

Amrita's interview with Stardust magazine

Star Speaks

TAMARIND WOMAN



Despite a non-starter of a debut in 'Ab Ke Baras', newcomer Amrita Rao proved her immense talent in a brief role as Bhagat Singh's fiancée in 'The Legend Of Bhagat Singh'. And now, having bagged big films like 'Main Hoon Na' and 'Deewar', Amrita emphasizes that she's here to make it big, As 'Ishq Vishq' and the audience cover her.

"Big surprises come in small packages"- the ideal case in point could well be Bollywood's littlest baby – new entrant Amrita Rao. Beginning as a model whose face became synonymous with your morning cuppa' coffee in the Bru commercial, further sweetened with the Cadbury's Perk commercials, this petite and talented girl is one of the most promising newcomers on the scene today.

'Ab Ke Baras', the launch-pad for Arya Babbar, was also her debut, where she was appreciated for her histrionics despite the failure of the film. And in a three-scene and a song role in the bio-pic 'The Legend Of Bhagat Singh', Amrita gave a performance that most couldn't give in three hours of screen time. Not surprising then, that she she's bagged some big films in the follow up run. If that doesn't speak for her immense talent, what does? I meet the dainty actress one warm afternoon, and over *chai* we discuss her conquests.

Amrita was to debut with 'Ishq Vishq', but not many are aware of her exclusive contract with the production company, TIPS. For a newcomer to be bound by a contract is not a very good idea these days. "It's a very flexible contract. Basically, they're just playing secretary," she airily dismisses the rumors. "TIPS had initiated the concept of Artiste Management and I was the first artiste to be signed for it. Since it was mutually beneficial to both, TIPS and myself, I had no problems with it. I'm not bound to do only their films, and not look at outside ventures. I'm aware that rumors say TIPS isn't allowing me to work with other filmmakers, but there's no truth to them," she clarifies. If reports are to be believed, then she's made a 'coool' two crore bucks from the deal. What's the truth? "Two Crores!" she exclaims in disbelief. "Well, let's not get into the details of the contract," she suggests, attempting to close the topic. But I rag the petite Ms. Rao, pursuing the issue of her contract. "No comments." she says. "I admit that two crores is a huge amount of money, but who would pay a newcomer such an amount of money..." she trails off. But considering that TIPS signed a contract with her, they haven't really given her work that justifies her talent so far, just a small role in 'The Legend Of Bhagat Singh' and a delayed 'Ishq Vishq'... Without waiting for me to finish, Amrita elucidates, "The contract is for a particular number of years. I can't go into the details and reveal information about it, it's not fair to them. It's a very fair contract, with no compulsions or bindings on me. They had promised to launch me with 'Ishq Vishq', but when Raj Kanwar approached me with 'Ab Ke Baras', they felt it would be a decent launch. I would get the necessary experience, understand camera angles, diction and other nuances of acting. I have no regrets doing that film. And I had a very good back-up with 'The Legend of Bhagat Singh' under the guidance of Raj Kumar Santoshi. I have no

complaints whatsoever, it's a great back up for me since I don't come from a film background or have a godfather," she maintains. Well, if she's giving so much credit to Santoshi, then how come Rajji didn't repeat her in 'Khakee', opting for Aishwarya Rai instead? "Perhaps that role required a mature actress. Rajji has told me that if there's a suitable role in his film, he'll always offer it to me first. Rajji chooses his cast on the basis of who suits the character best," quips Amrita readily in support of her favourite director.

Despite the initial hiccups, Amrita has been lucky in bagging a couple of big films in her kitty. Choreographer Farah Khan signed her for her directorial debut, 'Main Hoon Na', produced by buddy Shah Rukh Khan with Zayed Khan and Sunil Shetty, besides King Khan himself. And Gaurang Doshi chose her over the sensational Bipasha Basu in his next, 'Deewar - Let's Bring Our Heroes Home', starring Amitabh Bachchan, Sunjay Dutt and Akshaye Khanna, under the directorial baton of Milan Luthria. "Farah Khan wasn't even aware that I had done 'Ab Ke Baras', she knew me as the Bru model. But she signed me on after having seen me in 'The Legend Of Bhagat Singh'. The first thing that Farah asked was about my dancing abilities and only confirmed me after an audition and screen test. Farah, my mother and myself then met with Shah Rukh, after which everything was finalised. Farah was pleased that I didn't have a spate of flops behind me. Milan Luthria, had also seen 'The Legend of Bhagat Singh'. That's how he signed me for 'Deewar'," she sums up her conquests.

It must still have been a very trying and restless phase, waiting for the career to take off. Considering that 'Ab Ke Baras' was a washout, 'The Legend...' didn't hit the bull's eye at the box office, and 'Isha Vishq' did take some time to complete and hit the marquee. Not in the least discouraged or perturbed by the initial hurdles in her career, Amrita asserts, "It wasn't a stressful period even though my first film was soon forgotten and I only had a small role in the second. What mattered most is that I was appreciated for my performances. I wasn't sitting at home waiting for offers to come my way. We started work on 'Ishq Vishq' soon. I still have a long way to go and I'm in no hurry at all. Right now, I only want to concentrate on roles of my age. I'm in no hurry to jump into the senior character bracket so early in my career, just to prove that I'm doing something different, nor do I want to experiment with different images and land up nowhere. *Na idhar ki, na udhar ki..*"

When Hrishitaa Bhatt signed 'Asoka' with Shah Rukh, she was not prepared for the shock that awaited her on the film's release. Her role was chopped and scenes changed, making her look like a glorified extra in the historical saga. With Zayed's debut film failing, rumours are rife that his role in 'Main Hoon Na' is being slashed drastically, which could result in Amrita's corresponding role too being cut. "From what I've seen of the film and the scenes that I have done with him, Zayed will really stand out as a good actor," she defends her co-star. "The role seems to have been written for him and he's really done justice to the character." But that doesn't stop the producer Khan from exercising control to salvage his film, if need be.

Is she prepared for that eventuality? "That depends on a lot of factors. At the cost of sounding immodest, mine is a good role with a good number of scenes and most of Zayed's and my together scenes are with Shah Rukh." I bring up the question of Shah Rukh's interference in the name if involvement, whilst making




the film. It's a known fact that each time an actor produces a film, he calls the shots, firing the gun from his director buddy's shoulders." In staunch defense, Amrita avers, "Despite being the producer, Shah Rukh has never interfered in the directorial aspect of the film. Farah always called the shots and Shah Rukh's been a perfect actor and producer. He's never told Farah what to do and how to do it, an important fact that most actor-producers should acknowledge. You may be the best of friends with your director, but you must let the director do his job. It's important that one maintains a balance between work and friendship. It's not very often that newcomers get scripts and opportunities like these. I'm very excited to be acting with Shah Rukh in his own production." That speaks a lot for the faith Amrita has in her producer, who's had the reputation of being ruthless and manipulative, when it comes to his films. Amrita adds, "Of what we've shot so far, we've stuck to the script and no alterations whatsoever have been made on the sets or on the eve of the shooting. We're all working as a team and the end-product is what matters to us all."

With Shah Rukh's back surgery, immediate shooting plans seem to have gone for a toss. According to reliable sources, after his back treatment, Shah Rukh's prioritised his own production, the Aziz Mirza directed 'Chalte Chalte' and Karan Johar's 'Kal Ho Na Ho', pushing 'Main Hoon Na' to the bottom of the list. Is she disappointed by the strange twist of fate? "I'm not disappointed," says Amrita, dismissing all such notions straightaway. "Initially, 'Main Hoon Na' was scheduled to release this December, but now it looks like it might get a little delayed. But, these things keep happening. Everything is so precarious in the film industry. It's not as if Shah Rukh's intentionally delaying the film. It's a genuine problem and it was important for him to get his back operated upon. And, adequate rest after surgery is as important a part of the treatment, so that he regains complete fitness. Shah Rukh is so involved in his work that he doesn't really pay much attention to anything else. I genuinely wish he takes proper care this time and recovers fully before commencing his work," she ended, sounding really sincere.

One news that really shocked me was that the dainty Ms. Rao was reportedly seeing her 'Deewar' producer, Gaurang Doshi. So much so that Gaurang chose her over the more hot-n-happening Bipasha Basu. "That is ridiculous!" she bursts out in loud laughter. The rumour that I'm seeing Gaurang is really very stupid. I've barely met him enough to even know him." Well, if that's what she says, but apparently Gaurang, too, is so smitten by her that he changed the script at her behest. The petite Ms.Rao wields some power to have things her way, I remark with unmistakable sarcasm. "Imagine Gaurang and Milan making changes in the script at my behest!" She laughs as if it's some joke. "Do you really think so?" wonders Amrita, still amused by the controversy. "Yes, there might have been some changes in the script. But I don't think they'll make changes to accommodate me in the film when they have actors like Amitji, Sunjay and Akshaye, who're capable of carrying the film single-handedly. It's a very serious subject, and my presence in the film brings in some of the lighter moments. Increasing my role will mean losing the essence of the subject, which I'm sure you'll agree, they can't afford to. They're all established names, whereas I'm just a newcomer. They don't need me, I need them. It's an honour that they feel that I'm capable of delivering the goods and so have chosen me for it. I have gone through the script, and made sure that I have a decent role," clarifies Amrita, refuting allegations of her being high-handed and demanding at so early a stage in her career. "I know that I'll certainly have a couple of songs and a good number of important scenes in the film, and my prime objective is to do complete justice to the character. Being in the company of such great talents will obviously inspire and motivate me to try and rise to their level of excellence. It's a great

opportunity for a newcomer to prove herself. One can't always get films revolving around you as the protagonist. It's important for any actor to make the most of the available opportunities and justify your presence therein. With 'Deewar', I'm not thinking about how long my role will eventually turn out on the screen. It's really very stupid to even think that I can convince the makers to change scripts. I can't stop laughing at it."

After the laughter dies completely, and the atmosphere is sober once again, we continue. If it's not Gaurang, then who is the lucky man in her life? "There's no man in my life," she says in a flat tone, and I was anticipating this response. Yawn! Tell me another one! "Basically, I've always been shy, and I don't socialise a lot either. I spend most of my spare time at home. My parents are really very strict and have set a 9:00 p.m. deadline for me. So I don't venture anywhere out after that, unless I'm working. My parents know exactly what I am doing and where I am. I'm in no hurry for anything in life. I'm not under any pressure to have a boyfriend just to prove something isn't wrong with me. That's a very ridiculous notion. There's a proper time for every thing, and right now my career is of prime importance. Let me work towards realizing that, other things can wait. If Mr. Right has to come, he will come, at the 'right' time." But, if her parents were that strict, how did they react when she told them of her decision to model and then act in films? "Modeling happened accidentally, but very well. My dad was zapped. My mother's always been my constant pillar of support, accompanying me everywhere, from meetings to auditions to shoots etc. My family has always supported me in whatever I've chosen to do. So, when film offers came, it was my decision if I really wanted to take the plunge or not. Today, I'm here because I really want to make it big, to become successful as an actress. At the end of the day, I don't want to be known as a flop actress. My prime contention was that if I do films, I wouldn't want people to say 'Arre, woh to ek flop actress hai', which worries me. In films, you'll either be praised to the skies, or criticised and pulled down really badly if you're not good enough. It's not easy to become an actress. I would prefer to be known as a good actress instead of a good looker or dancer. I'd rather concentrate on good work and do a couple of films at a time. It's not the money that matters, coz if it did, then I could have easily signed a handful of films down south. But as I said, I'm in no hurry."

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