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SARA ALI KHAN

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I am very, very overwhelmed to be. I didn't expect this at all. And it's really nice. So, thank you so much for having me. You know, university's always been very important to me and my family. It's something that my father inculcated in me very early in life. He said that education is of prime importance.

But more than that, I think to find your own place in any institution is the most important. So, whether it's the subjects that you do, the university that you apply to, or the essay that you write, the one piece of advice that I would impart is do it honestly and do it yourself because there's a reason that universities ask you to write essays. You know, I got rejected from Oxford University, which is in England, which was my dream. It was my dream school to go to Oxford and I didn't get in.

And I thought that the world was going to end that day. I was, I didn't know what to do. I called my mother up hysterically crying, saying, mom, I've gotten rejected from Oxford. I don't know what to do. And then short enough, you know, the common apps came in and I got into Columbia. And those three years that I spent in New York, I mean, I would give an arm and a leg to do it again.

And I think it's moments like that, that you realize that people know what they're doing. You know, there's a reason I didn't get into Oxford and there's a reason I got into Columbia. And if you knew me at all, you would understand that I was happier in New York City than I would have been in Oxford, you know, and to each their own. But I would definitely say that when you think about education, as important as it is, it's also very personal. So, be sure and be careful to be yourself because that's the most important thing, anywhere.

So, when I finished the 10th grade, I was almost convinced that I wanted to do Medicine. But the thing is that I have like this mild tremor problem. Like if I keep my hands, you know, there's a slight tremor. So, I was like, okay, I can't do surgery. So, let's not do this. Let's do law. So, I decided to study law. So, I did history and political science, but then in my last semester, oh no, my second last semester of college, I did an acting course.

And I realized that as somebody that's loved studying, as somebody that till date loves reading, in a university like Columbia, in a city like New York, you know, I did courses in every field. I did history. I did Political Science. I did Chemistry. I did Math. I did Economics. I did Literature. I did Philosophy. I did courses in so many different, different things and enjoyed each and every one of them.

But the rush I felt when I did theater on stage, I've never felt like that. And that's when I knew what I'd known since I was a child. Because since I was four, acting has been a dream, but then I got distracted because, A, I was really fat, and B, I was really nerdy. And the combination meant that I probably shouldn't act, you know, why? Might as well study. Because I really, really enjoyed it.

You know, there used to be times and I promise you, I'm not making this up. That mom would come into the room and she would confiscate my books because she would say, this is not okay. You cannot do this. It's not normal. And I was, I mean, I would have laughed if you came to me when I was in the 10th grade or 11th grade and told me that you will be sitting in Singapore one day talking to children as an actor, I would have been like, yeah, okay. Haha.

But you know, here is where I am, so you know. You know, I have to say that I got very lucky because even though I've worked with big and established actors, they've both been extremely giving and generous as have my directors. So, I never felt, of course, there was personal intimidation, you know, that I felt within myself. Like in a van or by myself at home, I used to be like, oh my God, you know, I'm working with these actors and these directors and, you know, it was a little nerve wrecking.

But when I walked onto set, whether it was with Sushant and Gattu Sir or with Ranveer and Rohit Sir, there was no space for intimidation because they were so welcoming. They never made me feel inferior at all. Which of course I was. I'm a rank newcomer. I've never even done like a film making course. I've done theatre in school, which is totally different. You know, college level theater is not Bollywood at all.

I didn't even, I mean, and even though my parents are actors, the first set that I really went on was the set of Kedarnath. So, I mean, I was very, very overwhelmed. And I think that there are two ways you can go, you know. Either when you're working with such senior people, you can let the pressure get to you, or you can just aspire to learn from them. And I got really lucky because they were so keen on teaching me.

There wasn't a single day where Sushant or Ranveer made me feel like anything uncool. You know, I was always welcomed, always encouraged. And Gattu sir and Rohit sir were just a blast. So, I got lucky.

I feel that, you know, no matter which Institute you belong to, I was in Dhirubhai Ambani International School. Then I was in Columbia University, now I am part of the Indian film industry, I feel that no matter which institution you're part of, you just have to give your hundred percent and you have to respect it. And once that happens, most of your job is kind of done.

You know, you have to respect the books that you read. You have to respect the teacher that's teaching you. You have to respect the set that you're on. You have to respect the director that's directing you. You have to respect, the same way as you respect your classmate's opinion, you respect your co-actor's reactions. And it's not very different.

You know, a lot of people say that, oh my god, you know, you studied and now you're doing films and isn't it like earth shatteringly different. And it's actually not because the stakes are extremely high. The pressure is high. You need to perform. Your performance matters. Competition matters, not getting negative about competition matters. So, actually, if anything, I look at my college and my school as a training ground for what I chose to do, which a lot of people find very surprising because they were like, really, I mean, you went to an Ivy league college as opposed to dance class. So, it's not really the most stereotypical training that you need.

But I don't think that that's what it's about. For me, I don't even look at it as a transformation. I look at it as just a journey, you know, because going to college helped me identify who I am. It helped me find who I am. And I think that, that is the four most important thing for an actor. Because if you don't know who you are, there is no way that you'll be able to play five different characters and convey that because you need to know who you are at least.

So, I don't really look at it as a transformation or a change. I look at it as almost an inevitable journey for me. And as far as my aspirations for the future are concerned, I mean, there are many. I love what I do. I've always dreamt of being an actor, you know. But I think it's so different when you're actually living the dream. And having been appreciated for Kedarnath and Simmba, now I just have to go further. You know, because initially it was a little bit, it was a lot for me as well.

I was excited to see how I would be received. And because I have been received with so much love. I mean, even today, I'm till, what's the date? 25th of Jan, right? Two months ago, nothing of mine had ever released. Within two months, I'm suddenly in Singapore meeting like lots of students waving to me from like windows. And I'm like, wow, you know, it takes a minute and you, it's shocking for me.

Till date, like when at the airport, people recognized me in Singapore. I'm like, what's going on? I didn't expect this to this degree. And when that happens, somewhere down the line, you get aware of the fact that people have expectations from you. People recognize you, your family has expectations from you. So, from now on, there's only going forward. You know, there's no other option, but just doing even better. And you know, now I've proven to myself that I can maybe act. So, now I need to actually get so much better that everybody can continue to be proud. This is just chapter zero. I mean, I need to do a lot and god willing, I'll work hard at it.

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