more of a responsibility for me to make these unconventional choices," says Sonam.

If you look at her career graph, her game plan's paying off. This year, she has two hits to her credit—Sooraj Barjatya's *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo* and Ram Madhvani's *Neerja*. Alongside, she endorses brands like L'Oreal, Oppo, Snickers, Cera, Kalyan Jewellers and Colgate. Not surprisingly, she has moved eight places on the 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List, to 18 from 26 last year.

The going has been particularly good since *Raanjhanaa* (2013), where she starred alongside Abhay Deol and Dhanush. The movie opened a floodgate of hits for Sonam with *Khoobsurat*, *Dolly ki Doli* (2015) and *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo*, and capped it with the incredible success of *Neerja*, the real story of slain Pan Am flight attendant Neerja Bhanot. Says Sonam, "After *Neerja*, I was just irrefutable."

The movie has already fetched Sonam a few awards, but trophies don't really count much for her. "It's nice when you get awards. But awards don't define your stardom," she says. What gives Sonam greater satisfaction is that, with her list of hits, the conversation has moved from her role as a style icon to her acting skills.

It's perhaps only natural that accolades don't mean much to the actor who didn't set out to be one. "My foray into Bollywood had nothing to do with being an actor. It had everything to do with telling amazing stories," she says. "I just happened to become an actor by chance."



The happy accident of Sonam the storyteller turning into Sonam the actor took place after she returned home in 2003, after completing her two-year course in theatre and arts at the United World College in

Singapore. At that time, filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali was working on *Black* (2005) that starred actors Amitabh Bachchan and Rani Mukerji. "I liked Bhansali's aesthetic. He was technically sound and I thought why not assist somebody who is a fantastic editor and knows his shots. Because, at the end of the day, it's not about the kind of films he makes, it's about how he makes them," says Sonam. The stint ended up with her being cast as the lead opposite debutant Ranbir Kapoor in Bhansali's next, *Saawariya* (2007). She hasn't looked back since.

Father Anil Kapoor says Sonam's career decisions have been largely impulsive. "She goes with her gut both in her choice of films and co-stars. All she needs is a good script." With *Neerja*, for instance, Sonam knew it was a great film, but never expected it to be a hit commercially. "It's a woman-centric film about an air hostess, she doesn't get out of the plane, and there is nothing happy about this film. The girl dies in the end. I didn't expect it to be the biggest success of the year," she says.

But *Neerja* turned out to be a film that could define Sonam's career and legacy in the industry. It's one of those films, Anil Kapoor says, that is enough to prove your mettle "even if you get only one such film in your career". She carried the movie on her shoulders, depicting with empathy the last few days of Neerja Bhanot who died saving passengers caught in a hijack.

Neerja's producer and fashion photographer Atul Kasbekar says Sonam was their first and only choice because of her clarity of thought, which would reflect well in her performance. "Sonam's acting is more inward and a lot more controlled and international. When you watch a foreign movie, the actors don't look like they are acting. They look like the character [that they are playing]. That's exactly what Sonam does," he says.

Kasbekar's association with Sonam goes back a long way before

Neerja, when he did the first ever fashion shoot for the actor. “I remember meeting this lovely tall girl at a party, and I didn’t know she was Anil Kapoor’s daughter. I told her you should model,” he says. “As a photographer, I can tell you that Sonam is at an international supermodel level and extremely versatile. She can give many angles and understands how the camera works for her and how she works for the camera.”

But Sonam doesn’t take her love affair with the camera for granted. She knows that even star kids don’t have it easy if they are not good enough. “It’s an industry, a business. Nobody is going to invest in you if you don’t have something,” she says. While she doesn’t track box office numbers—“I understand numbers, just don’t track them because it’s not my business”—she is more than willing to go the extra mile to get into the skin of her character. Like, doing workshops. For *Raanjhanaa*, for instance, she went to Delhi and studied how to be a street play artist at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU); for *Khoobsurat*, she worked with a sports scientist, and for *Neerja*, she went to the Jet Airways office and learnt the art of being an air hostess. “I can become an air hostess anytime now,” she says with a laugh.

Once the homework is done, Sonam surrenders herself to the director and embraces his process. For Ram Madhvani, the director of *Neerja*, the ‘process’ meant shooting with four cameras at any given point in time and seeing “how a character can exist before action and after cut and not just during and in-between”. Sonam, he says, understood the process immediately and instinctively. One of her best

enacted scenes, Madhvani says, is when she tells the hijackers “*Main sirf apna farz nibha rahi hoon*” even as they try to stop her from serving the passengers. “In a game of tennis, you know your strokes. But how you play them depends upon how the opponent delivers the ball at you. Similarly, in acting, your line is your stroke. It’s scripted. But how you say it is entirely dependent on you. Sonam played the stroke very well,” he says.

Veteran actor Shabana Azmi, who

played the role of Sonam’s mother in *Neerja*, concurs. “Sonam was completely committed to the part and worked on a gruelling schedule like a trouper. No starry airs. Ram is a demanding director in a gentle way and she trusted him enough to surrender to his vision,” says Azmi, who has been friends with her parents Anil and Sunita for over 30 years and has seen Sonam grow from a “chubby little girl into the fine young woman she is today”. “There are two scenes



“IT’S NICE WHEN YOU GET AWARDS. BUT AWARDS DON’T DEFINE YOUR STARDOM.”

I particularly like her in. When she eats the chocolate after reading her boyfriend’s letter and where she sings ‘*Mere Sapnon Ki Rani*’ at gunpoint. Both could have fallen flat, but instead they worked beautifully.”

★ ★ ★

A recurring theme in many of Sonam’s films has been the presence of a strong female character, a trait that she identifies with. Brought up in a household that encourages individualism, she has essayed the hard-hitting *Neerja* or the playful Bittoo Sharma (of *Delhi-6*) with equal ease. “When I was narrated *Prem Ratan Dhan Payo*, the first scene of Maithili was that of her sitting at a dining table with Yuvraj Vijay Singh (Salman Khan) and saying ‘I don’t have to marry you. I’m very happy with my life. We can end this’. The whole idea of the film is that he is convincing her that he is worthy of her. Or Mili in *Khoobsurat* was like ‘I don’t have to change who I am to get my prince charming,’” says Sonam. “Each character is unique but what ties them together is that they are strong individuals.”

Even in *Raanjhanaa*, for instance, says the director Anand L Rai, “Zoya Haider was one of the toughest characters. It had a defined grey shade. But Sonam brought that vulnerability in her, and yet stuck to the rigid, stubborn woman.”

Her propensity for non-conformism can be traced back to the Kapoor household that, as Anil Kapoor says, has five friends living together. “There is a certain line which they cannot cross, but overall our approach is each to his own.” While the kids were growing up, Anil and wife Sunita explained to

them the numerous life diversities and allowed them to make their own choices. For example, Sunita is a vegetarian, Sonam is a vegan, while Rhea is non-vegetarian. Similarly, Sonam is a believer, Rhea an atheist, and brother Harshvardhan agnostic.

Being vocal can backfire at times, or be misconstrued, like it did when Sonam had a public spat with Shobhaa De at the beginning of her career. De had blogged that Sonam “just doesn’t cut it in the sex appeal stakes”, and Sonam, in turn, responded by calling her “a 60-something porn writer”. Or, more recently, during her interview to actor Neha Dhupia on a music streaming app, where she took a dig at some of her Bollywood colleagues. “I was very upset and so was she. She was completely misquoted in every way, just because she has an image of being honest,” says Anil. But Sonam has a more cavalier attitude towards such controversies. “I’ll say what I want to say anyway, but will always apologise if I have said something wrong,” she says.

Like she will continue to tell Bollywood off for being coy about exploring homosexuality. Or the yawning pay disparity that thrives in the industry. “It is disrespectful. I make sure it doesn’t happen to me,” she says. And she ensures that she keeps the conversation going, with herself, with her co-stars and even her fans, for which she has launched her personal app, the first for any Indian celebrity.

But, despite her outspokenness and keenness to reach out, Sonam is guarded when it comes to her private life. “I don’t like to be spotted. There is a reason why it is called private and personal. It takes away from the

sanctity of a relationship. It takes away from things, especially if you really love somebody,” she says.

When she is not shooting, she loves to lock herself up in her room and read books or watch shows. Says Anil, “Sonam is a lot like my wife. When I was dating Sunita, she would go to the library and get 15-20 books at one time. Similarly, Sonam is capable of finishing two books in one night.”

She also loves music. Ayushmann Khurrana, her co-actor in the 2014 movie *Bewakoofiyaan*, remembers the time he and Sonam went to a Norah Jones concert after a long day’s shoot in Delhi. “I slept through the concert because I was sleepy and hungry at the same time. To date, Sonam makes fun of that. Sonam knows her music. From Indian retro to contemporary international music, she follows everything.” Her appetite for life is significant. As Madhvani puts it: “Sonam is a voracious reader, voracious watcher of movies, a voracious listener of music, a voracious talker and, guess what, a voracious eater too. One way to make Sonam happy is to give her *chakli*.”

As she enters her tenth year in the industry in 2017, Sonam seems to be in a happy space. Her upcoming project is *Veere Di Wedding* and she will likely play Madhuri Dixit in a biopic on Sanjay Dutt’s life with Ranbir Kapoor in the lead role. While these would add to her portfolio, her father believes she still has a long way to go to fulfil her potential. Sonam, though, is ready for the journey, even if it’s a rollercoaster. And she reminds you before signing off. “I didn’t become an actor to become the biggest superstar in the country. I just hope to continue to tell stories.” 🌈

Celebrity100[★]

The Age of Kohli

Unapologetically aggressive, unquestionably masterful and fiercely loyal, India's best cricketer is redefining the nation's approach to the game—and to sport in general

BY **KATHAKALI CHANDA**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **COLSTON JULIAN**





B

Being Virat Kohli can be frenetic. The morning after India defeated New Zealand (NZ) in a closely-fought ODI series in Visakhapatnam, Kohli has an early start as he flies down to Mumbai for a brief stopover before heading to Goa to watch FC Goa, a football team he co-owns, play in the Indian Super League. Once the match is over, he takes a flight back to Mumbai past midnight because lined up for him the next day are two multi-hour shoots, one at a studio and the other at a five-star hotel in suburban Mumbai. The *Forbes India* interview was to happen during the changes for one shoot, but has to wait till it's wrapped up. His agent explains with an apology: "Sorry to keep you waiting, but Virat wants to focus on one thing at a time."

Those last few words could easily sum up the Kohli phenomenon. Indian cricket's hottest property is all focus and intensity, both on the field and off it. Consider his intrepid guard against the visiting English side on the final day of the Rajkot Test. Even as wickets fell around him, the ring of fielders, sniffing blood, closed in and chattered away to mess with his head, Kohli looked unflappable. He batted without panic—with merely his steely gaze visible through the grille of his helmet hinting at a sense of urgency, only just, and yet enough resolve to let you know that he's firmly in control.

It's with this fervour that Virat Kohli has capped a prolific year and led India to the top of the Test rankings. One could rattle off the statistics: Over 1,000 runs in Tests this year including three double centuries,

three centuries and four 50s in ODIs, and the highest run-scorer for the year in both T20 internationals and the Indian Premier League (IPL) with a record four centuries in the latter. These numbers have given him cricketing heft and, coupled with his suave urbanity, have sent his brand value soaring: His Rs 134.44 crore pay packet this year has made Kohli the highest-earning sportsperson in the country. He's had to change houses to avoid being hounded by fans, movie outings are a thing of the past, eating out ends with shaking off the paparazzi trail, and cricket lovers consider it their personal business to speculate on his relationship with Bollywood star Anushka Sharma.

But Kohli's impact has transcended the realm of mere statistics and popular frenzy. He is, arguably, the biggest star in world cricket now—and the top-ranked sportsperson at No 3 on the 2016 *Forbes India* Celebrity 100 List with the highest fame rank. Kohli has taught Indian cricket to fight back hard, to be a ruthless competitor and not be embarrassed about it. He represents the fearless, post-liberalisation generation that speaks up and doesn't cower to step out of the comfort zone. Taking on the Australians in their own backyard, for instance. Picture his animated send-off to Steve Smith or refusal to back down in a verbal confrontation with James Faulkner during India's

2015-16 tour of Australia. He evokes an unapologetic confidence that asks Murphy's law to go to hell. Because when anything goes wrong, there's always Virat Kohli to the rescue.

THE LEADER IN HIM

We finally catch up with Kohli as he heads from the first shoot to the second. Seated in the backseat of a plush SUV, he doesn't fidget much, except when the AC gets too cold for comfort. Or when one of his cellphones starts buzzing on the seat. He speaks at an unhurried pace that belies the frenzied life he's living and ensures every word is intelligible and well thought-out.

Clarity of thought is something that came to Kohli right from his younger days, when he would go up to coach Raj Kumar Sharma and tell him that he's too good for kids his age. "Why don't I put him in the senior group, he would ask," says Sharma. "After six months, I sent him to play with the senior boys. He turned out to be too good for them as well." Sharma also remembers the struggle he would have to go through to pull Kohli out of the nets. "We usually made the kids bat for 20-25 minutes. He would do his usual round and then insist on two more. And even after that, he wouldn't come away."

Kohli says he doesn't just want to stay on the field; he has to stay in the game. "Even when I was

“THE TRUE TEST OF MY CHARACTER IS NOT WHEN WE ARE WINNING, BUT TO KEEP THE TEAM TOGETHER WHEN WE ARE LOSING.”



young, I wouldn't be happy just collecting the ball and throwing it to the keeper," he says. "I had to be in the thick of things." Sometimes that abundant energy translates into dropped catches at slips and over-appealing but, at most other times, in stealing a single, converting the ones into twos, effecting a run out.

Kohli demands challenges, relishes responsibilities. In one of the most stressful sporting jobs in the country, the 28-year-old exudes control. Asked to stand in as Test captain for the first time, when Mahendra Singh Dhoni was ruled out of the first Test of the 2014 Australia series with an injury, Kohli rose to the occasion with a century in each innings (115 and 141). He considers the 141 the best Test innings he's ever played. "I've never been in a better mental state," he says. Two matches later, he was put in the saddle as Dhoni announced a surprise retirement; Kohli celebrated his sudden elevation by scoring a century again. Ever since, he has averaged 53.92 as captain in 17 Tests (till the end of the NZ series), up by nearly 13 points from before and by far the best record among Indian captains.

He's come a long way from the brattish days of yore when he would show his middle finger to the crowd (at the Sydney Cricket Ground in 2012) or celebrate vociferously in the middle. "Maybe I was a bit childish then, but at that age, it was fine," he says.

Kohli doesn't mind making mistakes because, he says, he'd rather learn from mistakes than follow

instructions blindly. "I don't like people telling me what to do; I need to know why." It's perhaps through this quest that the Kohli of 2016 has imbibed a maturity beyond his 28 years. Not just as is evident from the greys in his beard, but also in the way, for instance, he won over even his most trenchant critics by coming out in defence of girlfriend Anushka Sharma, lambasting social media trolls who blamed the actor for the team's defeat in the T20 World Cup earlier this year. His became the most retweeted tweet in the country this year.

In cricket, such maturity has taught him to tell 'over the top' apart from 'over the line'. He understands that, as the captain of the Indian Test team, he needs to tone down his aggression and turn into an elder statesman. He knows that if the panic button is hit all too frequently, he runs the risk of burning out, so does his team. "The true test of my character is not when we are winning and all's good, but to hold on to my wits and keep the team together when we are losing, when the chips are down," he says. "Failure teaches you the importance of being calm. That's why you'll see my century celebrations are also much muted. Just like you shouldn't agitate when you are failing, you shouldn't go overboard with celebrations when you are performing."

Could the overdose of success mean that he doesn't care enough to celebrate? "Not at all," for once Kohli raises his voice over the honking during evening traffic in

Juhu. "Every success is special. Just that I have become more balanced. I can't explain this to you because this comes naturally to me. I don't pretend," he says.

But he still retains enough firepower in him to be cocky. Ask Ben Stokes. The England all-rounder was reprimanded by the International Cricket Council for a verbal duel with Kohli on the first day of the third Test in Mohali. When he dismissed Kohli the next day, Stokes gestured back with sealed lips. Kohli returned the favour on Day 3 when Stokes got out: He stood with his finger on his lips as Stokes trudged back to the pavilion. You give it to Kohli, you get it back.

Yuvraj Singh has often said that he would enter and leave a party from the front gate as he had nothing to be afraid of. Kohli has taken this one step further.

FEET ON THE GROUND

For Kohli, the key to his success is an oft-quoted phrase: Sticking to the basics. In the context of his game, it means an absolute mastery of technique, irrespective of the format he's playing in. He doesn't change the foundations of his game, but has the ability to build a Gaudi or a tenement with equal ease. Former English batsman Ed Smith writes in *The Cricket Monthly*, *ESPNcricinfo's* digital cricket magazine, "He is a fine counterpoint to the idea that T20 will become a careless, unintelligent game in which batsmen place little value on their wicket. Kohli, in contrast, is totally invested in playing a proper

“IF I START COMPARING MYSELF TO SACHIN, I AM BEING UNFAITHFUL TO HIS LEGACY. I AM NOTHING IF I AM NOT LOYAL.”



Kohli says Sachin Tendulkar is the reason he started playing cricket and that everyone in Indian cricket comes second to him

innings.... Watch him walk out to the middle. This is not a man going out to whack a few shots and have a laugh.”

Says Kohli of his game: “Some people get carried away with improvisation. For me, a good technique will bail me out of any situation.” He doesn’t try unorthodox purely because it’s cool; he works with what he has and sticks to what works. And he never lets up, extricating a contest out of everything, even sparring against his own body. In the Royal Challengers Bangalore’s (RCB) match against Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens in IPL 2016, Kohli split the webbing on his left hand. At a stage where RCB needed to win every match to advance to the qualifiers, Kohli got it bandaged and returned to field as well as produced a match-winning knock later. In his next match, with multiple stitches, Kohli scored a century, his fourth in IPL 2016.

“Kohli has matured very fast because he has quickly picked up that everything else—fame, celebrity status—can get bigger and better only if your cricket stays where it has to stay. He’s been able to successfully compartmentalise his game and the economic benefits he can derive out of it,” says veteran sports writer Sharda Ugra.

In a way, that reflects the grounded personality that Kohli has. He begins the interview with an apology for being late. He happily obliges selfie requests outside the shoot venue, clicking some himself. In fact, he takes multiple shots just to be sure that he hasn’t botched one up.

His teammates vouch for his work ethic as well as his ability to weave them into a unit, making every chalk and cheese feel at home. Says KL Rahul, the 24-year-old opener, “The most important thing for a young player coming into the national side is to feel welcome. Virat does that straight away. He makes everyone feel comfortable. And with the highest standards he sets for himself, to have him around is inspirational.”

His long-time manager and CEO of Cornerstone Sport and Entertainment, Buntu Sajdeh, calls it a result of being part of a close-knit family. Kohli lost his friend and confidant, father Prem, when he was 18. He was playing a match in his first Ranji season when Kohli senior had a cerebral attack in the middle of the night. Kohli didn’t give up the match to grieve at home, instead reached the ground, scored 90-odd before returning to the crematorium for his father’s final rites. “Since then, his career has been on the upswing, but he never forgets

where he comes from,” says Sajdeh.

AB de Villiers, his RCB teammate, agrees. “His competitiveness never crosses the line, and his approach could never be fairly described as either aggressive or brash,” says the South African.

Kohli admits that perhaps his difficult beginnings and penchant for roughing it out in ultra-competitive Delhi has made him feisty. It’s his game face, he says, one that he needed to own his space. “You can’t walk onto the field and expect someone to respect you straightaway. You have to fight your way up.”

The constant performance pressure can also leave your nerves jangled. Every time Kohli walks out on the field, he knows there are 50,000 people beyond the boundary line who expect him to score a boundary every single ball. Every time he is stopped at an airport for an autograph or a handshake, there are requests for a century. If he scores one, there’s demand for a double. Notwithstanding the billion-decibel noise, he doesn’t get ahead of himself. “I understand that because of the position that I am in, people can’t point out my mistakes. People will tell me what I want to hear, but if I latch on to that, it’s self-pity. With self-pity, you can never improve. That’s why I always have people around me who aren’t ‘yes men’, people who can put me in my place.”

Perhaps that’s why when you compare him to Sachin Tendulkar, he lets out a chuckle. “Every time I hear the comparison, it makes me laugh,” he says. “People will never understand the importance of Sachin in my life. He is the reason why I started playing. Everyone in Indian cricket comes second to him. If I start comparing myself to Sachin Tendulkar, I am being unfaithful to his legacy. And I am nothing if I am not loyal.”

THE FUTURE IS HERE

Kohli may demur, but if he continues to ratchet up the numbers the way he does now, he will soon be considered the gold standard in world cricket.

Take his ODI record for instance. His tally of 26 centuries now stands fourth to Tendulkar (49), Ricky Ponting (30) and Sanath Jayasuriya (28). But Kohli has been the fastest to pile on the runs: While the top three took 463, 375 and 445 matches, respectively, Kohli is already within sniffing distance in just 176 matches. His unbeaten 154 in the third ODI against NZ is his 14th hundred in successful chases, a record that puts him on a par with his idol.

But Kohli doesn't crave numbers,

the previous season. "When I went back home, I looked into the mirror one day and was embarrassed with the way how I, an international sportsman, looked," he says.

Almost overnight, he opted for a lifestyle change that included eating smart and training like a workhorse. That meant cutting out his regular high-carb Delhi diet, sweets, alcohol—his only indulgence being the rajma-chawal his mum makes when he returns from a tour—and gymming five to six hours a week during season and nine to 10 hours during off season. Like his cricket, where he looked to improve at least one aspect every time he practised, he set new benchmarks

Basu, "He responds very well to power training. He now trains like a track star and his mobility drills, strength and power work, running drills are sequenced systematically according to his cricketing load."

Kohli's obsession with fitness is a reflection of his dogged pursuit of excellence. People close to him say it's a quest that comes from within. All he needs is to be interested. Like with the brands he endorses as well. His manager Sajdeh recalls an instance when Kohli chose to forgo a higher endorsement fee for a brand that was paying less but he felt was classier. "He could be easily doing 30 endorsements. But we turn down more endorsements

“I DON'T CRAVE NUMBERS. NOT ANY MORE. I WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE... LEAVE CRICKET BETTER THAN WHAT IT WAS WHEN I STARTED.”

unless it's a *Game Of Thrones* episode that he's tracking (he's already on to Season 6 in a month despite being sceptical about the genre). Instead, he wants a legacy that eclipses shortlived goals. "When I came into the team, I was after numbers. Not any more. I want to make a difference. I want to leave cricket better than what it was when I started," he says.

It could start by turning the new generation of cricketers into the finest of athletes. And being the one who wants to lead by example, Kohli threw himself a challenge first. It came to him one fine morning four years ago, when he was taking a break after IPL. He had gone into the tournament on a high, having performed well against Australia, but couldn't consolidate his performance, finishing with an average of 28, down from 46.41

every time he hit the gym. Once he started to lose weight and became confident of improved reflexes on the field, he turned to Shankar Basu, the fitness coach for RCB and now Team India, for power that would help him clear the boundary more often. Basu introduced Kohli to weightlifting during the 2015 tour of Sri Lanka, but not before he taught him the right technique for a month-and-a-half with a stick. Once he mastered the technique and started lifting weights, it worked like magic. Says Kohli, "I can now hit shots 10-15 metres further. I can't believe I got the maximum sixes award in the IPL because, earlier, I couldn't trust myself to hit that far."

His body fat percentage is also down to 9, just a shade over 7.5 of tennis ace Novak Djokovic. Says

than the ones we pick. Because Kohli doesn't want to be force-fit into a brand. He wants to identify with it," says Sajdeh. His business interests reflect a similar philosophy, too. His clothing line Wrogn and Chisel, a fitness startup that he backs, represent two of his current passions and allow Kohli the scope of being creatively involved in the projects.

But, at the end of the day, Kohli is not looking to build products but relationships that would last him a lifetime. He values not the runs or the trophies, but the friendships that he's forged over the years. "If I am spoken of when I retire, I want to be the guy who may not have spoken the sweetest words but always said things the way they were meant to be said," he says.

As in cricket, so in life, Kohli has set his sights high. 🌈



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Black And White

SANJAY LEELA BHANSALI is a man of contradictions: He directs masterpieces, and produces potboilers. He is a task master who is loved by his team. He splurges on his movies, but remains aware of the despair that debts bring. He is a dreamer who is also a realist

BY NEERAJ GANGAL

FORBES INDIA
CELEBRITY 100

RANK
No. 75 ★

They are expecting him any moment now and speak about him in soft, but respectful tones.

His film crew, aware of his obsessive attention to detail on the set, is ensuring everything measures up to his standards. Assistant directors and the camera team huddle to discuss deliverables for the next day's shoot; painters and craftsmen apply final touch-ups; workmen hammer on wooden planks and metal sheets; and cleaners remove scrap from the floor.

The set conforms to the spectacular production values associated with his films. A crew member points out that only a select few are permitted on these fiercely-guarded premises. Photography is prohibited. Before we can respond, there is a stir and someone whispers: "He's here."

Sanjay Leela Bhansali has arrived. After delivering two blockbusters in three years, *Goliyon Ki Raasleela*

Ram-Leela (2013) and *Bajirao Mastani* (2015), the 53-year-old filmmaker, producer and music director is in a very creative phase. The films he has directed have won critical acclaim, his cast and technicians have won bagfuls of awards, the songs he has composed have become chartbusters, and the films he has produced have sent the box office into a tizzy.

Bhansali carries a reputation of being a tantrum-throwing authoritarian, an ostentatious showman whose films are distant from reality, and a high-brow artiste who lives in a bubble.

But spend some time on his sets, speak to his team members, and you discover another personality, one diametrically opposite to the popular perception: A Bhansali who is patient, popular, self-effacing, and sensitive to diverse opinions.

Does he live in two different worlds? What makes him so complex?

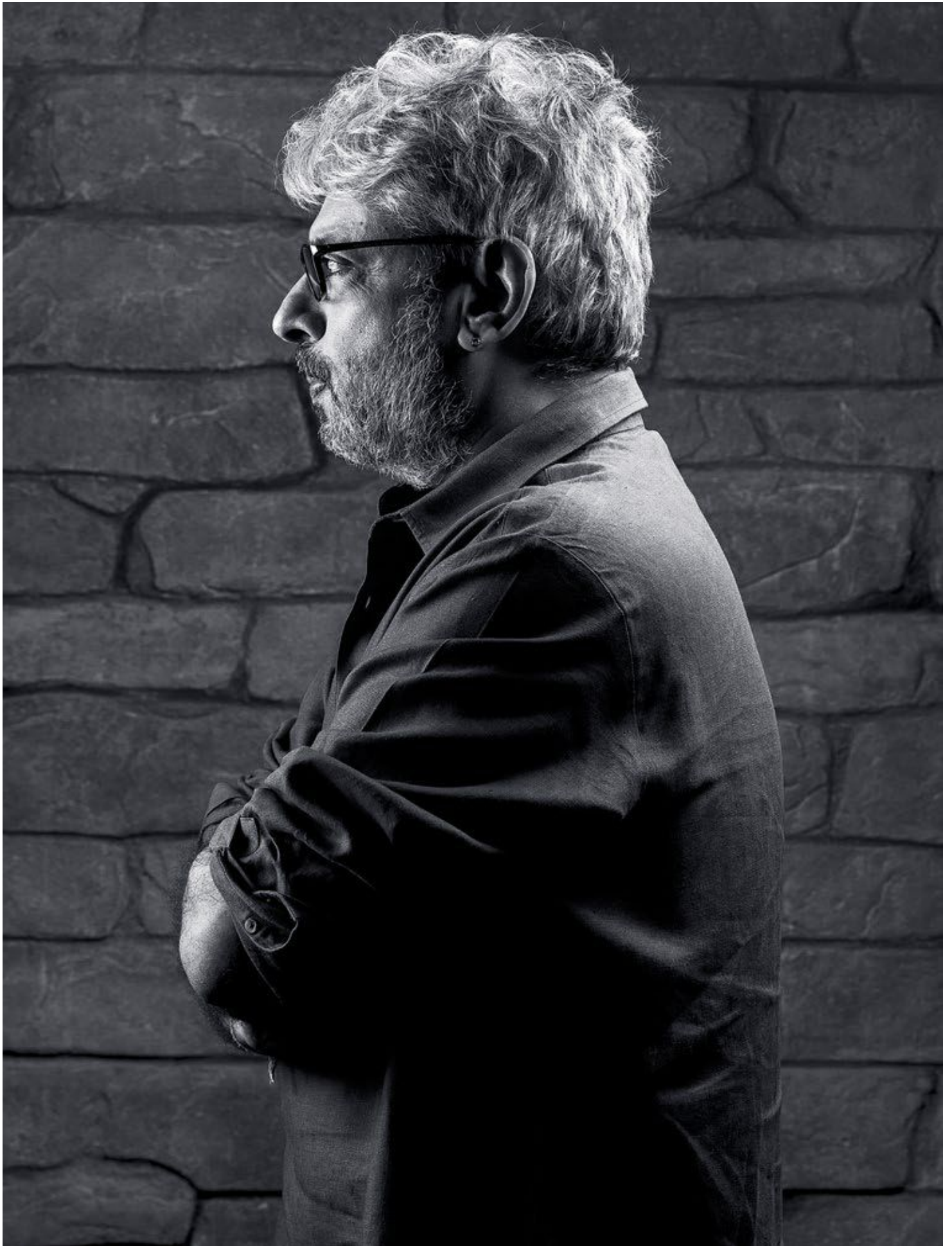
We found out over the

next couple of hours.

★★★

We are seated outside his film's set in Bandra's Mehboob Studios, where parts of his debut film, *Khamoshi: The Musical*, were shot. Bhansali looks relaxed and pleased with the preparations for his next film, *Padmavati*.

Through his conversation with *Forbes India*, there is a reference to a theme, one that has influenced his films, creativity, values and ambition: Bhuleshwar, a South Mumbai neighbourhood where century-old temples and wholesale markets stand cheek by jowl. It is an unlikely place for an avant-garde artiste to thrive. But back in the 1970s, its bylanes housed talkies, including Alankar, Central, Shalimar, Imperial, Taj and Moti, where a young Bhansali developed his lifelong love affair with the movies. However, he also recalls being bitten by the film bug much before that. Navin, Bhansali's



father and producer of films such as *Jahaji Lootera* (1957), visited a film set one day, with his young son in tow. Sanjay was “fascinated” by the energy and action around a song being shot. “A cabaret,” he laughs, recollecting his father’s embarrassment at the discovery.

From that day on, he knew he belonged on the film set. But films also brought pain to the Bhansalis, when Navin’s movies failed at the box office.

Sanjay remembers walking with his grandmother from his home in Bhuleshwar to Colaba and back (a distance of 16 km) to recover Rs 10,000 that a producer owed his father, but returning empty-handed. Angry creditors turning up at their doorstep is another vivid memory. “This is my association with films. And that’s why I make those big films. Those ten thousand rupees have to come back to me with interest—I want those under any circumstances. Now you know my melodrama comes from there; the need to express that humiliation that you go through.”

His cinematic language is in large part a byproduct of this misfortune. For instance, he attributes his love for architecture, reflected in the production design of his

films, to growing up in a small, “claustrophobic” home. “I used to repaint the walls, pushing them behind, making space bigger, redoing it, changing the pillar—my mind as a child was doing this all the time. With the misfortune of being deprived of aesthetics in the chawl I lived in—and my soul craving for it—I was always rearranging spaces.”

He also credits his early exposure to music to his father, who introduced him to the best of Indian classical and Hindi film music. Records of Ustad Abdul Karim Khan, Roshan Ara Begum and Pandit Omkarnath Thakur stacked alongside the likes of Lata Mangeshkar, Madan Mohan, Naushad, and even Dada Kondke. He recalls how his father took him to watch *Mughal-e-Azam* 18 times, just to hear Bade Ghulam Ali Khan sing ‘*Prem Jogan Ban Ke*’ and ‘*Shubh Din Aayo*’.

Such influences also shaped his own compositions when he turned music director with *Guzaarish*, without any formal training. The music of *Ram-Leela* and *Bajirao Mastani* have been raved about for being influenced by India’s folk and classical music. Bhansali’s reinterpretation of the *bandish* ‘*Albela Sajan*’ (used in its original raga Ahir

Bhairav version in *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*) in raga Bhoopali for *Bajirao Mastani*, is a bold experiment.

“Over the years, I learnt from the music directors I have worked with. So I didn’t just randomly and spontaneously jump in [saying] that I know music. I do not live without music. It is my biggest reason to create, to express: How would I shoot this song, how would I have arranged this song? All the workouts that people do in a gym, I do on the radio.”

Inevitably, Bhansali went where his destiny beckoned. After being expelled from the Film and Television Institute of India in Pune (over a disagreement related to his diploma project), Bhansali assisted documentary filmmaker Shukla Das for a while, before director and producer Vidhu Vinod Chopra invited him to assist on *Parinda* (1989) and *1942: A Love Story* (1994). Bhansali remains grateful to Chopra for teaching him much more than filmmaking over the next seven years—especially to speak up.

In 1996, Bhansali released his first film, *Khamoshi*, which, he claims, was called the ‘*Razia Sultan of the Decade*’ by trade magazines; it was a classic that failed at the box office. But Bhansali bounced back with *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999) and *Devdas* (2002).

“When I celebrate love, when I celebrate Indian music, a lot of people call me melodramatic, a *tamaasgir* or *nautanki* [theatrical showman]. They feel my films are more *ram-lila* [dramatic folk story-telling] than cinema. My cinema is theatrical, yes, but that’s the art form that has fascinated me. It’s that celebration of the theatre and cinema that comes together, and then there is music and dance. My songs are very proud, artistic moments for me.”

His next film, *Black* (2005), with Amitabh Bachchan and Rani Mukherji, did well, but *Saawariya* (2007) was slammed as the ‘Twin Towers’ of the box office. However, it remains one of Bhansali’s favourites.



GETTY IMAGES

Sanjay Leela Bhansali (centre) with actors Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone

He admits that as a director, it was not an easy failure to take. But as a producer, he insists he does not think too much of a film's financial performance. "When I am making a film, I want what I want. I am never going to take this shot again. I am never going to shoot this scene again. I am never going to come to this place and see the way I am seeing it, again. I am never going to make this story or film again. So I have been very honest. If the film does well, it does well. My bank balance would be negligible or laughable. If not, I will learn from the experience."

Bhansali is being unduly modest. After *Saawariya*, he admits he was the highest-paid director in the country. Even today, he is the highest-revenue-earning director in *Forbes India's* latest Celebrity 100 list (rank 75).

"When I made *Sawaariya* and it did not do well, and they [critics] said go back to *Devdas*, I made *Guzaarish* immediately after that. They said this is harakiri, it makes no business sense. You have put Hrithik [Roshan] on the bed, and he's not moving anything except his head. I knew it was a risk to make it after a film like *Saawariya*. But I said I want to make this at this point of time. I do not know what box office predictions, calculations and permutations are."

★ ★ ★

But Bhansali does know. He is quick to point out corrections if I stray even by a crore in my box office facts. Yet, he is willing to compromise everything else in favour of his films. He breaks into self-deprecatory laughter as he remembers how actor Rekha dropped in to congratulate him for the success of *Devdas*, and was amused to discover that he lived in a one-bedroom, 450-sq-ft home, which he shared with his mother, Leela.

Social interaction is not his forte though, perhaps because of his childhood when he avoided his father's creditors. "So going away from people is a part of what cinema brought to me: That you can't face

certain facts; you have to go away. So I won't come out to a party today. I will not come into public today," he says.

His inability to indulge in small talk could be another reason he is misunderstood. "A lot of people who have misconceptions about who I am, of being this arrogant, outspoken, foul-mouthed, abusive [person] is all coming from the image that they have created from the work that is a little inaccessible. *Devdas*, or *Black*, as films, are not very accessible, and you have started attributing that image to me."

And just when you think he is getting contemplative, he asks with a throaty laughter: "So, in your eyes have I now absolved

is bound to be temperamental, but there is no negativity in that. And whoever gets a shouting will get a hug in the course of time. If you ask the unit people, everyone loves him."

Bhansali admits he occasionally loses his calm, reprimanding the crew for any lapse in focus. "When I am watching all my films on my death bed, I don't want to live with that mistake because of you. So I care for that image which is sacrosanct; that is what I pray to. We pray to images, we pray to some form in front of us. My God lives on my catwalk. I don't have to go beyond that," he says.

Chatterjee also describes him as being "ridiculously open to

AFTER SAAWARIYA, HE ADMITS HE WAS THE HIGHEST-PAID DIRECTOR IN THE COUNTRY

myself of all the wrong images?"

It is this ability to see humour in serious situations, stay animated and connect with people, that has endeared Bhansali to his team.

Two-time National Award winning cinematographer Sudeep Chatterjee, who has worked with Bhansali on *Guzaarish* and *Bajirao Mastani*, wonders where the "myth" of the director being temperamental originates. "What he says to me in those fits of anger is actually very funny. Whatever he is doing or saying is for the benefit of the film. Here, you have a man who is breathing films 24x7. After a shoot he goes back, works on the music or script. He is up at 2 am or 3 am, fine-tuning a scene. He is on the set before everyone. A person like that

suggestions", considering feedback from anyone if it is valid. In *Bajirao Mastani*, a twilight battle sequence was shot in daylight, he says, and credits Bhansali for encouraging such experiments.

While he is harsh on sloppiness, the director is sensitive to genuine concerns. Chatterjee narrates an incident where he requested a reshoot of an entire day's work to improve a scene. Bhansali agreed. "Not just that, he completely had my back. He never told anyone else why we were reshooting. It just gives you a lot of confidence to have somebody like that backing you up," Chatterjee says.

Bhansali chooses his team carefully and has an eye for talent. Many popular names such as Ismail Durbar, Shreya Ghoshal, Shail Hada, Nusrat

“HE IS THE ONLY DIRECTOR WHO PUSHED ME BEYOND MY OWN BOUNDARIES.”

Badr, Monty Sharma, Ranbir Kapoor and Sonam Kapoor made their debut with Bhansali. “When they come in, they come with another perspective. I want to see their perspective, I don’t want to stagnate by saying I know it all and it has to be done only my way. My biggest asset is that I haven’t stopped learning. I have not stopped receiving. And I am very self-critical,” Bhansali says.

Hrithik Roshan believes the director stretches his actors to extremes they have never explored before. “Working with Bhansali is something I will cherish the most. He is the only director who pushed me beyond my own boundaries. I didn’t know where my boundaries were. He made me discover them and then pushed me beyond them. And he does it with so much ease!”

The push is in the form of creating an emotional, spiritual and physical environment that puts actors in such an “inspired” state, that they would be able to “literally fly”, Roshan adds.

“What they think as freedom, is what I am tapping in them, without them realising it. I want them to feel they are doing it. If you do not have the freedom to ask me a question, then how are you going to talk to me or going to understand me?” says Bhansali.

And what if they do not deliver?

“I take you through the grind till I get what I want. But I won’t tell you how to do it. You have to interpret it yourself. That is why you are there. You evolve as an

artiste, I evolve as an artiste. The audience also has to see it in their own way. That’s how it is,” he adds.

This ‘understanding’ is critical to Bhansali, another reason why he has frequently collaborated with the same actors, like Salman Khan, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Priyanka Chopra, Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh.

After *Ram-Leela* and *Bajirao Mastani*, Deepika and Ranveer will feature in Bhansali’s next production, *Padmavati*, a film that has been on his mind for almost nine years. After the *Saawariya* debacle, he rediscovered himself while directing his own interpretation of French composer Alberto Roussel’s 1923 opera titled *Padmâvatî*, inspired by the story of Rani Padmavati of Chittor. The opera had a successful run in France and Italy in 2008, and Bhansali believes the story now needs to be told on celluloid. The movie is slated for release next year, and promises to have all the quintessential ingredients of a Bhansali film.

Like Satyajit Ray and Charlie Chaplin, who composed the soundtrack of their own films, Bhansali had concerns about expression through music. “How do you translate that thought, which comes with a sound, to somebody else? It gets lost in translation or sometimes lost in ego. In today’s times, everyone thinks, ‘We know it all; what are you telling us? Why are you explaining it to us? We will give you the soundtrack. If you like, keep it, or else don’t keep it.’ The whole approach

has changed,” says Bhansali, who watched RD Burman compose the songs of *1942...* Another Bengali giant who left a deep impact on Bhansali is Ritwik Ghatak. He remembers watching Ghatak’s iconic *Meghe Dhaka Tara* in an auditorium and weeping. His other major influences include classic film makers such as V Shantaram, Raj Kapoor, Kamal Amrohi, K Asif, Mehboob Khan, Bimal Roy, Vijay Anand and Andrzej Wajda.

Strangely, as a producer, he has made choices that seem out of sync with his banner: *Gabbar is Back*, *Mary Kom* and *Rowdy Rathore*, to name a few. But that is his true love. “I go to Chandan Talkies, on the first day of *Rowdy Rathore*. I can’t hear a dialogue of the film. I can’t hear a single song. The minute a song would start the aisles would be filled with people throwing coins and dancing. And I said ‘this is catharsis’; the reaction of an audience that feels that this is the art that we want. I care a damn for your cerebral art and your Spanish, Korean and French cinema influence!” he says.

The film reminds him of the area he grew up in, watching masala films like *Fakira*, *Chor Machaaye Shor*, *Pratigyaa*, *Rampur Ka Lakshman*.

Asked if he would want to direct a movie like that, he says, “I am dying to. I want to make one film with abandon where I am not wondering about the aesthetics of a frame, and worrying about the one moment that will touch and choke the audience. Through *Rowdy...*, I felt that I did give back something that I learnt from and I enjoyed, but I want to make it myself—some mad film. Of course, [the critics] will attack me saying, ‘He’s forgotten filmmaking, He is over. He’s lost his art; he’s lost his aesthetics.’”

But that can wait for later.

Sanjay Leela Bhansali gets up and returns to his set. The director and his cinematographer discuss something. Finally, they grin, and Bhansali draws in a deep breath. He is ready to direct his next magnum opus. 🌈

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Sunny Days

Former adult film star **SUNNY LEONE** has defied conventions and survived as an actor in India for five years. She has also evolved into an enviable brand. And this is just the beginning of her entrepreneurial journey

BY **ANGAD SINGH THAKUR**

It is late afternoon in November as we stand at the door of Sunny Leone's sixth-floor apartment in Mumbai's Juhu suburb. Daniel Weber, her husband, business partner and former adult film co-star, lets us in. He is tall, tattooed and wearing a blue vest with a Peta (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals) insignia. Leone, dressed in a denim skirt and a white blouse, smiles and waves from behind him before stepping forward to introduce herself. "Would you like something to drink?"

"Water, please," I reply.

It's quiet, and no aides or publicists are milling around. We pick a spot on a couch across from the TV in the living room, next to a bank of windows. "I know it's not the Indian way, but we don't like having help at home," says Leone, handing over the glass of water before taking a seat at the other end of the sofa.

It all seems normal, relaxed, boring even. Especially considering the heightened sense of drama that surrounds the former porn star's public personality and the incessant media coverage it receives.

The 35-year-old Leone is, by some accounts, the most popular celebrity in India. She regularly eclipses some of the biggest names

in Bollywood (and occasionally even the prime minister) in the 'most searched' lists released by various online search engines. And she was recently named among BBC's 100 most influential women as well. Thanks to her appearances in films, scores of item songs and reality TV shows, you'd be hard pressed to find someone in the country who hasn't heard her name. But it is her eventful journey that puts her in a league of her own.

Karenjit Kaur Vohra: An Indo-Canadian girl who changed her name to Sunny Leone to become an adult entertainment star in the US, and having succeeded, left it for a mainstream movie career in India. It's a compelling story, one which has captivated Indian audiences for half a decade since Leone participated in the fifth season of *Bigg Boss*, a reality show on Colors. [Colors is owned by Viacom18 and is a part of Network18, the publishers of *Forbes India*.]

And yet, to limit Leone simply to her status as a unique crossover star is to do injustice to her remarkable successes both within and, especially, beyond films. There is more to the phenomenon that is Sunny Leone than simply the element of surprise. Though, that is how it started

out when she and her husband arrived in Mumbai in 2011.

"The plan was to survive in the moment," says Leone, who was scheduled to be a guest on *Bigg Boss*. Weber tells *Forbes India* that he initially planned their travel for just a week. "We did the deal (with Viacom18) from the US. I thought we would probably spend a week over here." The show's format was such that one member from the *Bigg Boss* house would be eliminated every week, depending on the audience votes. "I figured [that if it's] voters' choice, I'd be out," says Leone. That, of course, didn't happen. Audiences took to her, and she lasted much longer than what Weber and she had expected. While on the show, Leone was offered a movie by filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt. And things snowballed from there, making the overseas star a household name in India.

★★★

"I've been a brand for 12-13 years before I arrived in Bollywood," Leone points out. She recalls setting out to do business when she was just 18. "That was the magic number in my head. I wanted to own a business." She hadn't figured out the specifics or what it would look like, but she knew that she needed to build it. "It's

not the typical Indian way, and I know that. I definitely heard a lot of different lectures on that growing up. But that's just who I was."

With this pursuit in mind, Leone familiarised herself with the fundamentals of building a website, editing software, "and all those lovely geeky things that it involves". And, though by the late 2000s she was a successful adult film star in her own right (with her own adult entertainment company, Sunlust Pictures), it was her arrival in India that gave impetus to her goal of creating something that lasts.

Leone has since starred in a number of films, including *Jism 2* (2012) and *Ragini MMS 2* (2014), made special appearances in others, and co-hosted reality TV show *Splitsvilla*. Just this year, Google revealed that she was the most searched Indian actress in the past decade ("And I've only been here for five years!"). Leone also wrote a book of erotic short stories for digital publisher Juggernaut Books, launched a mobile app, and expanded her perfume and deodorant brand Lust.

"You know, when you think of being able to launch a brand or your own line, it's either not available or it's a dream too far to reach," says Leone. "But when we came to India, it became a dream that wasn't too far to reach." The line of perfumes, Leone says, is just the first step towards what she believes will be a broader brand that will soon include cosmetics and other beauty and wellness products. For it, Leone and Weber have partnered with the manufacturer and maintained control over the rest of the process, from



Sunny Leone with her husband Daniel Weber at a Hollywood event in September 2015

marketing to distribution, through their own team. She is wary of ceding ground. "We have the capital to do that right now," says Leone. "So why not keep it small and tight in terms of who has control over it?"

Evidently, she has transitioned from dreamer to entrepreneur.

★ ★ ★

While most of these developments may be seen as successes for Leone's vision of building a lasting brand, the films which contribute a large part to her public profile, have been below par. "I am in absolute admiration of Sunny Leone, the entrepreneur," says

film critic Anupama Chopra. "The problem is that the movies themselves are not worth talking about." They make up an assortment of 'sex comedies' and horror films that have featured Leone as a provocateur, a femme fatale, and, in one instance, a porn star.

Chopra, in a review of Leone's recent film titled *One Night Stand*, wrote: "In some scenes, Sunny's face resembles a mask—she's gorgeous, but nothing moves." She goes on to add, "I can't really recommend *One Night Stand*. But I think we need to acknowledge another marker in the evolution of the Hindi film heroine."

It's extraordinary that despite most of her films tanking, Leone has been able to contribute to this evolution. "Everybody had these preconceived notions because of her history in the porn industry, and she's completely broken those notions," says Chopra. "The fact that she can change your perception completely about who a Hindi film heroine is, what a person who comes from a background in pornography is like, all these things have helped create a new paradigm for who comes in (to the industry)."

Leone admits that her journey has been completely different from anyone else's. But she qualifies it, adding, "You talk to someone and they'll tell you the same thing. Their journey has been a completely different journey than everyone else's; every celebrity." Weber is more emphatic. "I think our journey is extraordinary. Only because I feel that our leap from one place to another is unique in comparison to anyone else."

This distinction, though, comes with its challenges. Leone has been

the target of absurd criticisms by politicians, who have variously blamed her for “increase in rapes”, and causing a “negative impact on the mindset of children”. Her treatment by the press, too, has often had undertones of prurience and derision.

“There have been days when we’ve thought: ‘Oh my god, what’s happening?’” she says. “And it’s not so hard to imagine what those moments could be since they’re all over the news all the time. But there have been a lot of amazing moments too. Like when we met Aamir (Khan)!” The Bollywood heavyweight is one among a legion of her supporters, who strongly backed her after a controversial television interview this year. Says brand consultant Harish Bijoor, “Sunny Leone is the classic example of someone who is able to hold her own confidently and battle it out on issues consistently.”

Importantly, the misogynist hues of criticisms against her put Leone in a position she had found herself in before: At the centre of an impassioned gender debate.

It’s not a position she actively covets. “I just see myself as a girl who wants to work,” she shrugs. The same insouciance is on display when you ask her about the impact that fame has had on her. “I don’t know. I don’t see myself as a famous person,” she says. “I see myself as an awkward person in a big gigantic room with all these famous people, and I want to go into a corner and just drink a glass of wine.”



Her admission, though, contrasts with the scale of her accomplishments. Leone may not see herself as a famous person, but she and her team realise fully well the financial potential of her extant fame. “I’m a product of social media, I believe. That’s how I grew my fan base to what it was, and when we came here, I knew I had a following in India; I just didn’t know how far that reach would go.” Quite far, it has turned out. Just between Facebook,

Twitter and Instagram, Leone has nearly 30 million followers.

Her online following lends itself to the gaming world, which Leone hasn’t shied away from. About a year ago, she struck a deal with Mumbai-based game developer, Gamiana, for a mobile card game called Teen Patti with Sunny Leone. “She is one of the few celebrities in Bollywood that I know of who’s been playing video games for years,” says Vishal Golia, co-founder and CEO of Gamiana. Not long before Leone and Weber first met Golia, the game *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* had become a sensation, driven in part by Kardashian’s massive social media following. Gamiana,

“Essentially, viewers and consumers live vicariously through their stars,” he says. “And when they’re honest about themselves, people love that.”

On the film front, Leone is now working on a movie called *Tera Intezaar* alongside Arbaaz Khan. Her underwhelming performances in the past have now led Leone to seek the assistance of an acting coach.

“I sit right in this corner every day for my acting workshops,” she says patting the seat next to her. She’ll also appear in a song in Shah Rukh Khan’s upcoming movie, *Raees*, and is working on another undisclosed project in the US.

Five years is a long time for

“I DO NOT SEE MYSELF AS A FAMOUS PERSON... I JUST SEE MYSELF AS A GIRL WHO WANTS TO WORK.”

in collaboration with Leone, went on to build the game, which has been live for nearly a year now and is among the top 10 casino games on the Google Playstore in India.

And while the structure of Leone’s company and brand is still taking shape, Bijoor believes they’re being built on a strong foundation. “There are persona-driven brands that have used controversy to establish themselves in India, but they haven’t clicked the way she has.” The key: “Her integrity and ability to stand up for what she thinks is right. Those are things that people look forward to.” He adds that the fact that Leone doesn’t apologise for her past helps

someone who thought she was visiting India for a one-week engagement. And, in that time, not only has Leone changed, but she has also managed to alter both the industry and the country of her parents’ birth.

Her last few films may not have done well, but as Anupama Chopra puts it, “I really admire the machinery that she has created. And she’s done it in a very intelligent, systematic way, in an extremely conservative society that didn’t know what to do with her.”

The trouble with us, Chopra adds, is that we want to put her into a pigeon hole, which she just won’t fit into. “And that’s wonderful!” 🌈

The Legend Of Rajini

For 41 years, he has kept audiences and producers happy. And, surprisingly, it is the superstar's humility and sense of being grounded that best explain his unmatched phenomenon



BY N MADHAVAN

The first ever shot that Rajinikanth gave as an actor involved throwing open a gate in what was to become his inimitable style. It was for the climax of the 1975 superhit Tamil film *Apoorva Raagangal (Rare Melodies)* directed by the late K Balachander. "Little did we realise then that he had just opened the gates into the hearts of the Tamil people," says director SP Muthuraman, who went on to direct the actor in 25 films. Balachander, who gave Shivaji Rao Gaekwad—a Maharashtrian born and brought up in Bengaluru—the break he had been desperately looking for in the Tamil film industry, and was the one who rechristened him Rajinikanth, had an inkling about his rise as an actor from the start. "Wait and watch," the director had told his assistant after Shivaji gave an audition for the role. "This boy has fire in his eyes. He will be a phenomenon some day."

Balachander's words were prophetic. Four decades later, Rajinikanth, 66, is a one-man industry. He has acted in over 160 films and

is among the highest paid actors in Asia. Such is his stardom that he can effortlessly carry off the huge budgets of his films—his 2010 film *Enthiran (Robot)*, with its budget of Rs 132 crore, was India's costliest movie when made, and *2.0, Robot's* sequel, for which he is currently shooting, has a budget of Rs 400 crore, which again makes it the costliest ever Indian movie to be made. He is the first Indian actor to have appeared in four different formats of cinema—black and white, colour, 3D and motion capture technology. His fan clubs number in excess of 50,000. His fans cut across age groups—from children to senior citizens and across regions—from India to Japan. His words sway the masses so much that even established politicians in Tamil Nadu fear his possible entry into politics. His rise to No 30 on the 2016 Forbes India Celebrity 100 List from No 69 last year is inevitable.

He would be even higher but consider this: He acts in just one movie every two years. He does not promote his films. He does not endorse any products. He keeps a

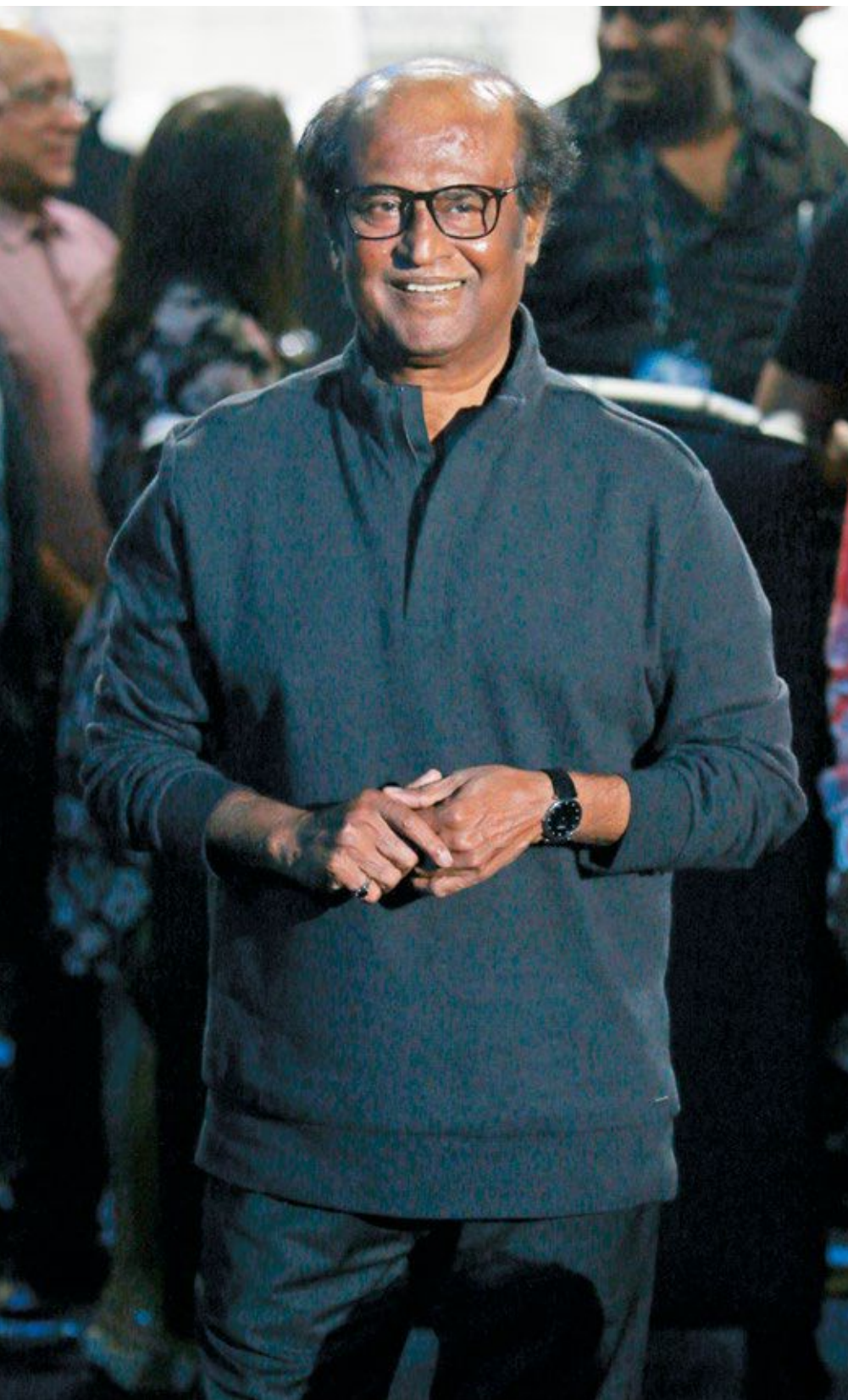
low profile and on the rare occasions he is seen in public, he appears as he is: Bald, at times dishevelled, and without make up. He has certain limitations as an actor. For instance, he is not a good dancer. And yet, even as his peers have faded away, either into retirement or to elderly roles, Super Star, or Thalaivar as his fans call him, continues to play the protagonist in films replete with action and drama. His films rarely fail at the box office (when they do badly, he feels guilty and reimburses distributors, something perhaps no star has ever done) and the craze among his fans continues to grow.

What is the secret of his unparalleled success and the longevity of his superstardom? Some attribute it to his goodness, some to God's grace, a few to his shrewd mind and hard work, and some to just plain luck.

Bollywood star Akshay Kumar, who shares screen space with him for the first time in *2.0*, is more specific. "He is a producers' man," he tells *Forbes India*. "In choosing a script, he looks for commercial viability first," adds Sreedhar Pillai, a film critic. "He

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ensures his films have all the elements in the right proportion so that they not only appeal to his fans but are also profitable to the distributor, theatre chains and the producer.” Rajinikanth films have a fair share of melodious songs, fights, ‘punch’ dialogues, comedy and emotions. “If you ask me the reason for his longevity, it is because he cared for the box office,” says Pillai. “He believes in rewards at the box office rather than awards.”

Management guru Daniel Goleman, in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, says successful people must not only know their strengths but also their limitations. In his 41-year-long career, Rajinikanth has been aware of his limitations and, unlike his peer Kamal Haasan, rarely experimented with roles. He sees himself as an entertainer who caters to the mass market.

On the sets, too, he is down-to-earth and keeps the producer and script in mind. “He is always on time and will be ready with make up at least 15 minutes before a shot,” says Muthuraman, who also had a hand in repositioning him as a hero (Rajinikanth started off doing negative roles) and making him a commercial success. Some of the films in which they worked together include *Murattu Kaalai* (*Wild Bull*, 1980), *Priya* (1978), *Paayum Puli* (*Pouncing Tiger*, 1983), *Velaikaran* (*Servant*, 1987) and *Aarilirunthu Arubathu Varai* (*From 6 to 60 years*, 1979).

Between shots, Rajinikanth would rather read spiritual books than demand to be driven to a plush hotel. “If the shoot is in Chennai, his food comes from home. If it is elsewhere, he will eat what is served to the entire crew,” says Kalaipuli S Thanu, who produced Rajinikanth’s recent film *Kabali* (2016). “He will never allow a producer to spend more than what is needed.” It was Thanu who gave Rajinikanth the title of ‘Super Star’ after *Bairavi* released in 1978.

Thanu shares an incident from the sets of *Kabali*. He and the director (Pa Ranjith) wanted an elaborate climax involving a big set and 200-300 people. “When Rajini sir came to know about it, he told us there was no need for it as the script did not demand it. We shot the scene with a handful of people,” says Thanu. “If only other successful actors follow Super Star’s footsteps, the film industry will be better off.”

Muthuraman cites another incident during the filming of *Sivaji The Boss* (2007), a high budget film by AVM Productions, directed by S Shankar. During a schedule at AVM Studio in Chennai, all the actors were provided with vanity vans and a high-end one was also arranged for Rajinikanth. “When he came to the set, he headed straight for the make-up room in the studio. When I told him a vanity van had been arranged for him, he said

manager who accompanies him.”

The simplicity stems from his personal life. Says Muthuraman, “In real life, he dresses up simply, eats simple food, at times even at roadside eateries, and drives around in a simple car.” For years, he drove a Fiat and preferred an Ambassador when he was chauffeured around. He then switched to a Honda City and that remained his vehicle for a long time, until recently, when his son-in-law (actor Dhanush) presented him with a BMW.

“He has not forgotten his past,” says VM Sudhakar, who was his senior at the Chennai Film Institute and manages his 50,000-plus fan clubs. Rajinikanth had to work as a bus conductor in the Karnataka State Transport Corporation to make ends meet. When he chose to do a course in acting at the film institute, his friends at the transport corporation gave him

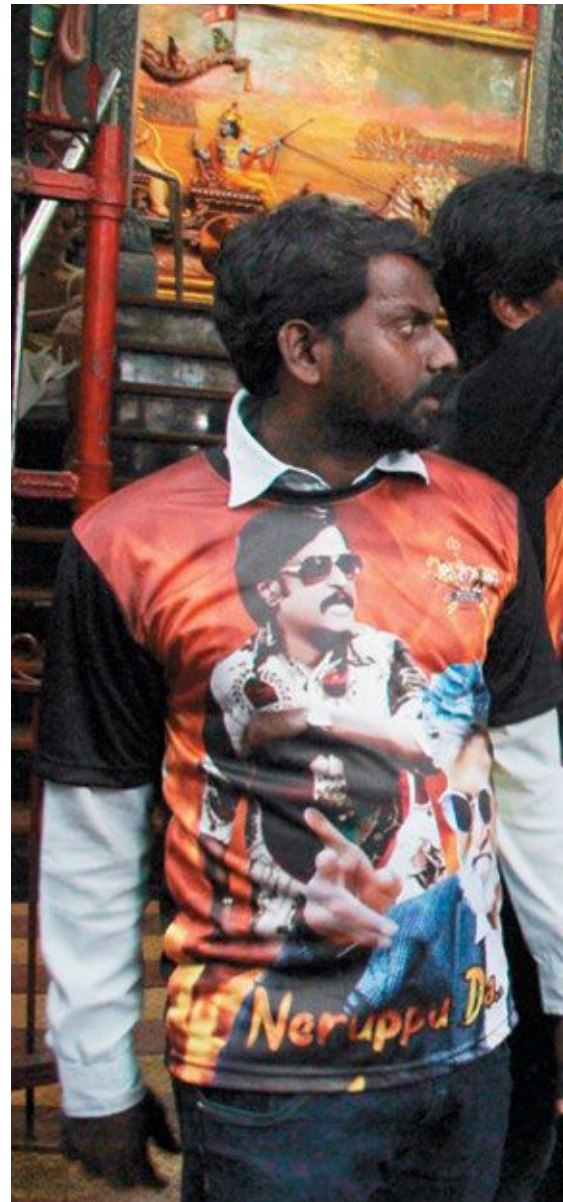
“HE WILL NEVER ALLOW A PRODUCER TO SPEND MORE THAN WHAT IS NEEDED.”

there was no need for it and asked us to return it,” says Muthuraman.

These incidents make him popular with everyone in the film industry. Unlike other stars, he does not move around with an entourage. The only person who accompanies him to a shoot, apart from his driver, is his manager. He does not have a dedicated make-up man and gets it done by the person arranged by the production house on the sets. “He does not ask us to pay for his driver, make-up man, security or his manager,” says Thanu. “Rajini sir himself pays salary to the solitary

the money to buy the application form. And he has not forgotten that. He still goes to Bengaluru, often staying at their homes and continues to be close to his friends from the film institute. “I know him since 1974 and the way he treats me has not changed except that both of us have aged,” says Sudhakar.

Ask Akshay Kumar about that one quality that he likes in Rajinikanth and pat comes the reply, “He is a very, very humble man. People adore him [for that quality].” Balachander too gives us a glimpse of that in the foreword he wrote for the biography of the actor *The Name is Rajinikanth* by Gayathri



Sreekanth. “Although unprecedented adoration and adulation as well as unparalleled popularity and power can go to any other person’s head—and it normally does—it is really amazing that Rajini still has the grace and humility to place all his achievements at the feet of his guru and his God—treating them both the same,” he writes. “So it is not that I discovered Rajinikanth, but what I discovered in Rajinikanth that amazes and pleases me.”

He may have become a huge success, but Balachander recalls in the book, “For, when I call—he still



Rajinikanth's fans revere him so much that they throng to the theatres before dawn to watch his films and bathe his posters with milk

rushes, when I smile—he still blushes; and when I ask him to sit—he still nervously perches on the edge of his chair; when I look into his eyes, I see the same awe, the same reverence, the same respect and gratitude that I have seen and recognised all across these 30-odd years.”

The humility is not restricted to just his guru. “From producers to light boys, he treats everyone with the same respect,” says Muthuraman. “He remembers their names and calls and inquires about their family. These things come naturally to him.”

He goes out of the way to make his co-stars comfortable and unlike other stars, he has no qualms about giving them greater space in his films. “Films like *Mannan* (*Emperor*, 1992), *Padayappa* (1999) and *Chandramukhi* (2005) would not have been massive hits if the leading ladies were not given a prominent role as demanded by the script,” says Thanu.

Rajinikanth, who attributes his success to the grace of God, draws unparalleled devotion from his fans. And it is not just because of his on-screen persona—many other

reasons that endear him to them.

In public life, he has been open, never trying to hide things, including his wild life before his marriage; his understated philanthropy—he often gives away money for education, health care and marriages to deserving people. Akshay Kumar calls this ‘his goodness’.

For the movie-crazy people of Tamil Nadu, films are akin to a religion and the stars are seen as demi-gods. And if there is one demi-god who seems to have lived up to the reputation, in their view, it is Rajinikanth. 🌈

A New Note

Playback singer **SUNIDHI CHAUHAN** has remained at the top of her game for two decades. And though singing stays her first love, she's now exploring her acting potential too

BY KUNAL PURANDARE

As we step out of the elevator on the 19th floor of a high-rise in suburban Mumbai's Lokhandwala area, we hear faint music streaming out of one of the apartments. The music becomes louder as we move closer to our destination. Sunidhi Chauhan, who has just returned the previous night after performing at IIT Roorkee, greets us with a polite hello. She is dressed in a lavender tank top and black tracks and as she sits back cross-legged on the sofa, she picks up the TV remote to mute the Western music she has been immersed in.

It's been a long journey for the 33-year-old who, at the age of 12, became the youngest participant to win a televised singing competition, *Meri Awaz Suno*, in 1996. But ask her about the start of her career and she downplays the win, saying she participated in the show only to meet her idol, Bharat Ratna Lata Mangeshkar, who was the chief guest. "I was just starting out then... there was no other way I could have probably seen and met her," she says. However, she does admit that the show on Doordarshan got her noticed. "It was a big thing for me. It did give me a lot of boost in my career. Ever since, I have been singing," says the playback singer, who had started

singing at the age of four as a hobby.

Still, it wasn't a cakewalk. Chauhan had sung one film song before the competition—'*Ladki Deewani*' in *Shastra* (1996)—and the victory did not instantly translate into more offers. But it was a stepping stone, strengthening Chauhan and her father's resolve.

Her father, theatre artiste Dushyant Kumar Chauhan, made the rounds of music directors' offices, making her sing the odd *alaap* here and there, hoping for a big break. "I was like a tape recorder. My father would do the talking and I would just sing. I wouldn't like to take credit for my struggle," says Chauhan as she recalls the effort her father put into her career.

It didn't take long for the film industry to notice and embrace Chauhan's voice. Her singing career took off after playback singer Sonu Nigam recommended her for Ram Gopal Varma's *Mast* (1999) to music director Sandeep Chowta, who was looking for a new voice. Nigam had already recorded a song for the movie and felt Chauhan fit the bill, having heard her previously during her stage shows in Delhi. "Sonu insisted I hear her. She was into Mariah Carey and Céline Dion then and had a stupendous voice," recalls Chowta.

Chauhan, then 15, was initially

signed for just one song in *Mast*, but when the team realised that her voice suited lead actor Urmila Matondkar, she got to sing two additional songs. "The female version of the title track was incorporated just for her," says Chowta.

"It was anyway a big break—a film made by a cult director like Ram Gopal Varma. It became even bigger when I got three songs. It's hard to get even one line in a song [for a beginner] when there are biggies around," she says. Varma says both he and Chowta were lucky to have stumbled upon an "extraordinary talent" like Chauhan. "I can't ever forget the visual of the intense expression, the first time I saw her singing with her eyes closed. I think it's the various facets of her personality, that is so full of life and energy, which come through in a musical way in her diverse songs," Varma tells *Forbes India*.

★★★

Today, Chauhan is regarded as a volcano of talent who can lift any song with her melodious voice and expression. And despite the fact that she has consciously cut down on playback singing—the few numbers she lent her voice to in 2016 include '*Maa*' from *Neerja*, '*Tere Liye*' in *Fitoor*, '*Darkhaast*' in *Shivaay* and '*Just Go To Hell Dil*' in *Dear Zindagi*—she continues to be flooded with

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offers. “The point is to sing quality, not quantity,” says Chauhan about her decision to go slow in 2016. “I still get a lot of songs, but 80 percent of them are similar to those I have sung before. Why should I repeat myself? It is my responsibility to keep entertaining my fans with a new me.”

Chauhan has been at the top of her game for the last two decades and been a part of every change the music industry has gone through. And one major reason she has managed this effortlessly is that she still works with the enthusiasm of a newcomer. “Earlier, I was like an excited kid who would put my heart and soul into it [the song I was singing]. It’s still the same. I always treat every song as my first. Only then can I improve as a singer; only then can I give something different each time. That’s what I strive to do... to sound different in every song. Or sing better than the last one, at least. That keeps me going,” she says.

It’s a trait she has had since she was a kid—to be different; she would pick the most difficult songs even when she sang at school functions. But singing was just a hobby and what she really wanted to be was a dancer. “I still want to be [a dancer]. But my singing got noticed when I performed before guests at our house in Delhi. My dad’s friends would tell him to train me in singing.” She, however, taught herself. “My training to date has been listening to music. Earlier, it was singing along with Lataji or Ashaji’s [Asha Bhosle] songs. Then, a lot changed when I was introduced to Western music and English songs. I started listening to them, adapted a few things from different singers and various kinds of music to create my own style,” says Chauhan, who was moved by Australian singer Tina Arena’s music. “The first ever English song that I heard was her ‘Chains,’” she says.

Her way of adapting to every situation and song and her distinctive style have meant that she has worked with the best in the industry and has

numerous popular songs to her credit already. “She is a brilliant singer with a wide range and an individual style. She does not copy anyone. She knows what she’s doing and is in total control. She’s not just a singer, she’s also a musician,” says Chowta, referring to the fact that she has an understanding of how musicians work. “She’s a versatile singer with a style and voice of her own,” adds

RAPID FIRE

Song closest to her (sung by her):

‘Le Chale’ from *My Brother Nikhil*; ‘Bhaage Re Mann’ from *Chameli*

Favourite singer: Sukhwinder Singh.

“There are no words for him. He’s godlike. He’s something else.”

Actor/actress: Irrfan Khan and Tabu

Toughest song: ‘Dil Mein Jaagi Dhadkan Aise’ from *Sur: The Melody of Life*

SUNIDHI PLAYLIST

Some of the singer’s best/popular songs:

- ‘Aisa Jadoo Daala Re’ – *Khakee*
- ‘Mere Haath Mein’ – *Fanaa*
- ‘Dekho Naa’ – *Fanaa*
- ‘Mehboob Mere’ – *Fiza*
- ‘Te Amo’ – *Dum Maaro Dum*
- ‘Kamli’ – *Dhoom:3*
- ‘Udi’ – *Guzaarish*
- ‘Beedi’ – *Omkara*
- ‘Bumbro’ – *Mission Kashmir*
- ‘Bin Tere’ – *I Hate Luv Storys*
- ‘Crazy Kiya Re’ – *Dhoom:2*
- ‘Bhoot Hoon Main’ – *Bhoot*
- ‘Sheila Ki Jawaani’ – *Tees Maar Khan*
- ‘Sajnaji Vari Vari’ – *Honeymoon Travels Pvt Ltd*
- ‘Hey Shona’ – *Tara Rum Pum*

music director Anu Malik, who has used her wide range to great effect—he believed in her softer tonality and got her to sing a slow number, ‘Meri Zindagi Mein’ in *Ajnabee* (2001), at a time when she was known for her racy numbers. “She had been singing those high-pitch songs. That’s when I thought why not get her to sing a falsetto? I wanted to use her mellow voice in a romantic track,” he says.

Lyricist Prasoon Joshi, whose acclaimed songs ‘Maa’, ‘Mere Haath Mein’ and ‘Dekho Na’ (the latter two from *Fanaa*, 2006) were soft numbers sung by Chauhan, also believes that she can lend her voice to every situation. “She is an effervescent and soulful singer,” he says. Varma, who has used Chauhan’s voice for challenging songs in many of his films, including *Jungle* (2000) and *Bhoot* (2003), describes her as the best singer he has come across in his entire career.

★ ★ ★

The manner in which she switches from racy to mellow, from soulful to effervescent, may seem effortless but belies the years of hard work she has put in. Over time, she has come up with what has now become a process when it comes to the recording of a song: Learning the tune, understanding the lyrics and finally getting to the mike. Now it has all become second nature, so much so that as long as she knows the song and what it is meant to convey, she doesn’t even need to know the storyline or the actor she is singing for.

“The lyrics tell the story,” she says. She recalls an incident when during the recording of a song for music director Shantanu Moitra, actor Raima Sen dropped by at the studio. Chauhan assumed she was singing for Sen and that is why she was there. It was only later, when she saw the song ‘Kaisi Paheli’ from *Parineeta* (2005) on TV, did she realise that she had sung for the legendary actor Rekha. “That was such a high, but all credit goes to her. She is such a



brilliant actor that she made my voice sound like her own,” says Chauhan.

★ ★ ★

After two decades of adapting, evolving and doing things differently, Chauhan, whom Chowta calls a multi-faceted personality, decided to challenge herself further—in 2016, she made her acting debut with a short film, *Playing Priya*, (the director, Arif Ali, made an offer after watching her perform on stage in Bengaluru). She played a housewife in the short film and though she didn’t have many dialogues and it was just six minutes in duration, the urban thriller showed she didn’t lack acting chops.

“Acting is an extension of my singing. I have acted on the mike while recording so many songs. I know I am decent looking and a lot

of people, for many years, believed I should get into acting. But I was not ready then. Now, when I know I can give my 100 percent to both [acting and singing], that’s when I decided to act,” she says, adding that she is even reading a few scripts. She may have caught the acting bug but that doesn’t mean she’ll stop wielding the mike. “I am not going to leave singing. It’s not possible,” she says.

There’s plenty in the offing in 2017 as far as film songs are concerned. Besides, there are also concerts and live performances where her high-voltage energy perfectly complements the madness of a crowd. It is something she enjoys and it shows. “You are like a bird, you can fly,” she says. But she is also aware that there are limits. “In

that freedom [during live shows], you need to control. You can’t just go berserk,” says Chauhan. “For me, singing has always been moody [mood-related]. It depends on how the atmosphere is around me,” she adds.

How does she prepare, we ask. Is she constantly working? “It’s okay if I don’t sing or hum a line for a day or two. It could be a week of no singing, and then performing directly on stage. I don’t do proper *riyaaz* (practice)... that *kaam chalu riyaz* (informal training) is still on, playing a CD and singing along,” she says.

The interview comes to an end and we make our way out. As we wait for the elevator, the faint sound reaches us again. The music is playing once again. Clearly, the self-learning and grooming don’t stop. 🌈

Recipe For Success

SANJEEV KAPOOR did not always want to be a chef. But he always wanted to do something different

BY PARAMITA CHATTERJEE

In 1992, a new television phenomenon began to take urban Indian homes by storm. The hero of the show did not sing and dance, or romance pretty women, or beat up villainous characters. And yet, women (mostly) would go into a tizzy to not miss him on screen. Dressed in white, with a perpetual smile on his face and a ladle in hand, he taught his audience how to cook. Sanjeev Kapoor was, perhaps, the unlikeliest and, yet, one of the most successful matinee idols that Indian satellite television has ever produced.

Bursting onto the scene with *Khana Khazana*, a show that ran for 18 years, Kapoor became the country's first television celebrity chef, with a following that runs into several millions. And while his status as India's best-known face behind a cooking stove continues, he has built himself a business empire spanning a 24-hour food channel,

manufacturing premium cookware, selling a range of bottled gourmet goodies, and authoring scores of cookery books. Also tucked under his toque blanche are awards and nominations from national and international organisations alike.

And yet, cooking was something that Kapoor gravitated towards more by a process of elimination, rather than of selection.

Back in the 1980s, Kapoor had the choice of opting for a 'normal' profession. "Normal would typically mean becoming an engineer or a doctor," says the

52-year-old, whose father worked with the State Bank of India and mother was a homemaker. But with the urge to do something different from everyone else, Kapoor—despite the option of becoming an architect after gaining admission at Delhi's School of Planning and Architecture in 1981—decided to pursue a degree at the Institute of Hotel Management (Pusa) instead. "People laughed at me

then," he remembers. "There were no chefs in those days... I wanted to attempt something that no one in my family or friend circle had thought of. That's the only reason I decided to pursue hotel management."

But even after studying hotel management, cooking was nowhere on his radar. "It was not even a distant hobby," he recalls. And the only reason he opted for the kitchen was because the rest of his classmates opted for the front desk. Standing out among his peers was perhaps also the reason why Kapoor managed to become the executive chef of Centaur Hotel in Mumbai at the age of 28, a designation that chefs usually attain by the time they are in their 30s. "I reached the top very early in my career. I could never follow, I could only lead," he adds, confessing that he became a chef even though he "wasn't always great at cooking."

"Sanjeev Kapoor is a celebrity masterchef who has made the job of a chef very respectable and glamorous, much before the food revolution started in India," says Anjan Chatterjee, founder and managing





director of Speciality Restaurants that owns restaurant chains such as Mainland China and Oh! Calcutta.

Kapoor's quest to do more saw him embark on the next stage of his journey. "Television also happened to me by a stroke of luck," he says. Kapoor's television stint began when Zee TV approached him in 1992 to do a cookery show for the channel. "They approached several other people, but I managed to bag the show," he says. Initially, *Khana Khazana* was called *Shrimaan Bawarchi*, a name that "I did not like at all," he adds. After a lot of thought, it was changed to *Khana Khazana*, a name that Kapoor himself suggested to the producers.

Those were the days when satellite television was beginning to transform the social and political landscape of the country. *Khana Khazana* was an hour-long show, initially aired once a week, and won millions of hearts with exotic recipes and simple cooking techniques. It went on to become the longest-running cookery show on television in Asia and garnered over 500 million viewers. The show ran for a record 18 years and was broadcast in more than 120 countries. "After Bollywood and cricket, if anything is entertaining, that's food," says Kapoor. "Globally, too, food sells."

Kapoor's long-standing association with television cookery shows culminated in him launching his own 24-hour food channel Food Food in 2011 that today reaches more than 40 million households. However, in May this year, Kapoor divested a majority stake in Food Food to Discovery Communications India. The transaction is in the final lap and is currently awaiting regulatory approvals. Once it comes through, Kapoor will retain a minority stake in the channel.

Besides, he also runs Wonderchef—along with Ravi Saxena, co-founder and former CEO of Sodexo India—a brand of premium cookware,

appliances and kitchen tools. The enterprise is backed by Zurich-headquartered investment firm Capvent. Wonderchef was launched in 2009 and through four main channels—retail and general trade, television sales, online sales and direct-to-home sales—via a network of over 40,000 all-women workforce, and more recently through boutique stores.

If all this wasn't enough on his plate—"I like doing different things to break the monotony," explains Kapoor—he has authored around 200 cookbooks, mostly in association with Popular Prakashan, and has sold more than 10 million copies. Besides, he sells a range of food products, including pickles, blended spices, ready-to-cook mixtures and gourmet chutneys that were launched in 2001 under the brand of Sanjeev Kapoor Khazana, and also runs a production house called Khana Khazana (launched in 2000) that creates content for digital platforms and television shows. His website sanjeevkapoor.com gets up to 10 million views each month, while his YouTube channel Sanjeev Kapoor Khazana has more than 1 million subscribers and more than 3 billion views.

Kapoor is also a celebrated restaurateur. He forayed into the space in 1998 when he opened his first restaurant Khazana in Dubai. Today, he runs 59 restaurants under six brands, all of which come under the umbrella of SK Restaurants. These include The Yellow Chilli, Signature by Sanjeev Kapoor, and Hongkong.

Kapoor has won several awards and government advisory contracts. In 2005, he was chosen by CNN as one of the top five celebrity chefs in the world, the others being Heston Blumenthal, Gordon Ramsay, Jamie Oliver and Wolfgang Puck. More recently, he was flown down to Abu Dhabi to prepare a vegetarian meal for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Having spent 32 years in the industry, Kapoor has experienced,

first-hand, the changes it has gone through. Initially, he says, it was everyone having Indian food. But today, with rising disposable incomes among the average Indians, and a booming overseas tourism industry, people are more open to exploring and soaking in new cultures.

This perhaps explains the mushrooming of restaurants that cater to diverse taste preferences. "Food is travelling across borders," says Kapoor. Consider India itself: Apart from Indian food, there is a variety one gets to choose from, including Japanese, Korean, Italian and Greek.

"The Indian food industry has evolved significantly over the last two decades—new formats have

emerged, service levels have improved and supply chain practices have become more efficient," says Rajat Wahi, partner and head of Consumer Markets at KPMG. "A number of foreign and domestic players have set up their base in the country, owing to the prevalence of a number of opportunities in various areas of the food service industry."

around the country. European fare, called 'continental' food, was mostly restricted to a few restaurants, clubs with colonial legacies, and high-end hotels. Even buffets did not exist. "Food is more about meeting aspirations, and establishing a lifestyle and status," says Kapoor, who, after launching into a brief history of how lifestyles have evolved in the country, points out to the slew of cookery shows on television today, something that he pioneered in India over two decades ago.

So, what is it that takes to be a successful entrepreneur? "A first-mover advantage always helps," says Kapoor. Besides, it is also the ability to adapt to change that's

"SANJEEV KAPOOR HAS MADE THE JOB OF A CHEF VERY RESPECTABLE."

emerged, service levels have improved and supply chain practices have become more efficient," says Rajat Wahi, partner and head of Consumer Markets at KPMG. "A number of foreign and domestic players have set up their base in the country, owing to the prevalence of a number of opportunities in various areas of the food service industry."

Echoing the same sentiment, Speciality Restaurants owner Chatterjee says, "The entry of young diners has created space for all kinds of global and modern Indian cuisine. The new globalised India has brought in the trend of eating and drinking out like never before."

With economic liberalisation, India started witnessing a change in the early '90s, a time when an Indian version of Chinese cuisine was the only popular 'foreign food' available

absolutely critical to go to the next level, an ability he developed in his childhood when his father had a transferable job. Born in Ambala, in Punjab, Kapoor moved with his family to Delhi, and then to Meerut and Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh. "As a banker, my father never stayed in one place for more than three years, and that has helped me adjust to change seamlessly," he says.

While the love for cooking is a talent that Kapoor acquired, it is the creativity associated with it that keeps him motivated. "I don't have a favourite dish," he says. "Why would anyone like to eat the same dish twice... It's like listening to the same joke again," he says.

And for someone who always has one pot simmering with a new venture, the banquet is yet to be served. 🍷

Lighting Up The Small Screen

Far from the glitter of mainstream cinema, there is talent galore on TV, revving up viewership and revenues of general entertainment channels

BY SHRUTI VENKATESH

A Shooting Star

It's been a decade since her first lead role, but Divyanka Tripathi still rules the roost on TV

She is a gold medallist in riflery from the Bhopal District Rifle Club, has undergone training at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering in Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand, learnt parasailing professionally, knows jet skiing, and, once aspired to work for the Indian Forest Service. "I was an NCC [National Cadet Corps] cadet. Acting was just time-pass," says Divyanka Tripathi, 31, who used to take up endorsements and modelling assignments in Bhopal, her hometown, as a teenager.

An odd contrast, given that today, she is among the most popular actors on Indian television. From playing the 'ideal' *bahu* (daughter-in-law) to taking up roles in comedy-based shows and now essaying the character of Dr Ishita Bhalla in the Star Plus soap opera *Yeh Hai Mohabbatein*, Tripathi has managed to woo the audience in every role. Dr Ishita



Bhalla was ranked No 1 on the ‘Top five fiction characters on Hindi GECs’ (General Entertainment Channels) list in the 2016 Ficci-KPMG report on the media and entertainment industry.

“And that was exactly the plan,” she tells *Forbes India* while returning home late on a November evening, from the sets of *Yeh Hai Mohabbatein* in Andheri, Mumbai, after a gruelling 12-hour shoot. “Every time people attempt to typecast me, I try and break away from it,” says Tripathi, who has also proved her worth in several talent-based reality shows.

In 2000, she signed up for Doordarshan’s telefilms. It was her telefilm co-actor Prashant Chawla, who recommended her name for the lead role in Zee TV’s *Banoo Main Teri Dulhann* in 2006. “I got a call from Zee, and thought it was a hoax,” says Tripathi, who eventually bagged the role.

Ten years on, she is still at the top

of her game. “*Yeh Hai Mohabbatein* has been Star Plus’s flagship show and has consistently featured among the top five shows in the [Hindi GEC] category since its launch in 2013,” says a Star India spokesperson. “What makes Dr Ishita Bhalla so popular and aspirational to viewers is that the character embodies the modern-day woman, with her progressive outlook, the maturity to handle and solve problems, and pursue a successful career, while being the ideal mother, wife and daughter-in-law,” he adds.

Tripathi, though, is aware of the fickleness of fame. “Events, endorsements and appearances come to you only as long as the show is on. So it is important to save money, because nobody comes to help actors,” she points out.

People often ask her when will she take the leap from the small screen to the big screen. “My strength is Indianness. I will do films if there is

a good role, but let them move away from the ‘glam doll’ image first. I am not cut out for those, and even if I do it, neither I nor my audience will be satisfied,” she explains.

Instead, she says, she is a proud television actor. “I feel that television actors are much more hardworking and polished than other actors. We get the script ten minutes before the shoot, and we memorise five-page scripts in as many minutes,” she says. At times, the pressure to get an episode ready also means having to shoot despite being unwell. “I once fractured my leg during a dance rehearsal, so we just incorporated an accident scene in the story and I continued shooting on a wheelchair,” she recalls.

Like adventure sports, Tripathi says, this industry is tough. It tests you every single day; there is less work and more competition. “But I want to ensure that I never lose my essence. That, for me, would be success.”

Snakes And Ladders

Mouni Roy has slithered her way into viewers’ hearts and up the ratings chart

When Mouni Roy was offered the role of a *naagin* (snake-woman), a shape-shifting serpent trying to avenge the death of her parents in Balaji Telefilms’ eponymous show, she refused. She had played Goddess Sati in Life OK’s *Devon Ke Dev...Mahadev*, and did not wish to be typecast. But, as Roy puts it, “when [producer] Ekta [Kapoor] ma’am talks, you are mesmerised. When I heard her, I knew I had to do it.”

Roy, 31, is still in her costume, a golden dress with snake-shaped jewellery and brown contact lenses,



as she speaks to *Forbes India* from the shoot of *Naagin* at an old bungalow inside Filmcity in Goregaon, Mumbai. A typical day for Roy entails at least 12 hours of shooting. “I haven’t taken a single day’s leave since the second season started airing [in October 2016],” she says. She attributes her enthusiasm to her passion for acting. The results are evident. Ratings by the Broadcast Audience Research Council—the body that monitors viewership habits of Indian households—show that *Naagin* has consistently been among the top five shows viewed in India.

Following *Naagin*’s success, similar shows based on supernatural themes emerged. While *Naagin*’s critics termed the show regressive, Roy feels there’s nothing wrong with it. “We are doing fantasy fiction. We

from Balaji [Telefilms] spotted me outside the university and asked me to audition for the role of Krishna Tulsi, the onscreen daughter of Tulsi [played by the now Union minister for textiles Smriti Irani] in Star Plus’s *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi (KSBKBT)*,” recalls Roy. A few days later, Roy got a confirmation call. Although apprehensive about television being too “melodramatic” and *KSBKBT* not being a new serial (at that point, the show had been on air for seven years), she went with her gut feeling and moved to Mumbai, terming it a summer job. “I never went back,” she says smiling.

Ekta Kapoor, joint MD, Balaji Telefilms, that produces both *KSBKBT* and *Naagin*, observes that there is a hunger in Mouni’s demeanour for quality work, something unusual among today’s actors. Kapoor says Roy

“I HAVEN’T TAKEN A SINGLE DAY’S LEAVE SINCE OCTOBER.”

are not trying to make it regressive or propagate something which doesn’t exist. We watch *Twilight*, *Vampire Diaries* and *Game of Thrones*, so this is also fiction, Indian fiction.”

Acting, however, wasn’t always Roy’s calling—she aspired to become an IAS officer. Born in West Bengal’s Cooch Behar district, Roy belongs to a conservative Bengali family. Her late father, Anil Chandra Roy, was a civil services officer, while mother Mukti Roy is a teacher. “As a Bengali, you are supposed to sing, dance and paint, but those are supposed to be hobbies. Not your profession,” says Roy, who completed her BA from Delhi’s Miranda House and followed it up with an MA in Mass Communication from Jamia Millia Islamia university.

It was while she was pursuing her MA that acting beckoned. “Somebody

was apt for the role of *Naagin* as she “personifies both a damsel in distress as well as a woman full of reprisal”.

Fiction apart, Roy has participated in several reality shows, hosted a show called *Telly Talk* and done a travel show with Deepti Bhatnagar for NDTV Good Times. She made her Bollywood debut this year in a song in *Tum Bin 2*, where she showcases her dancing skills. She says that although she is happy with her work in television, she wouldn’t mind a good big screen project.

Roy wishes to foray into other avenues like writing and fashion, but adds that she has never been able to plan what she wants to do in life. “I just do what I am destined to,” she says as she gets ready for her next shot in full earnest. Little wonder then that destiny has favoured her.

Holding Her Own

Sakshi Tanwar leaves most things to chance, but her passion for acting has ensured that prime roles find her

In 1998, Sakshi Tanwar, who was preparing for the Indian Administrative Services, got an urgent call from her college friend Supriya, who hosted the music-based show *Albela Sur Mela* on Doordarshan. Supriya’s co-anchor hadn’t reported to the sets that day and she wanted Tanwar to step in. “I was free, so I went. The requirement was a good command over Hindi and the ability to memorise dialogues. Since I could manage both, I was on,” recalls Tanwar, who was born in Alwar, Rajasthan, and later pursued her graduation from Delhi’s Lady Shri Ram College. What she didn’t realise then was that this would be the beginning of her television career. “I was more excited about earning Rs 500 for that anchoring,” she laughs.

Tanwar discovered her passion for acting while shooting for *Rajdhani*, a weekly show for Star Plus, in May 2000. “It was during a scene that I realised that acting is much more than just delivering dialogues. I realised it’s a process which needed me to transform into another character. I enjoyed it so much that I wanted more of it. That’s when I realised that I wanted to pursue acting as a profession,” says Tanwar. Since then, she has been a part of several hit shows, the most notable ones being *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii* on Star Plus, which ran for eight years, and *Bade Acche Lagte Hain* on Sony Entertainment TV, which ran for over three years. She has also hosted crime shows like *Crime Patrol* on Sony and *Code Red* on Colors TV (part of Network 18,



the publishers of *Forbes India*), and endorses over eight brands. This year, she was also a part of Anil Kapoor's finite series, *24*, aired on Colors TV and is now preparing to reunite with her former co-star Ram Kapoor for Ekta Kapoor's upcoming web series.

Tanwar also makes her Bollywood debut opposite Aamir Khan, as his onscreen wife, in *Dangal*. The film is a biopic on Mahavir Singh Phogat, a senior Olympics coach who taught wrestling to his daughters Geeta Phogat and Babita Kumari, who went on to win medals at the Commonwealth Games. "It was as unplanned as everything else in my life," says Tanwar about her film debut. "I don't think I am ambitious

but I do cherish and savour what I do and what I have done."

"The beauty was that once she was briefed during the audition on what was expected from her, she got the role just like that. Even when she is not speaking on screen, her face is saying a thousand words. She has proved that you need not have a line in a scene to leave a major impact," says Nitesh Tiwari, director of *Dangal*.

As far as possible, Tanwar tries to work on one show at a time, taking long breaks once it is over. When she isn't working, she loves to travel and spend time with her family. "That helps me detach from the routine and do something which is not only different but also exciting. The idea

is not just to grow as a professional but also as a person," she explains.

Tanwar is now itching to do more finite shows. "At a time when it is believed that television content is created largely for the masses in the country's interiors, it is relevant and important that finite shows like *24* and *POW: Bandi Yuddh Ke* [aired on Star Plus] are telecast along with soaps and serials," she says. Her dream role is to play Charulata (from the eponymous Satyajit Ray film), Rosy (from RK Narayan's *The Guide*) or *chhoti bahu* (from the 1962 Hindi film *Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam*). "I wish I was a part of at least one black and white classic of the '50s and '60s," she signs off wistfully. 🌈

Celebrity100[★]

Evolution of evil: The
transformation of
villainy in Hindi films
P/106

Framed stars: The
studio photography
of JH Thakker
P/112

MEENA KUMARI

Using dinky lights and
props like the back of a
chair, photographer
JH Thakker creates a
dramatic background for
actor Meena Kumari



Breaking Bad

On-screen villainy has evolved—feudal landlords have given way to ganglords, menacing or otherwise, and to obsessive lovers and shapeshifting killers—and so have the actors. The democratisation of the bad guy role is complete

BY JASODHARA BANERJEE



Danny Denzongpa (right) plays Kancha Cheena in *Agneepath*

Mainstream Hindi cinema is easy on our conscience. We know who the good guys are, who the bad guys are, who we should root for, and who needs to die in the end (unless the cops turn up and play spoilsport).

Also, in the world of Hindi cinema, villainy often has a kind of magnetism that heroism rarely has: Villains come wrapped in an abundance of charm, confidence, cunning and control that heroes (female ones included) barely possess. In scene after scene, movie after movie, heroes bluster on with lines of heavy dialogue, while the villains sedately smoke cigars, or nod indulgently with amused smirks on their lips; heroes blunder their way through the plot, falling prey to temptations and travails, while villains

remain steadfast in their ideals and objectives. If the hero manages to finally prevail over the villain—often with the help of generous amounts of luck and chance—it is almost always because good must prevail over evil (audiences don't take too well to cynical plotlines), and not really because the villain comes up short. We are all too aware that villains are perhaps better than the heroes in every which way, except in that sticky department of morals.

Morals were what separated the good from the bad. And the lines were clearly demarcated among actors and even at award ceremonies. Indian film awards follow this strict demarcation by having separate categories for actors in 'a negative role', unlike, say, the Oscars or the Baftas, which have no such category. It is almost as if we are morally obligated not

to award a villain the award for the best actor. Or is it because we know who the better actor really is?

From the 1950s to the 1990s, villainy lay in the clutches of a few actors—Pran, Premnath, Ajit, Prem Chopra, Ranjeet, Amjad Khan, Amrish Puri, Gulshan Grover, Shakti Kapoor, and Kiran Kumar are some of the most prominent ones. While it was not entirely unusual for these actors to portray non-villainous characters—Pran being the most prolific in this category with roles such as Sher Khan in *Zanjeer*, Michael Gonsalvez in *Majboor* and Jasjit in *Don*—it was unthinkable that an actor who played the hero would take on a negative role. Even when heroes crossed over to the dark side—Amitabh Bachchan, most notably, in *Deewaar* or *Kaalida*—they did so for the sake of their families, which automatically



(Clockwise from top left) Ajit (left) plays gang leader Teja in *Zanjeer*; Amrish Puri (left) as Mogambo in *Mr India*; Amjad Khan in the iconic role of Gabbar Singh in *Sholay*; Kulbhushan Kharbanda (left) as Shakaal, the sadist crime lord, in *Shaan*

PHOTOGRAPHS: EXPRESS ARCHIVE PHOTO

justified all their crimes in the eyes of the audience; alternatively, they started out as baddies, and eventually grew a heart of gold.

And then along came the upstart called Shah Rukh Khan in 1994 when the hero himself morphed into the villain, breaking an age-old taboo in the world of Hindi cinema. (But more on that later.)

★★★

Though there have been villains of varying kinds, it would not be entirely inaccurate to claim that the myriad faces of the Hindi cinema villain are representative of their times. At different points in time, different groups of people have been considered 'bad' by society, giving rise to discernible patterns in the way villainy has been portrayed on screen.

In the 1950s, while India grappled with land reforms and the abolition of

reforms, Ughranarayan from Bimal Roy's *Madhumati* (1958) had no such compulsions. Portrayed by a suave and dandy Pran, Ughranarayan is the quintessential young, absentee landlord who rules by the lash of his whip. Dressed in riding breeches and knee-high boots, or ornate dressing gowns, he towers over Dilip Kumar's righteous and soft-spoken Anand.

One of the incarnations of the tyrannical landlord was the oppressive moneylender. A fixture in the fabric of rural India, this was another character that easily lent itself to villainy. For instance, Sukhilala in *Mother India* (1957) is the cause of all misery in the lives of Radha (Nargis) and her sons Birju (Sunil Dutt) and Rama (Rajendra Kumar). So death-like was the grip of account books on the lives of farmers that Birju, in his ultimate act of revenge, hurls

while Naseeruddin Shah played the arrogant *subedar* in Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala* (1987).

★★★

By the mid-1970s, the landlord was no longer fashionable in mainstream Hindi cinema as the realities of independent India changed rapidly. Moving on from the vestiges of a colonial past, villainy now came in the form of those who broke the law of the land. And who could break it with as much frequency and panache as Bombay's ganglords and smugglers? Following the ban on gold imports post-independence, gold was (and continues to be) one of the most coveted commodities smuggled into the country. Thus emerged characters such as Teja (*Zanjeer*, 1973), Shakaal (*Yaadon ki Baaraat*, 1973) and Deen Dayal, better known as 'Loin' (*Kalicharan*, 1976),

AT DIFFERENT TIMES, GROUPS OF PEOPLE CONSIDERED BAD BY SOCIETY WERE SHOWN AS VILLAINS ON SCREEN

the zamindari system, villainy came in the shape of the landlord. Long vilified in Indian literature as the embodiment of all things oppressive, unjust and evil, the *zamindar*—and all its variants, such as *kunwar saab*, *raja saab*, *rai saab*, *raja thakur*, etcetera—was a character that was easily identifiable.

An early example of this is the character of Thakur Harnam Singh in Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953). Insecure, greedy and manipulative, he brings ruin upon the farmers who till his land (by planning to build a mill on it), and in particular to the family of Shambhu Mahato, immortalised by Balraj Sahni. But while Harnam Singh portrayed a middle-aged landlord facing uncertainty in the face of land

Sukhilala's ledgers into a blazing fire.

The feudal hangover continued well into the 1960s in mainstream and well into the 1980s in parallel cinema, with the scheming and unscrupulous characters of Kunwar Saab in *Teesri Manzil* (1966) and Ranjit (alias Bhupender Singh) in *Johny Mera Naam* (1970), portrayed by Premnath. Both characters belonged to the rich and landed aristocracy—they were impeccably dressed and lived the good life while being corrupt and ruthless in their ways. Meanwhile, in parallel cinema, Sajal Roy Choudhury, for instance, played the greedy moneylender in Mrinal Sen's *Mrigayaa* (1976), Mithun Chakraborty's debut film,

played by Ajit. They were rich and flamboyant characters who ran crime networks, employed tough-looking henchmen, had female arm candies, and paid off corrupt policemen.

While in the badlands of Bombay, mention must also be made of the exploitative owners of mills, factories and businesses; in a way, they were the modern-day versions of the landlords and moneylenders. Although these characters did not often occupy much screen time or space, they created the socio-economic background against which the hero rebelled. Instances of this have been seen in *Namak Haraam* (1973), *Deewaar* (1975), *Trishul* (1978), *Kaalida* (1981) and *Laawaris* (1981).

However, the villain who stood



(Clockwise from left) Karan Johar's 2012 *Agneepath* saw Rishi Kapoor and Sanjay Dutt don menacing new avatars; Nawazuddin Siddiqui in *Gangs of Wasseypur II*

head-and-shoulders above all the rich, urbane, and flamboyant bad men of the 1970s was, of course, the tobacco-chewing, rotting-toothed, trigger-happy, rustic Gabbar Singh of *Sholay* (1975). Hindi cinema had seen dacoits before—from Pran in *Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai* (1960) to Prem Chopra in *Mera Saaya* (1966)—but none came close to the undiluted evil of Gabbar. Unlike the dacoits of past films, Gabbar did not abide by any honour-among-thieves rulebook, and killed his own men with as much glee as he killed hapless villagers.

The flamboyance of the 1970s went haywire in the following decade with villains who verged on the ludicrous with their appearances and manic idiosyncrasies. Heralding this era was Shakaal, played by Kulbhushan Kharbanda in *Shaan* (1980), a film that was clearly inspired by the James Bond franchise in more ways than one. From Usha Uthup's throaty title song to Kharbanda's Yul Brynner-esque bald pate and pet sharks in giant fish tanks, it was the film that took villainy into almost something akin to lunacy. Following in these footsteps

were characters like Dr Dang, played by Anupam Kher, in *Karma* (1986) and, of course, Mogambo, played by Amrish Puri, in *Mr India* (1987). Not content any longer to run smuggling networks, villains like Dang and Mogambo went many steps ahead of Shakaal with their goals to control and conquer the whole country.

These characters, although memorable, were shortlived, and Hindi films soon fell back on the tried-and-tested characters of ganglords, smugglers and bootleggers. This is the period that saw the emergence of characters such as Lotiya Pathan, played by Kiran Kumar, in *Tezaab* (1988), Kancha Cheena, played by Danny Denzongpa, in *Agneepath* (1990), and Maharani, chillingly played by Sadashiv Amrapurkar, in *Sadak* (1991). The ganglords, too, refused to remain confined to India's physical boundaries and began to expand their horizons—like Ajgar Juraat, played by Amrish Puri, in *Vishwatma* (1992), and Pasha, played by Kiran Kumar, in *Khuda Gawah* (1992). The one villain of the 1980s that broke the mould and created a

new genre of movie-making in India was that of Anna, played by Nana Patekar, in *Parinda* (1989). Vidhu Vinod Chopra's second feature film brought the ganglord down from the high echelons of style and panache, and nailed him for good to the ground of reality. Gone were the urbane clothes and homes, the nightclubs and female arm candies, the stylishly-dressed henchmen and fancy cars. What emerged was an underworld don with a brooding, impenetrable face, a sharp streak of lunacy, and a deep fear of fire. Where Teja and Loin had amused the audience with their heavy dialogues, Anna sent a cold shiver down their spine with his manic laughter.

Although Ram Gopal Varma's *Satya* (1998) is often hailed as the first film that portrayed Bombay's crime world in a realistic manner, it was *Parinda* that had taken the first step in that direction. What Varma succeeded in doing—through his many films about the city's underworld—was to create a hero out of the ruthless ganglord; the hero who was no longer shackled by issues of morality and ethics,

criminality and corruption; a hero who was as bad, if not worse, as all the villains of yesteryears in his actions and thoughts, but remained a hero by virtue of being the protagonist. The villain-as-the-hero theme has been amply explored in films such as *Company* (2002), where Ajay Devgn plays a gangleader called Malik, *Sarkar* (2005), where Amitabh Bachchan plays a Vito Corleone-like character called Subhash Nagre, and *Gangs of Wasseypur* parts 1 and 2, where Manoj Bajpai and Nawazuddin Siddiqui play criminals in the coal belts near Dhanbad. (See box.)

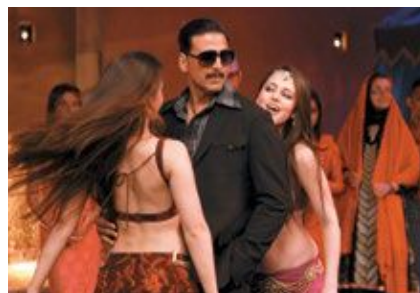
★ ★ ★

In 1993 was born a villain who did not have a fiefdom to rule over, a list of criminal activities and imprisonments to boast of, or personal grievances to avenge. He was simply obsessed with a woman. When Shah Rukh Khan appeared as Rahul in *Darr* (1993), he did what no other actor before him had done: Switch from being the 'good guy' to becoming the undisputed 'bad guy'. While in *Baazigar* (1993), too, he played what was touted as the 'anti-hero', it could still be argued that his character, Ajay Sharma, was seeking revenge against Madan Chopra (Dalip Tahil), who had wrecked Ajay's father's business empire—a much-beaten plot in Hindi cinema. In *Darr*, however, there was no such justification. Rahul was simply obsessive, scheming, violent and murderous.

Although the immense hype generated at that time around the concept of 'anti-hero' was to promote the film, the publicity was perhaps unintentionally prophetic. For what followed were several films where actors who had so far played heroes (and heroines) began to portray negative characters. Cases in point are Kajol playing the obsessed and murderous lover in *Gupt* (1997), Urmila Matondkar playing the psychopathic killer on the loose in *Kaun* (1999), Amitabh Bachchan playing the shapeshifting

killer in *Aks* (2001) and a vengeful bank manager in *Aankhen* (2002), Ajay Devgn playing a criminal ringleader in *Khakee* (2004), and Saif Ali Khan playing the scheming and manipulative underworld operative in *Ek Hasina Thi* (2004).

Although this could have been just a passing trend that was cashing in on the cult of the anti-hero, it proved to be more lasting than that. What this trend effectively did was erase the line that had so long separated actors into two broad categories: Those who played positive roles, and those



BAD, BUT GOOD

Gangster films such as **Once Upon a Time in Mumbai** (2010) and **Shootout at Wadala** (2013) are good examples of how ruthless criminals and killers have been made the 'hero' of the film. However, the villain-as-the-hero theme took on an entirely new persona with the **Dhoom** franchise, **Gangs of Wasseypur**, and films based on real-life underworld characters and killers. Through the three films in the **Dhoom** franchise, the villain—first played by John Abraham, then by Hrithik Roshan and then by Aamir Khan—simply kept growing bigger and badder, overshadowing the heroes (Abhishek Bachchan and Uday Chopra) till they were reduced to pitiful sidekicks. In the decades-long saga of **Gangs of Wasseypur** (2012), Ramadhir Singh (Tigmanshu Dhulia) and Sardar Khan (Manoj Bajpayee) are both ruthless criminals, with one vying for revenge on the other. Similar is the case in the sequel. Films that claimed to be based on real-life criminals—such as Anurag Kashyap's **Raman Raghav 2.0** (2016) and Prawaal Raman's **Main Aur Charles** (2015)—also put villains in the shoes of heroes by making them the film's protagonist.

who played negative roles. Although there are examples such as Arjun Rampal playing the namesake villain in *Ra.One* (2011), and Vivek Oberoi playing Kaal in *Krrish 3* (2013), it was producer Karan Johar's 2012 retelling of *Agneepath* that best exemplified this trend. The new script cast Sanjay Dutt as Kancha, earlier played by a very suave Danny Denzongpa, and introduced the character of Rauf Lala, played by Rishi Kapoor. Although Dutt had earlier portrayed thugs and corrupt policemen in films such as *Thanedaar* (1990), *Khalnayak* (1993), and *Eklavya* (2007), these were characters with redeeming, even likeable, qualities. Kancha was the embodiment of evil. He, quite literally, towered over Hrithik Roshan's Vijay Dinanath Chauhan in every way, almost reducing him to utter helplessness. If Vijay finally managed to overpower Kancha, it was simply because the script said so. The other big surprise that *Agneepath* held was Rishi Kapoor, who had played the loveable, good-natured lover, husband and father so far. But now, his Kohl-lined eyes shone with a menace never seen before.

It is as if established heroes and actors with chocolate boy images decided they had nothing to lose. And, of course, because being bad is fun. Villains have existed for the sole purpose of letting the hero be a hero. For what good is a hero, if the villain does not provide him with the opportunity to display his heroism? And although the villains of Hindi cinema have rarely got their due—Pran, however, is believed to have been paid more than Amitabh Bachchan for a period of time—they have been the ones who have made movie-watching fun and entertaining. They are the ones who brought in the glamour, the high-octane action and the final catharsis.

For, if Gabbar had never existed, Thakur would probably be leading an uneventful and sedate retired life in Ramgarh, twiddling his thumbs. 🌈



If you understood art completely, *it wouldn't be art.*

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Portraits From The Past

Lensman JH Thakker, a master of light and shadow, immortalised some of the leading film stars of his time at his still photo studio in Mumbai

CURATED BY MEXY XAVIER ★ TEXT BY NEERAJ GANGAL



PHOTOGRAPHER: JH THAKKER © VIMAL THAKKER / INDIA PHOTO STUDIO

The first decade and a half after India's Independence is widely regarded as the Golden Age of Hindi cinema. Film personalities were becoming the new icons of hope for an emerging nation. And one of those capturing these hopes and aspirations on film was photographer Jethalal H Thakker. A post-Partition refugee from Karachi, who served as a civilian photographer for the British army before Independence, Thakker set up India Photo Studio in 1948, next to Chitra Cinema in central Mumbai, a major film production hub back then.

Would-be-legends Raj Kapoor, Dev Anand, Dilip Kumar, Nargis and Meena Kumari, to name a few, often dropped in, either for personal photo shoots or to have publicity stills shot for photosets, showcards and posters.

SURAIYA

In this still, actor-singer Suraiya has been highlighted using 'rim lighting' (also called hair lights), a technique used to outline the subject

The camaraderie and comfort level is evident in the pictures he shot, as is his skill. Thakker was one of the first Bollywood photographers to employ chiaroscuro—a technique that plays with light and shadow to create a dramatic effect. With the imaginative use of 'dinky' spotlights, shadow-textured backgrounds, props and costumes, he presented his subjects with an air of glamour and dignity.

At a time when printing and film rolls were expensive, his son Vimal recalls that Thakker, who passed away in 2003, usually shot only one precise frame. He generally used a field, Graflex or Rolleiflex camera.

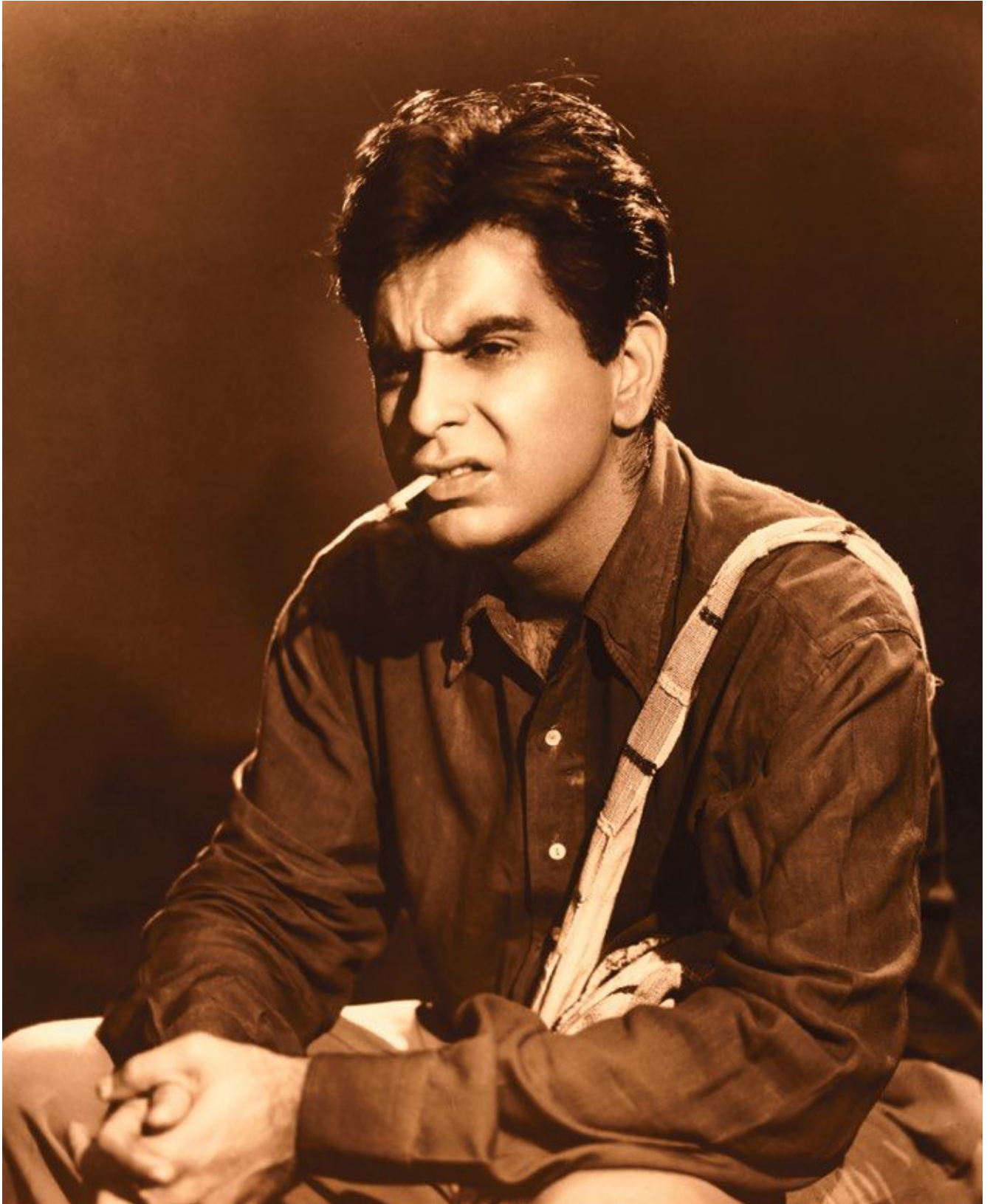
Forbes India spoke to senior journalist and film historian Rafique Baghdadi and Vimal Thakker for insights on the images.



RAJ KAPOOR AND NARGIS / A publicity still for *Chori Chori* (1956), one of the last films the popular pair appeared in together, that uses Thakker's signature low-key lighting



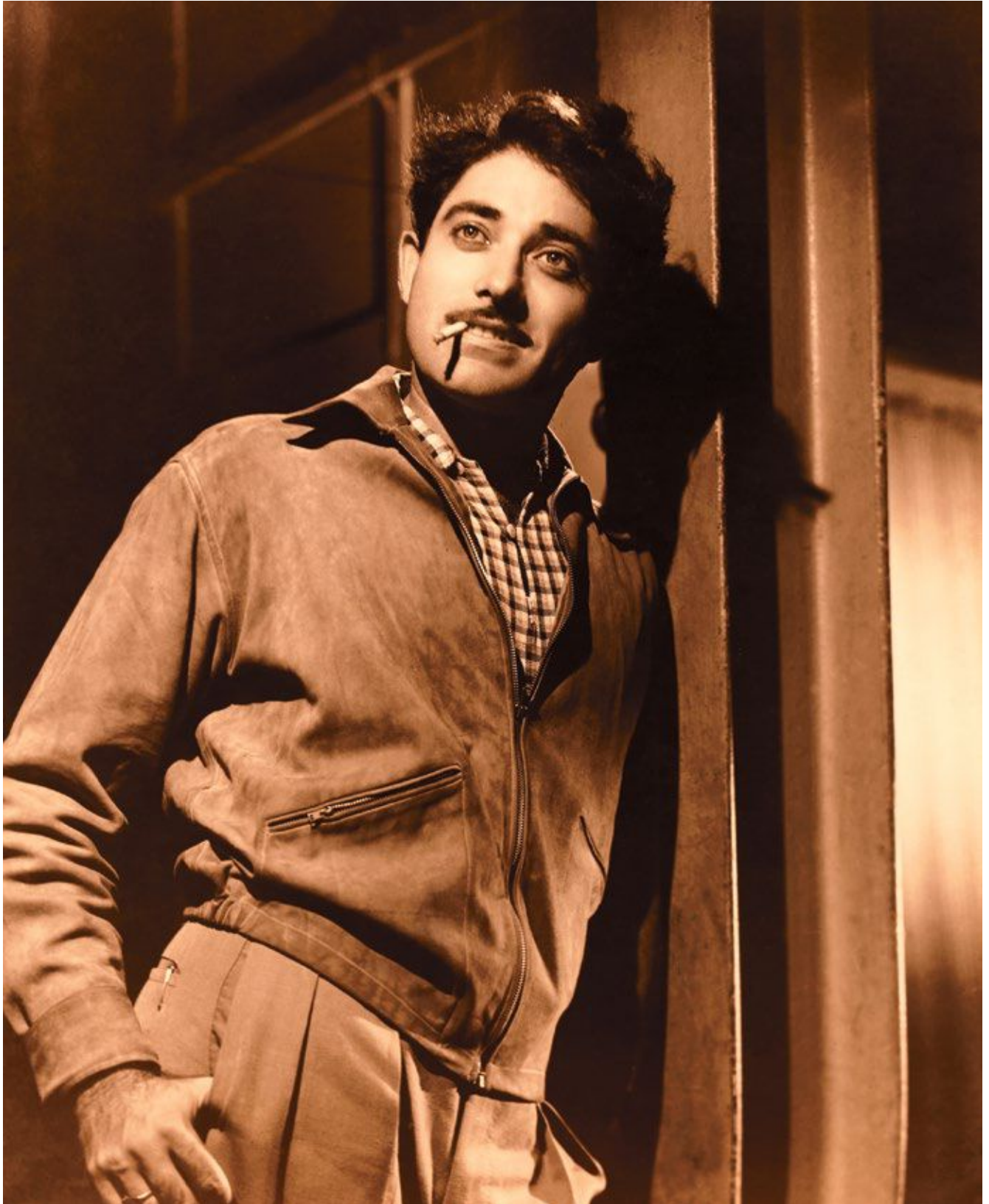
NUTAN / A publicity still for *Dilli Ka Thug* (1958). The lighting is such that it allows her image to be cropped along the silhouette for use in various publicity materials



DILIP KUMAR / For a publicity still for *Footpath* (1953). Interestingly, *Footpath* was the last film in which the thespian was seen smoking on screen



MADHUBALA / Madhubala was a frequent visitor to India Photo Studio. The foliage in the background was sourced from Chitra Cinema's garden, next to the studio



RAAJ KUMAR / A shot reminiscent of American film noir of the 1950s, where characters were often seen with a cigarette hanging from their lips

If you come to fame not understanding who you are, it will define who you are.

—OPRAH WINFREY



Fame itself... doesn't really afford you anything more than a good seat in a restaurant.

—DAVID BOWIE

If one has a good disposition, what other virtue is needed? If a man has fame, what is the value of other ornamentation?

—CHANAKYA

I spent so long studying really hard to become a fine actor, but threw it all away because I got the adulation and the fame so easily.



—MICKEY ROURKE

Oh how wrong we were to think immortality meant never dying.

—GERARD WAY

Don't confuse fame with success. Madonna is one, Helen Keller is the other.

—ERMA LOUISE BOMBECK

I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer.

—JIM CARREY

Fame means millions of people have the wrong idea of who you are.

—ERICA JONG

I don't think I realised that the cost of fame is that it's open season on every moment of your life.

—JULIA ROBERTS



Fame is empowering. My mistake was that I thought I would instinctively know how to handle it. But there's no manual, no training course.

—CHARLIE SHEEN

Fame is fickle, and I know it. It has its compensations but it also has its drawbacks, and I've experienced them both.

—MARILYN MONROE



BOWIE: LEONHARD FOEGER / REUTERS; SHEEN: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; WINFREY: ANDREW KELLY / REUTERS; ROURKE: MARIO ANZUONI / REUTERS; MONROE: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES / GETTY IMAGES



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