

“Nobody is ready to believe that they might have misjudged me!”

**S**hiney Ahuja. The last time I had met him was during the promotion of his solo hero project HIJACK with Esha Deol. Like every other interview I have read of Shiney's, he had sat there in front of me defending his stand against the trillion accusations we had put forth. I have to admit the source of all the questions I had for him was not first-hand information but merely things I had overheard over time. Yet somehow, though he had managed to reply to every one of my queries with agreeable answers, the stories coming out now are still the same... Having the whole media talking about his temper tantrums and starry airs and having to defend his stance over and over again, I was half expecting to meet a battered Ahuja - but the man in front of me was smiling broadly.

“You are not the first one asking me questions about why people out there hate me, but all I can tell you is that no one has ever told me that to my face. So I would like to believe

that all the stories that are floating around are untrue!” I couldn't make up my mind if his smile was that of a defiant man or merely an ignoramus. May be that was the way he kept sane, I thought to myself...

How tough it must be trying to make a space for yourself in the profession of your choice with everyone in the line talking ill about you, behind your back. “I am a tough nut to crack,” he shrugged. “Also, I am not being ignorant and turning a blind eye to what is happening around in the industry. But I do know that no one who has really interacted with me, who really knows me, will go back with anything bad to say. It is really amusing how the people who claim to hate me are the ones I have never really met. But then no one actually tells you that to your face!” he mused.

With the Hollywood project SILVER CORD wrapped tightly around his little finger, there's hardly anything he has to worry about out here in the industry... We love to embrace

## SHINEY AHUJA





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those who have the Hollywood-returned tag to them. “It is a big deal for me to have signed a film with a bigger banner and international audience, more so because I don't even play an Indian in the film. It is a professional step-up there but then it has nothing to do with the actor that I am. It doesn't mean I am concentrating elsewhere or anything. For me, I am here to act. If I get proposals from elsewhere, I will still just try to sell my talent. It is as simple and clear as that.”

If selling talent is all that he is doing here, I told him, he had nothing to worry about because he won't be running outta talent any time soon! This is perhaps the only quality that makes him fit into this industry which, from the outside, looks almost hostile. Why else would stories about Shiney be floating all over the place? We all know media doesn't get a whiff of things without there being any smoke to carry it...

“Let's not get there,” he flashed a smile. “Frankly, when I am at work we are all together having fun and talking. I am the same way with everyone. I don't sit in my vanity van and stay secluded. Just some days ago there was a mention in the papers that Soha and I were having some issues; they dated those issues back from when we did KHOYA KHOYA CHAND. But when someone from the press landed up on the sets and saw us chatting, they promptly wrote about how I was trying to make good my bad impression etc. Even with my marriage, they did the same thing. Since Anu wasn't in Mumbai they concluded that we were having a bad marriage and were an estranged couple. And then suddenly when they heard that Anu was shifting base to Mumbai, and I went to pick her up, they promptly filed in stories saying I went there to *patao* her again and brought her back after a lot of cajoling. Just no one is ready to believe that they might have misjudged me or they might have reported the matter in a way that was not all truth! That is sad. The more I think about it, the more I want things to be alright between me and the press, but then what I want most is for things to be alright at work, which they already are... I am pretty happy with the way things are, I have some decent films I have signed, *dil se kaam karta hoon, achcha kaam karta hoon*. That's all that is important.”





Perhaps his being immodest about his talent sometimes gets him into trouble, I surmised, since I was getting desperate to know where these stories keep coming from! Clearly the man had no friends in the industry. It doesn't matter if he doesn't spend time in the van - people will never really stop talking behind his back. He agreed, "That's the point, *na*. People are so good to me to my face that I cannot believe that they go behind my back talking about me even as I defend them. But that's a good thing; at least the work environment is not bad. At face value, all are good to me and I will pretend that's all there is to them."

Guess that is why they say ignorance is bliss, but he sure must be having some friends around. What is his social scene like, I wondered aloud. "Did I tell you I do yoga? I hang out a lot with those friends of mine." Without really saying it, I assumed it spoke of his acceptance of the fact that the film industry was only his work place. He clearly didn't fit into the social scene out there. It was pleasant to know that he refused to brood over that and decided to party with those who would comply. He elaborated on why he prefers the company of the yoga guys, over that of the stars he works with... "They really let me be me. We meet often for dinners and it's a nice comfortable space between us all. We sit and talk and they just consider me one of them. They don't mind turning around and telling me to just shut up if I am talking too much. My wife always likes it when we can unwind with people who don't fuss around stars. It is also good for my daughter since she is at an impressionable age. All we want is that she should have a normal upbringing. It is very important to us. I guess that's why it's so comforting to be around my yoga friends; they help keep the atmosphere normal."

Acceptance and comfort is all that a rational individual asks for and that is perhaps Shiney's only demand in life but somewhere there still is a dichotomy. If he only wants to act for acting's sake and does not desire to be a star and enjoy its perks, why take part in those inexcusable commercial flicks?

"Of course, I would like to be among the top-ranking actors; why would I not? I am fairly ambitious. I might have decided to do certain films without my heart really being in it but I have still worked at them earnestly. I can't let my heart dominate all my decisions for me, and nor will people just trust me with big films simply on the strength of their faith in me as an actor. I have to prove myself somewhere, somehow... with all my limited means and paths... I will get there though, sooner or later!" he said, showing me the place he likes to frequent, sharing his child's pictures and talking things a little less stressful than his battlefield, which we know as the Hindi film industry. ★