

In conversation with Ms. Rupali Mehta

Producer, Greenlight Entertainment | *SIMSR Alum Batch 1994-96*

**1. From being an independent film producer to be adjudged as a SIMSR Superstar for Excellence in Entrepreneurship, how has the journey been so far?**

**A.** I feel very honoured and humbled to have received the SIMSR Superstar for Excellence in Entrepreneurship award, given especially that we have a lot of illustrious and accomplished alumni. Since my professional journey started with SIMSR, it feels great to be associated with my Alma Mater through this award at this point in my career. I think a woman entrepreneur winning this award will encourage female students who dream of becoming entrepreneurs to follow their dreams and consider entrepreneurship as a viable career path for themselves. Personally, my journey continues to be exciting and challenging every single day.



**2. You are someone who is known for producing quality and contemporary films/content. What made you produce films like Mr. & Mrs. Iyer and Rang Rasiya?**

**A.** The motivation behind producing these movies were the scripts and the film makers themselves. I fell in love with both scripts and I could see the films unfold before my eyes as I read them. Both the film makers – Aparna Sen (for *Mr. & Mrs. Iyer*) and Ketan Mehta (for *Rang Rasiya*) – are amongst the finest film makers of our time. I could see the creative vision both Aparna and Ketan had for their respective films, which made the whole experience of producing these films exciting and memorable. I also felt that both *Mr. & Mrs. Iyer* and *Rang Rasiya* were important and relevant stories for our time and needed to reach an audience.

**3. What are the parameters you consider when selecting scripts for your production house?**

**A.** The story itself and the conceptualization of it are the most important aspects for us in selecting a film or a television or digital series. When we read a script, firstly we consider whether it engages us and whether we believe in it. Then, we look at it from the audience's perspective – are there universal and relatable themes and emotional graphs that an audience will relate or aspire to. We examine whether the script aligns to universal themes like love, loss, heartbreak, family, fighting for a cause, passion, etc. We also consider whether our vision for the film or series aligns with that of

the Director and Writer. Creatives are subjective. After considering all other parameters, including the commercials of the project, finally we go with our gut instinct and how much we believe in the script.

**4. How do you strike a balance between commercialism and art?**

**A.** In recent times, the lines between mainstream cinema and art house cinema have blurred. The audience has evolved, and today there is an audience for all kinds of content, as long as it is well made and is true to its space. Moreover, digital platforms in India and globally have opened up the market for stories and content that would not find a place in conventional media. As Producers, we see Entertainment as a creative business, so there is a business aspect to it that has to be considered. We don't make art for art's sake. As Producers, we wear two hats - a creative one and a commercial one. Firstly, we focus on whether we have a strong belief in the story and the script, and if we are willing to invest ourselves in the story for the next few years. Only after asking ourselves these fundamental questions, we then consider the commercial parameters of the project such as budgets, target audience and markets, marketing plans, etc.

**5. As a producer, how different it is to conceive and produce an ad film vis-à-vis a feature film?**

**A.** The two are extremely different pieces of creative work, hence the processes and challenges involved are very different for each. For an ad film, the creative brief, the script and the brand message come from the creative team in the advertising agency, and our role, along with that of our director's, is to bring our creative interpretation to the agency's script, while effectively and engagingly communicating the brand's message. In the case of a feature film, you are telling a story across a span of two hours, carrying the audience through a journey of some sort. Hence, important creative aspects such as the story arc, the character arcs, are involved. However, you still need to get the audience's attention in the first ten minutes of the film. But, you get some time to develop your story and your characters. In an ad film, you have to get the audience's attention immediately and convey the brand's message in a span of 30-45 seconds. The logistics and time lines involved

in making an ad film also vary from that of a feature film. Hence, the approach towards the two is different.

**6. Do you feel that the digital medium and conventional media of entertainment can co-exist or will one eat away into the space of the other?**

**A.** Content wise, digital media has largely taken off from where conventional media, i.e. feature films/television, have left off. Stories that could not be presented through conventional mediums have found a home on digital mediums. In this sense, digital media has not eaten into the space of conventional media, but rather, expanded the market for content and stories. However, there has been some shift in the audience share from conventional to digital platforms, due to the varied content options available to choose from on the latter, and based on the audience's likes, convenience and affordability. For today's generation, their mobile phone screens are their preferred mode for consuming content. Hence, at some level, conventional and digital media complement each other, and at another level, compete with each other. A lot of content from conventional media also ends up on digital media - from feature films to cricket, to popular TV shows. This has created another revenue model for conventional mediums that didn't exist before the advent of digital media.

**7. With the advent of digital medium, how have the dynamics changed for those working in the creative space?**

**A.** Digital media has opened up a whole new market for creative people in the media and the entertainment space, wherein they can tell those stories which they could not tell through conventional media. With the quantum of content that is required to fuel platforms such as Hotstar, Netflix, Voot, Amazon Prime, or any other digital platform for that matter, there has never been a better time to be a content creator. Digital media has also given a new life to all those stories that had taken a back seat in the process of bringing them to life because of the limitations of a feature film.

**8. Have you ever had to handle a difficult conflict in your career? What did you learn from it?**

**A.** Yes, I have faced several conflicts in my career, and these difficulties have taught me to believe in myself and do what I believe is right, even though it might be the tougher choice in the present. I have found that doing the right thing is always much more liberating and in the long run, the tougher choice, if made for the right reasons, really pays off.

**9. What are some of the significant learning you had in your two years at SIMSR?**

**A.** I came from a very different background as compared to my batchmates - I was from an arts background and had done my graduation in Clinical Psychology. SIMSR taught me to step out of my comfort zone by putting me in situations where I had to collaborate and work with people from diverse backgrounds, having diverse personalities and varied opinions. I learnt to put my best foot forward because the competition was great. This made me unafraid of the unknown and made me take on challenges - I learnt that I could manage it, I could survive it and do well. These have all been great life skills and life lessons to be armed with when stepping out in to the real world. And of course, the management skills, communication skills, marketing and sales skills, be it for marketing yourself, your product or your idea - I learnt all of this at SIMSR.

**10. What would be your advice for the students/young alumni who are starting their careers?**

**A.** There is absolutely no short cut to success. Working hard and working smart are both equally important. Be very open to new ideas and opportunities. And no matter how hard, try to be as adaptable as possible to the ever changing world we live in today - accept change and evolve with it. Also, never get disheartened by your failures - failure is an integral part of the journey to success. So, NEVER GIVE UP!

**RAPID FIRE QUESTIONS:**

- a) **Role Model:** Priyanka Chopra, Anushka Sharma, Oprah Winfrey, Shonda Rhimes, Tina Fey
- c) **Quote you always go by:** Carpe Diem (Seize the day)
- e) **Your goal in life:** To tell great Indian stories to a global audience
- g) **Books/Movies:** Dangal, Sarfarosh, Love Actually, Four Weddings And A Funeral, Erin Brockovich

- b) **Success Mantra:** Believe in yourself; Back your instincts; Follow your dreams
- d) **Favourite hangout spot in SIMSR:** Canteen
- f) **Favourite holiday destination:** London
- h) **Favourite cuisine:** Varied cuisine from different parts of India

**Interviewed & drafted by:**

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