

THE MAKING OF A STAR

The life story of one of India's most loved actors woven into a racy account of the evolution of Hindi cinema

KING OF BOLLYWOOD: SHAH RUKH KHAN AND THE SEDUCTIVE WORLD OF INDIAN CINEMA
by ANUPAMA CHOPRA
Warner Books
Price: \$24.99; Pages: 250

By Chandan Mitra

Shah Rukh Khan has two defining characteristics: astonishing vivacity, which is an outlet for the powerhouse of intense energy he carries within, and a disarming self-belief that often expresses itself as incorrigible self-praise. His philosophy of life is perhaps best expressed in a song he lippped for a 1990s quickie, *Yes Boss*: "Jo main chahoon wo main paaon/saari duniya par main chhaon/bas itna sa khuwab hai (I have just this teeny-weeny dream that I should get everything I wish for and tower over the world)." The song continues with the refrain, "I'm the best, I'm the best..."

India's foremost contemporary actor has always believed he is indeed the best. As Anupama Chopra quotes him telling a magazine in 1994, "I have already picked up three (Filmfare Awards). I intend to add at least one to the collection every year. And why not? I'm one of the best actors on the scene today." There could not have been a better biographer of Shah Rukh Khan than Chopra, who is among India's most intelligent and perceptive film critics. She has not penned a hagiography of the actor she evidently admires. The book is not just a narrative of Shah Rukh's life story; it is a broad canvas depiction of the world of Hindi cinema, its evolution reflecting changes in value systems; fascinatingly woven into her racy account is India's transformation into a self-confident economic power. Chopra has fused Shah Rukh's life story into that of post-Independence India.

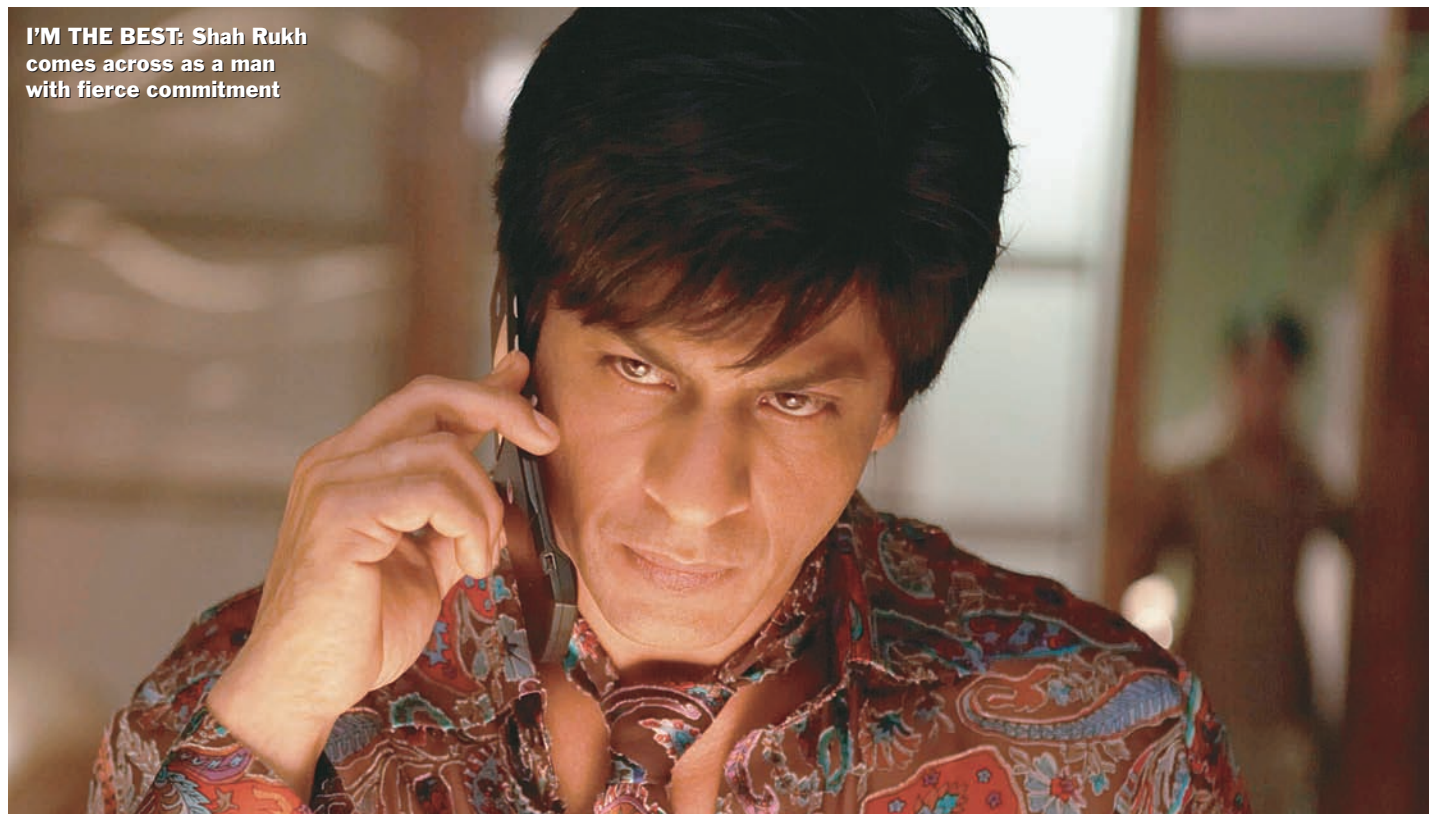
While the actor's phenomenal rise to superstardom is relatively well known, Shah Rukh's early life is something he doesn't talk about much. I have always thought this to be a measure of his self-conviction: he never tries

to peddle his middle class background as a selling point to garner sympathy. But Chopra tells his early life story poignantly—his father Meer's migration from Pakistan leaving the bulk of the family behind because of a passionate belief in India, Meer's failure to establish any worthwhile means of existence, his mother Fatima's struggle to give the children a good upbringing

theatre teacher and TAG founder Barry John, his natural flair for drama—give remarkable insights into his evolution as India's most loved actor today.

Even more than what he learnt from his teachers, he internalised life or even chance comments from seniors. Chopra refers to producer-director Lekh Tandon once telling him that while dying onscreen one must never

I'M THE BEST: Shah Rukh comes across as a man with fierce commitment



and Shah Rukh's deep attachment to his large-hearted parents.

Interviewing him in 2005, I had asked if he had any regrets in life and Shah Rukh said, only that his parents didn't live to see his success, adding he had even arranged a TV set in his mother's hospital room so she could catch episodes of *Fauji*, the teleserial that catapulted him to fame. But she was too ill. The early chapters of the volume, detailing many hitherto unknown facts of Shah Rukh's early life—participation in *mohalla* Ramlilas, involvement with

try to squeeze sympathy out of the audience, but depict death with passion and dignity instead, prompting Shah Rukh to demonstrate anger while enacting the death sequence in *Devdas*, giving screen death a new definition.

The book also brings out the actor's human side. Shah Rukh comes across as a man with fierce commitment. His love story, passion for future wife Gauri—he chased her to Mumbai when she tried to get away from him—and his ability to be two persons at the same time, one for the industry and another

for his family, are brought out with fine craftsmanship.

Apparently, Shah Rukh would have highly charged exchanges with Kundan Shah on the sets of *Kabhi Haan Kabhi Na*, a film that laid the way to his meteoric rise. Yet, when Shah ran out of money to buy raw film stock and okayed a shot Shah Rukh knew he actually wanted re-taken, he scoured all adjoining sets to borrow some at 3 a.m., returning to Shah's sets and crying like a child. Then there was the time he went straight to directors Abbas-Mustan's home in Mumbai to touch their feet immediately after winning his first best actor trophy.

TOP 10

A monthly national list of bestselling books compiled for INDIA TODAY by ORG-MARG based on data from 15 retail outlets in six cities.

BESTSELLERS

FICTION			
NO.	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
1. (12)	A Thousand Splendid Suns	Khaled Hosseini	Bloomsbury
2. (9)	The Kite Runner	Khaled Hosseini	Bloomsbury/Penguin
3. (1)	The Witch of Portobello	Paulo Coelho	HarperCollins
4. (16)	The Collectors	David Baldacci	Macmillan
5. (-)	The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time	Mark Haddon	Vintage

NON-FICTION			
NO.	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
1. (3)	The Secret	Rhonda Byrne	Atria
2. (-)	In Spite of the Gods: The Strange Rise of Modern India	Edward Luce	Random House
3. (1)	It Happened in India	Kishore Biyani, Dipayan Baishya	Rupa
4. (-)	India's Unending Journey	Mark Tully	Rider
5. (11)	The Last Mughal	William Dalrymple	Penguin

OTHER INDIAN BOOKS IN THE TOP 20

FICTION			
NO.	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
11. (-)	Passion India	Javier Moro	Full Circle
14. (4)	The Inheritance of Loss	Kiran Desai	Penguin
15. (8)	Shantaram	Gregory David Roberts	Penguin
20. (-)	Chowringhee	Sankar	Penguin

NON-FICTION			
NO.	TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER
6. (-)	The Last Nizam: An Indian Prince in the Australian Outback	John Zubrzycki	HarperCollins
8. (-)	The Indians: Portrait of a People	Sudhir Kakar and Katharina Kakar	Penguin
9. (7)	India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy	Ramachandra Guha	Picador
10. (6)	The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari	Robin S. Sharma	Jaico

Last month's rating in brackets

Participating bookshops: Delhi: Om Book Shop, Faqir Chand, Teksons, Full Circle; Mumbai: Crossword, Shah Book Stall, Danai Book Shop; Bangalore: Fountainhead, Gangarams; Hyderabad: Walden Book Link, The Book Point; Kolkata: Oxford Books, Modern Book Depot, Family Book Shop; Chennai: Fountainhead