

# Bazaar

Harper's

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DISHA  
PATANI'S  
METEORIC  
RISE

THE  
*NEW*  
NORMAL

HIJAB  
FASHION  
TRANSGENDER  
IDENTITY  
MULTICULTURAL  
VOICES

MOTHERS  
& DAUGHTERS  
A LOVE  
LETTER

# A CLASS ACT

WOMEN WHO MAKE THEIR OWN RULES





*"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.



