

“NO ART ON THE SMALL SCREEN!”

1 - Your upcoming television show attempts to dispel the negativity that prevails around the medical system. What makes you opt for such a subject, in a time when doctors are accused for commercialising their profession.

I'm an ardent fan of many of the western television serials revolving around the medical field, in particular House M.D. and Emergency. Considering the level of medical illiteracy in India, there was a pressing need for a show which will enlighten the masses on health related issues whilst dealing with human drama. I am hoping that Roshani... will fulfil this niche.

The show attempts to map, in a very realistic manner, the family rift in the context of the medical field. The dilemmas such as whether the older generation's value based orientation is practical enough in the onslaught of the 'number games' of the competitive younger generation; whether patient care can be devoid of the market forces; whether personal-human approach to patients and the state of the art treatment in large hospitals are mutually exclusive... many such core layers will be handled by this show. Such a different, yet entertaining pursuit exploring contemporary predicaments being supported by Life OK channel is a pleasant surprise. Moreover, the creative team approached me to get an understated texture of the show which in itself was a very *hatke* vision. I sincerely hope that this variant idea would not get diluted once the serial goes on air.

2 - You've a had a strong association with television since Kachchi Dhoop in 1981 and last made an appearance in Kareena Kareena which was a decade ago. What kept you away from television for so long?

My relationship with television, both as an actor as well as director has been only with Doordarshan where we were never forced to change the content or 'the tracks' as is called now, and the number of episodes used to be fixed. My directorial ventures such as 'Kachchi Dhoop', 'Naquab', 'Mrignayani', & 'Krishna Kali' in Hindi, and 'Paool Khuna' in Marathi are still fondly remembered by the audience. Apart from a cameo in Kachchi Dhoop, my performances in 'Aa Bail Mujhe Maar' & 'Ados Pados' were extremely popular. (Incidentally, I marvel at the journalistic ingenuity of telling me repeatedly that I had acted in a serial titled Kareena Kareena?!! I'm clueless about that show!)

Despite several offers from many teams, I've never accepted any since I genuinely dislike the inferior content as well as the stylistic deficiency prevalent in the contemporary small screen world. The glitter and the opulence is anaesthetic, the shot taking & the visual tussle

in between close-ups is vulgar, the content and the plotting is hideous, the performances are atrocious. **There is NO ART on small screen!!!** Besides, from my friends, I hear the horror stories of their plight and the bonded labour scenario in the daily soap shooting set-up. I've never succumbed to such compulsions. Work ought to be fun and rejoice. The *Roshani* team not only accepted all my terms but they also implement those. The entire crew is very professional and friendly. The taking is film-like with lovely camera angles, soft lighting and without any *gali-galoch*. I will continue working with them till the role remains unadulterated.

3 - Your daughter Shalmalee too is a renowned doctor. Did her being in the profession propel you to take up this show?

(Thank you for asking me to ignore this question! It would have been embarrassing for you, to say the least. She is a doctorate of English literature and has no connection with the medical field.)

4 - You're known to be a method actor. What preparations did you do before the shoot for it began?

Since I'm not from NSD or FTII, I don't know much about method acting. I learnt acting from the theatre legend Satya Dev Dubey. I was privileged to act in films with every top director as well as technician in our country and honed my craft with their guidance. Even today, I am a disciplined actor who firmly believes in getting my brief, inputs about the character from the writer & director. All that I do is to surrender to the director and also try to satisfy his need to the best of my ability. Since I am playing a doctor's role, I expect the team to tutor me about the mannerisms of patient care etc. I hope there won't be any faux pas.

5 - Television over the years has evolved and so has their working pattern. How do you see yourself fitting into this new age working pattern, which also sometimes compromises on the quality of the content to adhere deadlines.

Not only television, everything in showbiz has changed over the years. It has become much larger, more technically equipped and certainly far more glossy! At the same time, I am happy to see a much better professional approach towards the work ethics today. In those times, I asking for a final bound script was blasphemous! Today it's a norm. I also used to stick out as a sore thumb for reporting on time; today it's done routinely. But on the other hand, the crass commercial approach dominating the majority mind sets has resulted in decline of thought provoking, better content on television. I'm disappointed with the complete absence of brilliant content over all these years! Hence, I have always kept myself away from this world.

6 - What's your opinion about the content on television today?

I have answered it in 2 & 5.

12 - What message should we draw out from your new show, 'Roshini'?

I think audience should look for an interesting family drama in the context of medical profession. People should also notice the non-filmic set design along with the sensitive, film-like shots and visuals of the serial.

10 - A Cineplay version of Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe is being made by Subodh Maskara which stars Nandita Das in the lead. Do you think classic should be left alone and not tampered with?

I'm not only aware of this exercise but was also approached by Nandita to play Kashikar. With everything getting on the digitized platform, such endeavours are inevitable and also will help reach the younger and newer audience across borders.

11 - In your opinion should actors who have achieved super stardom needs to contribute more in serious cinema for its growth, stability and prosperity?

Again your usage of 'serious cinema' is undefined. I assume that you mean 'low budget, good cinema with good content'! Of course they should! I am proud of myself for making a musical like 'Thodasa Roomani Ho Jayen' with Nana Patekar in a sensitive, non-villainous role. All established stars should entertain even the first time directors with excellent scripts. Suppose they do, the problem will be their inability to surrender their stardom and to do what is envisaged by the director as per the script. Unfortunately the stardom brings more insecurity which incapacitates them from exploring newer genre and fresh idioms. I saw this happening with Shahrukh during Paheli. He had loved the script and the role. He never interfered with the script. He as a producer went out of his way to satisfy my vision. However, the non-mainstream elements in the film were discomfiting to the mainstream coterie which ridiculed his attempts to support the low budget film. I consider Shahrukh as a brilliant actor who is capable of performing superb roles with tremendous variation. Unfortunately, by shying away from Paheli, he has deterred many to explore him in different roles.

Incidentally, today (25th June) is the 10th anniversary of Paheli! Hence, this nostalgia!

9 - In an age of multiplex, viewers aren't willing to spend money on parallel cinema as they are usually perceived as dark and sincere. Do you think this perception must be changed in order to generate their interest, as serious messages can also be delivered in an entertaining way.

Your premise is wrong, and also the usage of the phrase 'parallel cinema' is undefined. In this age, viewers are indeed welcoming "good, non-mainstream and different content". Many examples can justify this claim. Pan Singh Tomar, Kahani, Wednesday, Lootera, Udaan, Gangs of Wasseypur, Peepli Live, Ship of Theseus, Margarita With A Straw, etc were loved by the audience. All these are parallel cinema. In fact the experiments done by Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap, Vikramaditya Motwani, Neeraj Pandey, Rahul Dholakia within the mainstream idiom, are commendable. Where you differ with me, are my parameters of success or the magnitude of revenue gathering. If 100 crore is the only bench mark of success, I'm sorry there is something seriously wrong with our perception. If a low budget film which has given exciting content and/or without using any mainstream gimmicks, collects three times more money after recovering its cost, it is indeed a successful film. Why should you expect a wind fall??? Such a small film cannot survive the multi crore publicity compulsions and also a wide release cost. Obviously, it will impact its collection but does not mean that the audience did not like it or spend money on it. A film's success ought to be judged by its critical acclaim, audience patronage and fastest recovery of its cost with maximum overflow in proportion to its investments. I like the fresh attempts by newer directors. I only hope that there are more and more adventurous and strong producers who will support such films.

7 - Movies like Masaan and Qissa have been widely appreciated in the recent past. Do you feel that parallel cinema has finally begun to get its due.

I have answered this above.

8 - Any plans to direct a film or television in recent future?

No. Past few years, the changing times have alienated me from making films... and I have found consolation in the blank canvas. All what I've been doing for last one year was to paint... cajoling my fingers to be supple and propelling some courage to face an empty canvas! I am happy to be back where I began my creative pursuits!!!