**Screen Exclusive: The Rise and Rise of Deepika Padukone | The Indian Express**

Summary. Related. After a season of success,Deepika Padukone gets back to doing what she enjoys best movies and more movies. Between her countless assignments,she speaks her mind on work commitments,monetary matters and more. That actress Deepika Padukone within a short span of seven years has slipped easily into the numero uno slot among actresses is impressive,but her journey is even more impressive for the fact that such an arc was unexpected. By her own admission,director Farah Khan who gave her her first Bollywood break in Om Shanti Om stands impressed by the progress she has made in these few years. She feels very proud. I remember her saying in an interview that in the first film she had to take me by the hand and spoon-feed me; show me exactly what Farah wanted me to do and now I just understand what she says. And that feels nice, says Padukone. Her rise has been swift but sure-footed. And pleasantly,on the back of some good films that tapped into her acting potential. That they have yielded magic numbers is an added advantage. When the leggy Padukone arrived on the scene,with a role opposite Shah Rukh Khan in his home production,no less,she automatically pole-vaulted into the A-league. The success of the film guaranteed big projects,but industry watchers were uncertain of how long the golden run would last. While she scored high on stardom,her acting chops were yet untested. After a middling success with Bachna Ae Haseeno and a not-so-impressive Chandni Chowk To China ,Padukone was still waiting in the wings to really strike out. The checkered score continued with hits and misses of different kinds but over the last year and half,Ms Padukone has impressed the industry and the audience alike with her new-found on-screen bravura. After Cocktail,Race 2,Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani,Chennai Express and now Goliyon Ki Raasleela – Ram-leela ,she has delivered the perfect serve. Needless to say,at this moment the industry cant have enough of her. But of course,none of this would have been possible without Padukone grabbing golden opportunities and turning them into an advantage. Bhansalis …Ram-leela is an example. Kareena Kapoor was originally pencilled in for the role but when news of her walking out of the project began to circulate,Padukone when approached was quick to step in and seize the moment. She juggled her work schedules to ensure that the prestigious project landed in her kitty and now that the film is a success,all that hard work would seem worth the trouble. But shes not resting on her laurels yet. After the gruelling promotion of …Ram-leela ,she is back to shooting for Farah Khans next venture Happy New Year . And yes Homi Adajanias Finding Fanny too. Its hardly any wonder that her vanity van is her most frequented space these days. So much so that shes spruced it up with some lovely wallpaper,painted wooden furniture,even a gen-set and matching pink and grey clothes hangers too. There is a smart coffee machine besides cookingware and every other domestic detail in place. Padukone steps in between shots,looking pretty in pink but its only after pack-up that we settle down to an interview in transit before she leaves for an appointment with the beautician for manicure for an ad-shoot the next morning. As they say in showbiz,regardless of success and failure,the show must go on. After two hits earlier this year,…Ram-leelas success must make you very happy? Its lived up to my expectations and much more and of course,you hope for success for every film that you do but also for me,personally it started so fast and so much happened so soon that I dont think I even had the time to process it. Before I knew it,we were done with the shoot and the promotions and it was up for release. I think I was still reeling from the success of Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani and Chennai Express so much has happened this year but the kind of critical acclaim that …Ram-leela has got and the kind of appreciation it has got from the audience I dont think any of us expected. What convinced you to get on board? Were you worried about pulling it off convincingly? I go with the story,whether it has something I connect with. How challenging a role is never a reason for me to accept or decline a film. I dont think I have ever not done a film because I am scared of confronting a role or taken on a film thinking, arrey ,this is going to be really easy. And yes,there are some roles that come more naturally and others that you have to work on because I have always believed that every actor brings a little of themselves to every role. For example,for someone like me playing a Naina Talwar in a Yeh Jawaani… is more identifiable because I have experienced a lot of my life like that and that makes it easier for me versus say a Leela or even a Meena Lochini ( Chennai Express ) for that matter. Those were completely out of my comfort zone,but I dont think I am scared any more. I am not saying I dont get the jitters. I do. My mind is constantly working as to how can I make my role more exciting or interesting,but at the same time I am not scared to try something new and do something different. Everyone is talking about your confident and competent performance so what has changed? I think its been more on the personal front than professional. On the personal front,it has been about an acceptance of myself. Initially I was a bit lost. I had questions What am I doing? What is it that I want to do? What is it that I dont want to do? Today,I think I have answered all those questions and that clarity within myself has made things a lot better. That is the only thing that I can think of. At the same time,its a bit silly to intellectualise the process. Something good has happened where I am enjoying the work and its flowing. I feel that all the energy that I have is going into my work,so maybe its the fact that I have become more comfortable with myself,but it could even be something that I am not aware of. You have mentioned in interviews though that criticism from a columnist made you work on certain aspects of your personality which helped. Every step of the way for all the love and appreciation that you get,you will always get a little bit of criticism. I think I have been very fortunate that the proportion has not been much,but whatever little it is,today if 80 people like me,tomorrow I want 100 per cent people to like me. And I think I have been very fortunate that I am a very strong person in a sense. Of course I have had my moments of weakness,of course I have had moments when I question things. But I have never allowed any kind of negativity to get the better of me. I have remained a very positive person in spite of anything that I might have gone through in my life. I never came into the industry with any preconceived notions of how things would be. Even though I was told all these things,I never bought into it. I have always believed that I need to have my own journey,my own experiences to come to a conclusion. I have always been very lucky as far as work is concerned. Yes,I have had films not doing well but even those were with the biggest of directors and banners. Right from my first film I think I have been very fortunate. In spite of my films not doing well,I have never been written off. The industry always gave me that chance. People have always encouraged and supported me and I still got to do the best. I think a large part of that has to come from my fans who love me for who I am. I feel like they have accepted me from my first film and irrespective of the films that did or did not do well,they still came in to watch my films. So that gives you a different kind of inner strength. After five consecutive hits,two of them the biggest blockbusters,have you upped your acting fees? I havent. Besides,I have never been comfortable discussing monies. I dont even get into that conversation with my producers. I believe I have a team of professionals,who do a damn good job. How does it feel to be hailed as the new numero uno on the block? I am not anyone to make such claims. It could be a feeling for people,but its not a feeling I walk around with because like I said,I cant take any of this for granted. I had a bad phase too and now my films are doing well. I am not someone who takes success or failure too seriously. That doesnt mean I dont take my work seriously,but I think at some point you need to learn to not allow these things to sway you. But surely it is permissible to feel euphoric for ones achievements? I feel happy for like,a few hours. Like the Friday when …Ram-leela released,I was so euphoric and then overwhelmed,that whenever anyone who phoned,I was on the verge of breaking down but on Saturday I was back to work. Would you describe yourself as a workaholic? I am borderline workaholic,but my colleagues would say I am a complete workaholic! I started working when I was 18,I dont know life beyond this. I dont know what else I would rather be doing than this. Are there any actresses whose work or career graph you have admired? Yes,there are actresses whose work I have admired,but everyones career shapes up in a different way. Having said that I have admired Madhuri Dixit. She came,took the world by storm and then chucked it all up. I think that is amazing for a woman to do. Having said that,I am not saying thats what it will be for me,but I will embrace whatever destiny has in store for me. I guess the day you stop enjoying your work,you have to stop or the boredom is going to show. But then again you have actresses like Zohra Sehgal still at it and are still amazing. Over the last few years,have you found your own technique to tackle a role? I dont think I process and analyse too much. There is no right or wrong in acting. What I bear in mind is whether you are being true to yourself,that moment and that character. A scene I have done today can turn out different the next day because of the different energies at work. As actors when you watch your films years later,you always feel that you could have done better,done this or done that. If you were to choose your favourite among all the five hits,which character would you say was the most challenging? Its very tough because Cocktail was a role that was really close to me. I took a long time to get out of it and then Ram-leela happened. But then when I think back, Chennai Express was also a tough one. Chennai Express was a film where I struggled in the initial days with the language,etc but once I got it,I flew with it. Then I enjoyed being Meenamma. For a character like Meenamma,one has to be completely uninhibited which,as an actor,you have to be any way. Speaking of Meenamma,tell us something about the famous sleep-talking scene. I read it and on paper it was hilarious,so there was tremendous pressure on me that it translates on screen in the same way. I am glad people think it is one of the outstanding scenes in the film. I have never seen people react to anything like they do to that scene. I believe you let go of Fast & Furious because you did not want to drop any of the projects that you were committed to? I couldnt have not promoted Ram-leela . Its a film thats very,very close to me. I know what I have put into that film. I had also committed to Finding Fanny and I stick by my commitments. Once I make a commitment I stick by it,no matter however exciting other opportunities might be. If I have started something,I have to see it through. And I believe in destiny. I believe that if despite trying everything,it still didnt work out,it means there is something else in store. Or may be this is not the right time. How is it to work yet again with Homi Adajania and Farah Khan,after a short break? Theres a lot more familiarity that they both feel with me. The first time it takes a while to understand the mechanism of working with each other. Farah especially,because she has seen the journey and watched me very closely. Now I see the pride in her, in fact when the …Ram-leela reviews came out,she was the first person to call me up. Do your parents have any favourites from your films? My parents have loved all of them. This year I think they are really excited. They are proud parents. I think they almost feel like Where has all this come from? ( laughs ) They feel proud because they know the efforts I have put in and how passionate I am about my work. Whats the best thing about this hard earned success? I am sensing that people are feeling a part of my success,they are happy for me. More than anything else,I hope they like me as a person. Its something my father has always taught me to be conscientious of people should appreciate or respect you for the person that you are. You can have all the fame and success in the world,but if you dont have respect whats the point? Whats next on the cards a Sooraj Barjatya film opposite Salman Khan? I havent been approached yet. I am keen to do a film with Salman but whether its this one or some other,I dont know. But theres Finding Fanny,Happy New Year and Imtiazs (Ali) next with Ranbir (Kapoor).