**‘I tried being a star but it did not work for me’ | The Indian Express**

‘I tried being a star but it did not work for me’ Summary. Irrfan Khan,winner of the National Best Actor Award for his role in Paan Singh Tomar,speaks about his films,the rigour he brings into acting and the roles he would like to do. This session was moderated by Senior Assistant Editor Alaka Sahani. Related. Irrfan Khan,winner of the National Best Actor Award for his role in Paan Singh Tomar,speaks about his films,the rigour he brings into acting and the roles he would like to do. This session was moderated by Senior Assistant Editor Alaka Sahani. Alaka Sahani: Your career has followed an interesting trajectory. How much of it was planned? To begin with,I wanted to become a sportsman. But I didnt have family support. Also,in any sports team,there are a limited number of people and an age limit. You cannot go beyond that. But in acting,it is just me. I did not need anyones support and I could go as far as I wanted to and for however long. So,I decided to become an actor. I got admission at the National School of Drama in the first attempt. Then I struggled the way a lot of people do. I carried my photos around and tried to look glamorous. I had to create my own path and this takes time. So I had to wait for a longer time. P Vaidyanathan Iyer: At what stage did you realise you have to break away from the rest? When I started meeting people from the film industry,I realised I was not making an impression. Whatever was my capability,it was not coming out. I was not able to convince the other person what I was capable of. I had a lot of pressure to learn acting,because when I saw myself on screen,I wanted to like myself. Priyanka Pereira: When did you start liking yourself as an actor? My wife is my biggest critic. Whenever I thought I had done a good job,she would say no. Whatever self-esteem I would gather for myself,she would kill it. When Haasil released,I did not go for the screening. My wife came back from there around 2 am. She woke me up and started crying and told me that my performance was mind-blowing. Television also taught me a lot. Priyanka Sinha: Which is more difficultbeing a star or an actor? Whatever comes naturally to you is easier. If you think you are glamorous and love talking to people,then you can become a star. If you are inquisitive and there are things to explore through acting,then you stay an actor. Becoming a star is about boosting ones ego. I tried being a star but it did not work for me. Smita Nair: In your movies,we have always seen that no matter which actress is cast opposite you,youre the perfect man. How do you achieve that? Its a very intense desire to experience a romantic life,which I couldnt. So,whatever chance I get in cinema,I grab it. Im fascinated by love stories,Im fascinated by women. Smita Nair: Theres one scene in Paan Singh Tomar where you have to show sexual appetite. How did you manage that? I didnt have to manage that,I didnt have to work for that. Its just there. Asad Khan: When an offbeat film like Lunchbox comes to you,do you experience any apprehension in terms of the commercial success of the film? What are the factors you look for in a role before signing up for it? Lunchbox for me was always a commercial film. I do consider if a film will commercially work or not. It is a very strong factor when Im choosing a film. The way I am hungry for stories,I know that the audience is also hungry for stories. So I saw the potential in Lunchboxthat its going to warm peoples hearts. I knew the treatment will not be exactly like commercial cinema,but it has its uniqueness. With Qissa,Im not sure if its going to work in India as a commercial film. But that film will definitely have a shelf life. Suanshu Khurana: In one episode of Katha Sagar,you played a 40-year-old doctor when you were only 25. What was it that appealed to you about the story? There was no choice. These old-age roles have been coming to me since the beginning of my career. Im surprised myself. The first play I did,I was maybe 16 or 17 and they made me an old man. This is a mystery to me and Im still fighting with it,but I keep getting those roles. Amrita Dutta: What kind of homework goes into the roles that you do,because you dont do too many? Every role needs a different kind of homework,theres no one formula. Its new,so you dont know what youre going to do. Sometimes a role doesnt need homework at all. If you do the homework,you might spoil the performance. Its instinctive. Mayura Janwalkar: How often are you frustrated by the Censor Board? Once I felt really bad because there was a dialogue in Yeh Saali Zindagi. There is a line in the film where I say Tune saale usse kutiya kyon bola?. And the Censor Board said,kutiya hata do<U+0094>. And the whole point of the story was gone. I felt helpless and frustrated. Shobhana Subramanian: What is the one thing you would change if you were on the Censor Board? There should be more classification. It cant be just A,U/A and U. A film is a medium of expression,so you cant put strange conditions. Cinema is a medium of expression,let it flourish. Put conditions the way they have to be put. Sankhayan Ghosh: Do you think it would have been possible for you to do these middle-of-the-road films 10 years ago? No,10 years ago was very difficult. We thought were going to redefine entertainment after Haasil (2003),but the atmosphere was not there. If Haasil and Maqbool (2003) had come in todays time,they would have been completely different. Shubhangi Khapre: Is there a dream character that you want to play 10-15 years from now? I want to do the role of a musician. That is a desire Ive had for two years and I still do. Sharvari Patwa: Who do you think are the most underrated and overrated actors in the industry? Whoever is overrated let him enjoy that rating,why puncture that? There are fantastic actors who never got their due. Pankaj Kapur is one of those actors and Om Puri. In todays time,everyone is trying to get there. Pitobash is fantastic and he will do wonders in a year or two. Also,Deepak Dobriyal and Rajkumar Yadav. Vidya Prabhu: If there is one film you wish you had not done? Chocolate. I couldnt watch it. I was only given the first half of the script. The second part I did not get even after the movie was over. Manasi Phadke: You said there are stars and there are actors. In this era,who,according to you,has been able to evolve as both? There are a few stars who have a kind of earnestness and capability to give great performances. Hrithik Roshan,Saif Ali Khan and Ranbir Kapoor have that. They can make audiences believe that they are playing characters. They need to be used in a very intelligent way and they have a drive to go that side. Bharat Sundaresan: Is it difficult to replicate a sportsperson on screen? You create that situation,thats the job of an actor. You have to believe that you are in that situation and you react accordingly. Thats why sometimes being an actor feels like you are naked in front of people. When we were in NSD,theyd make us do these exercises where we would be blindfolded and theyd ask us to fall flat and we were like,What exercise is this? What if I fall and get hurt?. But that was about trusting others. You have to trust yourself,your co-actor and your directoryou are opening everything from inside. Mihir Vasavda: Is there another sportsperson whose biopic you want to act in? I am dying to play Dhyanchand,but I dont think I suit his physicality. Maybe Ill bring elements related to him into a character and Ill play that. Dipanita Nath: Why is it that unlike in the West actors in Bollywood are seen so rarely in the theatre? Do you miss the stage? We dont have a culture of theatre. In America,theatre is alive. People are writing plays. Here when we do theatre,we either borrow scripts from abroad or there are few writers who are writing for a particular audience. So theatre movement itself is not so vibrant here. There are a few genuine people like Naseeruddin Shah who are doing theatre and doing it for the right reason. Sometimes,I do miss it but not in a way that I will leave cinema and start doing theatre. Mayura Janwalkar: What is the definition of a good actor? Somebody who can hypnotise you. Even if its buffoonery,as long as he or she is engaging you,its fine. Thats the function of an actor. Sandeep Singh: Who are your biggest influences? There are a few,though in Jaipur,we never watched films. At NSD,I discovered and admired Marlon Brando,Robert De Niro and even Philip Seymour Hoffman. Hoffman had a small role in the film Scent of a Woman,and he was a huge influence on me. I wonder why he didnt get his due. Similarly,Gerard Depardieu,Frances McDormand and Al Pacino. Among Indians? I havent seen many Motilal movies but whatever I saw was ingrained in my head. Of course,theres Dilip Kumar and Amitabh Bachchan,a whole generation was influenced by the latter. Mithun Chakrabortys early films like Mrigaya were also good,he was an instinctive actor. Rajesh Khanna,I. loved his easiness. He had a nice smile too. Mayura Janwalkar: Is there any character that you would have loved to essay? At one point of time,I wanted to play Devdas but that desire and that time have also gone. Suanshu Khurana: What were your growing-up years in Rajasthan like? My father was from a feudal family and my mother was also from a reputed family. But our fortunes were on a downslide. So those were the days when they were trying to make their own identity but also holding on to their values. They looked down upon films,ditto for sports. They only wanted us to focus on studies. I would go to school at 6 am and come home at 6 pm. I would long for the time when this school business would end and Id grow up and lead my own life. My father was a hunter,so I can never forget those nights when I accompanied him. They have left a strong impression on my mind. Whenever I get time,I look for jungles where I can go see animals at night. Its the most exciting moment for me. Shiny Varghese: When you are shooting a film over a long period of time,how do you bring rigour into your work? Thats the nature of the profession. When you work with a story and shoot it for 5-6 months,sometimes you do half a scene today and half the scene four months later. In such cases,you learn as an actor,you pick up the skills. You are driven by both passion and skill and when the passion is gone,the skill takes over. But yes,when only the skills are working,then you are deadthe profession is dead to you and theres no fun. Smita Nair: Are you stubborn as an actor? Earlier,I used to be. But now I consider it a collaboration. Its more of a discussion and exploration together. It cant be either my way or his way,because then there is no fun making a movie. We both are there to tell a story,and bring our own elements to it. Like in Life of Pi,(director) Ang Lee had a particular design: he told me that for a particular dialogue,I need to turn and say it in a certain way. Very precise. Five years ago,it would have been very difficult for me. But now,I know how to adapt to that design and make it my own. Thats also the function of an actor,to make a certain thing your own. Sankhayan Ghosh: Does criticism affect you? Yes,it does. In Hollywood,it matters a lot. It can make or break the film. Back home,certain films are above criticism,you can keep on shouting but still the audience will go for them. But I do get upset when the reports are cynical and biased. Priyanka Pereira: Do you watch films that are above criticism? I dont watch many films. I dont have the time and the appetite to sit through a film where I know whats going to happen. The film should surprise you. Earlier,I used to think,Im in the film business and I should watch every film that comes. But I dont have that patience. P Vaidyanathan Iyer: What do you do when youre not working? When I do have time,I try to go away from the city,to a place where there are no people and just me. I also try to spend time with my kids. I watch documentaries. It takes time for me to get engaged by fiction. Sagnik Chowdhury: You are an actor who gives a lot of importance to the craft of acting and filmmaking. Do you foresee a time when you would get into filmmaking yourself? I dabbled in direction once when I was in television,but I did it because at that point,I was bored of acting. But direction doesnt come naturally to me. Ill definitely direct if a story becomes so compelling that I cannot live without sharing it. I wish I could do it. I wish I could write so that I could make films,because this is the best time to tell stories. The audience is ready to listen to stories,so it is the best time for a director. But Id love to direct and act. Because as an actor,you have to wait for stories and present the other persons point of view. Shubangi Khapre: Since you played cricket,is there any player you really followed and thought this is where I want to be? Many cricketers fascinate me because of their openness. It was not the craft that was making them players,it was their gut instinct. Like Vivian Richards,who didnt follow set rules. You become such a master in your craft that rules start obeying you. There was also Imran Khan,who had a lot of charisma,and Steve Waugh,who had a very unattractive way of playing cricket but it was fascinating how he used to lead the team with such confidence. I also think M S Dhoni has god-given intelligence for the game.