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Ben (Gandhi) Kingsley Now Gets In Turban Gear!



BY PREETI THANDI

Toronto: Ben Kingsley can transform into any character by using just his “voice, body and imagination”! The acclaimed actor who is best known for his Academy Award winning performance in Gandhi takes the driver’s seat in Isabel Coixet’s *Learning to Drive* where he plays a Sikh driving instructor in New York City. Kingsley who is addressed as Sir Ben after his knighthood in 2002 was in Toronto for the premiere of his film at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) where he greeted fans and the audience with folded hands. In the film he transforms into Darwan Singh and is difficult to recognize in a turban and a beard and refers to his character as a

Sikh warrior when speaking to select media at TIFF.

His character Darwan Singh, a cab driver starts giving driving lessons to Wendy Shields (Patricia Clarkson), a book editor in Manhattan whose life is in shambles after her husband walks out of the marriage. The two characters connect despite the cultural divide and Singh not only guides her on the road but also gives her renewed confidence to relive her life. “Yes he drives a cab but he is a warrior. I almost played him as though he is always in uniform,” reveals Kingsley.

“When you are reading a screenplay, don’t just read your character, read what everyone else says about your character, how they react to your

character. It’s a great lesson I learned while playing Shakespeare,” says Kingsley about how he decides to take on a role. “An utterly distraught, betrayed woman who quite understandably goes through the period of hating men touches a guy’s cheek and says you are a good man. So the choice when I read Darwan Singh is what others say about him, how others react to him and to his decency,” explains Kingsley.

“His brother’s been killed, his whole family had been tortured and he’s been imprisoned and yet he still remains undistorted and untarnished. He has survived all that compared to a nice New York townhouse and an unhappy marriage. There are two bubbles - the neurotic New York and the warrior Sikh are brought together in the narrative. I love narratives where you can almost hear the Gods looking down and saying let’s put those two together and see what happens. That’s the start of drama.”

When asked why he chose to play a Sikh man with a turban and if it reflected his partly Indian roots in any way, he explains,

“What you have to understand is your narrative function in the film. I shape the clay, the clay does not shape me. I have a great respect for the guy with whom I worked who helped me put my turban on every morning because I can’t tie a turban. It’s not that important. What is important is that you see a man on the screen who brings to the life of that woman something essential and unique, it’s not about me. It’s about the portrait I present to you.”

Asked if he spent any time researching the role, “I don’t do any of that,” he says, “It’s all from my imagination, all from my observation.”