



Cinema has the power educate and entertain

HOW FIRST TIME PRODUCER SWATI SANGHI CREATED A NEW KIND OF INDIAN FILM



THIS week all eyes will be on brand new Bollywood release *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* because it revolves around homosexuality, but other commercial Indian films have tackled the subject before it, including hidden gems like *Friends In Law*.

The path-breaking comedy drama did the same long before the Ayushmann Khurrana starrer and after overcoming challenges recently found its way onto Amazon globally. The story of an orthodox Indian mother who journeys to Bangkok and unexpectedly spends a life changing 10 days with her gay son's partner is the brainchild of first time female producers brave enough to step out of their comfort zone.

Hyderabad-based Swati Sanghi and Shreedevi Chowdhary, who also stars in the film, successfully launched their production house with the taboo-busting Telugu/English language drama directed by Amit Khanna. *Eastern Eye* caught up with Swati Sanghi, who hails from a famous Sanghi industrialist family, to talk about the remarkable journey she went on with *Friends In Law* and why it's an important film.

What led you towards producing *Friends In Law*?

There was a strong desire in Shreedevi, who is like a sister, and I to produce a movie, but we were clear that it had to be original and unique. A number of producers had already approached Shreedevi to act in their films, but she wanted to act in a meaningful project and the best way to do that was for us to create something unique. Then we brought together other like-minded individuals such as director Amit Khanna and our journey began.

Didn't you feel the gay topic would be too risky for a first project?

It would have been easy for us to follow the crowd and make what you



HUMAN CONNECTION: (Clockwise from this image) Swati Sanghi; a still from *Friends in Law*; and a poster image of the movie

would call a commercial film, but we thought what was the point. There are people already making these kind of movies and doing them very well. We wanted an original subject that hadn't been done before and were determined to make it for a global audience. *Friends In Law* ticked all the boxes. More than being about a son and his gay partner, it's a human story about acceptance.

Tell us more?

Friends In Law is a movie that has been made with a lot of love by a very talented team. It's about the journey of a mother who finally finds herself in the most unexpected

place, which many will relate to. It is a crossover movie that has been made predominantly in English and one that has a lot of emotions attached to it, including moments that will make you smile.

What was the biggest challenge in getting the movie made?

The first challenge was identifying a unique subject and we found that. After that, we made sure the movie had everything that was needed to bring the story to life. A very dedicated team in all departments went above and beyond to create a magical movie. We just hope audiences will appreciate the efforts of the team and help us take this journey global.

Was tackling the taboo subject also challenging for you?

Most times people create their own obstacles and challenges. If we had gone in with that mind-set of the subject being taboo, then I am sure obstacles would have been created. The gay community has been represented as victims or outcasts in Indian cinema and we wanted to change that. Actually, *Friends In Law* isn't about being gay or straight, it is about the human emotions that connect us along with believing in yourself and others.

What is your favourite moment in *Friends In Law*?

The most beautiful aspect of this movie is that it has so many wonderful moments. I must commend the cast for breathing life into a wonderful screenplay and director Amit Khanna for creating such an amazing canvas. But if I had to choose one thing I love, it's the transformation of the mother played so beautifully by Shreedevi Chowdhary. It reminded me of the journey late great actress Sridevi takes in her wonderful film *English Vinglish*.

Can you elaborate on the performance of Shreedevi Chowdhary?

I am so proud of her. Those who watch the movie won't believe this is her first film. She has really embraced the character and breathed so many emotions into it. I am sure it will resonate with parents and their children in some way. Hopeful-



ly, they will understand one another better after seeing this film. I am looking forward to audiences seeing her magical performance. It's really heart warming.

What does the future hold for HRH Film Productions?

Right now, the main focus is *Friends In Law*. We just hope audiences are entertained by the film and take away something from the story. It is available on Amazon Prime globally, and we are hoping to get a release in India soon. We are currently looking at a number of projects and want to make international projects with human emotions.

Finally, why do you love cinema?

Cinema can transport us to new worlds and can bring out different emotions in the audiences. It also has the power to change, educate and entertain audiences.

■ *Friends In Law* is available now on Amazon Prime



Priya Mulji

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Stop comparing your relationship

WHEN we're young, we have lots of ideas about what our future relationship and life will be like in many ways. I myself thought I'd be married by 28 and have kids by 30. Even though at 37 I am in a relationship, there is still progress to be made until we reach that point. I have full faith that it will. However, when we see other people moving faster than us, it's hard not to often feel like we should be in the same place.

We get exposed to many relationships, especially in a world where everyone posts everything on social media. It's easy to get carried away when we see couples going away on holidays, posting pictures of their children or buying a house together. A while back during a Facebook cull, I deleted people who only posted pictures of their children. Not because I hate kids, but because, honestly, I would love to have children and sometimes seeing pictures of their seemingly perfect life made me a little

sad. I wanted what they had, but this can prove to be a very toxic trait within ourselves, which can cause anxiety, because your relationship is different than theirs.

My friend may not have anything else apart from her family to post and it's okay for her to do that, but when we start comparing ourselves to them, we can become resentful of their lives and this is when we

have to take a step back and be grateful for what we have in our lives. Love is so hard to find and so disposable, so concentrate on all the many blessings you do have.

If time goes by and you want to move ahead in your relationship but your partner isn't ready, be realistic about what you want and have regular discussions as a couple. Talk about where things are going and where you stand, but, ultimately, do what's right for you. If you want to meet his parents, then you should, but don't ever force something that doesn't feel right for both of you. You may end up pushing your significant other away if you try to force something too early in a relationship.

Some people just want to race ahead in their relationships because they think time is running out, they're getting too old, they want to have kids or want to compete with everyone else around them who are dating. Relationships take time. Enjoy the moments, make memories and really get to know each other. In this very disposable world where it is easy to dump someone one day and meet another person the next, take your time to understand what the other wants and respect their desires.