

INDRANI HALDAR

BENGAL AND BEYOND

She made her acting debut as a teenager in the serial, Tero Parbon. The journey that began long ago eventually turned her into a star and gave Bengal one of its finest actors. She had rightfully been endowed with roles in films directed by legendary makers such as Rituparno Ghosh, for which she won a National Film Award along with a co-star. Crossing the realm of Bengal, she performed in Hindi TV serials in Mumbai. 'Sujata' was aired on Sony TV; 'Maryada' was aired on Star Plus and 'Savitri' on Life OK. These made her a well acclaimed actor all over India. Recently, Star Showbiz caught up with her. From recent endeavours to future plans, and from life in Mumbai to reminiscences of working with some of the industry's finest people, Indrani Haldar allowed us an intimate glimpse into her life.

Let's begin with your current projects. What's keeping you busy these days?
I have started working on two films. And yet another movie's work will begin soon. That film has a really big casting, which I won't reveal at the moment! When it will be disclosed, it's going to be sensational news.

You were in Mumbai for many years. Why did you leave Kolkata in the first place? Why weren't you doing Bengali pictures anymore?

You have to think about the time when I decided to move to Mumbai. Back then, there weren't many good quality Bengali films, and I was not very keen in doing commercial movies. Nowadays we see a lot of good Bengali movies. But at that time, this was not the case. And I also wanted to work on a bigger platform. To tell you the truth, the decision was not very well thought out. Actually, even before I permanently started living in Mumbai, I had worked there for some time, playing a role in a TV serial that was aired on Star Plus. After that, I returned to Kolkata. One fine day, I got a phone call from the late Ravi Chopra of BR Films, who invited me to Mumbai for the main role in a Hindi serial named 'Sujata'. It was a daily soap, which meant that I had to stay there. I continued to do other major serials in Mumbai after 'Sujata'. I stayed in Mumbai from 2008 to the end of 2013. Now I am back in Kolkata.

What made you return?
My friends and family members urged me to, saying that Bengali cinema has changed a lot in these years and that there are now new, capable directors to work with. Everybody was saying that they

missed having me on Bengali cinema. So, I'm back for good -- although I still go to Mumbai quite regularly.

When you were in Mumbai, didn't you wish to work on movies as well? Why did you just stick to TV serials?
Well, I was invited to Mumbai to work in a serial. Besides, television is an extremely strong media in Mumbai, and Hindi serials are watched all over India. For example, 'Sujata' was promoted all across the country. On top of that, the serial was aired on a very popular channel. Today, I am perhaps more known among non-Bengalis -- Gujaratis, Punjabis and many others -- than Bengalis.

Many people think that doing TV serials after someone has worked in movies is a step down. It seems you do not see it that way.

Even when I was in Bengal, I used to do serials along with movies. And my birth as an actor was on Television. It is a media that has penetrated into every house. Previously people could demean saying that the TV shows are free to watch. But now, channels are payable. You are not seeing my work for free.

When you lived in Mumbai, your family was in Kolkata. How was it like being away from home?
My life in Mumbai had been extremely busy. For about six years, I could not even properly celebrate Durga Puja, Diwali and other festivals. And I had com-

pletely forgotten traveling. So this year, I took a break and did some traveling and enjoyed my life. Actually, my husband is posted in neither Kolkata nor Mumbai. Therefore, it has always been a long distance relationship for us. On top of that, we do not have any children to take care of.

Being in a long distance relationship is surely not an easy thing to do. How do you make your marriage work? What's your magic trick?
It's been around 15 years. I give all the credit to my husband. He is extremely supportive. Even about moving to Mumbai, I was quite uncertain at first. But my husband said that I must not miss an opportunity like this, and that he will simply visit me in Mumbai, instead of going to Kolkata.

You've worked with many big names. Who did you really enjoy working with?
I have worked with Atanu Ghosh in several projects, including many telefilms. Our telefilms have earned many awards and have been shown in many festivals. We even did a show in New Jersey with a telefilm. Atanu Ghosh is a fabulous director. I have also worked with Buddhadeb Dasgupta and Gautam Bose. Buddhadeb Dasgupta is the one who introduced me to the world of 'parallel cinema'. I did two movies with him: Charachar and LalDarja. He is an extraordinary man. He writes

poetry with films.

Tell us about your experience working with Rituparno Ghosh.

It cannot be explained in words. I remember the script reading of 'Dahan', where Rituparno was so brilliantly instructing everyone on how to play their respective roles. When I asked how I should play mine, she told me off by saying that Jhinuk -- the character I was had to play -- is just like me. "Just be yourself," she said. "And I won't allow you much make-up either; you look beautiful the way you are." Her demise is a huge loss. Our generation got the opportunity to work with her and directly learn from her. I have learned a lot from her. I feel very sad that our next generation will not get this privilege.

Do you see yourself working in Bangladeshi productions?

I did a commercial Bangladeshi movie long time ago, and that was the only time I worked here. There have been several joint ventures between the

two Bengals in which I worked from Kolkata. Aside movies, there could be stage and dance shows in collaboration. I would love to take part in that.

You have an acting institute. Tell us about it.

Kolkata Film & Television Institute (KFTI) has many branches, from acting to script writing. Many renowned and successful people teach in this institute -- I want to pass on their experience and wisdom to the next generation. I have been running this organisation for many years now, and a lot of my students are now working in Bengali and Hindi TV serials and movies. I am also trying to start a finishing school. I want to groom people. Even when I was in Mumbai, I used to

come to Kolkata to take class. I love teaching. In the future, I want to see myself more as a teacher.

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Interviewed by Rafi Hossain & Narrated by M H Haider