

Jesse Sullivan, a electrical lineman, has been regarded as the world's first bionic man. When both his arms were severely electrocuted in an accident in May 2001 and had to be amputated, Sullivan was fitted in with 'bionic arms' by the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago



"I like women who look like women. I hated grunge. No one's more feminist than me, but you don't have to look as if you don't give a — you know. You can be smart, bright and attractive aesthetically to others — and to yourself."
— Catherine Zeta-Jones

'The less flesh and blood I am, the longer I'll last.' Fitted with a titanium disc and a torn shoulder that will be anchored soon in surgery, Shahrukh Khan calls on his indefinable energy before the release of *Billu Barber*

By SHRADHA SUKUMARAN
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PICS BY SAMEER MARKANDE

HE'S back in town after presenting a Golden Globe and shooting with Kajol after eight years. Shahrukh Khan may be in agony with a torn shoulder, but he's still at work till late at night, handling interviews for his *Billu Barber* (February 13), with barely a grimace of pain.

Shahrukh, first, how are you feeling now?

I'm feeling okay, I've taken some cortisone and steroid injections on the shoulder so the pain is less. I was in lot of pain when I was shooting (*My Name Is Khan*) in LA. Then when they did the tests and all, they found out that it's fully torn. Now the effect of the painkillers is wearing off, but I've got seven-eight days before I go into hospital for surgery.

And that's only after Billu Barber's release on February 13?

Yeah, I'm feeling little bad because I wanted to be in a happier state of mind for the release — I hope lots of people go and see it and make me happier when I go in for my surgery (grins). I'll go into surgery February 15 night or 16 afternoon.

You have a theory about pain, don't you?

Yes, I think all of us are good people. There are few bad people in this world; I think you can count them on your fingers. Everyone has inherent goodness. Whenever Allah, Bhagwan, God gives you pain, it is only to take away something else worse that was going to happen. So He gives physical pain instead. It's His way of saying, "You've been good, that's why I'm giving you physical, not emotional pain." It just requires painkillers and a surgery.

Is surgery scary?

I've had lots of them and it's part and parcel of my schedule for couple of years now. I'm nearly becoming bionic — I have a

I AM BIONIC MAN!



titanium disc, they will suture this and put an anchor. The less flesh and blood I am, the longer I will last! (Laughs) The titanium stuff will not rust.

I look at it positively. It will give me time to read my scripts and work on them: *My Name Is Khan*, *Ravan*, *Happy New Year* and *Don 2*. Strangely, I recently met Mahesh Bhatt on a flight who had asked me 15 years ago to write a book. I told him, 'Listen, you never told me when to end it!' He told me to take

this time and end it.

How do you talk of the injury to your kids?

They're very cool. More than anyone else in this world, my children think I'm a hero and not because I'm a movie star. I also feel somewhere that I hope this pain is something I take so they don't get it. They have blind faith and love — it's so beautiful. They know I'll be okay. Grow-ups are so convoluted; we worry.

My son was just saying, 'So after the surgery, you can beat me up, na?' Right now, we were having a little fight and I asked him to be gentle. He said, 'Papa, this is it. I know you're making excuses, but I can beat you even when you're not hurt.' They say they want to come see me in hospital and that's one of the reasons I'm having it in India. Last time, I was away for a month and I missed them. They're older now. They will

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see me a little unwell, but it's okay, they have to understand now.

Have you seen the original Malayalam version of Billu Barber?

No, Priyan (Priyadarshan) sir said not to see it, but I think we've retained it to the original. He feels he's been long enough in Hindi films to understand it better when you adapt it. He gave me the freedom to work with the dialogues. I saw *Billu Barber* a few days ago with family. The film is highly emotional and all of us were crying.

Billu Barber is not like a Shahrukh Khan film. We added a bit more physical presence but I haven't taken over as a star. I heard you don't even see Mammooty *saab* so much in the original. This film is touching.

We saw you as Shahrukh Khan in Luck By Chance last week and you're playing a superstar again in Billu Barber.

I'm not Shahrukh in *Billu Barber* — I don't dress like that, wear dark glasses or have 14 people walk out of a helicopter with me. This is playing a superstar called Saahir Khan. Maybe *Luck By Chance* was more like me. In *Om Shanti Om*, the superstar was really spoilt and bratty. We've also given this superstar a tinge of rockstarryness.

I'm not trying to deride Priyan Sir's film but if I've liked a film after *Viraasat*, it's *Billu Barber*. This film too has a quietness and you get slowly taken into it.

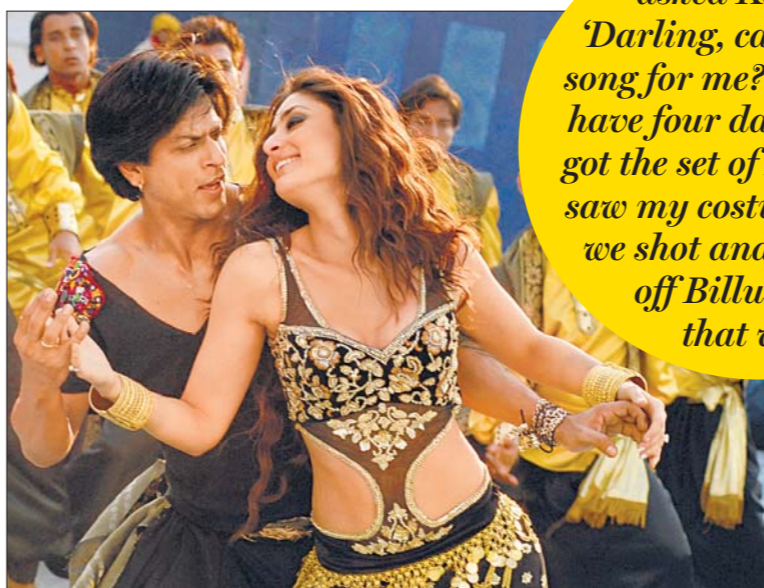
How is it you haven't worked together before?

Priyan sir wanted Aamir and me to do a film long time ago — I think that was *Hera Pheri*. Even now, he narrated two films. One was a comic heist. He also said, "I have another film I can shoot in 40 days and I need 20 days of yours."

I asked Kareena (Kapoor), 'Darling, I need you to do *Paanchvi Pass*, but can you also do a song for me?' She said, 'I have four days now.' We got the set of *Marjaani*, I saw my costume the day we shot and we kicked off *Billu Barber* that way.

The film is about keeping a friendship. How many of your old friends are you still in touch with?

I've had four friends since childhood. Bikash, Raman,



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Ashok and Vivek. I couldn't attend one of their weddings. We're friends because we don't expect much from each other. I don't talk to them on the phone and then Gauri will say, 'Arre, Vivek has come.' And we'll start off where we left off nine months back. Two are in Delhi, one in Singapore and one in London.

I was in Singapore and Ashok called, 'Shall I come see you?' I said I was too busy and he said, 'Okay, love you man.' It's very easy and that's what friends are for. To count on them to not encroach on your space, while filling it with love.

When I was in school, our principal's office had this saying, 'Count your life by smiles, not tears. Count your age by friends, not years.' So I'm a four-year-old. Here in Bombay, I have Karan, Adi, Farah, Juhi, Aziz and Chunky's brother. There are some like Ratan Jain or others I don't even meet. I can't be emotionally available to everyone because of my line of work; I'd rather reserve that for my family.

Not being emotionally available — does that hurt a friendship?

If it does, it wasn't a friendship. It has hurt some, but that's what I truly believe. (Inhales) You know, I can't. Things happen to me more than I can coherently explain. Twenty years — where I come, go, who and why I am. When my book comes out, people will understand it. I'm very honest in that book. I don't know what I'm doing at times, I just keep doing it. But God's been kind.

Maybe I was meant to serve another cause than just having a few beers with friends. That's spreading love through my work. I don't think I'm a philanthropist. I'm just making people feel happy when I laugh, dance and sing. I notice this — people smile even taking my name.

So are you the audience's friend? Yes, I'm emotionally, not physically

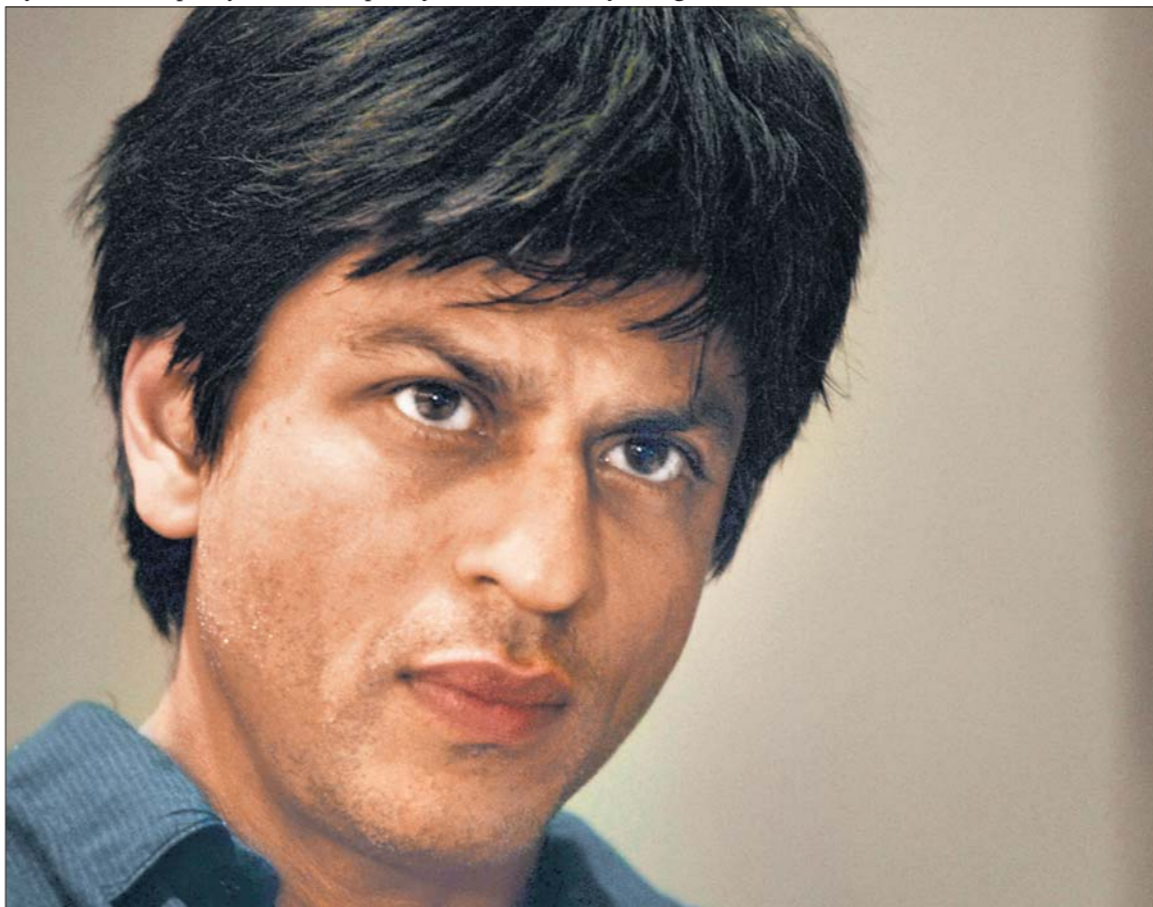
available to them.

Who are your oldest friends?

These four guys — we've been together from kindergarten. Ashok and I in one section, the others in another. I remember one emotional incident. I used to run very fast and during one race, Ashok (my best friend) was behind. I stopped and waited for him without thinking I would lose. When he came along, I was happy to go with him and finish eighth or tenth.

My son was four-years-old and I went to see his race at Kangaroo Kids. You know how fathers are pushy? I told him to win and he ran fast and stopped. He turned and waited, took another kid's hand and came last. I forgot I'd done the same. I said, 'Aryan, you don't have to stop.' Sweetly he said, 'Papa, he's my friend.' That purity of friendship

How is it shooting with Kajol for My Name Is Khan after eight



I remember. Of course, we lose it as we grow older.

These friends and I did everything together. We were suspended, met our girlfriends, lied to parents, were reprimanded, got 1/100, lost football and hockey matches, discussed girls and even contemplated suicide together. Yeah, one guy was very serious. I told him, 'I don't think so. Suicide isn't the answer.' And they looked at me and said, 'We didn't mean that.'

We were even caught by the police together! We were a gang called the C Gang, after the section we were in. My wife has kept a beautiful section of our pictures on the seventh floor here.

Did you ever have bad hair days?

I never comb my hair if I'm not shooting. I take a bath and finger-comb my hair. I don't own a comb or travel with a brush. I'm easy about all of me.

Are there movies where you laugh at how your hair was?

Oh, there will always be that, yaar. Juhi once said, 'Shahrukh Khan is a fluke — he had such funny hair and was brown and scrawny.' The hair, skin, dialogue delivery, dance is all wrong, but try beat me (grins)!

How is it shooting with Kajol for My Name Is Khan after eight

years?

Like I said about friendship — I don't find it special, neither does she. We start off where we left off and we keep meeting each other anyway.

Karan says he can't describe how you two do it.

Yes, I know he does. There's a funeral scene in *My Name Is Khan* where our friend has died and she holds me. I'm autistic, and I'm sitting in a black suit. Suddenly, I put on dark glasses, made her do the same and we did this *Matrix*, *Men In Black* thing and enjoyed that more than the scene we were shooting! Karan keeps saying things. We just tell him, 'Just shut up. If it's good, let us go home.'

Kajol's and my relationship is so wonderfully ordinary that we start looking special on screen.

Dev.D just released. Curious to see how this Devdas looks?

I saw a programme of Anurag Kashyap's last night. I really like him because he's got mad eyes; he's demented. I like what he writes — he wanted me to do *No Smoking*. I don't what to see *Dev.D* because I did *Devdas*, but because of Anurag — he's a quirky talent. *Emosanal athyachaar* sounds very good! Not because of *Devdas*; I'm sure Abhay will do a much better job than me.

What really happened at Preity Zinta's party between you and Akshay Kumar?

I'm sorry, what? (surprised)

You were said to have had cold

vibes and that it's Bollywood's new war.

(Does a double take) No, no, this is completely baseless. Because of my shoulder, I reached the party very late and Akshay wasn't there. I suppose we fight when we're not even there (laughs).

How was the Golden Globe experience?

It's great to be part of Newsweek's most influential people and the Hollywood Foreign Press has been so kind. I was introduced to all these stars as the biggest movie star on the planet — Emma Thompson, Clint Eastwood, Mark Wahlberg, Jennifer Lopez, Cameron Diaz and that other girl from *Charlie's Angels*

Drew Barrymore?

Ooh, she's so beautiful, looks like a doll! And Catherine Zeta Jones, oof beautiful! The *Slumdog Millionaire* guys were so sweet. I met Dev Patel in the loo and he said, 'I can't believe I'm p**ing with Shahrukh Khan. I'm a fan!' I'd love to go someday to the Globes with a Hindi film.

Was it strange that Slumdog Millionaire was a film you knew of before the world?

Ya, ya, Danny and I sat here and discussed it. I read the book because I wanted to make it myself. Danny sat here and discussed it; I think the script is also lying here. I didn't think it was right to do (the role of Anil Kapoor's) and I stand by that. But the book didn't leave me — from when I read it to presenting it at the Globes, a full circle. And now, Inshallah, the Oscar.

How long will you now be out of action after the surgery?

Eight weeks in a sling and two months after that. I was anyway doing IPL, but I guess I can't now jump around or run into the crowds. I should be fit to exercise in July-August.

Guess it is then the right time to finish your autobiography.

Yeah, I still have my right hand (laughs)!