

Something, somewhere, made for you

A Bollywood blockbuster reinforces the importance of correct career choice, for your career constitutes bulk of your waking existence

BY HIREN SHAH

THE most important hymn of young India today, *Rock on, hai yeh waqt ka ishara*, has the country ecstatic with joy. But the strongest undercurrent in the movie is the sadness that the key four characters carry with them, 10 years after they split, signaling an end to their music band. They achieve varying degrees of success in their respective professions, including investment banking, but that does not take away the bitterness about what they could have been. The best designation in investment banking and the best office suite can't compare with the lifestyle — long hair, hair bands et al — they have left behind. No promotion can touch a chord, what music did 10 years ago.

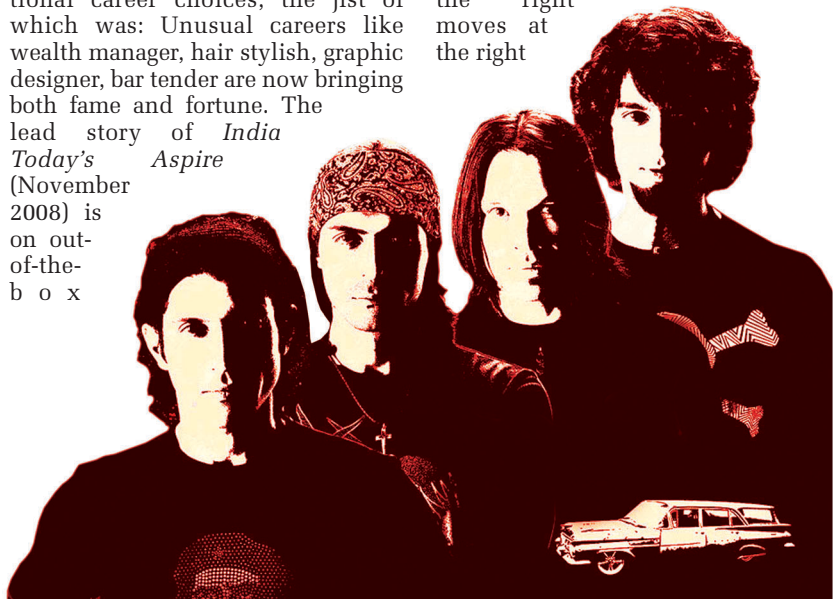
The movie *Rock On* is about a character called Avinash (portrayed by Farhan Akhtar), an investment banker by profession, who comes across as quite grumpy and indifferent initially, but changes drastically when music reenters his life. He had been an aspiring music star in his college days but could not pursue his calling. Though he has become a successful professional, he does not at all seem happy with life. Rekindling the old passion does seem to rejuvenate him and infuse a spark into his somewhat moribund existence. Even the character Joe, played by Arjun Rampal, is shown rejoining the music band in the end, rather than take up a secure job which his wife feels so strongly about. The narra-

tive in the end depicts practically everybody following what they enjoy doing after dropping old occupations.

A week before the movie was released, this is what I read in an article in the *Brunch* magazine of the Hindustan Times group: "Dancer and choreographer Sandip Soparrkar made quite a few pit stops before he found his true calling. He started out with a degree in hotel management, did an MBA, was the head of a PR firm and then turned to modelling. He left that boring life a few years ago when he discovered dance and never looked back." Sometime later, The *Sunday* supplement of *The Times of India* had two articles on unconventional career choices, the jist of which was: Unusual careers like wealth manager, hair stylist, graphic designer, bar tender are now bringing both fame and fortune. The lead story of *India Today's Aspire* (November 2008) is on out-of-the-box

careers, where they have mentioned various other unconventional careers, apart from those given above.

In May this year, I went to Ladakh on a holiday. We were staying at Mantra cottages in Leh. One evening, in a group gathering, the manager in charge, Sunil Motay, played the guitar so well that there were repeat requests for other songs from everybody. His body language indicated that he was enjoying himself very much. That prompted me to ask him the very next morning, "Didn't you ever think of taking it up as a full time profession?" He replied that because of lack of proper guidance, he could not make the right moves at the right



time, and music being a field of sporadic and irregular income, he didn't later have the guts to switch professions. He also told me that his niece was an aspiring singer and he was encouraging her to participate in the music shows on television so that she does not repeat his mistakes.

In the context of passion for music, the one person who comes to mind is the all time great singer, the late Kishore Kumar. He put in so much zest in his singing through his vibrant, bubbly personality that his co-singers were inspired to perform better by his sheer presence. The book *Kishore Kumar* by Derek Bose says that since he would perform a song with all nuances and expressions, his dancing and jumping around in the studios would make it impossible to hold one's laughter, so much so that his lady co-singers would plead with the music director for half-hour breaks with Kishore not being around. He carried this exuberance to stage shows and could galvanise live audiences into dancing with him for hours on end. The king of playback singers was a living testimony of the fact that to "sing is king".

However, the same book also records the very same Kishore Kumar's attitude towards acting. "I only wanted to sing. But I was conned into acting and I hated every moment of it — I muffed my lines, pretended to be crazy, shaved my head off, played difficult, began yodelling in the midst of tragic scenes, told Meena Kumari what I was supposed to tell Bina Rai in some other film. I screamed, ranted, went cuckoo." All this considering that he was such a natural actor that neither could any director enact a scene for him, nor did any seasoned actor find it easy to match his style. When his elder brother, the established star, Ashok Kumar pointed out all this to him along with the fact that actors got paid more than singers and musicians, he replied "Acting is fake. Music is real as it comes from the heart. Only that which emanates from the heart can reach the heart of others." It would not be out place to mention here that many, if not most Indians would have even at that time preferred to be a Bollywood acting star or a part of the Indian cricket team because of the visibility and fol-

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lowing they have always commanded compared to other occupations in India. More importantly, it shows the plight of a person in the wrong sub vocation even within the same domain, the film industry.

What Kishore Kumar says about the heart seems to find an echo in management circles as well. I found Mr Kumar Mangalam Birla's views, the most intriguing in this context. In the book, *Smart Leadership Insights for CEOs*, he says, "It is not always that a family member wants to spend his entire career in the family business. With education and changing value systems, today's youth often prefer an independent path, and sometimes a vocation completely different from a family business. If those aspirations cannot be accommodated, then the successor may as well have to come from outside the family." That would probably happen when the family member decides to follow his passion fulltime. One such person was Subir Malik, key recordist and manager of the most successful rock band in India, Parikrama, who made a conscious decision to switch from his motor spare parts business in Kashmere Gate to music. The adulation that the music band received at an informal public performance queered the pitch for the formal creation of India's first rock band. On the other hand, Osho had once advised a very successful surgeon to spend the last fifteen years of his life as a musician for personal fulfilment because the person felt that music was his real calling.

Since this article is written in the context of music, it may not be out of place to mention that Singer Abhijeet was a chartered accountant, singer Shanker was a software engineer and

last but certainly not the least, AR Rehman was a civil engineer. The so called extra curricular activity may sometimes turn out to be the main activity. Anupama Shah's book on Shah Rukh Khan states, "Shah Rukh enrolled in Hans Raj college for a degree in economics but his real education started in the evening with the Theatre action group." What draws out innate talent in the right vocation is real education indeed — "In work, we have the possibility of discovering ourselves." This is a far cry from the tendency to have a somewhat negative attitude towards vocational education vis-à-vis studies. In our time, SUPW, which stands for socially useful productive work, included music, electronics, clay modelling, batic, among other things. As students, we used to joke that SUPW could also stand for some useful periods wasted but such jokes can turn out to be very costly in real life if one is in the wrong profession, where he may have to spend a majority of his waking hours for a lifetime.

MANY people, though they feel miserable in the wrong profession, do not have the guts to change because of various reasons: fall in income, fall in stature and status, lack of confidence of functional excellence in their professed area, possibility of exploitation etc. An American entrepreneur, when complimented on being able to leave his six figure salary to pursue his passion of opening a chain of food stores, said, "such decisions can only be made if the personal profile, the business profile, and the market profile match.". One cannot ignore the practical perspective before making such a shift. The point to note is that like Soparrkar, if you take a very long time in seeking your correct working identity or matching the personal and business profile, the chances of success can reduce considerably as your unique talent also needs to meet the market requirement of the times. This could especially be so with certain unconventional career choices having low success rates and the solution is to know your correct vocation early. There are certain things only practical experience can teach for which there is a gestation period in which one learns the new trade or occupation.

The director of *Rock On*, Abhishek Kapoor himself started off as an actor but after his first couple of films (which he didn't believe in) flopped, he moved out of the film industry to create an entertainment-based website at the wrong time when the dotcom business crashed. He then wrote and directed a film in which he believed, *Aryan*, which took four years to release but didn't do well. That, however gave him the confidence and practical experience to write and direct *Rock On*, a film in which he closely identifies with the character Joe. He has been overwhelmed with the response to this movie. The correct working identity with a suitable market profile at the right time queers the pitch for commercial success. Currently, the demand for music and new sound has been rising because of the media and the entertainment boom, which means opportunities for people with that kind of profile.

One wonders why determining the right career can be tough. Supposing one were to indulge in a bit of upside down thinking and contemplate how the situation would be if sports or music education is imparted the way general education is imparted. Supposing here the aspiring sports or music students were stuffed with all kinds of facts on their subjects for a few months/years, earn a degree and then made to try the musical instrument or their respective sport. What could probably happen for some of them is the opposite of what happened in Soparrkar's case. Many of them may realise that music or sport is not their cup of tea and opt for an MBA but it may not be easy to shift. Learning by doing not only enhances learning but helps in pinpointing vocation. Functional talent and passion can only be reaffirmed if not known by functioning and not by analyzing what others may have done, which can, at best make an intellectual of the particular subject or vocation.

IT was the pioneer of training and development, Dale Carnegie, who said that choosing one's spouse and one's occupation are the two most important decisions of one's life. When one comes across fancy expressions on career coaching sites like life purpose, life work, personal

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fulfilment, career meditations to know one's vocation, it reminds one of the lines in the movie *Dil to Paagal hai*: "God has already made your life partner, it is a matter of finding him or her." The Tagline: Someone, somewhere is made for you. That is equally true for the right occupation as well — something, somewhere is made for you. One may not find a hand in glove kind of match but at least the broad direction has to be right. The negative is also worth pondering upon. Just as the lover Devdas is shown destroying himself in a spiral of negativity because of not being able to marry his desired choice, the misery of the Career Devdas is even greater for not being in the right occupation because of the time involved. In my article 'Soul of a profession', I narrated the real life plight of the great Indian actor Balraj Sahni. Another Sahni, Jaideep Sahni, the writer of *Chak De India*, called the wrong occupation "Lifetime imprisonment". These questions of career coaches explain it all:-

Do you dread Monday mornings and feel that the day and week just drags by? Are you ready to make a change but want to avoid saying 'yes' to a job that you may end up despising even more? Do you lack self confidence and have the belief that you can't accomplish your career goals? Are you feeling stuck in your career and confused about possible job options? Are you puzzled about your strengths, talents, career values and career interests? Is your work your calling? Are you engaged in work that you value or does it merely pay the bills? Does your work bring out your strengths or do you keep think-

ing about turning work activities into your life's work? Do you have the financial security to effect a career transition?

Another analogy could be the recent big bang experiment, where the The £5bn machine, Large Hadron Collider (LHC), was designed to smash protons together with cataclysmic force to discover what the Universe was made of billionths of a second after the Big Bang. In the West, no foolproof method has so far been devised to know the talent of a human being (what he is made of). Benjamin Franklin's saying, "There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond and to know oneself", is almost as relevant today as when he first said it. As far as I am concerned, if you discover what you are made of correctly early in life, it is like the big bang either way — it considerably enhances your chances of success and happiness as career constitutes 70-75 per cent of waking existence. On the negative side, life can bang you very badly — you can suffer both emotionally and financially — a lifetime of frustration and regret according to Devajit Bhuyan, chairman of a Career NGO.

It is not easy for everyone to determine his working identity but that can pave the way for both satisfaction and professional success. Writer Salim Khan, who joined films as an actor but switched to script writing, says in the book *The making of Sholay* that he had the gift of conception but not the gift of projection. He managed to make a shift within the same domain but what about people like Soparrkar who have to seek their working identity by trial and error across industries. While feeling a rift within, one can continue to drift for discovering one's gift by making a shift from occupation to occupation. It can be a merry dance and as stated in the movie *Rock On*, life may never offer you another chance. Contrary to the commonly heard phrase among youngsters these days, "You rock, dude", the wrong occupation could be a prelude to your being anything but a dude. It could very well be knock off; not Rock on.

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