



Southern Comfort

PREMANKUR BISWAS

YOU may not have heard of *Savaari*, but the sociological import of this Kannada blockbuster is not to be taken lightly. In fact, it will be of vital importance for the obsessive kinds of the Bengali race who try to stake claim in every possible success story (Hrithik's great grandmother was a Bengali, Kareena's grandparents spent a few years in Kolkata, Dhoni can understand Bengali). The lead stars of the film, Raghu

Mukherjee and Kamalini Mukherjee, are both Bengalis. And they aren't just a pair of starlets trying to make mark, the Mukherjee duo is being hailed as the new faces of Kannada cinema. A significant achievement indeed considering the fact that both these actors are rank newcomers to the industry. "When I started my film career, I was asked to do away with my surname. I was told that the Kannada audience will find it difficult to relate to my Bengali surname," says Raghu. But

clearly his advisors had misjudged the Kannada audience's attitude. Not only did this Bangalore-bred Bong achieve instant stardom, he also managed to impress the conservative Kannada audience with his flawless dialogue delivery. "I faced no problem with the language because I have always spoken Kannada," he claims.

His co-star, Kamalini, however, had no such advantage. Brought up in Kolkata, Mukherjee has acted in several Tamil and Telugu films,

but was not conversant with the language at all. "This is my first Kannada film and I didn't know what the dialogues were all about. I learnt the script by heart and would translate the lines in Bengali first in my mind before delivering them to get the expressions right," says Kamalini.

Interestingly, Raghu and Kamalini aren't the only Bengalis negotiating a career in the Kannada film industry. Their most significant predecessor is Tollywood's own Priyanka Trivedi who has

The Mukherjees and the Rays through the Kannada film industry



Clockwise from left, a still from the Kannada film *Savaari*; Kamalini Mukherjee; Raghu Mukherjee and Aindrita Ray

acted in a number of hit Kannada films before marrying the reigning Kannada superstar, Upendra. Then there is Aindrita Ray who burst into the scene with a successful potboiler, *Jungle*. "Even though I am not of Kannada origins I am perceived to be a Kannadiga here. People identify with me," says Ray.

And why this sudden influx of Bengali actors in the Kannada film industry. "Bangalore, the seat of Kannada film industry, is a very cosmopolitan face. People are used to

seeing all kind of faces around," claims Ray. Raghu claims that new faces have infused a lot of energy in the industry. "People want to see new faces and new perspectives. It doesn't matter if you are a Bengali or a Punjabi, you only have to love the culture enough to be accepted," he says. Kamalini reiterates. "People here are quite open to new faces. They don't care where you come from as long as you act convincingly. And it shouldn't really matter. Art knows no barrier." Touche.

STORY TIME



Sunil Vishnu K from Chennai calls his organization, 'a happy factory'. We couldn't agree more, given that for ten long years, he has been organising shows, workshops and programmes for people to sharpen their leadership and managerial skills apart from helping them evolve as individuals and de-stress. The best way for all this is of course, theatre with a bit of storytelling thrown in, Sunil would tell you. The east zone finalist for the Young Performance Arts Entrepreneur 2009, an integral part of the Young Creative Entrepreneur Award (YCE) organised by the British Council Library (BCL), started Evam around ten years back.

Evam specialises in organizing storytelling sessions for children and theatre workshops that help people discover their latent talents. "The theatre sessions are designed to make the youth identify with the characters, with the ideas dealt with in course of the procedure," says Sunil. The young entrepreneur at present aims at incorporating new techniques in his productions that improve the over-all quality of his work. "I also want to experiment with new forms of expression that can complement traditional theatre and also boost the quality of Indian performing arts," says Sunil. He is also looking at business tie-ups and collaborations that can take theatre to new heights.

No wonder, Samarjit Guha, head, programmes, at the BCL says, "Sunil has great commercial clarity and a clear vision of his goals in putting the creative arts in a viable and lucrative mode. He has infectious leadership qualities and loads of positive attitude and that would leave an indelible impact on the performing arts scenario." The award is aimed at recognizing talent and entrepreneurial skills in the performance arts sector, and the winner would be visiting Edinburgh and get a prize money for five thousand pounds. "The winner should have a profound understanding of performing arts so that he/she can contribute in strengthening Indo-European relations through art. The aim of the award is to create a critical business sense in the artist community but the basis remains creativity that will strengthen business plans, make profits and sustain it," says a BCL representative.

— SOHINI CHAUDHURY

Echoes of the Nightingale



Radha Mangeshkar has a surname to live up to

SUANSHU KHURANA

A name like Radha Mangeshkar is a dead giveaway, and the young singer whose debut album Naav Maaza Shami was launched a few weeks ago is only too aware of this. Radha is Pt Hridayanath Mangeshkar's daughter and niece to sisters Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhonsle, both doyens of Indian music. "I have been learning Indian classical music since I was four and been performing on stage since the age of nine. Though my father has been my guru throughout, I have picked up a lot from my aunts, especially Lataji's expressive nuances in her dulcet tones," says the reticent Radha.

Naav Maaza Shami, a Marathi folk album, was released by proud aunt Lata. The six tracks are mostly traditional Marathi, with fusion touches that come from two Goan melodies Mazya Goyachya Bhumi and Bai Gele Phirayla that describe the scenic beauty of Goa. There is also a unique song which is based on a Punjabi heer tune. "People might not have heard a Marathi song rendered in the stirring heer tune," says Radha. The songs have been set to the lyrics by legendary Marathi poets like N.D. Mahanor, Sudhir Moghe and B.B. Borkar and the music has been composed by Hridayanath Mangeshkar. Radha's first brush with a recording studio was when she was 11, when she recorded a children's song for a private album.

There are no offers from Bollywood as yet, but the 20-something-year-old knows it's just a matter of time before music directors notice her. Here, too, Lata is her heroine. "My father says that when people copy her, they either sound like caricatures or get only one aspect of her rendition — the punch, pitch or classical dexterity. But to be like Lataji, one must try to work on all these facets and still maintain one's own individuality," says Radha. She wants to do justice to her surname. "It is easier to ride on a surname than to get up and go ahead but I want to prove everything on the basis of my talent and am sure the industry will accept me," quips Radha. Famous first words!

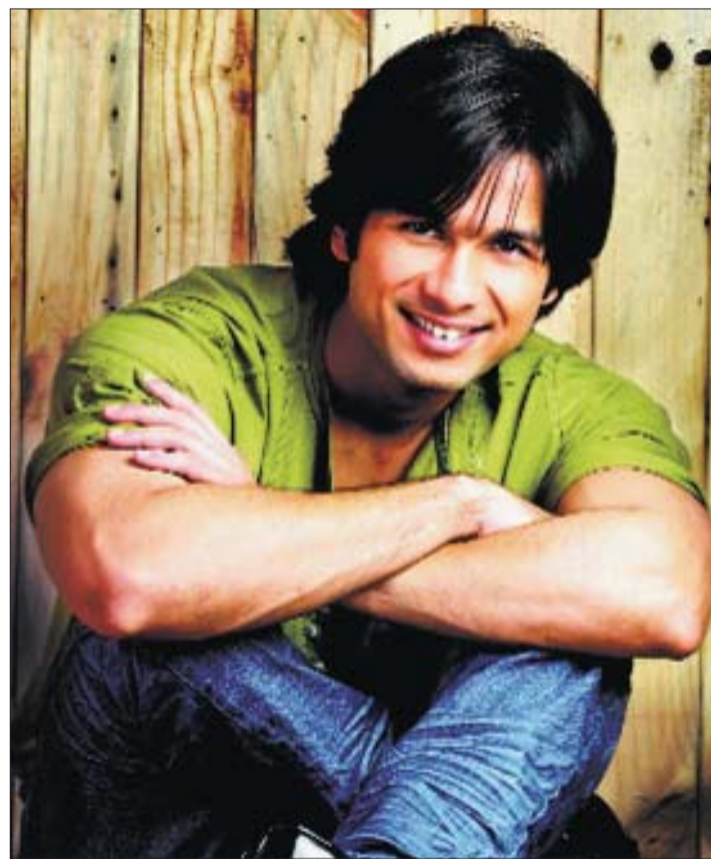
IMAGE MAKEOVER

IF change is fast becoming a constant in Bollywood, rewriting first impressions is what most actors hope to do. Especially when a cliché sets in. But a reinvention in the early years of one's career is a hard gamble, one that Shahid Kapoor is willing to take on. With Vishal Bhardwaj's *Kaminey*, he's only too eager to shake off his chocolate-boy tag, an attempt he began with his grimacing act in 2007's *Jab We Met*.

The August 14 release will have Kapoor play a local goon in a double role. "Kaminey is indeed hugely different from what I've done before. And I am hoping that it will make people see me differently," he says. Kapoor entered the industry at a very young and gawky 17 where he was a part of the musical troupe in Taal. And, he misses his lost candour. "I miss the innocence of being here without knowing exactly what I was doing," he laughs his killer dimpled laugh, adding, "Honestly, I don't like the way I look now."

Is he Mr Goody-Two-Shoes for real? The 27-year-old frowns: "I think there are too many people inside me. I'm discovering many sides to myself now — there are days when I am quiet and there are days when I'm talkative. But I'm usually a correct-face person."

— DIPTI NAGPAUL-D'SOUZA



A first-time filmmaker probes into the problem of identity snatching in Madhya Pradesh

Name Calling

DEBESH BANERJEE

DIRECTOR Mazhar Kamran is not a man in a hurry. The cinematographer of Bollywood thrillers like *Satya* in 1998 and *Kaun*, a year later, he worked on four films and waited several long years before narrowing down the script for his first film — *Mohandas*. The two hour-long film is India's official representation at the International Film Festival of Innsbruck, Austria, and has garnered encouraging reviews at six other festivals including the Kolkata film festival in 2008.

Mohandas draws its storyline from a little-known problem — that of identity snatching in Madhya Pradesh. Sonali Kulkarni plays a Delhi journalist Meghna who goes to Anuppur in MP, to investigate a case in which basket weaver Mohandas, played by Nakul Vaid, is claiming that his identity has been stolen.

"After being selected for a top job at the local coal mine, Mohandas is shocked to see that



MISTAKEN IDENTITY: (Left) Kamran; Kulkarni and Vaid in a still from the film

someone is working under his name. The idea is based on a real life occurrence which a close friend narrated to me on one of his visits to MP in 2005," says Kamran, 45.

He has pooled in contemporary elements and satire to create a gripping thriller. "I concentrated on giving an impression of the rugged rural landscape," says Kamran, who completed filming after a 35-day shoot from July

2007 in the Sonbhadra district of MP. "I did not want a plastic feel of a village and preferred real locations. I could draw on my familiarity of the terrain from my shooting assignments region years ago," he adds. The film will release in multiplexes on July 10.

Even when Kamran was roped in Ram Gopal Varma in *Satya*, he harboured dreams of directing films. "I wanted to master what happens on the shooting

floor before getting into direction. That has helped me get a perspective in making films since nobody can teach you how to direct a film," says this graduate of FTII, Pune. Some of the tautness of *Mohandas* also comes from Kamran's five-year-long experience with documenting short films for teleserials like *Turning Point* and a 25-minute bio-pic on the life of writer Qurratulain Hyder.