

EMRAAN HASHMI GETS REAL

BY PREETI THANDI

Toronto: Emraan Hashmi is no stranger when it comes to depicting bold themes on film. May it be the bad boy gangster or passionate lover, Hashmi can easily shed all inhibitions on the screen. Quite grounded, focused and easy to talk to, Hashmi was in Toronto for the world premiere of Oscar winning director Danis Tanovic's film *Tigers* at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF).

Hashmi's performance in *Shanghai* which screened at TIFF 2012 got him the role in *Tigers* where he plays the common man from the lower strata of society who is trying to make ends meet. Hashmi plays a pharmaceutical salesman who sells infant formula and is shattered when he finds out that the incorrect use of his product is causing babies to die in Pakistan. He then goes out to defy all odds by standing up against the multinational corporation. The film is based on a true story, the corporation in question is Nestle, (name changed to Lasta in the film) and the real salesman now lives in Toronto.

"*Tigers* is an exciting film," says Hashmi who is quite a regular in Toronto but first timer at TIFF, "This is a film which was being made for quite some time. It has been researched so well and in so much detail. As an actor to sink my teeth into something that is this powerful a narrative is very different for me. Bollywood has films that are fairly episodic, they probably don't need so much of research, there's the usual song and dance and kisses here and there. When Danis came to me with the script I was completely



Emraan Hashmi, Geetanjali Thapa, Prashita Chaudhary (producer) Guneet Monga (producer) & Danish Tanovic (director)

blown away. It's one of the best scripts I have read."

A challenging film to make on the mis-marketing of infant formula, an issue that has been around for many decades, *Tigers* co-writer and producer Andy Paterson traveled to Lahore and Sialkot in Pakistan with Danis Tanovic to investigate it. They were hoping to find that the problem didn't exist anymore but after visiting hospitals and talking to doctors they discovered that infants were still dying.

"One of the great talents of Danis is that he manages to make big movies about very very real people and so naturally he went to a Bollywood star to find that ordinary man," says Andy Paterson. "Danis had indeed seen Emraan in *Shanghai* but didn't know the rest of it so when he discovered that he was a big Bollywood star, he was a bit surprised including what a genius he was to cast



him. The film was very difficult to make because when you try to tell a story about huge corporations, people get very scared. Some very reputable western financiers were scared not because the story isn't true but because big corporations try and stop you

and it can cost you hundreds of thousands of pounds just to prove that the story is true."

For Hashmi it is all about the story when it comes to choosing his roles and the story of *Tigers* really appealed to him. Hashmi seems to be choosing roles that

are closer to reality. "I definitely like to play the ordinary man in extra-ordinary situations," reveals Hashmi. "A hero need not be a guy who goes out there and bashes up many people. He could be an ordinary guy who succumbed to the pressures and overcomes them. I like playing relatable characters. My films have become parallel mainstream cinema in Bollywood. There's a certain realism and relatability to my characters. I love the human spirit. A film like this is more than a film for me. It's the issue of taking it to all those parents and having the social responsibility through this film to go far and wide with the subject with an issue that's been prevailing across the world in different countries, even more so in the third world countries. In India there are a lot of regions and pockets where a large section of the population is below poverty line and you have sanitization that is not up to the mark and the infant formula is mixed with contaminated water which leads to babies dying."

The film also features India's National Award winning actress in 2013, Geetanjali Thapa who plays Hashmi's wife in the film. The film is slated for an early 2015 release and would have an India cut with a different structure.

Describing *Tigers* as a landmark film, Hashmi hopes that it would hopefully spark off a debate to get the message out there. On a lighter vein when asked about how he feels about being called a serial kisser in Bollywood, Hashmi quips, "I love it. Kissing and getting paid for it is the best profession anyone could have!"