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## KANGANA RANAUT

### THE NEW FACE OF INDIA

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**Shabnam Mahmood:**

Hi everyone. I'm Shabnam Mahmood from BBC News and I'm here with Kangana Ranaut, one of the biggest stars in India today. She shot to fame in 2006 with her debut film Gangster, and in less than a decade, she has established herself as one of the leading actresses in Bollywood. Her choice of roles has redefined the stereotypical Indian film heroine. Let's welcome Kangana.

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Thank you everyone. Thank you. Thank you, Shabnam.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

First of all, Kangana, I'd like to take you back to your childhood. Tell me about your story. What were your expectations growing up as a young girl in your family, in your village?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Well, the thing is in India, it's a matter of fact that a girl child is seen as a liability. And probably the only expectation is that you grow up to be a presentable young woman who can get a decent spouse. That's not a much of an expectation, but yeah.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

So, what were you like as a child?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Oh, pain, I'd say. I wasn't a child that an Indian parent would like to have. I was quite rebellious, and I had to, I didn't see myself as I guess my family saw. I didn't see myself as a liability. I didn't see myself as someone who is just, whose purpose of life is just to find a good enough husband who can take care of her. I saw myself as much more than that.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

You said rebellious. What kind of things did you do as a child?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

I think I was quite confident of myself and I had a mind of my own. I liked the fact that my father had a lot of expectations from my brother and I wanted to, I probably wanted to be that person who he could be proud of and who could, you know, who could be her own hero. So, yeah, that led to many incidences, including my running away from my house, I guess.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

Before we come to that, just want to ask you a little bit more about your family. Was it a very traditional family? Was there a lot of, you know, the male members of your family, were they treated with favouritism?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Yes. I wouldn't say it was an exceptional Indian family. That is pretty much how it is everywhere, where you know, you grow up in a very, very protective environment which can sometimes lead to a little bit of suffocation also, you know, it can just be a little too protective sometimes.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

Were your family sought like they had favouritism towards your brother?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Yeah. Like I said in India, you know, a woman is, a girl child is seen as a liability. So, naturally, they did, they aren't, a girl child isn't that celebrated for sure.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

So, what eventually pushed you to leaving home?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Like I said, that quest. That understanding of your own self, that confidence that you carry in yourself that, you know, you're a lot more than people think you are and you want to prove that and you want to find yourself and you want to, you know, be a lot more than you're believed that, you know, you are. So, I probably that quest it.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

It can't be easy though.

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Yes. I've struggled for 10 years. Yeah, that's quite long.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

What was the opposition like when you made that decision to leave home?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Well, my parents gave me an easy option, that if you are going to go your way, so there's the highway and you can probably expect no funds and no support, which I think was legitimate. Because I think that was a fair option.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

What's the one particular incident that led to you leaving home? You know, your father was quite angry with you.

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Yes, I think I left, I just refused to go to school and I'm like, I can't do science. I will probably, I don't want to be a doctor. And he's like, then what would you be? And I'm like, I don't know. So, he's like, don't you think you should? I said, give me a year. And I would find out, and he's like, I have no money to spend on these sort of hobbies of yours. And I'm like, sounds fair.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

So, you left home and you went to big city, like Mumbai. What was that like when you first arrived there?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

No, fairy dream or story, nothing like that. It was quite harsh. And you know, I was nothing like I am today. I couldn't speak a word of English. And in England, people might be understanding of that. But in Bombay, they're not very forgiving. If you don't speak English, how would you expect to work in Hindi films? Well, that was an obstacle, I'd say.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

You overcame that obstacle, but you overcame many obstacles because it wasn't easy to establish yourself. What did you wanted to do the minute that you arrived in Mumbai? Did you think I want to be an actress or did you have to go through various stages like, you know, modeling?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Oh, yes. Various stages, various auditions. I ended up sleeping on the pavements and I didn't have food to eat. And my father called like, so did you learn your lesson? I'm like, no, you better get ready to learn yours. So, it took way too long. And I think for him to learn his lesson, 10 years is like, okay, fine. But I think I finally made my point clear. But yes, it was just one of those ordinary struggling stories where you're, you know, there's string of incidences or accidents, you know, one after the other, one worse than the other. And then you're like, you know, am I in a bad dream? Or it's just, you know, its just so, yeah.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

You are known for being very honest and very outspoken to the media. You're a great role model for the modern, independent Indian woman who goes against the traditional norms. How important is that for you?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Well, honestly, I really don't know how to be any other way. I mean, I find a lot of pride in being who I am, and that was the case from my childhood. Like I said, my parents saw me as someone else. They saw me as someone who was a liability, but that didn't change my understanding of my abilities and myself. And when I came to Mumbai, they saw me as this village woman who had weird accent and weirder appearance, I guess. But I didn't see myself like that. I thought of myself a lot more than just, I am a lot more than my appearance or my age or my color or my hair. And that is how I saw myself. And it'll never change. And why would I want to hide that? I let that be there. You know, for people, sometimes they find it too much to something they like it. I mean, that's just the way I am.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

What are expectations for girls now, compared to when you were growing up? And that wasn't a very long time ago, was it?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

I think, times have changed a little bit, not much. This generation isn't as bad as our generation, you know, when I was growing up. But I would say in India, we have a lot of work to do, and we need a lot more role models, which young women can follow. And parents can follow where they have people they would like to, you know, get inspired with their stories and their journeys. But definitely with literacy rate going higher, with women actively participating in the progress of the nation, working and stepping out of the houses, things have changed and there's a lot of confidence that has come in. But we are still nowhere close to the developed nations, for sure.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

So, things have changed a little bit. Do you think the focus is shifting away from marriage say, and are girls able to focus on careers?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

I wouldn't say that, I mean being in my place, who is a successful actress and you know, and working in an urban India, whatever you might or may call it, where I'm taking my job and my workplace is just taken as a hobby. You know, I come across people who like, what do you need money for? And I'm like, why are you making a movie? So, I can see the challenges which rest of the women must be going through. And I know of my friends who are married and every time they get married, their husband's job is the priority, you know. So, sometimes they have to even quit their jobs just because they have to prioritize their husband's work situations and maybe problems.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

Do you think it's particularly worse in your industry? Because there is this perception that in the Bollywood film industry, women are taken for their looks rather than talent?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Well, yeah. I wouldn't want to admit it, but, I'll get bashed there. You know, she went there and she said that. But it is true that they do objectify women, Bollywood films do objectify women. And not all of them, some of them at least.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

Sexism, Misogyny against women is an issue that all patriarchal societies have to deal with. And this is particularly close to you because it was reported that your sister was the victim of an acid attack. What can be done to combat this widespread gender crime?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

I don't know, I think I can just go on about it. But we, first of all, as society, as people, why to single out India, that is the problem everywhere where, you know, feminine as an emotion, feminine as a quality, it could be kindness. Compassion is seen as a weakness where it is not. You know, just not women, it is just not restricted to women, even to children, to men who are, who tend to display these emotions, they are seen as weaker beings, you know. And that is not the fact. We need to change that mentality. We need to respect feminine as an emotion and not transgress and crush it, but to love and to value it.

And the history is witness that in the past, if anything that could conquer the darkest and the deepest corners of a human soul, that has been feminine, it has been compassion, love. And that is the only way to penetrate the darkness, light. Not anger or you know, one of your very aggressive emotions. So, the tendency of human beings to see feminine as a weaker emotion, that is what has to be changed. So, when you see a beautiful woman and you can't acquire her, you want to destroy her. So, that needs to, that needs to be changed. And like I said, it's just not about, it's not just a women problem. It is a problem of the world.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

Can Bollywood help in that?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Oh, yes. I think cinema is a beautiful medium. It reaches out to millions of people. And through films, we can give ideas out there. We can give, we can, you know, implant ideas in people's brains or mindsets, which can grow into significant things, you know, and which can bring about significant changes.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

Because what you've been through and you've stood up for yourself, what are your thoughts about what happened to Jyoti Singh, the 23-year-old medical student who was raped and killed on a bus in Delhi?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Well, the thing is a lot has been spoken about that. And a criminal is a criminal, a criminal doesn't have a religion or a nationality. Do they? They are not even humans. They're not even entitled to be humans. So, if you see, you know, their tendencies, they probably would fit in animal kingdom and animals don't have religions. So, why to see criminals as people who belong to a certain, you know, race or creed or religion? No, they don't have, they're not even humans. So, there should be strict laws for animals like that. And they should be behind the bars and not left in the open like that to damage humans, I guess.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

That particular case received a lot of attention around the world. Do you think things have changed for women?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Things have changed for women?

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

Have things changed for women since then? Is it safer for women to go out there?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

How do you guarantee that, you know, how can you guarantee something like that? I mean, I wouldn't say that anyone can guarantee that sort of, though I would love to live in a perfect world like that. But we can only hope and try, and our sincere endeavors could hopefully lead us there. But it would be absolutely wrong if we tell our children that, okay, now we think it's, you know, completely a crime proof world that we're a part of, and now go out and do what you like. I don't think that's achievable. Probably in my little understanding of the matters, I think that's a little impractical to hope, yeah.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

But there are a lot of women in India that are reluctant to report crimes like that.

**Kangana Ranaut:**

Yeah. That is the, I think that is, that is the sad part that as a woman, you feel responsible and you're held responsible for an incidence like that. And again, that comes from the fact that you, your birth as a girl child is not celebrated. If it's not a tragedy to a family, it's definitely a setback. So, when you start from a point like that, it's very hard to find pride in your own self-confidence, in your own being and in your own actions. So, probably everything that you do is wrong.

So, even if you get teased or you get molested is probably, was your fault and you were wrong. So, I think that mentality has to change just so that these people can report and they can identify the animals we just spoke about. Because they roam around everywhere. And it's not just in, you know, not in, in every class, the crimes happen in all classes, you know.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

Coming back to Bollywood, what is the future for female actresses? Are they going to be taken seriously?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

They're going to be taken seriously? Well, I don't think we need anyone's approval about, you know, what we do as actresses. I feel it's a lot more important for women to accept themselves, as opposed to others accepting them. You can't be hoping to get others' approval on what you do. When I work in a film, I'm not seeking anyone's approval, you know? Because they always start as, hm, and I'm like, yeah, it's good, it's great. And they're like, yeah, it is good.

So, you have got to be confident of who you are, you know, and you can't really always, because others' opinion of you will always shift, their perspective will keep changing. Like I said, when I started out, they dismissed me like a nobody. And today I am who I am, because my understanding of myself never changed. So, as women, we don't have to hope that we get our do, we need to get up and get it ourselves.

**Shabnam Mahmood:**

And finally, Kangana, what else is in store for you beyond acting?

**Kangana Ranaut:**

I have a couple of projects coming up, I'm starting a period drama called Rangoon, which is based in world war two. So, I'm going to start filming for that. And then there are some biopics and regular film stuff. I love being here. I love being here. Thank you so much. It was something so unusual for me. Thank you.

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