

## Rani - from poor cousin to Bollywood's biggest star

From bit roles in C grade movies to the polished performance in 'Black', birthday girl Rani Mukerji, who turns 29 Wednesday, can look back at the last 10 years with deep satisfaction.

When she joined the film force in 1996 with the box office dud 'Raja Ki Aayegi Baraat', she was literally written off by critics. Rani was plump, short, her voice was rough and nobody was willing to work with her.

Then cousin Kajol, a big star then, put in a word for her and Karan Johar hesitatingly cast her in his directorial debut 'Kuch Kuch Hota Hai'. There was no looking back after that. The poor cousin metamorphosed into a rising star, considered one of the most powerful women in Bollywood today.

'When Karan wanted my voice to be dubbed for 'Kuch Kuch Hota Hai', I really thought that it was bad and very husky and rough, but slowly I worked to improve my diction, and am now quite comfortable with it,' Rani was quoted as saying.

Karan didn't regret his decision. The film was a blockbuster and Rani got rave reviews. Not only was she honoured with the Filmfare award, offers started pouring in as well.

Since then, Rani has played a successful innings and has given hits like 'Black' (2005) 'Bunty Aur Babli' (2005), 'Paheli' (2005) 'Veer-Zaara' (2004), 'Hum Tum' (2004) 'Yuva' (2004) 'Chalte Chalte' (2003) 'Saathiya' (2002) 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham' (2001) and 'Ghulam' (1998).

She was also seen in an unconventional role in Kamal Hassan's 'Hey Ram', which made headlines because of her kissing scene. But she rebuffed all the controversies saying that the kiss with Kamal was mechanical. 'He was constantly checking the right angle. Where was the passion?'

She claims that Kamal re-invented the actress in her after the 'Hey Ram' experience.

Last year, Rani had two releases -- 'Kabhi Alvida Naa Khena' (KANK) and 'Baabul' - both damp squibs. However, that didn't really make a difference because her performance was appreciated and applauded.

With six Filmfare awards in her kitty, the actress has today surpassed her rivals and is touted as one of the most versatile and talented actress.

As she climbed up the success ladder, controversies followed her to the top. In November last year, she was shooting a film in Varanasi when fans crowded the set and security guards beat them up with sticks. There was a storm in the media and reports that said she should have stopped the security guards. Rani even apologised for her behaviour at the conference but it didn't seem enough.

'I was asked to say sorry for my behaviour at the press conference, which I did,' she said.

Another controversy was her tiff with KANK co-star Preity Zinta. Talk of their tiff travelled all the way to India from New York but Rani put a stop to it by making an appearance with Preity on the Holi special episode of STAR Plus' quiz show 'Kaun Bangea Crorepati', hosted by friend and colleague

Shah Rukh Khan.

Rani is currently busy with Bhansali's 'Saawariya' and Siddharth Anand's 'Ta Ra Rum Pum', which is releasing on April 27. The story revolves around a racing driver and Rani is paired with Saif Ali Khan in the film.

She will also feature in Pradeep Sarkar's 'Laaga Chunari Mein Daag', hitting the marquee on Oct 12.

As far as her love life goes, she has been linked with her co-stars like Govinda, Abhishek Bachchan and right now the buzz is that she is dating the elusive Aditya Chopra.

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