

## 2006, a watershed year for Sanjay Dutt

As Sanjay Dutt looks back on 2006 that transformed his magnum screen image from a kind-hearted but fake doctor to a frivolous follower of the Mahatma, it is doubtful if he will find inspiration to pursue the projects on hand as vigorously as he did the previous ones.

There hardly remain any greater heights to be scaled after 'Lage Raho Munnabhai', the wonder flick of the year gone by - or so at least he may think.

As for his tryst with the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) (TADA) court, which will pronounce the quantum of sentence Jan 18 for his links with those who carried out the 1993 [Mumbai](#) bombings, it looks like he would be let off on probation. But neither he nor millions of his fans can take such a verdict for granted. Sanjay, however, has been acquitted of terrorism-linked charges.

2006 proved to be a watershed year in the turbulent life of Sanjay, also called Sanju Baba, the persevering actor and the self-made son of the great film stars of yesteryears - Nargis and Sunil Dutt.

Admittedly, the greatest film in Sanjay's chequered celluloid career of 25 years is the 2006 production that presented Mahatma Gandhi's adherence to truth and non-violence in a different manner but one the common man could understand and appreciate. That was the super hit 'Lage Raho Munnabhai'.

Both the film - forget its ludicrous presentation and flippant replication all over the country - and the court case kept Sanjay Dutt in the news all through the year more than any one else.

The immense popularity of the film, particularly the portrayal of Munnabhai, was apparently because of Sanjay the actor's total identification with the character, the pure-hearted goon who honestly tries to practice the Mahatma's teachings of truth and non-violence.

The love and sympathy that thousands of his fans have for this reformed drug addict also surged as never before during Sanjay's court appearances in the two most crucial months of November and December.

By judgement day Nov 28, people were praying for him even as he went to the Siddhivinayak temple. And everyone felt as relieved as he when the judge exonerated him of the serious charges of being in league with terrorists.

Days before that, filmmaker Mahesh Bhat said from Singapore: 'I oscillate between dread and hope; dread that he (Sanjay) would be sent to jail and hope that the judge will see the bigger picture and set him free.'

While the court verdict on his plea for release on probation is due to come up Jan 18, the popular verdict is already out - he deserves to be let off, considering his good conduct, the emotional torment he has suffered for 13 long years and the 16 months he has spent in jail.

The cruel blows that fate dealt him since his early years and the high esteem the people in India

held his iconic parents explain the popular sympathy Sanju Baba has enjoyed. And the grit he showed in tiding over his personal tragedies and establishing himself as a hero from zero earned him enviable admiration.

Deeply hurt by peers' insinuations linking his mother's name to a legendary Bollywood star, Sanjay fell in bad company and took to drugs during his school days. The addiction hastened his cancer-struck mother's death around the same time that his first film 'Rocky' (1981) was launched.

His first wife Richa Sharma too died soon after giving birth to a girl Trishala, whose custody he lost to his in-laws in a bitterly fought court case.

His second marriage with Rhea Pillay in 1995 too did not last - the divorce came after a long period of separation in 2005, the year his father Sunil Dutt, then a cabinet minister, died.

Sanjay's reel life was no less arduous. In a recent article on the struggling actor, Mahesh Bhat talks of the way Sanjay was sniggered every time he appeared on screen.

'There was his disastrous role in 'Vidhaata', where the audience roared with laughter when he did an emotional scene because he was so ineffective.'

But in the same piece, Mahesh recalls how gallantly the detoxified actor 'looking like a flower that has bloomed overnight in your backyard' began his second innings.

'Sanju played out his role in 'Naam' 'with the single-mindedness of a horse with blinkers,' says Mahesh.

Besides 'Khalnayak', one of the greatest Sanjay hits that coincided with his involvement in the 1993 Mumbai blasts, there were other films like 'Sadak', 'Vaastav' and the more recent 'Mission Kashmir' that earned him a name as an actor in his own class.

'Munnabhai MBBS' and 'Lage Raho...' of course catapulted him to the pinnacle of glory creating yet another history in the Indian film industry.

The infectious smile on his face, the pathos in his melancholy eyes, the common man's lingo that he so naturally mouths and his unassuming manners are the qualities that have endeared him to people.

Quoting Mahesh Bhat once again: 'Sanjay never behaved as if he were part of the Bollywood aristocracy, the child of two iconic film people... nor did the albatross of his parents' greatness weigh him down... It was just that he was always a people's guy, someone most at home with drivers and make-up men and light-boys.'

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