

ANIL KAPOOR

ACTOR AND PRODUCER

Interview taken by
Faraz Rizvi, Anushka Gupta,
Aastha Talwar, Rohan Ghosh
and Dev Daga

YT: You've had the front row experience of how cinema has evolved in the country over a span of three decades. How would you describe these developments and how do you envision the future?

AK: This is a great time for Indian cinema, from fantastic actors to visionary directors, I think our industry is on an all-time high and this is just the beginning!

YT: You had started acting from a very tender age. In this modern age, where there are a myriad of career choices, how can one solidify one's vision and start working towards it at a young age?

AK: I had a dream and a passion for acting from a very young age, and for that clarity of vision, I consider myself fortunate. The dizzying number of choices facing today's youth can indeed be confusing, and it's not always easy to find your passion and calling in the midst of it all. But I believe that if you're a curious person who's hungry for opportunity, it will find its way to you. Once it does, grab it with both hands and give it your best shot. If then it doesn't work, it just wasn't the right opportunity for you and you just have to keep moving till you find one that is.

YT: From Mr. India to Mission Impossible, you have experimented with different roles and associated with different people across the world. How different have the experiences been for you?

AK: I don't know if my career choices led to my personal evolution or if changes in my personality determined my career choices. I think it's a bit of both. And in both ways, the journey has been incredible! A large part of who we become is a reflection of the people we live or work with, and I consider myself blessed to have been in the company of some truly incredible people, who have shaped not just the face of cinema in India and internationally, but also my life to a large extent!

YT: With your prolific line of work, you've inspired many young individuals to enter the world of acting. Growing up as an aspiring actor, who were the people you looked up to?

AK: My father was my greatest inspiration. He introduced me to the magic and power of cinema, and it set off a dream in me that I'm still living to this day!

There were a lot of other people that I looked upto, as an aspiring actor. Raj Uncle, Shammi Uncle, Javed Sahab… They've all been great influences in my life.

YT: As someone who has played iconic and diverse characters, what role does commercial viability play in the decision to take on a particular project?

AK: When I was starting out, I can't deny that a commercially viable project was not just appealing, but crucial for sustenance. But over the years, and after a lot of hard work, I was happy to reach that point where I could choose roles on the basis of their meaningfulness to me. And that's how it's been ever since. I choose projects when they speak to me on a personal level, when they add something to my life and when I feel like they'll add something to the lives of people who watch them.

YT: With streaming services like Netflix and Prime Video consolidating their presence in India, how do you foresee the evolution of cinema with respect to the digital revolution?

AK: In some ways, the digital revolution is transforming cinema everywhere and making it more accessible and available at a touch. I do believe that nothing can compare with a larger-than-life theatrical experience, but there's no denying that with the increasing sophistication in digital delivery platforms and with strengthening collaborations between digital content creators, the future is clearly... well, digital!

YT: As one of the directors of the highly renowned Asian Academy of Film & Television, you've had a first-hand experience of nurturing the acting talent of the nation. How do you see the cinematic art and industry evolving with these young talented individuals?

AK: Every generation brings something new and exciting to the world of cinema. I've often said that cinema is a reflection of the society it exists in. The youth that shepherd today's society are adventurous, open-minded, risk-taking and empathetic, all of which bodes very well for the future of cinema. I'm always curious to see the new ethos and nuances that each new generation brings to Indian cinema.

YT: As one of the pioneers of the finite series structure to the country's small screens, in what manner do you think, should the Indian television industry change in order to survive in this dynamic consumer market?

AK: The answer to your question may sound unoriginal to you, but it's what I truly believe - good content, well executed and well packaged, works every single time.

The definition of good content is, of course, fluid. It has a lot to do with timing, the circumstances, the pulse of the people, and the need of the hour. But if you can gauge these well, and you can tap into the nerve of the audiences, you will not just survive, but thrive!

Indian television has come a long way in understanding and leveraging this. Ekta Kapoor & Raj Nayak are prime examples of Indian visionaries who realize the importance of tuning into the changing heart & minds of audiences.

YT: Do you believe that with the changing times, the essentials of what it means to be an actor have also been changing? What do you think are the quintessential characteristics of a modern day actor?

AK: What it takes to be an actor in any era, is empathy and an ability to make others feel it. I don't think that essence will, or should, ever change.

YT: As someone who has been the country's youth icon for many generations, what would be your words of wisdom for the students of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata?

AK: Find your passion, even if it takes you all your life to do it. Find what makes your heart beat faster, what makes you truly come alive, what keeps you up at night and lets you sleep in peace. Find your purpose and once you do, surrender yourself to it. Body, mind and soul. That's enough. That'll always be enough.