

# Hooda Plays The Gangsta With Style!

By Preeti Thandi

Randeep Hooda, known for constantly pushing boundaries, made his North American debut with Deepa Mehta's *Beeba Boys*,

Hooda was at TIFF for the gala premiere of the film in which he plays the lead character of Jeet Johar, a Punjabi gang leader in Canada's west coast. Best known for his roles in films like *Highway*, *Rang Rasiya* and *Jism 2*, it was his performance in *Once upon a time in Mumbai* that earned him the role in Mehta's film. Hooda actually spent time with an ex-gangster preparing for the role.

Quite candid in person, Randeep Hooda speaks about his experience of working in an Indo-Canadian film.

## How did you get the role of Jeet in *Beeba Boys* and what is it that drew you towards it?

Deepa obviously is the biggest draw, I've always liked her movies and I got it because her mother recommended me to her so I am very thankful to her. I had already received four other scripts on the same set of stories about Indo-Canadian Vancouver Sikh gangsters but they were gang banging without soul. The first was from a Vancouver



guy who was a photographer and photographed their weddings. Then he said, "I can't make it, they will shoot me". This was a few years ago when they were really prevalent. Now they have become lesser and you don't see them anymore which is probably a wise thing because they were not being very successful. They were too loud and ostentatious like all Punjabis, they attracted too much attention so they got shot. One big draw was playing in a North American movie and being presented as mainstream rather

er than bad accented taxi drivers and computer geeks that has become stereotypical for Indians across the world.

## You have worked with a lot of directors, how was it different working with Deepa?

Deepa has got more of an original voice. She is more honest and truthful to the content rather than creating a perception of it. She is quite a gangster herself, you don't mess with Deepa.

## What kind of research did you do for the role? I heard you spent some time with a gangster family.

I did a lot of research many years ago when I first heard of these people. I read a lot of articles and also saw some video footage. There is a chap called Jagdeep Mangat who is an ex-gangster and I went to

Vancouver and spent some time with him. He is a prime example of an adjusted gangster. He is now an immigration lawyer and doing very well so he regaled me with a lot of stories. A guy from Canada gave me some reference material 8 years ago. I was very fascinated. Vancouver is a port city so it's geographical location lends itself to these activities.

## You call yourself an involved not intense actor, why?

I am more involved than other people. I enjoy it and it's not a job for me. One of my biggest enjoyment as an actor is to experience another life without the real repercussions and that is my biggest joy. I just don't do the job, I am the job.

## What did you learn about the Sikh culture?

I already know a lot about the Sikh culture. I have a lot of Sikh friends. It is a very fascinating culture. Its origins were so Sufi but later on it added a martial wing to it because they took up arms against the Muslim atrocities over Hindus and became the guardians. Then of course, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had a huge empire but like *Beeba Boys* they could not hold on to it, because they are very loud ostentatious and show offy. Their culture is such. It is very vibrant, colourful and musical. *Beeba Boys* are not the discreet gangsters or the career gangsters.

## What do you like about Canada and Toronto?

It's a rainbow nation, very multicultural and accepting. People are more genuine here. I lived here for 3 months. It has a great vibe, it's not a vibe you get lost in. Toronto is more subtle and I felt more at home here. Vancouver has the daunting seafronts, docks and big gardens. Toronto is more cohesive, quieter and more relaxed. I got myself a bicycle here and I did horse riding. I got weekends off here, which is unheard of in our country when you are shooting a movie.

## Are you looking for more international work now?

This is my big North American debut I am hoping I find takers here. Though it is a bit impersonal and regimented, it is out of my comfort zone and that's what probably draws me to it.