

A photograph of a man sitting on a bed in a room. The room is dimly lit, with a lamp on a nightstand to the left. The man is wearing a light-colored shirt and pants, and is looking towards the camera. The bed has white pillows and a green blanket. The nightstand has a lamp with a white shade and a small clock. The overall mood is relaxed and intimate.

# IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Sidharth Shukla is out on a journey of self-discovery, going from pillar to post, with a hunger to learn. A man consumed by wanderlust, he believes not in the destination but in the process of getting there. *Mandate* walks a step or two with the latest hunk of Bollywood and brings home a souvenir.



T-SHIRT & TROUSERS: US POLO ASSN; SLIPPERS: METRO

PHOTOGRAPHER: MOHIT BHATIA; STYLING: NEHA BELANI; HAIR: NAYAN JADHAV  
MAKE-UP: SACHIN V GATHE; LOCATION: RED BLUE & YELLOW, MUMBAI

PROFILE



SHIRT: PAUL & SHARK; CHINOS: GANT  
JACKET: LOUIS PHILIPPE; SHOES: METRO



By Nairita Mukherjee

**Your character in *Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhaniya* is that of a perfect man. Are you Angad in real life too?**

Not at all. I'm definitely not a perfect man. Honestly, I don't think being perfect is necessary. I mean, what's important is to keep improving yourself. Perfection isn't the goal. The process of polishing one's self is what's important. Besides, I feel, it's not possible for a person to match up to everyone's expectations, so the ideal thing to do is to match up to yours.

**What is it that makes a boy from a typical middleclass family, hailing from Allahabad, stand out?**

Nothing really. I'm just realistic, happy-go-lucky type of a guy and I take life as it comes. The only thing I try is not to trouble others. I've had a journey and I'm here today because of that. So, I'm different but not special. And it's not that you have to look really deep to find me, what you see is what you get.

**You seem to emphasise a lot on your journey.**

Yes, I think the loss of my loved ones has been my greatest teacher. I've seen death very closely from a young age. When I was in kindergarten I lost a friend, but it didn't affect me much because I wasn't allowed to see the body. I just knew that I'd never see him again. At such an early age, you don't even know the impact of death, its only later that you figure it out. And then you forget, because you are in the process of growing up and making more friends. When I was about 19, I lost another very close friend of mine, Amit. His death had a deeper impact on me. Then my father passed away, which was perhaps the biggest blow. I felt an irrepressible sense of loss that could never be fulfilled by anything. There was a lot that I wanted to do, but at the time he passed away, I hadn't really done much...just one commercial. So that's a sense of discontent that'll always be in me.

**You've had quite a successful run so far with *Balika Vadhu*.**

Well, yeah. *Balika Vadhu* is my first television show and honestly, I've been doing pretty much the same thing for a while now. People have liked me the way they've seen me so far, and that's really great. Venturing into movies is an addition. I've always believed in the idea that an opportunity will come to you at its own given time, you just have to be ready to grab it.

**So that elusive opportunity came in the form of *Humpty Sharma...* How has the response been?**

Amazing (laughs). See, I don't have a manager yet, so I don't exactly know the response within the industry. But my friends who've seen the film told me that the audience reaction was great. The film is doing well at the box office too, so all in all, I cannot complain.

PROFILE



**Now, that you've arrived with a bang, do you worry that success will change you?**

I don't really think so. I will say that I won't change. But then, it's a much standardised thing to say, and one never really knows if he will actually change. But I really hope I don't. And if your next question is why I am confident about it, simply because I know where I've come from. Whatever I'm getting is hardly because of luck. The opportunities haven't come to me because they were meant to, I've earned them.

Let me tell you a small incident from my childhood: When I was in second standard, my class teacher said, 'Now, that you will move to third standard, you guys will forget me.' I remember, I stood up and told her, 'I promise I will come and meet you even when I'm in 10<sup>th</sup> standard,' and so I did. I think what she had said that time, hit me, which is why I can say today that no, I won't change, no matter what. Having said that, most of the time, it's the people around you and their attitude that changes, even if you remain the same. So, if something good happens to me, I just hope people around me don't change.

**You are in a profession of cut-throat competition. How do you deal with jealousy, anxiety and the fear of losing?**

My mother always told me that sympathy is easy to get, but jealousy, you have to earn it. So I'd rather have someone else be jealous of me than me being jealous of others, and losing perspective in life. There will, of course, be other people who would do really well, and the way I see it, it is okay. I should try and do as good as them, or maybe even better. Everyone has a journey and that's what makes them who they are. No matter how hard I try I cannot live someone else's journey and therefore I cannot be them. Similarly, no one else can be me either. So why be jealous?

**Fair enough. So, how well do you handle criticism?**

You know, I've realised that there are three kinds of people who criticise—firstly, the ones who really care for you, secondly, the ones who just say it without knowing you and are simply being judgemental, and then there are those, who criticise with an agenda in mind (possibly that of hurting or discouraging you). One really doesn't know which category the critic belongs to. So, whatever they tell me, I ponder upon it, and then I take whatever I want to take of it. So no, I don't get offended, because I take everything in my stride, I select which advice to take.

**Do you have any regrets?**

None whatsoever. I'm happy the way life has gone so far, and I don't think I would like to change anything. Yeah, there have been bad days, days when I didn't know what I'm going to do with my life. There were days when there was no work, but then, there were also days when there was so much work that I had to select the best possible option. So, I've gone through all of this and I feel life is exactly the way it should be.

**Lastly, what are the greatest challenges in your profession?**

Well, for starters, there is absolutely no time to lag behind. I need to be at par with everyone and therefore I need to work hard. Look at Salman, Aamir, Shah Rukh and the likes, looking younger and fitter by the day. They have been here for so many years and they are still at it, up and running. Their hunger inspires me. So there is no time to take it easy. If these people are not thinking of it, who am I? Secondly, you have to look good. Although, I'd like to believe that it's the heart that matters, but in today's world, where people run after materialistic things more than the real ones, you are more likely to get caught up in vanity. But you have to draw the line. For instance, if I'm going out for dinner in pyjamas, that's not appropriate, not because there are people who'll look at me and judge me on my physical appearance, but because it's not the right code of conduct. After all, there is a thing called etiquette. But I really feel sad for those people who judge others on the basis of the clothes they are wearing. It just goes to show how small they themselves are.

**SIDHARTH  
SHUKLA**

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T-SHIRT: PAUL & SHARK; JACKET: HARDY AMIES, THE COLLECTIVE

