

Smriti Irani turns to comedy, not shunning Tulsi image

Her stint on the daily soap 'Kyunkii Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thhi' popularised her as bahu-next-door Tulsi Virani. As actress-turned-politician Smriti Irani turns to comedy with the new series 'Maniben.com', she says she is not trying to change her image with it.

'A character is imaginary and fictional but Tulsi has become so real that it is a big achievement. This (Tulsi) is one image that has helped me achieve an identity and love of people and I am not trying to run away from this image at all,' Smriti told IANS.

'I am not upset with the (Tulsi) image that I'd want to change it. I am obliged and was lucky enough to get it,' she added.

After logging more than 1,800 episodes in over eight years, Star Plus' epochal TV serial 'Kyunkii Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thhi' ended in November last year.

Smriti, who is also into production, writing and social work, said she doesn't suffer any identity crisis because of the screen image.

'The change has come gradually. I realised the difference while doing other shows like 'Kuch Dil Se' (as a host) and during my political career. While people referred to me as Tulsi initially, they also started calling me by my name. I've, in fact, had the best of both (identities as Tulsi and herself).'

Smriti achieved overnight stardom after her breakthrough in 'Kyunkii...' and then went on to do shows like 'Ramayan', 'Thodi Si Zameen Thoda Sa Aasmaan' and 'Virrudh'. She is also the vice president of the Bharatiya Janta Party's (BJP) youth wing in Maharashtra and is a member of the party national executive.

She was in the capital to launch her upcoming comedy show 'Maniben.com', going on air June 8 on Sab TV.

Based on Imtiaz Patel's hit Gujarati play with the same name, it is the story of a middle class woman's experiences in Mumbai's high-class society.

Asked if pursuing comedy won't be difficult for her considering her serious roles, she said: 'This stereotyping of an actor's image is rubbish. I started my career doing comedy with a show 'Tea Time Manoranjan' and it was then that I started getting melodramatic characters.'

'Maniben cannot be compared to Tulsi. She is more of a common woman - very straightforward and blunt - and that is what the show is all about,' said the actress who won best TV actress awards five times in succession.

Smriti was also upbeat about the change in content on general entertainment channels (GEC) from tear-jerking family dramas to social cause centric shows like 'Balika Vadhu', 'Uttaran' and 'Agle Janam Mohe Bitiya Hi Kijo!'.

'The programming of GECs has changed... It's fashionable now to show social causes like it was once in page three circuit. But content should be genuinely different like in 'Agle Janam Mohe Bitiya

Hi Kijo!.'

But at the same time she feels that the serials shouldn't be too preachy.

'TV is about entertainment. It is not about bringing change. People don't produce things (shows) to bring a social change but to earn money,' she said.

Smriti also got an offer for such a show on Zee TV, which she refused because of date issues with 'Maniben.com'.

Asked if she would ever team up with 'Kyunkii...' producer Ekta Kapoor again after her known rift with her, she replied: 'It depends on Ekta.'

Apart from 'Maniben.com', Smriti is producing two Gujarati plays - 'Muktidham' and 'Ek Chokri Saav Anokhi' - and is also considering entering mainstream movies.

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