



BOLLYWOOD'S DRAMATIS *persona*

Karan Johar's feel-good films, with their elaborate settings, glamour and glitz, are loved by audiences worldwide, as is the man himself

Think of the young Karan Johar and you can't help but think of little Lord Fauntleroy, sans the negative connotations. If anything, Johar has had an aristocratic upbringing, much like the natty fictitious character.

As a young lad, Johar always cherished dreams of being famous. Father Yash Johar was one of Bollywood's top filmmakers (Dharma Productions), so Johar grew up amidst the charmed company of Amitabh and Jaya Bachchan, who were close friends of his parents. Like most star children, he also attended Hrithik and Abhishek's birthday parties, where he met up with other kids, many of whom have since grown up to become famous stars today. Some of Johar's illustrious childhood friends include Kareena and Karisma Kapoor, Twinkle and Rinke Khanna, Aditya and Uday Chopra, Abhishek and Shweta Bachchan, Goldie and Shrishti Behl, Hrithik and Sunaina Roshan, Tusshar and Ekta Kapoor.

Johar studied at the upscale Greenlawns High School and attended HR College in Mumbai. He has also received a Master's degree in French. Johar was a great orator in school, winning a lot of prizes in debates. His inherent talent for public speaking has stood him in good stead, enabling him to host several award functions all over the world.

Johar's love of the celluloid surfaced while he was schooling at Green Lawns. A complete movie buff, he nevertheless lacked for friends within the film fraternity, since he lived and studied in a tony district of South Mumbai. Nor was he particularly proud of being known as film maker Yash Johar's son, or that he was connected with

the Hindi film industry. So, he often denied any connection with the movies, insisting that his father was not a producer, but a businessman. However, unknown to the outside world, Johar was an ardent Hindi movie fan, and would rush home after school to catch his favourite movie on video. He had his own collection of the latest Hindi films and saw Yash Chopra's *Silsila* every single day. He loved trial shows and would often burst into tears when his parents refused to take him for preview screenings.

As Johar grew older, he realised that his penchant for cinema kept growing, too. It was at HR College that his dreams came closer to fruition. Johar befriended Yash Chopra's son, Aditya Chopra; the latter narrated a story idea that he had for a film and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ)* was born. The next two months saw Johar working along with Chopra on the scripting of the film, and finally, one day, Chopra asked him to assist him on the film. Johar had just completed his French course and was all set to leave for Paris to study Mass Communications. But, his passion for the movies overtook him and he stayed on to make Hindi movie history.

provided Bollywood cinema with a facelift. Known for his fixation for the letter 'K'—all movies written by Karan Johar start with 'K'—and consist of four words due to numerological reasons. He is also known to cast Shah Rukh Khan, Rani Mukherjee and Kajol in all his movies.

Among the many caps that Johar has worn is a cameo in the film *DDLJ*, where he plays the role of Shah Rukh Khan's friend. Closely associated with Yash Raj productions, Johar also worked as a costume designer for Shah Rukh Khan in films like *DDLJ*, *Dil To Pagal Hai*, *Duplicate*, *Main Hoon Na* and *Veer Zaara*. He is also the writer and host of *Koffee with Karan*, which does extremely well on television. His inherent talent of lending wit and humour to the show has made audiences love to wait and watch their favourite stars being interviewed by him.

About his relationship with the film world, Johar confesses, "At heart I remain an excited child who's been given a toy called cinema. I'm awestruck with the place I've been given in the film industry." However, Johar gets flak from some quarters for making over-emotional melodramas. Cynics dismiss



While working on *DDLJ*, during the Switzerland schedule of the film, close friend Shah Rukh Khan suggested that Johar direct his own film, and that is how his debut production *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* came about. The film turned out to be one of the biggest blockbusters of all time and Johar had donned the mantle of superstar director before he realised it. As a teenager, Johar had grown up admiring the works of Raj Kapoor and Yash Chopra, and he was now a successful filmmaker himself.

Thereafter, Johar took a sabbatical for a year as good friend Aditya Chopra was busy making *Mohabbatein*. "Both Adi and me have decided that we will make films alternately. So, when he makes a film, I will be there with him at every stage and vice-versa", he said of his decision. After *Mohabbatein* was released, Johar announced his next venture—*Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Ghum*, which was the biggest multi-star cast film made to date. With Amitabh and Jaya Bachchan, Shahrukh Khan with Kajol and Hrithik Roshan cast along Kareena Kapoor, it made *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Ghum* the hottest movie of the decade. Since then, Dame Fortune has been steadily conferring her favours on him.

But, Johar isn't happy playing one role. He's a master at multi-tasking. Writer, actor, creative director, costume designer, producer, director, television chat show host—he's done it all. Johar's fame and fortune is growing by leaps and bounds. He is the new age Bollywood director who

his glorification of Indian traditions, rituals, ways of life, values and mannerisms, his elaborate sets, glamour, voluminous finery, expensive clothing and materialistic luxuries as so much candy floss. Says Johar, "I get a certain amount of criticism for making films that encapsulate interpersonal relationships and family dynamics. Some say I create melodrama over relationships but it's because these are the everyday dramas of our lives."

Having brewed success with his *Koffee With Karan* show on television, Johar hasn't disappointed viewers with the flavours of his first few episodes of *Season Three*. Responding to a comment that he manages to make a splash with top celebs on his show mainly because of his clout as a famous film maker, Johar replies with his customary elan—"I'll answer that stating that there are people in two different zones. Firstly, there are people who are close to me and I invite them on the show. There is a comfort zone and I can ask questions more liberally as opposed to the other members of the media. But, yes of course, it is how you frame the question and put them across. I have interviewed people I don't know at all personally. There is a fine line between crossing the line and offending someone and I tend to not offend people. I think, of course, I have some leverage with lots of people that allow me to ask them questions, but more or less, it is the tonality of the question that makes it acceptable."

INDIRA LAUL