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WHY THE WORLD
IS TALKING
ABOUT
AKHIL SHARMA

hottie!

RETRO ► SURFER ► TROPICAL ► MONO

What's your bikini style?

From left, On Shalini: Silk crepe crop top, ₹5,500, **Mirage** by **Parul Bhargava**. Silk-jersey jacket, price on request, **Pankaj & Nidhi**. Printed jacquard pants, ₹4,999, **Marks & Spencer**. Patent leather heels, ₹6,800, **Aldo**. Metal and stone necklace, ₹2,480, **Blur**. "Ballon Bleu" watch, ₹7,50,000, **Cartier** at **Ethos Summit**. Gold-plated amethyst ring, ₹1,950, **Amrapali**. On Chaitally: Printed satin dress, ₹18,800, **am:pm** by **Ankur and Priyanka Modi**. Leather stilettos, ₹7,499, **Dune**. On Eka: Polyester knit blouse, ₹1,990, **Zara**. Silk-georgette jacket, ₹38,500, silk-georgette skirt, ₹19,500, both **KHEM** by **Khushboo** and **Prem**. PVC pumps with metal toe-cap, price on request, **Christian Louboutin**. Gold-plated pearl earrings, ₹2,100, **Amrapali**. "Love Letters Silver Light" rings, price on request, **Louis Vuitton**. On Aadore: Crepe and jacquard organza printed dress, ₹43,000, **Gauri & Nainika**. Suede pumps with sequined badges, ₹75,000, **Dior**. Silver earrings, ₹3,900, **Amrapali**. Rose gold-plated ring, price on request, **Malvika Vaswani**. On Sonam: Jersey tank top, ₹4990, chanderi and brocade Kalidar skirt, ₹69,900, both **Tarun Tahliani**. Quilted cotton jacket, ₹5,500, **Mango**. Leather booties, price on request, **Gucci**. Metal hoop earrings, ₹795, **Accessorize**.

SHALINI AGARWAL

CHAITALLY PARMAR

EKA LAKHANI

AADORE MUKHERJEE

SONAM NAIR

Photographs: PRABHAT SHETTY Styling: NIDHI JACOB

MOVING PICTURES

They're the stars behind the scenes, behind the million details that go into the making of a single film. Boasting technical brilliance, visual dexterity and boundless energy, these are the women powering Hindi cinema today

Art Director: RESHMA RAJIWDEKAR

Make-up: CELINA RAJAMANICKAM/JEAN CLAUDE BIGUINE SALON & SPA Hair: SÉBASTIEN COUSIN/JEAN CLAUDE BIGUINE SALON & SPA

SHALINI AGARWAL, 29

Sound Mixer and Designer

First steps: You only had to look to the sound consoles at college concerts to spot Agarwal, most likely chatting up the technicians. "Some people are visual, I'm aural," says the Delhi native, who specialised in sound design at FTII, Pune.

Big break: Shooting Imtiaz Ali's *Highway* in sync sound (capturing both dialogue and ambient sound) over six states as an independent sound designer. For *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol* (2011), another big career highlight, she positioned herself on a sharp bend in the road, with a speeding car coming at her. "It was worth it for the lovely tyre screeches and car passes we got."

Going pro: "There are few women in this field, especially in our country," she notes. Fewer still who have assisted Oscar-winner Resul Pookutty on *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) and *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011), and Drew Kunin on *Eat Pray Love* (2010) and *Life of Pi* (2012).

Coming soon: *Gandhi of the Month*, a communal drama she worked on with Pookutty, will release this year.

CHAITALLY PARMAR, 32

Scriptwriter

First steps: After an advertising degree from MICA, the 20-something from Surat – keen to keep from returning to small-town life – enrolled at Whistling Woods International, Mumbai, to learn production. Soon after, she worked with Mukta Arts and Hema Malini Productions on some rather forgettable films. Finding the rigours of a production job unsatisfactory, she switched to UTV's script development department on a whim.

Big break: When she switched to former UTV chief Vikas Bahl's Phantom Films and started working on his script for *Queen*. "I was just reading the script as a person who has lived that life and I noticed many loopholes." Initially Bahl rejected her suggestions but acquiesced when he saw the small-town nuances she brought to the title character.

Writer's life: Since *Queen*, Parmar has received countless Facebook messages from strangers, telling her how much they loved the film and which scenes stuck with them.

Coming soon: She's begun writing *Shaandar*, her next film with Bahl. "I hope I can contribute as much I did to *Queen*," she says.

EKA LAKHANI, 27

Costume Designer

First steps: Lakhani, who set out to be a fashion designer, swiftly changed course when she received an offer she couldn't refuse: the chance to assist Sabyasachi Mukherjee on Mani Ratnam's *Raavan* (2010).

Big break: In her second project, Malayalam film *Urumi* (2011), Lakhani went from assisting to taking charge. The period drama starring Vidya Balan and Tabu became a huge hit, and by 23, Lakhani had made her mark in South Indian cinema.

50 shades: While working on *Gulaab Gang*, her first solo Bollywood project, Lakhani was tasked with putting hardy vigilantes into an essentially cutesy colour. "Getting the right shade was crucial for the film. I love dyeing fabrics; I showed Madhuri [Dixit-Nene] and Soumik [Sen] 50 shades before we zeroed in on a fierce pink."

Coming soon: She has three releases this year: *NH10* (co-produced by Anushka Sharma), Marathi feature *Kaksharsh* and Prakash Jha's next.

AADORE MUKHERJEE, 29

Casting Director

First steps: At 16, Mukherjee joined production company Genesis, juggling everything from assisting directors

to costumes to casting. The latter, she found, she had a natural flair for. She went on to cast for Mira Nair's short, *Migration* (2008), and Abhinay Deo's Nike 'Street Cricket' ad film (2007).

Big break: Mukherjee began casting officially with *Delhi Belly* (2011), but for her, *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* (2013) was the turning point. "People were curious about the supporting cast. That's how I knew I'd done something different."

Casting calls: What was typically one of the assistant director's jobs has now become a specialisation, she says. "We have a new breed of casting directors, most of whom come from a background in direction. This helps because we understand the nitty gritty."

Coming soon: Farah Khan's *Happy New Year*, and Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra's *Mirza Sahiban* in which she's launching Sonam Kapoor's brother Harsh, and "a new girl, Saiyami Kher, who we found after half a year of looking out."

SONAM NAIR, 29

Director

First steps: Women directors in Bollywood are rare; 26-year-old women directors, rarer still; and ones who get their debut produced by Karan Johar – just one to date. "When I was gathering a crew for *Gippi* (2013), people would look at me in disbelief," says Nair.

Big break: Two gruelling years spent assisting Ayan Mukherjee on *Wake Up Sid* (2009) paid off two-fold: Nair learnt more here than she did at film school and it gave her a foot in the door at Johar's Dharma Productions. "I showed my script to Ayan and he really liked it," says Nair. "He passed it on to Karan."

Girl power: Like with *Gippi*, the story of an overweight 14-year-old girl coming of age, Nair wants to continue telling stories about women. "I want to write kickass girl power films and portray women as they really are."

Coming soon: Nair is writing a "raunchy comedy", the second of her three-film deal with Dharma Productions. ➤



The Gallery on M.G.-13,
M.G. Road, New Delhi
+91 11 41021122
hemant.nandita@gmail.com

 **hemant** *nandita* 

NAMRATA RAO, 32

Editor

Big ticket: Boredom led the Delhi-based IT programmer to join the Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute in Kolkata. After specialising in film editing, Rao worked on documentaries till director Dibakar Banerjee saw her work on the Bengali documentary *I am the Very Beautiful* (2006), and offered her *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!* (2008).

Turning point: *Band Baaja Baaraat* (2010), which sealed her place in the mainstream. And *Kahaani* (2012), for which she won the National Award. "I used to be bull-headed about what I wanted, but I am more of a director's editor now."

Then and now: "I was convinced I wouldn't make any money [in films] so I thought I might as well do projects I like," she says. And some of these pet projects include *Ishqiya* (2010), *Shanghai* (2012) and last month's *2 States*. "Now, the money is pretty good too," she laughs.

Coming soon: Banerjee's forthcoming *Titli* (which went to Cannes last month), and Yash Raj Films' *Dum Lagae Ke Haisha*, "a comedy about self-esteem and body image".

NEHA PARTI MATIYANI, 31

Director of Photography (DoP)

Breakthrough moment: As an assistant cinematographer (*Ghajini* (2008), *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (2008), *My Name is Khan* (2010)), Matiyani noticed no gender bias. "No one tells you outright 'You're a woman, I can't hire you', but they'll give you a sense that they're taking a risk," she says. After proving her mettle with the small-budget *Mujhse Fraaandship Karoge* (2011), Matiyani landed a 50-crore project – *Yamla Pagla Deewana 2* (2013).

Job requirement: Matiyani believes that whether you're a man or woman, you need to be physically fit to be a competent cinematographer. "There are a lot of men who are not steady with hand-held cameras," she says.

On location: Fielding unforeseen crises at a shoot is a constant for Matiyani – like working around massive crowds on a day planned for wide crane shots. "A lot depends on the DoP: if you have brain freeze, you could stall the entire shoot; there is a lot of pressure."

Coming soon: Matiyani is currently wrapping up her fourth project, possibly her best work yet. "I used to play it safe, but I've done stuff differently in my fourth film, *Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania*. There's this lovemaking scene we've shot in the film, and I think it's come out beautifully," she says.

RUSHI SHARMA, 39 MANOSHI NATH, 38

Costume Designers

Breakthrough moment: With films like *Talaash* (2012) and *Queen*, it's safe to say Rushi Sharma and Manoshi Nath's 14-year friendship has made for a lucrative business collaboration. Sharma's background in costume design for theatre coupled with Nath's artistic flair (she started out as a storyboard artist for films) brought them attention right from *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!*, their first film. "We used to get calls every day for Delhi-based films, but we refused them. We've tried consciously to never repeat a genre," reveals Nath.

Street cred: The duo is known for putting script and character above all bells and whistles. "Directors hand us the script and the first vision is ours. Then we streamline it with them. We're part of the acting workshops too, so we can get into the skin of the character," Nath says.

Sleuth sisters: For Dibakar Banerjee's upcoming *Detective Byomkesh Bakshi*, a noir drama set in 1940s Calcutta, the girls had their own mystery to solve. "We needed to figure how that era looked in colour with no reference," explains Nath. "We've had to scour old photographs and footage to estimate the grey values of colours."

Coming soon: Sharma and Nath have other big releases lined up for this year – Rajkumar Hirani's *PK* and Sajid Nadiadwala's *Kick*.



NAMRATA RAO

SHRUTI GUPTA, 36

Art Director

Building blocks: As an architect at CEPT, Ahmedabad, Gupta's thesis on marrying film and architecture was bluntly rejected. Three years later, she built a village of 25 houses outside Jaisalmer for her first film, *Mumbai Se Aaya Mera Dost* (2003), which the Rajasthan government then made permanent homes. Production company Genesis was her spring-board into TV commercials, telefilms and finally, full-length features.

Turning point: Her career highlights *Taare Zameen Par* (2007) and *The Lunchbox* (2013) were similar, in that they required her to work with tight budgets and demanded intense on-location prep. "On location, you can't decide where to put a wall – you have to work with layout restrictions," she says.

Space craft: Acting workshops are crucial to her understanding of characters; for *The Lunchbox* she even sent the cast shopping. "If Nimrat [Kaur] seemed at ease in the house it was because off camera, she was shifting things, adjusting things."

Coming soon: Her forthcoming release, *Khoobsurat*, re-unites her with the makers of *Aisha* (2010).



NANDINI SHRIKENT, 39

Casting Director

Turning point: *Rock On!!* (2006). She admits that even though she was flooded with offers after it, the truth is director Abhishek Kapoor had already zeroed in on much of the cast before she came on board.

Learning curve: Working with Ang Lee to find his lead for *Life of Pi* was a huge learning curve. Ten hopefuls from five cities were rounded up over one weekend for Lee to meet. "He doesn't cast by the look of the actor," she says. "He was looking into their souls."

Non-actors: "Casting non-actors is something Zoya [Akhtar] taught me on *Luck by Chance* (2009). "She has this amazing ability to look at people

around her and pick the roles they'd be perfect for," she says. It was Akhtar who gave Shrikent her first gig as casting director on *Lakshya* (2004).

Coming soon: A portmanteau film, *Words with Gods*, for which she has cast for Mira Nair's instalment, *God Room*. ●

ASSISTED BY: NEHA SALVI
COMPILED BY SONAM SAVLANI
AND VATSALA CHHIBBER

From left, On Namrata: Polyester shift dress, ₹ 30,900, **Joseph at Le Mill**. Silk jacket, price on request, **Rajesh Pratap Singh**. Suede peep toes, ₹ 11,999, **Dune**. Rose gold-plated pearl and Swarovski necklace, ₹ 19,850, **Outhouse**.

'Rose Angélique Monogram Vernis' belt, price on request, **Louis Vuitton**. Watch, ring, gold anklet; all her own.

On Neha: viscose dress, ₹ 5,990, metallic leather heels, ₹ 4,990; both **Zara**. Embroidered organza robe, ₹ 15,000, **Neeta Lulla**. Gold-plated topaz earring, ₹ 5,400, **Amrapali**. Ring, her own.

On Rushi: Georgette shirt, ₹ 7,200, **Pankaj & Nidhi**. Lurex shift dress, ₹ 16,500, **Rajesh Pratap Singh**. Studded leather pumps, price on request, **Christian Louboutin**. Metal earrings, her own.

'Drops of gold' cuff, ₹ 5,800, **Eina Ahluwalia**.

On Manoshi: Net-brocade dress, ₹ 19,500, **Anita Dongre**. Cotton appliqué jacket, ₹ 29,500, **Pankaj & Nidhi**. Brass-plated macramé belt, ₹ 3,500, **Ticket TO Timbuktu**. Floral lace-up heels, pearl and gold rings; all her own. Gold-plated cuff, ₹ 13,800, gold-plated onyx ring, ₹ 4,180; both **Amrapali**; 'Marine Deco' cuff, ₹ 7,000, **Valliyan** by Nitya Arora.

On Shruti: Silk-chiffon blouse, ₹ 23,500; silk-chiffon trousers, ₹ 8,950; both **Rohit Gandhi + Rahul Khanna**. Patent leather pumps, ₹ 14,990, **Kenneth Cole**. 'Dior Tee Shirt' earrings, ₹ 29,000, **Dior**.

On Nandini: Embroidered chiffon sari and crêpe blouse, ₹ 34,000; both **Neeta Lulla**. Stone earrings, ₹ 600, **Blur**. 'Shining Star' Brooch, ₹ 5,500, **Valliyan** by Nitya Arora. Ring, her own