

COVER

The 'star kid' of actor parents, Sooraj Pancholi breaks down the difficulties and advantages of getting an 'easy' platform in the industry

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Actor Sooraj Pancholi has fond memories of his first visit to *Khaleej Times*.

"I had been to your office when I wasn't an actor, in fact I was so young then that I didn't even know that my father was an actor," said Sooraj, who accompanied his father, actor Aditya Pancholi to the *KT* office many years ago and recollects his dad going in for an interview while he was "sitting and eating cereal here."

Sooraj was in Dubai recently and dropped into the *Khaleej Times* office for a chat about his career, who he takes life lessons from and why he doesn't believe star kids have it easy. Excerpts from an interview:

What brings you to Dubai?

I'm here in Dubai now for a holiday. Dubai is my favourite place for a getaway from the busy schedule back in India. I have my family here, my mother's brother lives here. I also have many friends from Bombay who have shifted here.

Which are your favourite places in Dubai?

I definitely like the food. The first thing I do is go to Cheesecake Factory! Then I like pizza - so I go for the truffle pizza at Bagatelle. I like partying but I'm not a heavy party animal so maybe something like going to a small lounge or poolside... Basically I'm here just to meet my friends, spend some good time with the boys, doing some nonsense (laughs) and go back!

You made your debut in 2015 with *Hero*. How has the journey in Bollywood been for you so far?

It's been very tough. But you know, if it comes too easy I wouldn't appreciate it. So I'm happy that it's been really hard for me; it's actually prepared me for the future. It might get tougher for me so this is just the beginning. Anyway I've done two films this year - *Satellite Shankar* and *Time to Dance*. *Time to Dance* I shot in London, before *Satellite Shankar*, which I shot throughout India; it's a story that spans Kashmir to Kanyakumari.

It's a road trip of a soldier, and it's India from a soldier's point of view. It has nothing to do with war or any

and his journey through the country.

What's the significance of the title, *Satellite Shankar*?

They call him 'Satellite' because he's connecting India, he's connecting dots. When you see the film you'll know. For now it's announced as July 5. We might postpone it because of the elections, I'm not sure.

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The new kids now like Janhvi (Kapoor) and Sara (Ali Khan) and others, it's very tough for them. Because I know what they go through, on social media. And now social media is huge. And they have to work doubly hard compared to any other newcomer.”

Sooraj Pancholi

Road trip movies are not so common in Bollywood. On a personal level did it teach you anything - this journey from one end of the country to the other?

I never knew India was that beautiful to be honest. I've never been up North. We were shooting in this place called Chitkul - the last inhabited village near the Indo-China border. If you open Google Maps for Chitkul - it's half in English for India and half in Chinese for China. It is another world, really beautiful. We drove down to Chandigarh in Punjab, then to Maharashtra, then to Tamil Nadu. So it was like a different geography throughout; India is big and beautiful.

Time to Dance is a fun dancing film, written by Remo D'Souza and directed by Stanley D'Costa. It has Isabelle Kaif. The film is due to release at the end of this year.

You mentioned you took dance classes. Would you consider yourself a good dancer now?

I would say I'm not that bad actually because I've trained with good dancers, I've trained with Remo's students, who I would say are some of the best we have. I'm not as good as them, and don't think I'll ever be! Because that is their daily thing, I'm not that good (laughs).

Your dad Aditya was quite a heart-throb in his days on screen. What

'My Bollywood has been very



I didn't even know that he was an actor till I grew up. I didn't even know my mother (Zarina Wahab) was an actress. Because they never spoke about films, though they won a lot of awards, they never displayed

producers or directors or what films were happening. They still don't. It's like a very normal middle class household. We all have dinner together, we talk about random things but we never talk about work.

In his heydays. Wouldn't you see people talking to him and wonder what's going on?

He still does. But growing up in that house was very normal for me. So even now when people take pictures

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for about a year and then joined Kabir Khan for *Ek Tha Tiger*. That is where I met Salman Khan, who asked me if I wanted to act. And I was still not sure if I wanted to act or direct, or what I wanted to do. And then I think that's how I got *Hero* because he said, train yourself because you'll be doing a film in another three years.

Salman has been a huge support to you. What's your equation with him? How do you define your relationship with him?

He's my boss, like you go to an office and have a boss. My father calls him 'bhai' (brother) - well, I can't do that because I see him as a 'sir', as a 'boss.' People call him my mentor but I don't see it that way, I just see it as him being someone to look up to and someone to take advice from. At the end of the day he's just the boss.

What's the best advice you've got from him regarding your career or life?

He just said, don't care about what people say because everything is temporary. He said when you start doing well people will say good things about you and when you don't do well people will say bad things about you. And when you become a superstar people will say the worst things about you. So just live with it and be with your family, and be happy.

You must have encountered both high and low points in your career. What do you do to pick yourself up when you're feeling low?

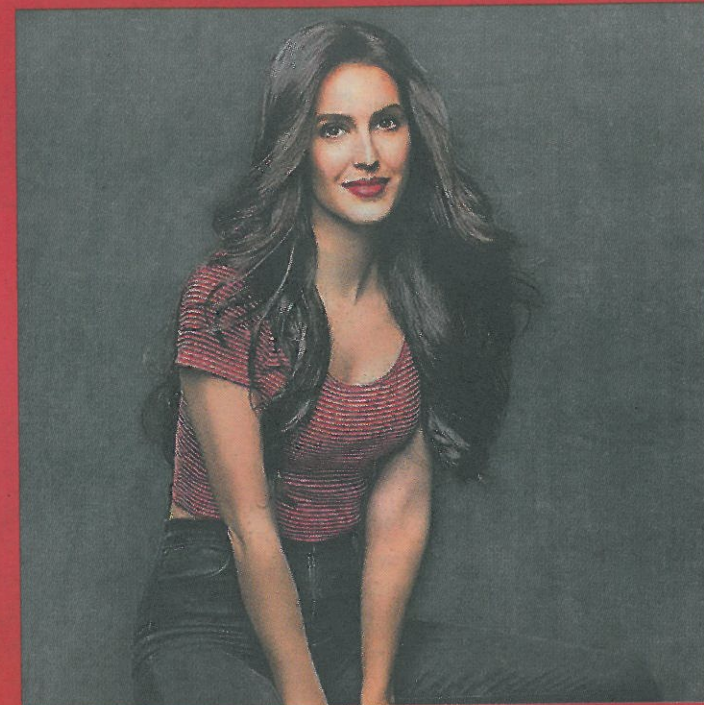
Spend time with family, I guess. I think that's the best.

Bollywood is going through a phase for a while now where a lot of stuff (not all of it good) is being said about star sons and daughters. What's your take on this?

If I would deny that it's not easy to get a platform, I'd be lying. It is quite easy to get a platform if you come from a film background. But it is double the hard work and courage you need, double the backlash, double the people hating on you. It's tough. And the new kids now like Janhvi (Kapoor) and Sara (Ali Khan) and others, it's very tough for them. Because I know what they go through, on social media. And now social media is huge. And they have to work doubly hard compared to any other newcomer. Because you're automatically compared to your father's or mother's last film, not their first film.

How often do you promote yourself on social media?

I'm not as active as other people. I'm just going with the flow. In fact I've just gone back to Twitter around a



'Isabelle Kaif is a fun person'

While shooting for your new film *Time to Dance*, was it daunting to know that you were acting with Katrina Kaif's sister?

Isabelle and me became really good friends when we had three-four months to learn how to dance. I think we're a co-actor combination that suits *Time to Dance* because we became such good friends that we knew what to do with each and every scene. She's a fun person to work with and an amazing dancer. A lot of people may not have seen her dancing, she's really good. I just can't wait for people to watch it because it's a different style, it's a different dance film. We've never had a romantic dance film, and that's what this one is.

I would not do anything on it. It takes a lot of time and gives you headaches sometimes, gives you anxiety about what to post next. Like maybe your manager goes, Sooraj, you've to post something before 7, that gives me anxiety... to take a picture before 7. I think social media is needed now but it should be used for a good cause and not for pulling people down.

Any intentions to get behind the

camera again?

Maybe a producer someday. But I've seen directors and it is a tougher job than being an actor. It needs a lot of patience and mind power, and good sleep and writing and ... I can't do it! If you ask me to dance, if you ask me to do action, if you ask me to act, I'll do it, but if you ask me to sit down with a pen and paper and write... I'm not made for that. I'll stick to acting and maybe producing.

Message for KT readers

Guys, *Khaleej Times* has been part of my family for long. I've actually grown up being in touch with Suhail Galadari - he's an amazing person, it's an amazing newspaper! Keep your eyes on *Khaleej Times!*

'I take film advice from my mother'

Your mother has many good films to her credit. Is there a favourite among them for you? Which of your parents do you take advice from?

Chitchor and *Gharonda*. Everyone knows her from those films. My father was always from the more commercial side of films and my mother from the arty side of films. Film advice I take from my mother and life advice from my father because he keeps saying, 'don't do what I have done.' Because he's tried and tested and done everything wrong, and he doesn't want me to repeat it. So, life lessons from him, work lessons from



brought me here I guess.

What initially got you interested in acting?

To be honest, when I watched

to have a body like him, wanted to dance like him, wanted to look like him. Then I started my journey with assisting directors on films and I got really lucky that I got to assist Sanjay