

## No SHORT CUTS

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Miscellany

Fashion

Heritage

Lifestyle

Music

People

Only hard work pays  
in fashion business,  
says Manish Malhotra.  
CHITRA SWAMINATHAN  
on the designer's USP



Pic. by T. A. Hafeez

**W**HEN THE thunder thighed and buxom 'Himmatwala' heroine transformed into the chic chiffon-clad 'Chandni', Manish Malhotra arrived on the movie marquee as a makeover man. Not just Sridevi, this young and dynamo of a designer made many Bollywood beauties shed their garish get-ups and take to a groomed and glamorous look.

Apparently as a hep Sridevi reached top of the heap, others too opted for Manish's style mantras. "I owe it to Sridevi. It was as tiring as it was thrilling to work for her. I used to fly in and out of Madras and Hyderabad to get her wardrobe ready. Though not exactly fashion savvy, she knew her mind. I continue to make her clothes," said the couturier, dressed in rugged jeans and simple shirt with the cuff buttons left stylishly open. He was talking to members of the Duchess Club at Hotel Savera on Monday.

Though bombarded with many a boring and bizarre queries (Imagine I am your wife, will you allow me to do up your clothes? Will you marry a designer? Which is the most versatile part of a woman's body?), the sassy and savvy bachelor boy charmed the dressy gathering.

For Manish, who hardly gets four to five hours of sleep each day, his creativity extends to interior (he recently did an upmarket restaurant in Bandra) and jewellery design-

ing, and more recently, film direction.

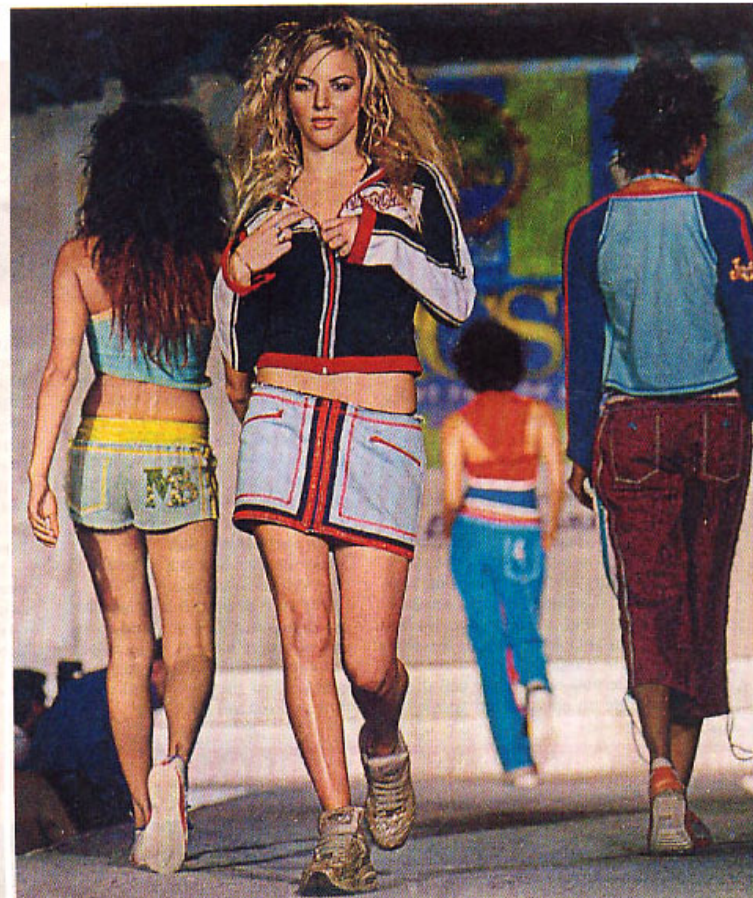
"The attention can be intoxicating but there's no short cut to hardwork," he stressed throughout the interactive session. Each time he was asked to spell take-home tips to look trendy, the style guru insisted that fashion, a much misunderstood term, is not about wearing expensive attires, it's about wearing what one is comfortable in with panache.

"Believe me, you could stand out even in a cotton sari or a salwar kameez. Though not very good looking, Shah Rukh Khan's sex appeal lies in the way he wears his attitude as his clothes."

Star-struck from childhood and hooked to the Hindi cinema, his foray into the film world happened when Manish decided to turn a fashion designer. He didn't have the money to go abroad to study fashion or prepare a prêt line.

"Making the Bollywoodwallahs style-conscious wasn't an easy task. It has taken me 13 long years. Initially intimidated by the tinselworld, I would, without protest, toe their line. But soon I realised the need to leave my style stamp on the stars. It's then that I started the 'revamping look' concept and proved it with Urmila in 'Rangeela'."

While the film and its heroine hit big time, Manish went on to win a Filmfare Award for "Rangeela", the first



and perhaps the last one for costume designing. Not just Sridevi and Urmila, Karisma, Raveena, Shilpa Shetty, Kareena...they are all Manish's muses.

Before Bollywood happened, Manish was into photo shoots for magazines. The money came through his modelling assignments while the designs from his sketching endlessly. Today, his hands are full with film work but he continues to indulge in his first love — couture. And this couturier's most memorable moment was when pop icon Michael Jackson wore a Manish Malhotra on stage.

The designer is delighted that film fashion of late is getting closer to realism. A reason why the audience is able to ape star styles. Besides, not just the heroine, even heroes are now working on their wardrobe, looks, physique and mannerisms.

"Much depends on the director. If he is bent on making the heroine look sensuous even in a dying scene, nothing can be done. He has the licence to do it as he is only selling dreams on celluloid. Fortunately, the new breed of directors seems to be open to ideas and changes."

Having had his fill of glamour, he is eager to do a period film or some mainstream movies. Both in his designs or daily life, Manish Malhotra seems to convincingly combine powerful pragmatism and fruitful fantasy. ■