

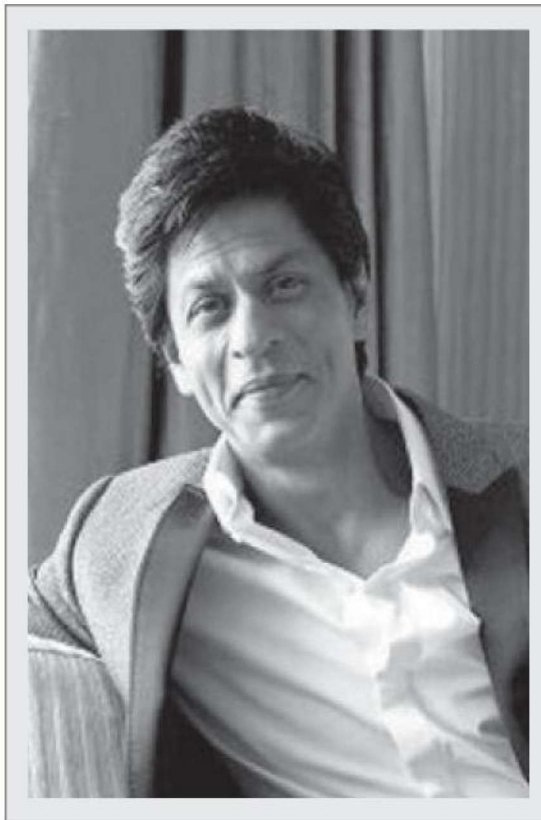


In Conversation with Mr. Shah Rukh Khan

Actor

YT: As a student you have excelled in academics and co-curricular. What inspired you to choose an acting career?

SRK: Actually I never chose acting, somewhere down the line acting chose me. It was always taught by my parents to me that there is nothing more important than a father and mother can give his or her child more than education. I am a big believer of 'education' and my belief is that whatever field finally comes your way, whatever aspect of life you choose as your profession; education is going to come in handy. Circumstances kind of led me to become an actor. I used to do a lot of theatre in school plays like all kids do. I was a sportsman, got injured, and because there was a lot of free time available, I was very depressed. I started taking more active participation in a theatre group called Theatre Action Group (TAG) with Barry John. My parents expired pretty early. My father passed away when I was fifteen, mother when I was 25, and I got very depressed. I decided that I wanted a change of scene. By then I had done a bit of television series called Fauji and seven-eight years of semi-professional theatre. When I was called to Mumbai to do films, it really did not interest me then, because I never thought that I was good enough to be a film actor, as I did not have the looks, the requisite connections etc. But due to the death of my parents, I thought of taking a year off and just for a change of scene, go down to Mumbai. So, I told my wife and my friends in theatre that I would go to Mumbai for a year and come back. In 1991, I came down for a year and it has been 21 years, I haven't gone back. My friends are still waiting and my wife is still patient. I do believe that whatever activities were undertaken by me, the sciences in school, kind of getting into the JEIT, doing my



graduation in economics from Hansraj Delhi University and almost nearly finishing my Masters course in Jamia, all of these together have made me more aware of my surroundings. When I read something, I understand it. When a character is played by me in any film, the understanding of different aspects of life, I think, helps me make my character a little more round. I have interpretations from different fields of education that are utilized by me to hone the character. It makes the character seem more real and if nothing else, it makes me understand that there are different people in the audience who would like to see a character and they might see or perceive it from an economic, scientific or communication point of view. So, it helps me to ensure that my performance or entertainment appeals to a wider segment of people.

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YT: How has the knowledge of being an Economic Honours student come of use to you in the Industry?

SRK: The knowledge of economics came in handy I think in a big way, however not in terms of the businesses that are owned by me. People believe that most of the businesses floated by me are attributable to my background of economics. I think most of the businesses ventured into by me are due to these wonderful set of people who are working around me, specially my accountant Sahab, Rajaramji who took

me on when I was a non star and helped me understand how we can do business or make ourselves a brand. The economics bit comes in handy when I think in terms of opportunity cost. When we started out, no actor used to get into advertising, television serials or performing on stage. Very few people indulged in such activities, but I decided very early on, that, if a job is offered to me which pays

well (of course with my work ethics not being compromised with), I would rather be doing a few acts, a few shows and advertisements, instead of compromising on the quality of films that I get involved in. So I ended up doing just a couple or three films a year. It has been twenty years and I have done about 65 films till date. It is an average of only two-two and half films, but as I earn from the other activities I can afford to charge less money for the films, which can moderate their cost and take away burden from the producers to an extent. When it comes to films, I feel that is something which should be very special and all the money that could be charged as fee, can be invested in the quality of the film. When the quality of my film rises above the contemporary films which are being released in the same period, it makes me a game changer. It makes me have a playing field on which only I play, which makes me somehow have an edge over competition.

YT: How difficult was the transition to Mumbai from Delhi, a city where you had spent a considerable part of your life?

SRK: Coming to Mumbai perhaps is one of the greatest things that happened in my life. I always say a little saying that, 'Between Delhi and Mumbai, both are like my mothers, ek ne mujhko janam diya, ek ne mujhko pala'. I really believe that Mumbai embraced me with open arms as far as my profession was concerned. I came here with my wife and then a decision happened that we are going to stay here and now we are going to be Mumbaikars. Delhi again, is my mother which gave me birth. Initially, as I used to work for about seventy two hours without any sleep, my wife was a little disturbed. She did not understand what I was doing, but she knew I needed to do this, work like this and divert and distract myself from the depression that I was facing because of the death of my parents. She said, 'okay, you go ahead and work as hard as you want', but then again, if a city does not offer you that kind of work; I may not have been able to do it. So, Mumbai offered me twenty four hours of work while Delhi offered me all the warmth, the love and education that I have. The transition was not difficult. As a matter of fact, I think I am truly blessed that I have lived in two of the greatest cities, this country has to offer. I have homes and friends in both the places. Very few of us are people who can go to two cities in a country and then say 'you know, this is where I belong'. I belong to two of the nicest cities and the transition has not been difficult at all, because the people in the film industry, Hema Malini ji, Rakesh Roshan ji, G.P. Sippi Sahab, Aziz Mirza, Juhi Chawla, Rajeev Mehra, F. C. Mehra, the people in 'Deewana'; were so kind to me when I came to Mumbai. They made me feel like a star and made me feel wanted and at that point of time in my life all I wanted was the feeling of being wanted. So, Mumbai was very kind, Delhi educated me and I have used my education in Mumbai.

YT: You started your acting career on the small screen in 1988 and years later you returned to the television hosting three shows? How different is the system now from then?

SRK: I don't know. Performance has always been something that I

have never been able to differentiate between. I have done street theatre, English stage, live shows, wedding shows, films and television. To me, the whole idea of entertaining is that can one hold the attention of the audience for a little while? Can one make them smile? Did they have a good time watching you? So, I have never been able to say what a medium is. Does one have to change it? Has television changed? Of course, the budgeting has changed and the reach has changed, since satellite and cable networks have come in. When I did Fauji, there used to be only Doordarshan, so of course, the influx of television channels has changed the quality of the product. It has changed the kind of pricing that one can work with. It has given more opportunities to people. I think, it is also very clearly a medium which is a part and parcel of our lives. The television has given you choice, and when there is choice, obviously competition increases. So television is more competitive now. People instead of talking about a 13 part episode wherein you were good, start talking about the TRPs and you know you are gauged by numbers, which is sometimes not very pleasant. But that is the truth and reality we live in. Television is a numbers game now and one needs to deliver the best one can. Of course, there are more professionals here and the technology of television has really increased. The live broadcasting, the professionalism, the corporatization as a matter of fact has changed television. It has been different but if you ask me personally as an actor, I have been doing exactly the same stuff I did then- trying to make people smile.

YT: The Indian Film Industry will experience a different dimension in terms of graphics through your film Ra.One. How do you think it will fare with the audience?

SRK: I have never been able to gauge how a film of mine will fare with the audience. If we start making films or start telling stories which we think people would like to hear, we would never be able to tell a story where you make people like something new. The whole idea is that every time a film comes out, given the restriction of the story forms that we have in India or everywhere else in the world, the idea should be one that invokes a new kind of sensibility. It is always said by me to everyone that when a film of mine comes, I hope people go back home with more than just an empty pack of popcorn. Till they get into the car, they can think about the film that it says a good thing, a moment, a song, an action, a sequence, a graphic, or a special effect. My reason for making Ra.One is again that I want to change the game. I don't want to play the game everybody is playing. We have a country here which has 70% of the population that is under 35 years of age. I fear that we are going to lose this young audience to westernized culture, cinema and entertainment. If we don't technologically hone up what we are presenting to people, and if we stick to the age old system where we are continuously giving them the same technology, they might get bored. In this era of information and ease of access to information, we are subjected to international cinema on the same day of release. I remember earlier, we used to watch a film two months later which was released in America, but now one can see it simultaneously here.

I think it is a step forward for the film industry, that we very clearly are able to say, we can deliver as good a high technology film as anywhere else in the world. Ra.one for me is a dream. I have earned twenty years from this industry, and I truly believe Ra.One is something I would like to give back. I want youngsters to feel very proud. I want them to take on their foreign friends and say 'You know what, India can make as good a film as any foreign film in terms of technology. Come and Enjoy!' Indian films are not just a dilution of the term Bollywood or just a kitsch, a fashionable thing, that one would want to do. I think Indian films are as good as some of the greatest films made in the world. As far as the story is concerned, it is a wholesome family film. It is a film about a father, a son, and a wife. It is about relationships. It is a film about what fun relationships can have and it is a film I made for how the youngsters are changing and evolving in our country. I want to make it a fun film and make it interesting. I wanted to make a film I think the whole audience, especially all the guys under 35 or even younger, will really like. I want them to like the whole concept of the film and hopefully my dream of changing the technological advances of Indian Films, will be fulfilled.

YT: Considering the Indian Film Industry is slowly becoming a world-wide brand, do you keep the people other than those from Indian origin in mind while promoting a film?

SRK: No, I never thought that. The story telling in the films needs to be kept as simple as possible. I think a good story has a universal language. It is not bogged down by any language. The film distribution industry has taken a different dimension with Fox releasing 'My Name is Khan' like an international film. We have had a huge fillip. Now, Ra.One will have perhaps more than 4000 prints, which was unheard of even one year back. We used to release about 1100 prints, which was the greatest we could go upto. Suddenly, we are thinking of 4000 prints! We used to hear Hollywood films releasing 1500 to 2000 prints. That used to be very impressive for all of us. Now Ra.One has a huge number of prints releasing all over the world. We have a market in Germany, in South America, in Morocco, in South East Asia, in Poland and some of the other countries in Eastern Europe and in Russia. The market is increasing and it is time that Indian film makers quickly grab this opportunity in all positivity and make sure that the people who are watching these films, as a novelty, start getting so used to watching them and they cannot ignore these films. Then we can be world leaders in cinema. The story telling may sometimes be liked or may not be liked but what we can control should be of the highest international standards. When I make a film, the thing that is kept in mind is that my film should look as good as the Hollywood film that is releasing next door in the same theatre. That is the only thing I care for. As far as the story telling is concerned, Indian stories have a lot of soul. I think the world audience is kind of getting ready and used to the culture, the mythology and the legends of Indian story telling.

YT: How different is the role of the media in shaping the

success of a movie currently, as compared to when you joined the film industry?

SRK: I think the media, specially the internet, the newspapers and television; all are now easily accessible. I have two aspects on media. One aspect is that it is now easier to get your film promoted on any kind of media or any platform because with so many media platforms mushrooming and being available, the access to them is very easy. Earlier, I remember it was very difficult to get one trailer on a television channel, but now that has changed. In that context, sometimes, when you are releasing a film, you do get a little concerned with the fact that the relevance of the film or the essence of the film gets lost in the crowded promotion of Indian films on television, news papers and FM radio channels; because everybody wants to see and promote their films from their point of view depending on which medium or which platform they belong to. Sometimes that may tend to incorrectly project the essence of the films. The positive is of course, now within a three day period you can make the whole country aware of your film. So the media role has evolved over the years. You have more access to people, bigger and better platforms and you have the world at your feet. I think what we need to do is be a little more discerning, a little more choosing; depending on the essence of the film. We have to choose the platform, the media and the presentation of the film. That is a big change in the media which is happening that we have to be aware of. Just because everything is available, the essence of the cinema or the film or the story that needs to be portrayed should not be taken away.

YT: A recent newspaper article read that production houses owned by established actors created a supply shortage of stars and a problem for independent producers as well as big corporate production houses. What are your thoughts?

SRK: No, Not at all. I do not think so. If you are talking about a production house like Red Chilies Entertainments Pvt. Ltd., which is owned by me; it is a pure production house. It is not a production house which is with a non-existent office to which the actor turns around to say that: 'listen I am co-producing this film and the co-production deal only being the share in profit'. Normally, actors now turn around and say that we have a co-production with you and we will take an 'X' amount of profit plus 'Y' is our fees and the production cost. The whole inception of Red Chilies was to be able to make different kinds of films. I started with Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani and failed. I went onto the last film Always Kabhi Kabhi, which also failed. However, a plethora of different films have been made by me, trying to give the films a different colour. As a matter of fact, whenever there comes across a producer reluctant to sign me for a particular kind of film I am interested in, I produce it. Very few people would have made Ra-One. It is, I think, the most expensive film in our country, ever made; and I am going to lose a lot of money on it, unless it becomes like a really huge hit. None of the producers would have even touched it or if they would have

produced it they would have compromised with the quality of the film. Similarly, I made an Asoka which was a cheap small film but the subject matter was something that was popular. I also made the film Paheli which went for the Oscars from India. So, I have always chosen my own production house for such films. If the number of films made by me were to be counted, it would be nine films in ten years. Doing one film perhaps in one year for my own production house leaves me with time for two others for other producers. Our production house employees about 500 people but nothing similar is done by other production houses. What we try and achieve is, to create a film which nobody wants to make, whenever we feel that there is a good story. So I demarcate my role into two, as a producer who wants to make a film nobody wants to make, perhaps with me in it and as an actor. I never force anyone to do a film in Red Chillies. If you start forcing people, yes, there may be an issue that is mentioned in the question. As far as I am concerned, I would do a film with the belief that the film belongs to the first thinker. The person who first thought of the film is the owner of the film and one should not try to have a piece of that pie at all. I think it is only fair business and it is only a fair human being like quality.

YT: You were awarded the prize of the Indian Business Leader. Do you consider yourself more of an actor or more of an entrepreneur?

SRK: I am hardly an entrepreneur or a businessman. I go by my heart. I came to Mumbai and wanted to be an actor. There was an ambition to become the biggest actor and star in the world. It comes from the heart, it is utopian, ideological and maybe a little silly; but that is what I believe every morning when I wake up, that I am going to be the best star actor in the world. Similarly, when I ventured into business, the reasons have been very personal. It has never been number crunching. I have never understood numbers. Unfortunately, my weakest subject in school and college was mathematics. There are wonderful people and managers who look at that, sometimes they come to a round and say, “this is a losing proposition” and I say, “that’s all right, I like this so let’s go ahead and do it”. So, most of the businesses that are run by me, have been from the heart. Most of the businesses, which I have started with, have initially failed miserably. To begin with, whether it was my cricket franchise, my production house, or this internet model business that I had started, I don’t stop. I have some more happening right now. Kid’s amusement park, properties and so on and I fail in most of them. But, eventually they have succeeded or they have started giving some kind of dignity or respect to the belief that I have had in them. So, as an entrepreneur I think I am Zero, as a movie star, I am a Hero.

YT: You are the principal owner of Kolkata Knight Riders. How has the journey been across the four seasons of the Indian Premier League also considering that Kolkata Knight Riders are the biggest brand and have the largest fan base?

SRK: Actually Kolkata Knight Riders, the ownership of it, the

business aspect of it, the publicity of it in the print media has not been something that has monetarily set me back, but it is and has been one of the biggest learning experiences of my life. I had reached a stage in my life where I started believing people when they said that ‘Everything I touch turns into gold, as an actor, as a producer, as an advertiser’. I have the maximum number of brands to endorse and so on; they ascribed the title ‘the Baadshah of Bollywood’ to me. But, I think Kolkata Knight Riders was needed in my life to make me realize that no, not necessarily. Everything that I touch does not necessarily turn into gold. As a matter of fact what turns it into gold is the team spirit. I am nobody without a good team; whether it is the cricket one, the production team, the people who help me act- my directors, my producers, my actors etc. This is a realization which has humbled me and has also made me learn that do not jump into something under the assumption that only an honest belief will carry it through. One has to have an honest belief, one has to work hard, both of which I do. But, apart from that, one needs to have strategies, one has to have people who are knowledgeable in the film, in that field and who help you to believe in yourself. No one man can lead anything, any business, any industry or any team into becoming the number one. I think, these are the things that dreams are made of. It is fantasized in books, but in reality truth is that you have to have a set of people who work in tandem to tell the same story and to make the same team. I learnt that from Kolkata Knight Riders. Now, with a success that we are in the last four, I feel that I am on my way to achieve and back to my turning things into gold albeit not individually. It is because of Gautam Gambhir, it is because of Venky, the people who have come onboard and because of putting all this together. So, Inshallah, this is going to be one more business venture which started off personally as a flop, not monetarily maybe. We are still the most successful team everybody tells me in terms of our balance sheet. But, like I have said, no business has been professional with me; it has been personal and in keeping with this, am hoping, will be personally satisfied. Maybe perhaps also some of the saddest moments of the past four years have passed since experiencing my team losing because somehow I started losing the belief of young kids, youngsters, who had believed that if something is done by me, I will excel in it. I wrote a letter to a child once, who had said ‘I have still got a KKR Jersey’, stating, “you know what, as you grow older, as you grow stronger, as you grow bigger, this jersey will become smaller. But, I promise you, I will make this team grow taller and bigger”, so Inshallah, that will happen now.

YT: Will the rising interest in domestic cricket over-shadow the enthusiasm for international cricket?

SRK: Initially when we started IPL, everyone turned around and said ‘you know domestic cricket is not going to work, nothing like league cricket has worked, club cricket or club sports has never been an aspect of Indian sports psyche’ and today the question is, ‘Is domestic cricket going to make everyone lose interest in international cricket’. I think every form of entertainment and

have any problems; regarding time and work management. You will be doing many things together, but you will never think: 'Oh God, I have to do this!' As soon as you have to say this line, and if it is a complaint, it is never going to work.

If it is an exclamation of happiness where you say: 'Oh God, I'm going to do this, I'm so excited!', you will not feel tired at all.

YT: Finally, do you think that India needs a growing economy or a changing mindset?

SRK: To be able to demarcate whether India needs a growing economy or does it need a changing mind set, I am a believer of mind, education, youth. I believe that the mindset is going to bring around an even bigger growth in the economy. If you see all the business houses which were run by forefathers and really intelligent, sharp gentlemen who started industrialization in the country, suddenly the younger generation has started stepping in. Some of them may not have succeeded, but if you see the younger ones, they are changing the way those businesses are run. They are

experimenting and going into products which, may be twenty years ago, their fathers or forefathers may have never even thought of. So, I think it has to go hand in hand - you need a changing economy, a growing economy and you need a changing mindset with it. If you have a growing economy and if you are stuck up with your mindset which happens to be non contemporary, slowly but surely you will bring the growing economy down. On the other hand, if the growth in economy is going to be slow as compared to the change in mindset, you will have a frustrated set of people in offices, in houses, in schools. You will have a country which has no emotional quotient. You will have a country which will be frustrated and you will have people who will just be- I am not saying they are going to become violent, but it is going to be an unrestful state for the country. So I think a growing economy and a mindset, I don't know which one comes first; according to me a changing mindset, should go hand in hand with a growing economy.

Interview taken by : Ishaan Updhyay