

BOLLYWOOD

RITEISH DESHMUKH IS AN ACTOR ON A HIGH, A HAPPY HUBBY AND A DOTING DAD



It's late afternoon on Id and Riteish Deshmukh is drinking copious amounts of black coffee. Farah Khan's legendary Id lunch might have something to do with Riteish needing such a caffeine boost. Along with wife Genelia D'Souza, Anil Kapoor, Sushant Singh Rajput, Sania Mirza, Sajid Khan and Sonu Sood, Riteish feasted on Yakhni Pulao, Shahi Gosht and kebabs. "Farah's Id lunch has become an annual tradition and it's always great fun. You meet all your friends and then there is all the wonderful food she serves," says Riteish as he fortifies himself with some more joe.

t2 met Riteish at Excel Entertainment's office in Santa Cruz in Mumbai for a chat about religion, his next film *Bangistan*, releasing July 31, and being on diaper duty.

From the promos it seems like despite all the humour, *Bangistan* addresses the serious subject of religion...

Yes. A satire takes a serious subject and wraps it up in humour to get the point across. *Bangistan* drives home a message against terrorism. It's set in a country called Bangistan which is divided into two parts — north which is Muslim and south which is Hindu dominated. There are elements within both parts who misguide two boys (played by Riteish and Pulkit Samrat) to bomb the other side. What I liked about the script was that there are two aspiring suicide bombers who go on a mission without realising what the final outcome is going to be... or the gravity of the situation. The two meet and that's when they learn about the other religion and realise that every religion teaches love and peace. To find humour within this parameter was fun.

Is it true that you were racially profiled in Poland while you were sporting a long beard for this film?

Yes... and I was offended. Not because I am a Hindu, but because no one should be judged on the basis of your appearance. In the West, if you have a long beard, you are looked at with suspicion. We were shooting inside a cave that was converted into a museum. It had no network, so between shots I walked out to make a call. There was a guy playing with his daughter and as soon as he saw me, he took her and went away. Something similar happened to Pulkit in the hotel that we were staying at. This woman who had served him earlier, refused when she saw him with a beard. It's like people are scared of long beards! That's really sad. In today's day and age, this is one of the things we are fighting against.

What is your relationship with religion?

(Pauses) I believe in god... in a power that exists. I believe in mythology. Those stories enriched my childhood. When those stories were narrated to me, they were like little movies for me. There were heroes and superheroes and villains... they were my DC Comics and Marvel. My childhood friends were Hanuman and Kumbhakarna. I go to the church regularly with Genelia and I like to

I have been blessed. Getting married to the girl (Genelia) I love and the birth of our son Riaan have been absolutely special. I am so glad that I have got these months to be with Riaan and Genelia. This is a phase of life that I have really been looking forward to

just sit and listen to the sermon. I visit mosques and gurdwaras. I don't pick one religion over the other. I don't feel the need to.

Getting back to the film, your director Karan Anshuman, until a couple of years ago, was a movie critic...

I didn't know that! I don't read movie reviews, so I had no clue. After I signed the film, Ritesh (Sidhwani, of Excel Entertainment, the film's producers) told me that Karan used to be a film critic. It didn't matter to me. He signed me despite having reviewed my films... so that says something about his judgement! (Laughs) But seriously, the best part about Karan is that he thought like a critic, but directed like a director. He has immense knowledge about films.

You've had an incredible couple of years, both personally and professionally...

Yes... I have been blessed. Getting married to the girl I love and the birth of our son Riaan have been absolutely special. Professionally, there have been quite a few highs. There were films that grossed more than (Rs) 100 crore (*Grand Masti* and *Ek Villain*). And, the appreciation I got for playing a villain in *Ek Villain*. I also made my debut in Marathi as a producer (*Balak Palak*) and as an

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want to do any more adult comedies. But you are still doing *Great Grand Masti*... (Laughs) It's all for (director) Indra Kumar. I couldn't say no to him.

You've had great success with both the Marathi films you've produced. Would you look at producing Hindi films as well? Absolutely! But I am going to take my time with it. Though I have worked in this industry for 12 years now, I am still new as a producer. The choices that I make as an actor are very different from what I'd want to as producer. For example, I can't produce a huge production like *Housefull*. I'll probably start with smaller films.

Until Riaan's birth you were shooting almost back-to-back. Things seem to have eased up now...

Yeah. Throughout Genelia's pregnancy, I was shooting continuously. I did *Ek Villain*, finished *Lai Bhaari* and *Humshakals* and started *Bangistan* and *Bank Chor*. Thankfully, when Riaan was born, I got three months off... I was supposed to start a movie that got pushed back. At any other time, I would have complained about work



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getting postponed, but this time it was god-sent. I am so glad that I have got these months to be with Riaan and Genelia. It's been great. This is a phase of life that I have really been looking forward to.

Are you a hands-on dad? On diaper duty?

Of course! It's always exciting to do the little things.

Karishma Upadhyay

What kind of roles should Riteish do? Tell t2 @abp.in

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