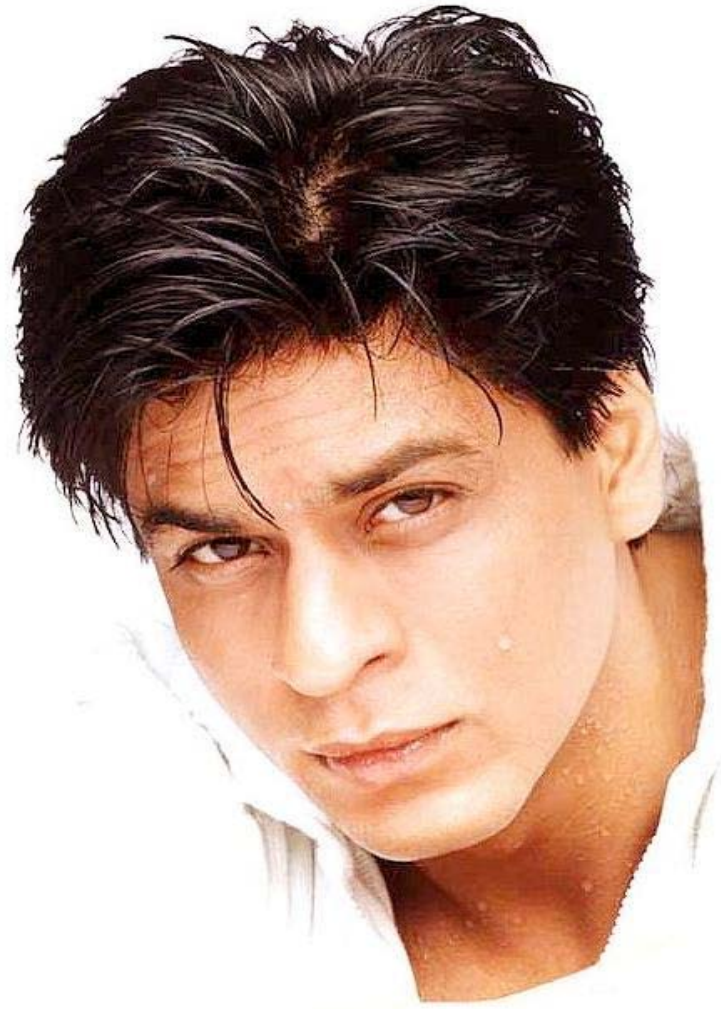


The Autobiography
Of
Shah Rukh Khan



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A Legend Is Born

On 2nd November 1965 a normal occurrence happened at the Talwar Nursing Home in New Delhi. Just like many newborns, I was born with the umbilical cord entangled around my neck. A nurse said that it was by the blessings of Hanuman and that I would be a very lucky child. I don't know if I believe in it but it is the one thing I was told by my parents about my birth that I remember.



We lived in Rajinder Nagar, I even remember the house number it was F-442. I have vague memories of my playschool, I think it was called Tiny Tots and was right next to our house.

After playschool I began my formal education at St. Columba's High School, New Delhi. It was near Gole market, run by Irish brothers who believed in discipline and a very high standard of education.

I can recall my first day and the teacher who interviewed me, Mrs. Bala, asked me to tell her what my father's profession was. And at that point my father had a transportation business, I had seen him dealing with tempos, trucks, etc. I believed anyone having anything to do with vehicles was a driver. So I replied that my dad was a tempo driver. Mrs. Bala told me that I had very cute dimples and then asked me to kiss her. That was my first kiss. Oh yes, and I was admitted to the school.

We were given black and golden stars for our behavior and test results. Five black stars meant lying across Mrs. Bala's lap and getting spanked three times, I think. Being quite naughty I was spanked a lot. I wish the same treatment was meted out to me even now. Looking back one realizes that what one thought punishment was actually quite pleasurable.

Overall my early years of schooling were quite wonderful. I had my share of spanking, and was often made to stand in the corner with my finger on the lips. I was forced by my teacher to learn how to swim by being thrown into the water and expected to survive with gallons of water in my stomach, eyes and ears. Till date I hate swimming and my teacher for subjecting me to this torture. But all said and done I love all my teachers. They were very kind and sweet. I guess the essence of one's life is developed during these formative years. And I feel I had the best formative years because of the nice teachers I had.

Here's to all of them good morning ma'am and thank you ma'am.

Incidents & Accidents

One important turning point in my life occurred because I was very bad in Hindi. I used to get 2 or 3 on 10 and always failed in this subject. Once, my mother told me that if I got full marks in

Hindi she would take me to see a Hindi film in the theater. I had never been to a movie hall before. So I stayed up all night and studied my butt off and managed to get full marks and my mother took me to see my first Hindi film, in a theater.

Two things happened because of this incident. One, I became quite the Hindi pundit and later always did very well in Hindi. And secondly, I got the feel for Hindi films. My command over the language helps me immensely to essay my roles in films today. The moral of the story is, if your mom tells you to study hard, do it. You may just become a film star and your education will help you one helluva lot. But if your mother is insisting on anthropology or biochemistry or perhaps aromatic therapy, then ignore her.

I remember sitting on the wall and blowing flying kisses to the schoolgirls passing by. Once a girl came complaining to my dad but my father was sure that it could not be me as I was too young. He made the girl wait so that she could see me and realize that it was the neighbor's son who was teasing her and not me. But to my father's embarrassment I walked in without my pants on and on seeing the girl blew her a flying kiss and told my dad that this was my sweetheart. This was the first and last girl I ever made a pass to.

St. Columba's School

Right or wrong, east or west, my school is the best. St. Columba's was a strict disciplinarian school run by Irish brothers. One could not wear the wrong uniform or grow their hair beyond a certain length. Many a times I had to get my hair cut in front of the whole assembly of students early in the morning. The barber used to be from a nearby street-side shop who hadn't bathed or brushed his teeth. He was as sorry to be there as I was to be sitting on his uncomfortable chair. And before beginning his hack job, he would ask if I wanted a Dharmendra or an Amitabh cut. By the time he was through, I just hoped I didn't look like a porcupine or a pineapple. My hair never recovered from these frequent attacks. This truly is the secret of my hairstyle, if one can call it that.



I was quite a good student, though I never studied throughout the year. The only time I studied was the night before the exam, when I wouldn't sleep a wink and go straight for the exam. I did rather well and this gave me the opportunity to do a whole lot of interesting stuff in school.

In School

My favorite soccer stars are Socrates, Pele, Maradona and Mattheus. And I loved Aslam Sher Khan and wanted to be like him and represent the country.

Electronics was my favorite subject at my A levels, and I think I got the highest marks in it when I passed out.

Mathematics was my weakest subject in school and I still have a problem with numbers. So much so if someone tells me a phone number I have to ask for it several times before I can write it down on paper. I even forget my office and residence phone number.

English, and especially Shakespeare, was my other favorite.

Mumtaz

Mumtaz (Actress)

Mumtaz was my absolute favorite. We used to listen to the radio at night and this is when all my dancing abilities were best showcased. One had to just tell me that the song on radio was from a Mumtaz film and I would move 20 frames per second, like the way people move in the old Charlie Chaplin films.

I loved the way she moved her hips. I think nobody in this world can be as beautiful a sight as she used to be. She was sensual, innocent, naughty and very energetic, all at the same time. She was the first personality I mimicked. I loved to walk like her and dance like her.



Usually actors have very important personalities and performers as their idols. Mine was Mumtaz. Not to say that she was unimportant or not special. What I mean is that for a guy she was an unconventional role model. To me she was the single most important cause of my tilt towards anything that had vaguely to do with the performing arts.

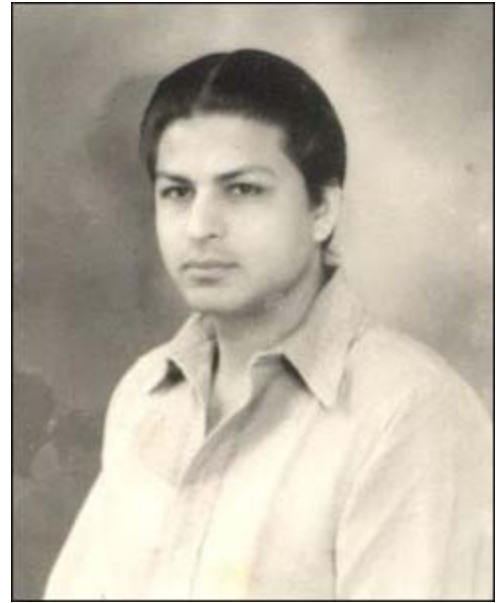
My favorite song used to be from a Shammi Kapoor film, Brahmachari. Its lyrics still intrigue me: “Chakke pe chakka, chakke mein gaadi, gaadi pe nikli apni swaari...” Anyone who can explain the meaning of “chakke” to me, please send me an e-mail.

My Father

My father, **Mir Taj Mohammed**, was 10 years older to my mother, **Fatima**, and therefore much older to me. I remember him as a gentle giant – 6’2” tall with typically Pathan good looks, grey eyes and brown hair. But he was very well-read and well educated too. He did MA, LLB and knew six languages – Persian, Sanskrit, Pushtu, Punjabi, Hindi and English. He was, in his time, the youngest freedom fighter.

Even today whenever I bump into people who knew him, they talk about his sense of humor, and how he was a gentleman. And I remember the same about him. I wish I could be like him or bring up my child in the same way that he brought us up but I don't know if I will be able to because I am more temperamental than he was.

Somehow, my sister and I listened to him more than we listened to our mother. He was gentler than her. Of course, my mother loved us too but with my father we were friends. We used to sit for hours and listen to him talk on various topics. We used to call each other 'yaar'. I did call him 'papa' but yaar was used more often. Probably because he never cajoled or pampered us like people do their children but instead, always treated us as individuals, as adults. It was always one-to-one.



My father had a great sense of humour. We used to stay on the top floor of our building. Once, an old couple staying on the ground floor complained to my father, "Upar se cheese neeche aati hai." My father laughed at the comment and said, "Newton discovered that long ago."

In another incident, I was teasing a south Indian girl next door by blowing up their letter boxes. Her mother came home to complain and my father opened the door. The lady could not speak Hindi well and she said, "Aapka ladka ladki ko chedta hai meri." He replied, "Is she as pretty as you are?" She said, "What?" My father repeated his question. She replied, "Yes" My father said, "Then I don't blame him. If I had met you earlier even I would have been after you!" She smiled.

Besides his sense of humour, another quality I have imbibed from my father is his passion for reading. My father was a very good human being. I try to imbibe that too. I think I have inherited his goodness, though not to the full extent. The only aspect I didn't inherit was his love for gardening. My father even enjoyed talking to flowers but I have never done that. Perhaps when I am older.

I have definitely inherited my absent-mindedness from my father. I have seen him walk out of the house in just a shirt, shoes, socks – without his pants! He would eat his breakfast in the toilet! He would just forget he was in there. I too forget names, I forget to eat sometimes. But where work is concerned I do not forget anything.

My father never screamed or shouted at my sister and me. My mother did that; even fulfilling his quota. He never hit us but scolded us once or twice. Even if he got serious for even a second, it would scare me but after a while he would laugh it off. He once told me, "Shit, I can't even get angry with you."

In another incident, he told me, "Look, your sister is now supposed to be studying. So I will go into her room and throw the novel she is reading, out of the window. You go and get the novel

back.” He went, shouted at her and threw the book out. It was a joke and his method to tell us what is to be done.

My dad had a hot temper, not like an Army officer, but he liked correct behaviour. He didn't expect me to get up and touch the feet of elders but a certain kind of respect had to be shown towards them. Even today if an elderly person is seated next to me, I cannot keep my feet on the table. He never told me not to do so. His persona made me realize that I should not do it.

One routine which formed on its own was my dad giving me milk in the morning. It started because my mother could not get up sometimes. Then it became a routine. He would warm the milk and give me but later decided against it. So every morning we would we would walk to the Mother Dairy booth (a milk dispenser typical of Delhi). He would insert a token and I would cup my hands and drink milk directly.

I never got irritated or angry with my father. In fact, I used to love watching my father come home in the evening. My dog would react to him when he was 15-20 feet away from the house. I would rush down take his bag and walk back with him or pick him at the bus stop if he came in a bus or car.

Because of my father, every activity in the house, every duty, was transformed into a game. He charged us with the idea that we were doing such-and-such work because we were having fun. Because of this, I find work fun. That is why, I guess, I'm so energetic. I enjoy small things like sitting and watching a squirrel climb a tree or sleeping on the terrace in the Delhi summers. It becomes a game for me – the best thing that could happen to me that day.

At four years of age, my father taught me that I alone would have to deal with my screw-ups. I was very naughty in school and in the colony and I regularly got into trouble. Once, during a game, I threw a rock at a boy called Tara. The rock bounced on the ground, hit his face and broke his teeth. He began bleeding. We were very scared. I had not done it on purpose. The boy's father got drunk in the night and armed with a knife, came knocking on our door. As soon as my father opened the door, that man began abusing and screaming: “Your son hurt my son. I'll kill him.”

He was a rowdy kind of a guy but my dad asked him if he wished to speak to me! Imagine, there was this drunk person with a knife in his hand and my father sent me to speak to him! My father closed the door, came inside and questioned me, “Shah Rukh, have you hurt somebody?” I said, “Yeah.” My mother was hyper but he coolly said, “He is standing outside, go deal with him.” I told Tara's father, “Uncle I am really sorry. I didn't mean to harm Tara. It just happened.” I was literally in tears. Of course he didn't mean to hurt me. My father had that much confidence in human nature, I guess. Dad later opened the door and asked if everything was sorted out. He told that man, “If you have a problem with me, you talk to me. If you have problem with my son, you talk to him.” I could have taken my father's stand to mean that he didn't want to stand by me, but I realised that it was his very nice way of teaching me that if I got into trouble, I would have to sort it out myself.

My dad taught me that in the long run, honesty always pays. In my school, St Columba's, whenever we took a day off we had to submit a leave letter or we would get caned. My father never stopped me from doing anything. If I said, "I don't want to go to school today," he would say, "If you don't feel up to it, it's okay." And he would give me a leave letter next day.

One day, he called me and said, "Today you go to school and tell your teacher that you don't have any excuse for being absent yesterday. I used to be really scared of Brother Morris, our tall, well-built Irish teacher. When he caned us, it really hurt. I told him, "My father normally gives me the letter but today he didn't. Not because he did not want to but he said I have no excuse for not coming yesterday." Brother said, "That's the right attitude. At least you did not lie. You were honest." And he let me go. My father had seen the whole world and had wonderful experiences in his life. He had fought for the freedom of the country, joined Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, fought the elections against Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad and lost. He enjoyed the fact that he had lost even his zamanat, perhaps he was happy to lose to a great person. When he was 16 years old, he left his home in Peshawar and walked to Kashmir, India. He studied law in a girl's college, in Delhi. He had no place to stay, so he went to the principal, an Englishman and asked him to let him stay in the hostel. There he was the only guy. It was illegal. He said he pulled it off because he was a charming and decent guy.

After college, he did not become a lawyer because he felt he could not be totally honest with himself and others as a lawyer. He was offered many political posts as he was close to the Gandhis. But he did not accept any help. All his other friends became ministers and MLAs. But my father used to travel in a bus with his briefcase, though we were well-to-do. He was a very simple man and lived a simple life.

My dad dabbled in different businesses. He had a thriving furniture business. Then he was into transportation and had tempos and trucks in Gurgaon. That closed down too as most of his partners cheated him. He was too trusting and honest. This was before I was born so I don't know much about it. When I was born, he was going through a very low phase. Later, he went into restaurants and hotels. He did everything on his own instead of taking advantage of being a freedom fighter or utilising his political connections.

He died when I was 15. We went on a holiday. And going for a holiday with my father was not to enjoy your stay in luxurious hotels, sight-seeing and eating various delicacies. It means roughing it out. We went to Itanagar and drove in a jonga (a four-wheeler driven in Pakistan then) to Lahore. From Lahore we sat in really crowded tempo and travelled for hours to Peshawar. We stayed in a uncomfortable hotel as we had not made reservations beforehand. My father wanted to keep us in touch with reality. Even though I was educated in a sophisticated Irish School, I am down-to-earth. I have read varied books, done my Masters and am a star, but I feel in touch with reality. I don't think like a star and feel that I should not meet XYZ people. That has been imbibed from my dad.



My Mother

My Mother, on the other hand, wanted me to have all comforts. She bought me a car but my dad said, “If you have the money, get it.” He always taught me that one should do things on his own. Once I asked him whether I could travel 20 kms on cycle. He said, “Why ask me? If you think you can do it, go ahead. When I was your age I climbed Mt K2 without asking my parents.” He made me realise that material gains are more or less superficial. If you have them, very good, but if you don’t have them, then it is not the end of your life. He had seen both



sides of the coin. He had been well off and then the business was not good. He could survive, in either a bus or in a Mercedes. He was that kind of a person.

My parents never forced anything on to me. They told me, “Read the Quran if you feel like. Read the Gita and the Bible also.” I have read everything. All the religious festivals were to be attended only if I felt like. Like the Id namaz. It was never a compulsion that, “Oh God! I have to go and read the namaz on Friday.” I was very keen to do it. I find a lot of people saying, “Oh God! It’s rakhi today. I’ve to go home.” It was never like that with me. If it was Id, it was meant to be an enjoyable day off.

I find it very strange when I hear a parent saying, “Let’s have a discussion son on what you are going to be.” I think that very British, pompous and uncalled-for. It should happen naturally. I was never asked, “Which line do you want to get into?” I would never do that with my kid. If I said, “I want to be an engineer,” the reply would be, “Ok get into it.” I was never forced to handle my father business. My mother was running it after my father died. Eventually, I never ran the business. I would occasionally run an errand like going to the bank or whatever. We had a big business at that time. It was an oil company.

In the film line, he knew Dilip saab, Motilal and many others. In fact, he knew Anil Kapoor’s father very well. He used to tell me, “If you want to join films, I will tell SK Kapoor to make you an actor.” I remember they were launching Woh Saat Din at that time and my dad said, “If you ever go to Bombay, meet him.” I came and met the wrong SK Kapoor. Just recently, SK Kapoor saab gave me a few photographs of my father.

He told us, “Whatever you do, do it to the best of your capability.” That kind of concentration was taught to me. Also, due to the freedom I had as a child, I did not get into any bad habits. Even today, I don’t like to be told what to do, what not to do. I think you have to understand your responsibilities. Responsibility cannot be taught. I think taught responsibilities are too formal, too mannered. One should know he will be responsible for himself.

Very few people know I used to write what I thought were Urdu couplets. Coming from an Islamic family everyone around spoke in Urdu. My father would read out bedtime stories in Urdu and sometimes also recite the poems of Ghalib and Iqbal to us. I guess my interest arose in writing such couplets because of this. My father encouraged me to think of couplets and write these poems. He even made a book in which he would pen down all that I recited, in his own hand in Urdu. I still have it with me. It is one of my fondest possessions. When he died there was no one to pen down my poems in that book. I didn't really ever learn to write Urdu. I sometimes have friends who can read Urdu read it out to me. I find the couplets and poems very amateurish and childish. But all the same the book, which is known as a diwan in Urdu, is my fondest link with my father.

When my father died, I didn't cry. I thought it was heroic. I was one of the pall-bearers and thought I had become a little big man. But I felt cheated despite the fact that he had prepared me for his death.

Learning all along

Hans Raj College, New Delhi.

Graduation in Economic Honors

After getting so many awards in school I believed that I would get admission in the best college of Delhi. I did not want to continue with science and instead wanted to switch over to economics. That entailed a cut in my percentage and strangely, I hadn't scored well in my favorite subject, English. This is one of my life's greatest mysteries because I thought my English paper had been the best. In fact, boys who borrowed my notes on Shakespeare and studied Thomas Hardy from me got higher marks than I did. It was also the first lesson in life I learnt that one cannot be sure or confident about one's best efforts either. As sometimes your best is just not good enough. And that is one truth I live by even today. One should not get disappointed but try harder next time.



Anyway, I did not get admitted to the so-called best institute and the principal was rather rude to me when I showed him my awards and certificates. It was my first brush with the realities of the world. You are nobody in the larger scheme of things. The best student of the top school in Delhi was not good enough to be a part of the best college in Delhi.

I decided that if I was not going to get the best I would try and make best of what was being offered. I took admission in the first college that accepted me, and it happened to be **Hans Raj College, Delhi University**. I also shifted from science to economics. The logic being I wanted my education to be such that I could understand every page of the newspaper. I really enjoyed

the supply and demand theory and national income accounting. Also I made sure that the marks I got in my exams were comparable to the highest marks in the so-called best college of Delhi.

I continued playing football hockey and cricket in college. Though I wanted to pursue my interest in sports my back injury and an arthritis-ruptured right knee would not allow me to. This was the time when I also did my first T.V. series Fauji and Dil Dariya.

Teaching grounds

Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

I went on to do my Masters from the mass communication research center, Jamia Millia Islamia. This course claims to train you in filmmaking and journalism. I did my first year and was doing very well because I always wanted to make advertising films. Short films till date hold a strange fascination for me. So much to be said and such little time. Somewhat like life itself. Again the vice principal did not like the fact that I was dabbling with theater, television and production work for short films outside the college in my free time. He told me one day that since my attendance was not upto the mark he would prefer me not taking the final exams. Attendance was not the issue as I had done an extra project so I felt very disturbed. His logic was inexplicable. He felt everything was going rather smooth for me and I should get to face a few hardships. Being requested off the college was his way of preparing me for the real world. I packed my bags and decided I would learn how to make films and only go back to that institute when they called me to give a guest lecture on filmmaking. I am still working towards that.



So much for my education. All in all I did learn to read the newspaper from cover to cover. I also learned that if you want to learn about anything, find books on the subject and try and understand them yourself. Do not ask others to teach you. If after trying sincerely, you still don't, then ask for help. Also read books on all subjects, even the ones you are not interested in. Education to me means being aware of everything that happens around us. That's all.

The Beginning

Vivid Bharti (India's 1st Radio Channel)

I started showing my inclination towards anything remotely connected with acting at a very early age. I remember we had an old radio, I think it was called a radiogram in those days. It weighed kilos and I still wonder why the modest 'gram' is attached to its name. Television wasn't a way of life then. I am talking about the early seventies, when the



refrigerator was not kept in the kitchen but instead held center stage in the living room. Our main source of entertainment used to be this boxy and knobby radio. My parents would put on Vividh Bharti and sit around it in the evenings to listen to songs and the news. Once the news was over I usually took over. I loved to dance to the music. My parents would turn up the volume and I would do some really frantic dances. My dance was a cross between the twist, the tango and an acute epileptic fit. Lately I have seen this kind of dance in discos and Ricky Martin videos. Sometimes, when I am alone I take pride in the fact that I was the inventor of this completely inexplicable set of movements. I used to dance best to any song that I was told was picturised on Mumtaz.

Circus

Circus was a great experience. I had never travelled so much in my life. We went all over Maharashtra and areas in Goa over a three-month period. I got to see life in the circus at close quarters. Here was an art form quite akin to mine and the performers showed the kind of dedication and hard work which one seldom sees in any other workplace. It involved an element of sports, which made me really identify with the whole set up. We would shoot at all odd hours in between the show timings. We would start when the circus packed up at about ten at night. We would continue shooting throughout the night till nine in the morning, when the shows would start again.



Life in a circus was gruelling. It was a common sight to see an eight-year-old kid holding his broken arm and being taken away from practice. Girls would stay separately and boys would be in a different corner of the dera, as the quarters were called. Girls were allowed to leave the premises only once a week and three girls went at a time with a headmistress to buy vegetables. Love stories or love between the performers was a strict no-no but they still found very interesting ways of having affairs and romances. An item where a girl would balance a little boy and girl in a barrel, on her feet, was their love letters postal service. The little boy and girl would exchange love notes while inside the drum and carry it back to their quarters at the end of the show.

Also, the bathrooms had a common wall. So a method was devised vis-a-vis the matching couples would end up at the same time on the either side of the wall and whisper sweet nothings to each other. All these wonderful moments under the same roof where the same people enacted death defying stunts every day. Their main aim in life was to become trapeze artists, that's all. Many died or got maimed in this quest. It was a common sight to see armless janitors working around. They were one-time lion tamers who got their arms bitten off. Now they knew nothing

else apart from performing so they stuck on, doing odd jobs here. Their training started early in life, and by time they grew up the only thing they knew were scary stunts. It is a lot like an actor, once an actor always an actor. I think this is where it set in my heart that I would also pursue my career in the same vein. Not to think of an alternative, just work towards being an actor. I wanted to fly, free as a bird, not bound by any consideration, but the independence of expression – I wanted to be a trapeze artist also. I learnt the maxim of acting from my time spent in the circus: “Ho gaya to kartab, gir gaye, mar gaye toh haadsa” – If you can pull it off, it’s a performance, if not it was just an accident, try and do it again and again till one day you die.



It was with this training from greats, these lessons in acting and performing from some wonderful co-actors and friends and a lot of energy and hope that I armed myself with, that I decided to work in films.

Dil Dariya

This serial was based in Punjab. It was a story of a Sikh and Hindu family who are neighbours and best of friends. The strife in relationships occur within this loving atmosphere because of the prevailing tensions in Punjab. The serial was directed by perhaps one of the best directors in our film industry, Mr. Lekh Tandon.

It was a major learning experience for me. The serial was highly emotional and required a lot of crying and heartfelt emotional acting. It became quite an exercise for me to relate to absolutely basic Indian emotions coming from a rather westernized school of acting. Mr. Tandon, or Lekhji, as I call him, really helped me a lot to just get over the inhibitions and relate to a louder set of emotions and overall acting style which was required for the role.

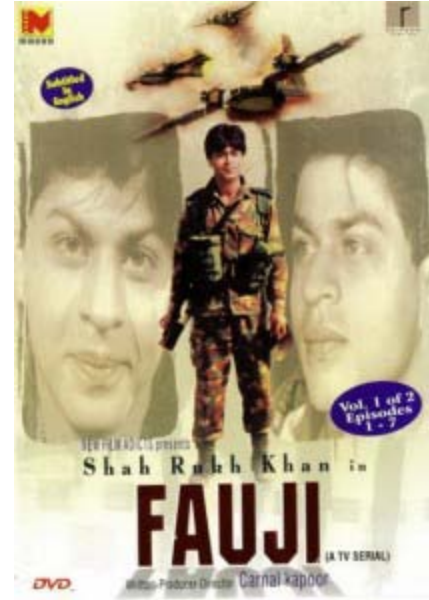
Fauji

Fauji (TV Series 1988)

Fauji was based on a set of young jawans and their personal relationships and problems in the army. Its main thrust was youth. The Colonel himself was a very jovial and fun loving person. He did not believe that army should be shown as a serious outfit of angry soldiers fighting. He wanted everyone to identify with the characters and feel that anyone could be a part of the army. He wanted to portray a side which would inspire people to join the army and think of fighting for the country a matter of honour, without getting alienated from reality. He was quite a visionary, I think. He managed to create a young, upbeat atmosphere around the entire army backdrop. Nobody since then has been able capture that kind of mix between youth and the army. I think

that in essence this was also the reason for my rise to popularity, I was amazed at the way people started recognizing me on the streets. At that time I had just joined college and honestly it was quite a thrill to have become a sort of a celebrity. I think lots of people in Bombay also noticed me on this serial and I started to get offers for movies. This was when I first saw the smiles that I could bring to the faces of people when they saw me on the roads.

An interesting aspect of working in Fauji was the physical training we got from the police and the army. The best part was when we were made to train for the parachute jumps. The training entailed practicing swinging, taking on positions while descending in the air, etc. The training culminated in a free fall of about 80 feet, with only a small wire attached to a pulley. This contraption, I think, is called the fan descender. When my turn came to jump the instructor told me to land with my body facing the crew standing below. He felt I would be so scared by the time I landed that I would pee in my pants. Well I did the jump... and ended facing the camera crew. No Problem. Later on, I went on to do jumps from fifteen-twenty storeys in my films with the same kind of contraption, the most recent one being for Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani. This is a case in point that no experience that you have in life can ever be wasted.



Both Fauji and Dil Dariya were made in Delhi. They got a very high rating and I was being recognized as a well-known TV star. Around the same time there were some other very nice serials like Nukkad, Tamas, Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi and Buniyaad being made. All these were made in Bombay and obviously had bigger production values than the ones made in Delhi. I had been offered a few films from Bombay, but my mind was not set at that time. I just wanted to act and I was very happy with my theatre and serials. At this time I got an offer to work with a Bombay based serial production house. The production was called Iskra Rogopag and had its helm Saeed Mirza, Kundan Shah and Aziz Mirza. They were big names on television and also in films. Kundan Shah had already made one of my favorite films, Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron. I was offered a two-episode part in their serial, to be directed by Vikas, another very famous director, and was quite delighted. I was on the next flight to Bombay, hoping to learn in the great city of Bombay. The serial was also coincidentally called Ummeed.

My first day's experience was quite interesting. Before this, all the work I had done was with a group of youngsters in Delhi. There used to be a camera and a recorder and it was shot in available light outdoors. Suddenly, I was exposed to huge lights with strange names like HMI and Baby. It was quite a shock to hear a lightman yell out "Baby ki mundi kaat ke laa", which meant bring the light, which was called the Baby, without its stand.

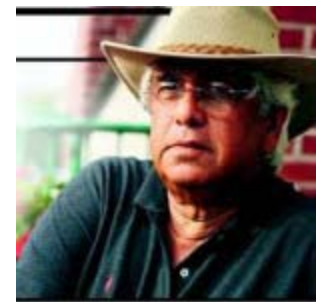
There was online editing and playback songs, all new to me. Everything was very professional and large. And yes, there were retakes. Normally in Delhi one retook a shot only when one messed up the lines, but here, just to get the performance right, Vikas would have fifteen retakes. I remember the first day after pack up I had a long chat with myself. It seemed to me that I was

the worst actor on earth because I had to do one shot so many times. It seemed like a great let down from my starry Fauji days. I felt I was not cut out to be an actor. Vikas sat with me and convinced me that this whole exercise is not only because of me but he also needed it sometimes to get his shot and conception right. He was really sweet about the whole thing.

I write about this because sometimes actors do begin to feel that they know everything, and suddenly you realize that acting is something that keeps on growing as much as you want it to. If I had stopped believing in myself then, I would have never grown. You have to believe that every time you express yourself, something new is to be learn't... the process never stops till you stop acting.

Actually most of the early TV I did was by default. Lekh Tandon had originally cast an actor by the name of Raja Bundela to play the part which I finally did in Dil Dariya. The serials of Iskra Rogopak had an in-house hero in Pawan Malhotra. Normally he would be cast for the roles in Ummeed and later on Circus, but he was very busy with Saeed Mirza's film Bagh Bahadur, so the roles came to me. Somewhere down the line, like I said, what you are meant to be happens to you somehow or the other. Most of the film offers I got were because people were beginning to see me on the TV playing roles which could fit in the mould of a Hindi film hero. Actually the serial that made me popular as a hero was Circus.

While working on Ummeed I got very close to Kundan's and Aziz's family. I started staying with them in their house. His wife and children became like a family to me. They were really nice to me and I started to feel like I have someone of my own in the big bad Bombay. Aziz is like a father to me. And while working on Ummeed he asked me if I would like to work on a 19-part serial based on the life in a Circus. By now I had been exposed to the high standards of work that Iskra Rogopak followed. I am not saying that Delhi serials were not good but it was a different ball game in Bombay. Everything was bigger and better... it was more like making films. I said yes to the offer and was soon travelling all over India with Apollo Circus to shoot the serial.



I believe

Some felt my looks were not adequate to make it as a romantic hero. One producer of mine still insists that my, - hair is like a bear's. I never felt bad about what they said. Because I believed. I believed that I would finally look my part in my films. I knew that I am no Greek God in the looks department, but I thought I would project an inner beauty on the screen which people would be able to see and understand. Even now I am not a vain person, because I firmly believe that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. My mother thought I was very good looking. I wish that



producer could meet up with her and she'd show him who looked like a bear just before she hung him on the clothes line to dry.

I believe that when you are in love, your partner is the most beautiful person in the world. I believe I can have a love story with my audience. I can love them and love them a lot. Even then, I was sure that they would realize this love and love me back. And once they were in love they would find me nice, whether I was Adonis or not.

I believed that when my audience would come to see me I was not going to present to them a well-sculpted, well-groomed piece of wax. I would not and I could not. Instead I would hold up a mirror to them and show them how they would look doing what I was doing. I wasn't here to show off my talents and whatever I had in the looks department and ask for admiration and appreciation. I was here to ask for love. I was here to woo them not impress them. I was here to make them realize that I am just one of them, like them, except that my job puts me in different situations and stories. And if I was able to hold up this mirror to everyone I was sure my audience would appreciate me because they would reciprocate their love to one of their own, hair not withstanding.

I love advertising

If I were given a choice between watching a film or watching a collection of good ads, I would prefer to watch ads. I remember when I was in Delhi I used to go to an ad agency called Anthem, where my friend used to work as a copywriter. I would enjoy sitting in for the brainstorming sessions which involved watching the world's best ads. I would devotedly read Ogilvy & Mather. During my free time in college, I did production for a lot of ads. Like the KLM Royal Dutch Airlines campaign which introduced their Jumbo Carrier with the image of an elephant carrying cargo on his back. As a matter of fact, in college I took up Mass Communication just to make ad films. I did not want to make feature films. I think 30-second films are an art form, and an art form which is very difficult to master. Just like brevity is the soul of writing, I believe advertising is the soul of filmmaking. Even today, I really get excited when I see a well-made ad. Unfortunately, now that I have become a star, there's only so much that can be done with me as a model. You have to use the 'Shah Rukh Khan' element.



Most people don't know this, but I have done a television ad for Liberty shoes while I was shooting Fauji. I looked really ugly in it. All I did was to wear my Puma t-shirt and football shorts and jump. They are the first sports shoes made in India and I was their first model. The second ad I did a Pan Parag kind of product, but it never really took off in the market.

Then there were a lot of public service ads which I had done in Delhi during Fauji and Dil Darya. For one of these ads, I did my first stunt, and that too without an action choreographer. I collided into a car with my two-wheeler, and somersault onto the bonnet and went over the roof. The first

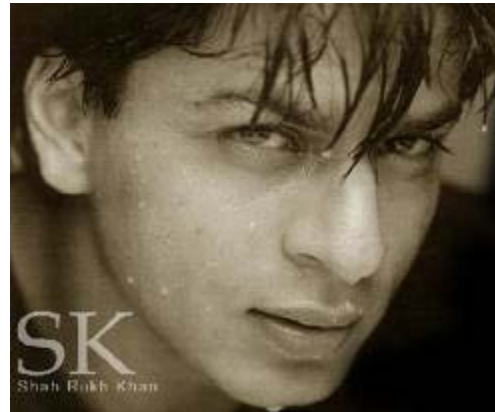
ad I did after I came to Bombay, the Tata Tea ad, helped me to buy a house. I did three films in three days with Prahlad Kakkar. They were produced by Pravin Nischol (who later produced English Babu Desi Mem).

They wanted me for the Pepsi ad at the time, but they did a survey and decided to take Aamir, who was already a star. Mukul had suggested my name because he felt that I would be the Next Big Thing. But after the survey, they didn't take me.

A brand named Shah Rukh Khan

As a star I believe I opened the gates for other actors to do ads. I brought respectability to stars doing ads by endorsing so many products: Pepsi, Mayur Suitings, Hyundai Santro, Snoodles, Cinthol soap, Bagpiper club soda, Clinic All Clear. And then of course I'm an Omega brand ambassador. I think I can be in the Guinness Book of World Records as the hero who has sold the maximum number of products: cars, soap, shampoo, noodles, watches, clothes – I have done it all.

People talk to me about overexposure but I don't agree. Many of the products I did were just being launched, so the ads would be taken off after a while. And more importantly, according to me, overexposure is not a dirty way to die. In the world of entertainment, not getting the recognition you deserve is worse than dying of overexposure. It is better to burn out than to rust out. It is better to be overexposed than be underrecognised. They say a star is someone who spends half his life struggling for recognition and the other half wearing dark glasses to avoid being recognised. I think that's highly stupid. I think there is nothing like overexposure, just as I think there's nothing like overacting.



I'm not at all ashamed of doing so many ads. The money I made from advertising gave me the scope to do the kind of cinema I wanted to. Though I have never done an ad only for money. For products like Pepsi or Omega, I just tell them to pay me as much as they can afford. Maybe they pay me less than the other film star models. I don't want to know what x,y,z is getting paid. I enjoy the product because my name is attached to it. I take great pride in the fact that I have done the maximum number of Pepsi films perhaps in the world. One model doing four different series of Pepsi commercials is quite a big achievement. And India is the country where Pepsi sells the most. I am very proud of the fact that I am attached to this product. It is my product.

Ad Philosophy

I do try to test a product before I decide to endorse it. But of course, I test a product only up to the level that an average person can do it. Like, I know Omega is a great product. Pepsi is a great

drink – I drink it all the time. In the Indian market, Clinic All-Clear is better than the others. I may not travel in a Hyundai Santro because of security reasons but if somebody were to ask me about the car I would say it's a good car because I have driven it. I don't do alcohol ads because parents call me up and request me not to do it, though I personally don't think there's anything wrong in advertising alcohol. I don't do cigarettes because my wife and my close friends tell me not to do it.

Ads have allowed me to do the kind of cinema I wanted to do. I am proud of all the ads and products that I have done. And I always wish from the bottom of my heart that the product I touch gets a fillip. Though I tell all of the advertisers that finally the product has to sell on its own strength. But I have good wishes for the product that signs me on. And I have done it with a good heartedness. It's never been only for the money. And I am loyal to the product mainly because I feel that if they believe in me then I should believe in them.

It actually makes no difference not to have Coke or not to drive a Maruti car. But I make sure that in my films, if a car has to be shown it should be a Hyundai and if a watch has to be shown then it should be an Omega. I do these things without them asking me to. Pepsi wrote me a letter of thanks because in one I said Pepsi was my favourite drink. I do it because I feel attached to the product. And if they can gain even one more customer then it would be really nice. And besides, they pay me a lot of money.



My Favourites

I have done a total of around 25 ad campaigns out of which five-six were quite good. The Pepsi 'dog' film was very good, the Pepsi film with Sachin was also tremendous. The Hyundai concept was very good when it was started, but it was a five-film concept, which was later reduced to two films. Omega is nice because it is very simple. It's an international style ad. I'm told the sales have increased a lot after I did the ad. And hearing that makes me feel really proud.

Arc Lights

When I set up Dreamz Unlimited the logic was to start a company where everybody was well-fed, got their money and were self reliant. The idea behind Arclightz was to have an equipment unit which would back up Dreamz Unlimited.

We saw things in perspective. The only way you can make a film without compromising is to make a film cheap. The simplest way to make a cheap film is to have a backend equipment company. So that's Arclightz. And how will Arclightz run? We will earn our equipment cost within three or four hirings and by the third film we will have no equipment costs. So that film will be cheaper. It will not be much cheaper but will at least save a crore of rupees on a seven crore budget.

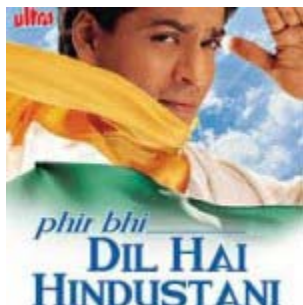
And then some of the set props we make can be used again. And everything is backend. We don't spend 35 lakhs on the publicity, we spend 25 lakhs and own the unit. Today if I buy publicity equipment, it will cost me 25 lakhs. But now that I have made the investment, I will have that equipment free to make the next film. So slowly, slowly there will come a time when I won't have to spend any money on too many things.

Going Digital

Internet is a medium which is there for the taking right now. Like television was at one point. I want to there when that medium happens. This time I won't let go of the opportunity, like I did with television. I have a camera and filmmaking equipment. Tomorrow, if I'm not making a film for 20 days and if this medium catches on, then I may make a 10-minute film for this medium. All the companies are finally going to tie up.

So then the entire unit may finally turn out to be self reliant. And mutually beneficial if all my partners think alike. It is not about just about making the Internet company successful. At the backend is software, which comes from the creative team at Dreamz Unlimited. For the equipment we have Arclightz. So all three should be interdependent which I believe is the correct model to have.

I see a huge studio with post-production facility on one floor and equipment storage on one floor and the office of the creative on top. So when you come in, you get the three mediums under one roof. And if that company can be a five-star hotel with a multiplex inside and three floors of office, it would be great. And that, without being pompous, is the dream behind SRKWORLD.



(Movies by Dreamz Unlimited)

Dreamz Unlimited

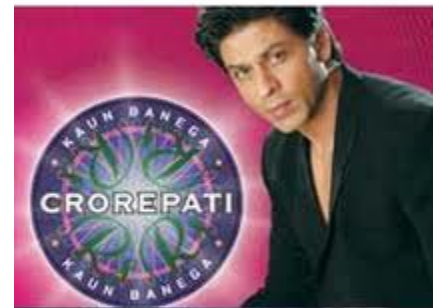
The logic of Dreamz Unlimited is not to make money but to make different films and to make sure not to lose money. We should not have to sell our houses to run the company. So when I decided to join hands with Aziz and Juhi for Dreamz Unlimited I was very clear that the company should be self-reliant. I was not aiming to be the biggest film producer in the world but I wanted that we should be able to make our kind of films without being dependant on producers who were not like-minded.

Our first film, Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani, was not as successful as we would have liked it to be, but the publicity has made us a name in the market within a year. Today, if I ask you what is the name of Sunny Deol's production company, you would probably not recall Vijeyta Arts. But everyone knows Dreamz Unlimited.

TV

KBC - 4 - SRK

Since I entered films through television, I do have a soft corner for the medium. A few years ago, I was trying so hard to convince all my friends to get a headstart in television but no one thought it was good idea. In fact, I had spoken of doing a game show, but everyone around told me that people won't accept a big screen star who appears on the small screen. So now, a little late perhaps, we are starting to provide software for television, though not necessarily featuring me. Once again, the idea is to make the kind of programmes that we would like to watch, programmes which don't insult your intelligence. We know we can provide content which is at least a little above the average.



Vision

My childhood was not a wealthy one, but a contented one. My family was not rich but then we never saw poverty either. Since my father had been a freedom fighter he had a lot of connections and he could have gone on to become a lawyer or a politician, but he tried to set up his own business. He tried his hand at many businesses but he was too nice to make money at



someone else's expense, so he was never very successful. He was never depressed or unhappy though. I call him the most successful failure.

At the Asia '72 Expo, he got permission to set up a chola batura stall. He hired a small staff to prepare the dish and it was a huge hit because it was right next to the Russian Centre, which had samples of mud from the moon. We made money from it but he distributed it amongst the people who worked with him. Then, he had a transport business but his partner cheated him. He had a refinery business. He also had a huge furniture business. My mother felt that he was too nice a man. He couldn't take advantage of people. He would just give out money. At one point he used to also run the canteen at the NSD. To date, actors like Mr. Raj Babbar and others owe him some money.

That's the way he lived and that's the nature I have too. But I also saw my mother suffer because of his niceness. I realised when my mother died that there is a reasonable essential quality about money. Since then I have always remembered one thing: you should do business to the extent that you have a position of choice. You get that position of choice when you fulfil your basic needs. It should not be that you don't marry because you don't have enough money. That is my basic line of thought when it comes to business. Even when I price myself, I don't go according to my stardom or the market rate. My price is based on how much I require. There are a lot of times when I have been underpaid because of this attitude and there are a lot of times when I have been overpaid too.

Secondly, at heart I'm a retailer. It should never be that you have to sell your personal belongings to make the business run. It should pay for itself. This is the basic premise of a retailer. If you open a shop it should pay for the electricity bill, the water tax and the staff salary at least. It may not make crores, but it should be self-sufficient.

Also, I believe that you should not take interest money. I believe in the Islamic principle that you should not take money if you don't deserve it. You should work for it. I don't dabble in shares. Nor do I dabble in speculation, lottery, gambling. I know it's an old-fashioned thought but I believe that money is no good money. I don't think I deserve it unless I have wrestled for it, boxed for it, run for it, made a painting for it I like that money.

These four principles cover my business philosophy: You should work for it, you should not lose money in any business, you should make enough money so that you are in a position of choice. And finally, if you start a business employing a lot of people, the end result, regardless of whether it made money or not, should be that all those people involved should be happy that they gave it a shot.

Many people say creative artists should not do business. But I don't do business at that level. Then again, a lot of people tell me I'm a very good businessman, but that's not true either. I believe in simplicity and clarity in business. I believe in honesty and quick decision. And I am ready to give more than what you expect from me. But what you promise should be delivered otherwise I feel cheated because I invariably give in more than what was negotiated for, whether it's a film, an ad, a TV serial or the production of a film.

Also it should have some newness to it. It should not be the done path. I have never taken amazing big risks in business as I have done in my career which also became a business at one time. It should be a little bit different from what others are doing. If I find that everyone is opening a toy store, I would like to open a toy store with one special toy which nobody has.

One of the greatest gifts of God to me is that I have never felt a lack of money. God has given me a lot of things – name, talent, fame, looks, success – but the one aspect he has given me for which I am most grateful is that I have never had to ask for money. Even in my growing years, I remember I once told my mother, “Mom, can I have a car?” not knowing whether she could afford one, but the next day she would tell me, “You know, Shah Rukh, while going through the accounts I realised that an FD is lying with me.” And from that money I would find a car standing outside the door.

When I wanted to buy a flat, Ratan Jain gave me cheque of seven lakh rupees. When I wanted to buy a bungalow, star prices suddenly shot up so much that I had the money to buy the bungalow. When I couldn't afford a Pajero, the dealer gave it to me at half the cost. It has always been like that. If I have wanted something it has always come to me. That's why I never wish for material things. Maybe God has said that He will grant my wish only 48 times in his lifetime so I don't want it to run out.

I have not been greedy for wrong things. But in a different context, I think greed is the mainstay of life. I believe that you should have a greed for knowledge, for money so that you can have choice, greed for love. Greed is the core of mankind's existence. Greed is what makes me what I am. I am greedy for doing more than what I am doing. I am geedy for more money too. I have enough money right now, but I will never let go of a chance to make money. Opportunity knocks only once. And if you don't let her in she walks past and knocks on the other door. Opportunity is like a lady. Dad used to say 'waqt ki choti aage hoti'. Opportunity is like a woman and her braid is in the front, so if you let her pass you can't catch hold of her. You have to hold her when she is facing you. So I believe in initiative and in striking when the iron is hot.

Before me, no actors and actresses used to do ads. Friends of mine like Anil Kapoor and Juhi used to say I was stupid. I take the credit for bringing honour to stars doing advertising. Now every star is doing it. No medium is too small for me. I will dance at weddings, I will dance on the street, on stage, on TV- Today, Amitabh Bachchan is the biggest star, thanks to the small screen.

I did ads because I need the money. And I find nothing wrong in having money. It is a proud moment for me when I earn money through my work. With the money I earn at weddings, I get the choice of not doing a film I don't want to do. Many actors have done 70 films out of which 30 are just for the money. Like, many actresses are stuck with films they did only for money.

I am very proud of the fact that I never did a film because I wanted money. Even Guddu was to be directed in a very fine way by Lekh Tandon, though it didn't eventually work out that way. I never did a film because I wanted to buy a house. A person who does a film because of money will dislike the film when it does not do well. This doesn't happen with me. There is not a single film from the 35 films which I dislike. As a matter of fact, I have made it a point not take money

when I do guest appearances. So that door of making money is closed for me. There is no easy money for me. That is my business philosophy. You should only earn money with your hard work.

Whatever business I do will be in some way connected to entertainment. I dream of one day owning a five-star hotel with a multiplex cinema and a bowling alley. I think there is some entertainment value attached to the hotel business. It forms a part of the entertainment industry. I like people to watch me shoot at Marine Drive and to have a smile. Similarly I would want people to come out of my hotel with a smile on their faces.

Love & Happiness

Shah Rukh Khan