BOLLYWOOD



A still from 'Lage Raho Munnabhai', a box office hit that is being credited with communicating Mahatma Gandhi's message of non-violence to today's youth.

H e has, for long, been one of Bollywood's leading actors. But it is only now that Sanjay Dutt's popularity has reached levels where he can perhaps be described as the No. 1 star of the Hindi film industry. And the credit for his soaring popularity should, at least in part, go to Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation and the legendary apostle of peace. Dutt has once again proved his histrionics by his sparkling performance in Raj Kumar Hirani's 'Lage Raho Munnabhai' and the film has so far been a box office hit both in India and abroad.

The current rage over Dutt is due to the recent release of Raj Kumar Hirani's 'Lage Raho Munnabhai' (Carry on Munnabhai) — an endear-

ing film about a small-time thug with a golden heart (Munnabhai, played by Dutt) and his sidekick (Circuit, played by Arshad Warsi), who are inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and seek to spread his ideals of non-violence and brotherhood.

The film — a sequel to Hirani's immensely successful 'Munnabhai M.B.B.S.' — has a been a runaway hit across the country and abroad that has wowed both the masses and the classes and has sparked what some observers are calling a grand revival in interest in the Mahama's life and work.

A fine balance of comedy, wit, romance, emotion and drama, 'Lage Raho Munnabhai' has Dutt delivering perhaps his best performance to date. As Munnabhai, he delivers his lines with extreme charm and wit, and his blundering ways are simply adorable.

Born in 1959, Dutt is the son of the legendary Bollywood actress Nargis and movie star-turned-politician Sunil Dutt -- both of them highly respected stars who were immensely popular. He began his film career as a child star in 'Reshma aur Shera', but his real debut came with 'Rocky' in 1981. And from 'Rocky' to 'Lage Raho Munnabhai' in 2006, this versatile actor has clearly traversed a long road. Though 'Rocky' was a hit, it did not establish him as a star. But he steadily began to build his career, notching up successes such as 'Naam', 'Kabzaa', 'Hathyar', 'Sadak' and 'Saajan'. His breakthrough role finally came in Subhash Ghai's 'Khalnayak'.

Over the last 10 years, he has matured as an actor, with action, gangster and comedy roles being his forte. His performances in 'Vaastav', 'Mission Kashmir' and 'Munnabhai M.B.B.S.' earned him



Sanjay Dutt, right, and Arshad Warsi in a still from 'Lage Raho Munnabhai'.

and Withiabhar W.D.B.S. earlied him rave reviews. The role of a highly-strung gangster in 'Vaastav', in fact, won him almost all the top awards that the industry has to offer.

Dutt soon ventured beyond acting, forming a production company called White Feather Films with friend and director Sanjay Gupta. His company has produced films such as 'Kaante', 'Musafir' and 'Zinda' in which Dutt played the lead roles. He has also, to the great surprise of his critics, excelled in comic role is a number of films such as 'Shaadi No. 1', 'Jodi No 1', 'Haseena Man Jayegi', apart from the two Munnabhai films.

A troubled personal life and brushes with the law have not detracted from his popularity, and his fans — who now call him Munnabhai — have been growing exponentially. No film or role he has done in recent times has failed to enthuse audiences.

Dutt is clearly at the pinnacle of his prowess as an actor.