



Naseeruddin Shah

Donning the director's hat

One of India's most versatile actors, Naseeruddin Shah is in the news again. This time, interestingly, not because of his acting skills, but for his directorial debut in movies — *Yun Hota To Kya Hota*. The 125-minute-long movie weaves together four stories about people with very different backgrounds planning to migrate to the U.S. from India, exploring themes such as love, betrayal, integrity, hypocrisy and morality.

"I had a blast directing them. I may just be doing direction for the rest of my life. Straining myself for a part even for something like *Paar* doesn't excite me right now. I'd like to help other actors do that kind of stuff. Hence my fascination with teaching," Naseer (as he is known in film world) said in an interview.

Born in 1950, Naseeruddin Shah showed keen interest in acting from his childhood. He graduated from the National School of Drama (NSD), New Delhi, in 1973 and enrolled in the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune, the same year.

He was noticed by director Shyam Benegal, who offered him a role in his 1975 film *Nishaant*. So impressed was Benegal with Naseer that he landed roles in most of his succeeding films.

Naseeruddin Shah got his big break with the movie *Junoon* in 1978 which he followed up with *Aakrosh* in 1980. A string of successes in both mainstream and alternative cinema followed with *Masoom*, *Khandan*, *Paar*, *Katha*, *Pestonjee*, *Tridev*, *Mohra*, and *Vishwatma*.

Soon, Naseer established himself as an actor par excellence and

won the National Award for Best Actor in 1979 for an effective portrayal of a blind man in the film *Sparsh*.

The 1970s was the era in which many new young directors were experimenting with off-beat films, which later came to be known as the era of "new wave" cinema.

Naseer won three Filmfare awards during this period. His performance in *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron*, a cult comedy, displayed his versatility but, at the same time, also made it difficult to categorise him.

He was considered for the title role in Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*, a role that finally went to Sir Ben Kingsley. It remains one of Naseer's greatest disappointments in life.

He was awarded the Padma Bhushan, India's third-highest civilian award, in 2003 by the Government of India for his outstanding contribution to Indian cinema.

For many years he was acclaimed as an actor of art films. However,

Naseer proved his critics wrong after he became active in mainstream movies, popularly known as Bollywood films, with the 1986 film *Karma* in which he was one of the heroes.

Later, he starred in international projects such as Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* in 1999 and a movie adaptation of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*.

Naseer's recent movies include Vishal Bharadwaj's *Omkaara* — based on Shakespeare's *Othello*.

Though *Yun Hota To Kya Hota* is Naseer's directorial debut in movies, he has been considered as an ace theatre director for long. He has directed plays written by stalwarts like Ismat Chughtai and Saadat Hasan Manto. ■



Naseeruddin Shah in a still from *Being Cyrus* and, top, from *Omkaara*.