

MRS. ALIA BHATT

Actress and Entrepreneur

Taken by the Editorial Board

YT: It has been more than a decade since you entered the film industry and have acted in a wide variety of roles ranging from Shanaya in 'Student of the Year' to Keya Dhawan in 'Heart of Stone', which has moulded you into an intense actress. Can you provide insights into the ways in which your approach to acting and your perception of the film industry have evolved over the course of your career?

AB: Being an actor means the learning never stops. There is always a new role to prepare for, always new things to learn and to understand. And I love every minute of the creative process. I am a very planned, meticulous person most of the time - and that has remained constant throughout my career. I think what has changed though is that I am not as hard on myself anymore. Some films do well and some do not but at the end of the film's release I just remind myself that I have put in the work and given it my all. As for the industry, we have definitely witnessed positive changes, with a broader array of narratives and opportunities for female characters. I would say it is a continuous process of growth and learning.

YT: You made your production debut with 'Darlings' - a film that was received with a lot of critical appreciation and fanfare. Could you tell us more about the storyline and themes of 'Darlings' that led you to choose it as your first production venture and did the experience shape your perspective as a producer?

AB: I am a storyteller at heart, that being the genesis of eternal sunshine. It was created as a platform for good talent – especially for writers and directors. 11 years ago, I was given an opportunity by a large production house that set the trajectory for my career. I now want to be that opportunity for someone else. And I want to tell interesting stories. I have always felt that as an actor, your debut film chooses you. Likewise, as a producer, Darlings chose me.

Darlings is a dark comedy about a mother and daughter who find courage and love in exceptional circumstances. It is such a special film and Jasmeet came in with a strong vision. I found it exciting enough to turn into a producer.

YT: Ma'am, you recently launched your own sustainable maternity and children's clothing brand, named Ed-a-Mamma. What was your idea behind this brand, what were some of the valuable lessons you garnered from this entrepreneurial undertaking and how do you plan to take it forward in future?

AB: Ed-a-Mamma is my first entrepreneurial venture. I was going through a presentation about launching a fashion label and I said I would love to do a label but there are already so many, does anyone need another one? I asked if there is a gap in the market and we realized there is a real need for a world-class children's clothing brand made in India. That straightaway got my attention. I was working on a series of stories about a little girl and her little dog having different adventures to save the planet from ecological harm. It was my way of nurturing a love of nature among children.

So, I put together a team of ninjas and we started working on this dream project and giving it shape. We had to delay the launch because of the pandemic and of course like any other brand we struggled for the first few months with all the restrictions. But we are so proud of the product and it has been so well received.

Our clothes are all natural – from the fabric to the buttons to the packaging and I am excited to see an entire generation grow up wearing Ed-a-Mamma, my baby included.

It has been three years of learnings. My vision, my venture and my capital. But we came to a point where we were looking for a partner to help the brand grow strategically into newer areas like baby personal care and baby furniture. And that is how Reliance Brands Limited (RBL) came in and together I hope we can make the brand bigger and better from here. A brand that is made in India but for the world.

YT: You are a socially responsible individual whose social initiatives are commendable. Recently, you partnered with the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group to donate funds to the Salaam Bombay Foundation, a humanitarian organization for adolescents. Can you elaborate on the motivations that drive your involvement in such endeavours and how they resonate with your own beliefs and values?

AB: It is such an honour to be the first Indian featured alongside so many global 'fans'. And what is better? Through the campaign Mandarin and I got to support Salaam Bombay Foundation, doing such a fantastic work for underserved communities. It is my belief that there is nothing more motivating than contributing towards the future of children, and in turn ensuring a better tomorrow for our planet.

YT: Given the fact that you are a role model for many young women in India who look up to you, what is some advice or guidance that you would like to offer them to help them pave their own path into the world of entertainment?

AB: Be true to yourself and love what you do. Opportunities will come and go and there will always be noise when there is crowd. But rise above that, and pave the way for your own journey.

YT: Ma'am, you have a highly demanding schedule in the film industry with various commitments and projects. How do you manage to keep yourself motivated and maintain a high level of enthusiasm in your work despite the challenges posed by such a busy and hectic lifestyle?

AB: I love being an actor and of course, it takes up most of my time. But as an actor, you learn the value of teamwork. It takes so many people to make a film and each one has to play their part while working towards the director's singular vision. So, I put together good production, investment and business teams, to help me in these aspects of my life. But I am a lifelong learner which makes everything I do very exciting.

YT: Given your diverse filmography, we are interested in understanding how you navigate the selection of projects. What factors or elements in a script or a director's vision appeal to you and make you say 'yes' to a particular film?

AB: For me, as an actor and a producer, story is the key. A compelling and well-written story is often a key motivator. My character should resonate with me on a personal level. I am alsooften attracted to roles that challenge me and allow me to explore different facets of acting, this helps me to grow as an actor constantly.

YT: Success often comes with its share of obstacles. Can you recount a specific challenge or setbacks you faced during your career as an actress, and take us through the steps you took to surmount it?

AB: Everyone goes through moments of self-doubt and I think when the doubt arises it becomes most challenging because at the end of the day, your true competition, shall and must always be yourself. You should always try and be a better version of yourself every day, at both personal and professional level. So, moments of self-doubt are the ones that might tend to throw you off but also the ones that are most important, because we all know, doubt is the key to knowledge. So let the doubt come and just ride through it.

YT: Ma'am, your resilience and talent as an emerging global icon have inspired several students at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata to pursue their dreams. What message would you like to convey to them?

AB: I have always believed change is the only constant, so whenever things get difficult just remember this too shall change and pass. You are just a small speck in a very large ocean. So, take every day, one day at a time, keep your head down, keep your heart open and keep going.