Mid-conversation, while describing himself filmmaker Sooraj Barjatya suddenly gives up, proclaiming, “Apne baare mein what to speak,” needlessly adding, “I think I am shy.” In an era of chest-thumping and mic-drops, Barjatya is not famous for his extroversion. “From the very beginning, I have been shy or not comfortable,” proving his words as he spoke them. For Barjatya, “work” is what is the most important. He prefers to spend his time observing and talking to people, and he’s at, “every marriage and function” doing just that. He’s also a self-professed avid reader. All of this, for him, is a director’s “main homework.” In a modest fashion he confesses, “I am trying to learn. Growing with every film.” In recent years, the shy filmmaker has at least been doing the mandatory pre-release interviews. The last such occasion was for a film that he had directed and scripted himself, the Salman Khan sleeper-hit, Ratan Dhan Payo (2015) which made ₹194 crores at the box-office, but was widely panned by critics.

Today at 54, Barjatya has learnt to be more accepting of criticism, which in his younger days would make him feel “misingly different. The filmmaker Barjatya is up to something promisingly different. The filmmaker Barjatya is up to something promisingly different.” Although Barjatya was intrigued enough to give a shot to Abhishek Dixit. Barjatya explains, “I am making a real film,” he claims. Set and shot in Noida and Kanpur, Hum Chaar is a “small film” with a new director and first-time music director. The filmmaker emphasises, the film still has the “marm”, the sensitivity and sensibility of a Rajshri film that is perfect for the studio’s existing audience and yet reaches beyond with its unique voice. “It doesn’t have my stamp,” he says with pride, but also adds, “friendship is also a beautiful rishta”

Ramayana prism

This year, Hum Saath Saath Hai, a film with tremendous cross-generational recall, completes 25 years, while Maine Pyaar Kia which launched Khan is three decades old. Barjatya’s films are not simply a celebration of family life but also expressive of deep nostalgia and longing for it. Barjatya says, “You can’t just start staying together again,” but one should take efforts to nourish and maintain whatever ties that remain — “jina rishta rakhte hai we should celebrate it. We should meet in Diwali, marriages, birthdays, anniversaries — forget and forgive — at least talk. We can’t say we want to live like Ramayana, but if you take one step so will the other.”

Through his films, Barjatya urges us to at least try to “trust” each other. Today, across generations, people are increasingly faced with loneliness and depression and the only thing one has is family. “Friendship is also a beautiful rishta.” Barjatya explains, “I have been hunting for a subject for a long time. From the very beginning, I have been doing the mandatory pre-release interviews. The last such occasion was for a film that he had directed and scripted himself, the Salman Khan sleeper-hit, Prem Ratan Dhan Payo (2015) which made ₹194 crores at the box-office, but was widely panned by critics.

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Sign of the times

Since 2010, apart from Prem Ratan Dhan Payo, the studio has been primarily busy making TV shows in Hindi. With Hum Chaar, slated to release this weekend, Barjatya is up to something promisingly different. The filmmaker turns producer for the upcoming film, which centres not on family but friends, and is written and directed by debutant filmmaker Abhishek Dixit. Barjatya explains, “I have been hunting for a subject where we could tell our little values from a younger[er] point of view, which is difficult for me. I know my audience is 35+ and when a younger comes, it is to show his grandparents a film he knows they will enjoy.” Yet, with Hum Chaar, Barjatya wants to engage not just the grandparents but the accompanying “youngsters”. “How can I say something [in my films] like Raju [Rajkumar Hirani] or Gauri [Shinde] says,” he asked himself, and the answer fortuitously came when Dixit narrated his story.

Still, the question remains — how could Dixit fit the film into Rajshri’s family-oriented framework? Dixit said to him confidently, “You make family films but friends are also family” and Barjatya was intrigued enough to give him a shot. The film is inspired by Dixit’s own life experiences as a migrant from Lucknow in Mumbai where he is now based. Living far from home, he could seldom go back, and friends became a support system. When you are away there is a normality that builds up even between family members, but to your friend, you can say “Abbe char-saau de na (just lend me some money, ya),” explains the filmmaker.

“I am making a real film,” he claims. Set and shot in Noida and Kanpur, Hum Chaar is about a group of four friends, medical students from different places in Uttar Pradesh and North India who have a fight but ultimately realise that all they have is each other. By Rajshri standards, Hum Chaar is a “small film” with a new director and first-time music director. The filmmaker emphasises, the film still has the “marm”, the sensitivity and sensibility of a Rajshri film that is perfect for the studio’s existing audience and yet reaches beyond with its unique voice. “It doesn’t have my stamp,” he says with pride, but also adds, “friendship is also a beautiful rishta.”

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