

## The Eternal Optimist

### An Interview with Anupam Kher

Actor Interview



He can effortlessly slip from the comic to the serious mode, from the positive to the villainous. Perhaps no other actor from Bollywood can handle versatile character shades with as much as ease as Anupam Kher. An eternal optimist at the core, Kher believes that anything is possible in life all you need is the desire to make it happen.

His autobiographical play, '*Kuch Bhi Ho Sakta Hai*' (Anything Can Happen) strings together the key events of Kher's life, adorning his failures. Widely performed in North America the show was a runaway success. It is seldom that the audience gets to see a man of repute talk about his failures in such a candid fashion. The multifaceted artist speaks to MyBindi about his career and achievements:

#### What inspired the autobiographical play, 'Kuch Bhi Ho Sakta Hai'?

I am a very optimistic person. The only way to live is to live optimistically and I think after few years of your work, you also want to give back something or convey your message through the medium that you are from. I had been thinking about how to convey my message. About 5-6 years ago I got a letter from Penguin to write my memoirs, that was the starting point. Then I forgot about it. I wanted to do something in theatre, I had exhausted myself in cinema with over 275 films so I thought about doing something unique and performing my autobiography. The idea was easy to come about but a little difficult to execute. So I taped the incidents in my life and gave it to writer Ashok Patole to make it into a dramatic monologue. I then requested Feroz Khan, who has also directed my earlier play '*Saalgirah*' to make it into a piece of theatre. He has done it remarkably.

#### What's the premise behind the title 'Kuch Bhi Ho Sakta Hai'?

'Kuch Bhi Ho Sakta Hai' is the best line for optimism, that you can do anything in life, you just have to decide to do it.

Looking back at your years in Lucknow Doordarshan, how does it make you feel? Did you ever think you'd be here today?

I was always ambitious. There's a body of work behind where I am, I worked for it. It wasn't like I was studying to be a doctor and became an actor, there were no surprises. I did a one year diploma course in Indian theatre from Chandigarh, a 3 years acting course from NFB and was teaching in the Lucknow Department of Drama. All those things are reflected. Still success doesn't come to everybody. My grandfather used to say, "If you work hard and go for it honestly, you will get it". I never proved him wrong. I am very happy with my career and very thankful to God. I have achieved much more than I thought I would.

#### As an actor which medium do you enjoy more – theatre or film?

As an actor, I am lucky that I have had a variety of roles in cinema but there's no doubt that theatre is the best medium for an actor. The adrenalin rush, the live audience...it's a totally different dimension. There are no re-takes, you have to be alert, and it keeps you alive. Every 5 years I do a play to discover if I am still alive as an actor.

#### You have performed roles in various shades from the comic to the serious, is there any you have enjoyed in particular?

I enjoyed most of them, perhaps the comic roles more because you need more skills as an actor. To make people happy makes me happy. I don't like doing villainous roles as I do a lot of work with children. Besides it is better to make people laugh rather than scare them off. There are plenty of scary of elements in the world anyways.

#### You are also one of the few Indian actors to diversify into international cinema. How has that experience been?

'*Bend it like Beckham*' came at the right stage of my career when I didn't have to work just for the sake of working. The film became a super hit. I was playing an ordinary man and that requires extraordinary skills. I am very happy that it became such a success.

I have also worked in Gurinder Chadha's upcoming movie '*Bride and Prejudice*'. It's a much larger project and I play Mr. Bakshi. The experience has been fantastic.

#### Is it true that you are going to act in a Hollywood production titled 'Soul and Spice'?

Nothing has been finalized in terms of the Hollywood production, it is still in the talks, no contract has been signed yet.

#### What projects are you working on currently?

I am working on a 3D film on the lines of '*Abra Kadabra*', a kid's show titled '*Say na something to Anupam Uncle*', a film titled '*Shukriya*', a BBC series and a drama series titled '*Second Generation*' with British Channel 4.

#### How was it like directing 'Om Jai Jagdish'?

I liked the whole process of directing '*Om Jai Jagdish*'. Perhaps I was too enthusiastic but I really enjoyed the experience of being on the other side of the camera. Failure teaches you more than success. But I will try not to make the same mistakes next time. I have written another script which will be on the floors hopefully by the end of this year.

#### How do you like your role as India's Censor Board Chief?

It is not the most cushy job out there but since I took the responsibility I am giving it 100%. The attached controversy and responsibility is all part of life.

#### What more would Anupam Kher like to achieve for himself?

Now I don't look at life in terms of achieving things, maybe 10 years ago I did. I have already achieved more than I thought I deserved. Now I'd like to do the kind of work I enjoy. I'll take life as it comes. As they say everything is ok in the end, if its' not ok, its' not the end...

by Preeti Thandi

