

DIRECTOR Q&A

Let's start with the film's title. Where does it come from?

The saying 'What will people say' (log kya kahenge) is an expression all Pakistani and Indians can relate to. In Hindi and Urdu, it's an expression that's used frequently in families and environments where tradition and honor are highly valued. And this focus on what other people's opinions are is something I want to get rid of; actually pull out the roots once and for all.

But on a more personal level, what does this saying actually mean to you?

Behind all of this there's a personal wish to live an honest life; to be faithful to myself. To do the things I want to do and not to live for others. It's just not in my nature to conform to others. Which is why I find it interesting to take a closer look at what conforming to other people's – or an entire system's – wishes and needs actually does to people. There's a kind of freedom in telling girls that are being socially controlled, that it's hard while it's going on, but that they should never let themselves be cowed by someone else's wants and needs.

What type of conversations do you hope the film will create?

I hope the film will open for a deeper understanding for the dilemma parents and children find themselves in, especially when they come from such different worlds like Nisha and her father. I'm not interested in provoking anyone, but I have a strong need to tell something true.

What inspired you to create the emotional story behind this film?

The movie is inspired by several events from my own life. Like Nisha in the film, I mostly had Norwegian friends and it felt really unfair being a young girl and not being allowed to do what the others were doing. I was kidnapped by my own parents and had to live with my relatives in Pakistan when I was 14 years old. That being said, I've added a lot of fictional elements to the film.

How has your creative process changed from the time you initially conceived the idea for the film?

I've waited to become mature enough to be able to convey this story in a nuanced way, to avoid it being a story about terrible parents and that poor girl. To put oneself into their situation is naturally harder for me than it is to relate to my own generation, but I had to try to put myself into their mindset; look at it from both sides. I also spoke with psychologists that work with the child protective services and other multi-cultural girls.

What are some of the key elements you tend to gravitate to when writing your scripts?

Narratives that interest me will always come first. And social control, family relations and especially the dynamics within the family is something I've been interested in for quite a while. I like exploring close human relationships and how we interact with each other. The shoot was split between Norway and India.

What was it like working in India?

Working in Rajasthan in India was a magical experience. My father and ancestors are from there. I do know the language and that helped a good bit. I felt like I found myself there. I was in India five times and got to show pictures and share some memories with my father while he was still alive. That meant a lot to me.

What was it like working with a wide range of actors, in terms of age, professional experience, and cultural backgrounds?

I loved having a whole Indian team working together with Danes, Germans and Swedes. The actors have been amazing the whole time; I love all of them. You do get very close to each other in an intense creative process such as making a movie. Maria Mozhdah who plays the leading role is a really amazing girl. There is something simply extraordinary about her. We had such an amazing chemistry on set that at times I even forgot she was only 17.

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