

Educating Sridevi In English!



-By Preeti Thandi

Toronto: She looks enviable, dressed in figure hugging skinny jeans, a cream blouse, yellow jacket and high heels. An entourage surrounds her. It takes a while to take it all in - her orb like eyes, cascading hair, polished skin and her grand stature in Indian cinema. Enchanting, mesmerizing and celebrated Sridevi remains unrivalled in the way she captivated audiences. From her popular dance numbers to her verve, she lit up the screens with expressive performances. She's enjoyed the mega-star status for years but remains unassuming. Sridevi exudes a relaxed finesse and speaks quietly. In Toronto for the Gala premiere of her comeback film, English Vinglish at TIFF 2012, Sridevi opts for a de-glamorized role and plays Shashi, a simple homemaker whose life revolves around her family and who struggles with her English.

Interview

You have been away from the screen for 15 years, did you enjoy your time off? What did you do?

Yeah, absolutely! This break has been wonderful for me being a mother. I was busy taking care of my children and enjoying every minute of it. Growth is a beautiful experience.

What brought you back?

The script and of course I loved Bal-ki's previous films, Paa and Cheeni Kum and when I heard he's producing it and then when I met Gauri for the first time we instantly clicked.

Is stardom or limelight an addiction that a star needs? Does it pull you back?

In that case I would have done it much earlier and not waited for almost 15 years! It's nothing like that, you know, I never felt that I was away from this industry because being a producer's wife I was always around and part of the industry and more than that I was enjoying being on the other side of the camera watching people performing, dancing.

What is it that attracted you most about the script of English Vinglish?

Well, Shashi's character and her simplicity. I felt I could relate to it and I thought even the audience would relate to it as well. It's a very vulnerable and relatable character.

You could have chosen any director, why Gauri Shinde?

Why not Gauri? It was her story and she created this character, Shashi's character itched her mind so much. It made it tremendously easy for me to work on this character.

But it's a very simple character that kind of de-glamorizes the screen goddess, was it easy for you to shed that?

Yes absolutely! It is not the first time I did something like this. I did it even in Sadma.

Was it tough going back the first day?

Not at all. When I faced the camera for the first time, I didn't feel that there was a gap of 15 years or maybe it's thanks to Gauri and the atmosphere on the set, which was very warm and made me feel so comfortable.

How did you prepare for the role?

We did dress rehearsals, we worked on the look. It was totally Gauri's vision, I totally surrendered to it.

You put a lot of love in rolling the laddoos in the film...

Which is not me, it is Shashi who enjoys it, I am glad you are saying that because that's what she says when her husband asks her to stop making laddoos. She says that's my only passion.

So, are you a good cook yourself?

Very bad, I can't cook at all but my daughters are better cooks than me. It has to come from inside, the interest, it's not a learning thing, you need to have a passion for certain things.

Your passion is painting, is that right? What attracts you towards it?

My passion is painting. I feel it is very soothing to your mind and it is very relaxing. The best part is that I am at home and not away from my children, my husband and my house.

There was an auction of your paintings? Is that right.

Yes in New York at Christie's. I did "Thoughts." They are figures of humans in different kind of moods.



You yourself faced challenges in speaking the language when you first came to the Hindi film industry.

Why only Hindi, other languages too like Malyalam, Kannada. Why only me, most of the people face this problem. When people watch the movie, they will relate it to their mother or aunt. When we were coming to Toronto, we saw a woman dressed up exactly like Shashi with one braid and a bag. I was just watching her, she came to the immigration counter and it was the wrong counter. They had to send her back and she was totally lost.

How was it like working with the international cast?

There were different actors from different places like West Indies, US, Mexico in the classroom in the film, we all had great fun as a group and they were all very pumped up.

Were they nervous working with you?

I don't know. The first day we did a theatre scene, there was total pin drop silence, from the second day onwards we were all freaking out and laughing.

Have you worked with women directors before?

It was a great experience working with Gauri. Gender didn't matter to me, for me Gauri is a director, that is it.

A female Bollywood star getting married is bad news in the box office?

It is very sad. Definitely it happens the moment they are married they are just put in a different category. No more glamour or running around with the heroes and dancing. But it's very good what's happening with films like The Dirty Picture and Ka-haani.

But they are all single women playing those parts, Rani and Vidya they are not married.

But these are the characters even the married women can do.

Are you looking for those kind of roles now?

No, I never planned this film, it just happened, so let's see.

There was a trend from South India that a lot of actors were transitioning into Bollywood, do you think it is becoming more difficult, we are not seeing as many actors coming from the South like yourself.

It is both ways. From the north they are going to the south and from south they've been coming to the north.