

# Harper's BAZAAR

10<sup>th</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY

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APRIL 2018, ₹200

INDIA

HOW  
WE  
WEAR OUR  
HAIR

*Untangling  
Identity*

*Aditi  
Rao  
Hydari*  
MAKES  
HER  
MOVE

THE  
MEMORY  
KEEPERS

*Aatish Taseer  
Manju Kapur  
Aanchal Malhotra  
Siddharth Dhanvant  
Shanghvi*



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Spring  
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# OPENING ACT

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*A girl on the verge of stardom,  
Disha Patani believes that acting is  
about getting over your inhibitions*

*Text by SUMANTO CHATTOPADHYAY*

*Photographs by ANDREA VARANI*

Dress, ₹9,800, **Flame**. Shoes, **Christian Louboutin**. Earrings, **Bina Goenka** set with Gemfields Zambian emeralds. Ring, **Rosentiques** set with Gemfields Zambian emeralds.  
Art director: **Yurreipem Arthur**.  
Fashion editor: **Prayag Menon**.  
Production manager: **Parul Menezes**.



*"I never played with dolls. A tomboy, I loved basketball, and even played at the state level. I used to keep my hair short. And when I danced to Bollywood songs, I would often take the boy's part."*

I first met Disha Patani when she modelled for me. We were shooting a television commercial for Pond's Dreamflower Talc and she was the new face of the brand. All I knew about her was that she had played the Indian cricketer and former captain's first love in *M. S. Dhoni: The Untold Story*. I had seen her in the film and remembered that she was good looking. Very. She was a picture of loveliness. I recall thinking that her boyfriend, fellow actor, Tiger Shroff, is one lucky guy, as I saw him drop her off at the shoot location in Bandra. Sometimes models are merely photogenic—they look beautiful on camera but are a disappointment in person. But not Disha.

Willowy. The word that came to mind as I saw her walking towards me, leggy and lissome. As I began to interact with her, I found her smart, easy-going, and—in an industry where people learn to throw starry tantrums even before they become stars—refreshingly 'undivalike'.

I learned two other things about Disha that day: The first was that she was a good dancer. This was great news as our ad required her to trip the light fantastic. The second was that I had been mispronouncing her surname. Yes, I know. A bit embarrassing. It turned out that it wasn't Pataani, as I had been saying. "It's pronounced Paatni," Disha gently corrected me.

Our shoot went off brilliantly. Disha executed her steps with élan. Her expressive face and eyes conveyed the requisite emotions perfectly. And she looked flawless through it all.

So, a few months later, when *Bazaar* asked if I would write about the actor, I readily agreed. And there I was face to face with her again.

I confessed to Disha that I had tried—unsuccessfully—to delve into her background to prepare for the interview. I didn't learn anything other than that she was from Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. "Ask me, I'll tell you," she said, with a laugh. She was born in Uttarakhand, she said, but the family later settled in Bareilly. She was a middle child, sandwiched between an older sister and a younger brother. "I never played with dolls. A tomboy, I loved basketball, and even played at the state level. I used to keep my hair short. And when I danced to Bollywood songs, I would often take the boy's part." Hard to imagine now.

Though Disha got noticed as a dancer in the video for *Befikra* (a song released as a single), she never took formal training while growing up. "My sister and I would learn moves from movies and perform them at home for fun. I was an introvert, with few friends at school. My sister was my best friend." She is also her role model. Like her, Disha too became the head girl in school. Her sister later joined the Indian Army. Again, Disha wanted to emulate her. But life had other plans—and the armed forces' loss is our gain.

Becoming an actor was a serendipitous journey. Disha doesn't believe in making plans. Yet one thing seems to lead to another. "When I was in college, a friend signed me up for a modelling contest, so I participated. I ended up winning." She soon stepped into the world of modelling and her face became her fortune. Several ads later, she got her first movie offer, a Telegu film called *Loafer* directed by Puri Jagannadh. For Disha it was like diving in at the deep end. "It was the toughest thing I had ever done. I had to memorise page-long monologues in a language I didn't know. Imagine trying to act when you don't know the meanings of the words you're saying!" After that, the Dhoni film was a breeze ▶

Dress, **Rahul Mishra**. Necklace, **Gyan Jewels, Jaipur** set with Gemfields Zambian emeralds. Earrings, **Meraki** set with Gemfields Zambian emeralds.



Top, ₹10,500, **Karn Malhotra**. Pants, **Stella McCartney** at Le Mill. Shoes, ₹44,100, **Chanel**. Necklace and bracelet, **Gem Plaza, Jaipur** set with Gemfields **Zambian emeralds**.



*“Acting, to me, is about getting over your inhibitions. And with each film, you learn something new. I never want to reach a point where I think I know everything. Because that’s the endpoint.”*

for Disha—because, as she said, it was in Hindi. “And also because director Neeraj Pandey knew exactly what he wanted.” I was beginning to notice Disha’s self-effacing manner—crediting her success to everything but her talent. “Whenever I look at my own performances, I only see the flaws.” Yet she won the best acting debut at both the Star Screen Awards and the Stardust Awards. “Acting, to me, is about getting over your inhibitions. And with each film, you learn something new. I never want to reach a point where I think I know everything. Because that’s the end point.”

The third film Disha landed was an international project: The action comedy, *Kung Fu Yoga*. “I grew up watching the *Jackie Chan Adventures* animated series. I never thought I would be in a movie with him one day!” she said, her eyes shining. She had wanted to learn martial arts as a child but did not get the chance. Now she was going to get to perform them in a Jackie Chan movie. While shooting for *Kung Fu Yoga*, Disha had a language problem different from the one in *Loafer*. Here, though her dialogues were in English, almost no one spoke it in and around the unit. Even the translator’s vocabulary was limited. “If I wanted an omelette for breakfast, I would first say the word, then show a picture of it, and still I would end up getting something else,” recalled Disha. But that was a relatively minor challenge. The other difficult thing was having to memorise pages of dialogue that were handed to her every morning just before shooting started. “But all that didn’t matter. I was working with Jackie Chan. I just wanted to impress him!”

In this age of the cult of celebrity, what also sets Disha apart is that she is accessible to her fans. “I don’t call them fans, they’re my friends. They’re so adorable, so young—sometimes just 14 or 15 years old. I talk to these girls regularly on social media. And in person too. If I am travelling to a town where they live, I let them know. They come and meet me. They talk to me about all sorts of things... life, relationships, and boyfriends.”

Speaking about boyfriends, I asked her what her thoughts were about Tiger. She blushed a little. “He inspires me—because he’s so focused. He wants to make it big, and he will. That’s what is exciting about him.” And what did he think of her? “You must ask him and tell me,” she said, and broke into a laugh. On a more philosophical note, she added, “For any guy and girl to be soulmates, you should each have your own passion, and pursue your own dream. And then, when you come together, it makes for a good marriage.”

Who is the actor that she admires the most? “Priyanka Chopra. Like me, she’s from Bareilly. She came from a small town and made it big. That makes me proud! Now she’s successful in Hollywood too—and she’s opened the door for other Indian actors to follow. I haven’t met Priyanka, but I really want to. That will be my fan moment!”

As our conversation drew to a close, I asked Disha if she had any advice for her fans. “I’m no one to give advice, but I do have a message for the young girls out there: We try so hard to convince others that we’re good. But you have to believe in yourself first. Don’t be disheartened by failure—there’s always something better waiting for you.” Proud that she hadn’t taken any money from her parents since she was 18, Disha concluded, “Stand on your own two feet. Do something you believe in. Rule the world!” ■

*The writer is the Executive Creative Director, South Asia, Ogilvy*



Dress, ₹69,000, **Missoni**. Cuff, **Gem Plaza, Jaipur** set with Gemfields Zambian emeralds.

Jumpsuit, ₹24,000, **Lola by Suman B.** Shoes, ₹44,100, **Chanel.** Necklace and earrings, **Gem Plaza, Jaipur** set with Gemfields Zambian emeralds. See Where to Buy for details. Hair and makeup: Marcelo Pedrozo at Toabh Talents. Fashion assistant: Sneha Indulkar.

