

Bollywood Revisited

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While Bollywood is basking in its global appeal, entrepreneur Hinesh Jethwani's company, Indian Hippy, is busy reviving what was long considered Bollywood's dying art—hand-painted film posters. He speaks to Society as he gives the art a new lease of life

BY UJWAL SALOKHE

Even as the world is raving about Bollywood movies and its recently found global popularity, people at large have forgotten Bollywood's trademark—hand-painted film posters that one found outside cinema halls. While there were ample reports in the media on the dying art and the



"When the business is set, and there aren't many challenges left to accomplish, I start getting complacent and distracted. So, I refuel my energies from time to time by taking up something insanely difficult."

unemployed, eclipsed lives of the poster artists, nothing substantial was carried out to restore their economy.

When 30-year-old Hinesh Jethwani, who was then running a technology outsourcing business, read about these artists, he instantly knew that something could be done about the art form. Hinesh knew that reviving something like that in the digital era, something that was completely forgotten, was going to be an insanely difficult task. However, he chose to follow his gut and decided to turn the concept into a business module.

A true entrepreneur, who loves toying with new business ideas, Hinesh speaks of how he established his company, Indian Hippy "Ninety-nine per cent of my business ideas remain hidden in a word document on my computer; they don't actually make it to reality. I have several crazy ideas, one of them was to do something with Bollywood film poster art and the idea germinated as a result of several articles that had appeared in the press on how the poster artists were suffering and how the art was being wiped out. I was running a technology outsourcing business then, which I still run on the back burner. That was my mainstay business, but when recession set in, most of our large clients walked out. That is when I had a lot of free time to think on my next course of action."

It so happened that one of his German clients had visited him, and as the custom goes, Hinesh had to give him something to carry back as a memento. He went around looking for something typically Indian to gift him. He says, "To my dismay, there wasn't much variety available. I ended up finding this beautiful *Rajasthani* chair which was handcrafted and hand painted with motifs of the rajas and camels. Nonetheless, I gifted it to him and he got back saying that he wanted me to get him one more. I was intrigued by that. To me, the rajas and the camels didn't represent India anymore. So, that is when I put two and two together and clubbed the idea of using Bollywood poster art on furniture."

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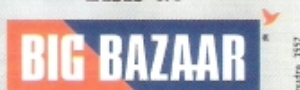


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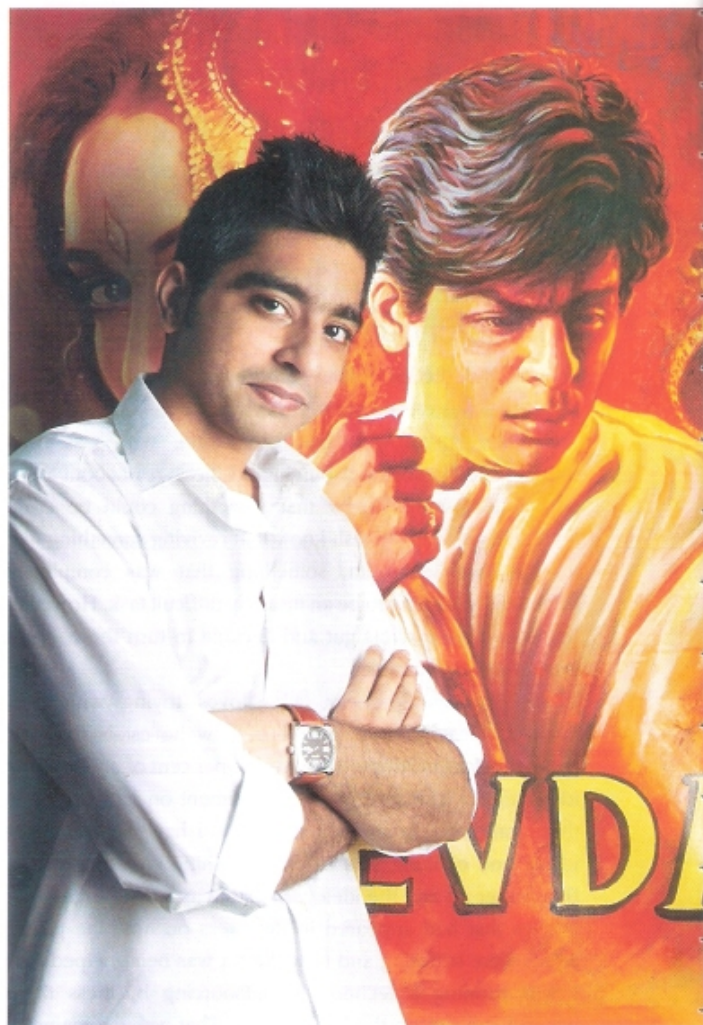


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A qualified engineer, Hinesh has dabbled in myriad fields, ranging from technology journalism, programme and partner marketing for a multinational technology company to founding an outsourcing venture called Text Sourcing that offered a full catalogue of marketing and brand building services to his present venture Indian Hippy that deals with customised products with hand-painted Bollywood posters on them.

Hinesh nonchalantly admits that he detests stagnation of any kind. Quiz him on whether his unsettling ways hamper his life and he says, "When I get stuck in a rut, I feel I stagnate. I have always been a slightly creative person by nature. I like new challenges. Sometimes, that actually works against me. At times, when the business is set, and there aren't many challenges left to accomplish, I start getting complacent and distracted. So, I refuel my energies from time to time by taking

"We are going to have whacky t-shirts with humorous twists to iconic Bollywood dialogues. Every artist who designs this will get a royalty on every t-shirt sold. They will get remunerated lifelong."

up something insanely difficult, something that doesn't have a clearly visible beginning or an end. That actually drives me to keep my energy levels in check. So for me, the shift is not unsettling. Instead, it is a part of my personality, something that keeps me young and creative."

Hand-painted Indian film poster art was something that died a silent death around the early 80s when the popularity of the copy-paste technique was settling in. Towards the end of the decade and the beginning of the 90s, it completely vanished with the onset of digital techniques. Soon, the life-size hand-painted posters were replaced by digitally done up posters, rendering hundreds of poster artists jobless. While many lived insignificant lives in their hometowns, others resorted to means like starting art classes to make ends meet.

Meanwhile, armed with a concept, Hinesh was now accosted with the Herculean task of quite literally unearthing these elusive artists from wherever they were. Though tough, Hinesh didn't think it was impossible. With a vague idea of where the studios were situated, he set out looking for the artists. Though the studios were now replaced by high rises, he felt that those areas would serve as helpful points to begin his journey from.

While he found one of his artists through an advertisement in a newspaper about an art class conducted by the artist, Hinesh often indulged in a lot of footwork to find the others. Narrating one such incident, he reminisces, "I remember searching for a very well-known artist. His studio used to be somewhere in Dadar (Mumbai). Obviously, it had shut down but I had an idea that he lived somewhere nearby. One day, I was walking through the area and noticed a house with its doors ajar. I saw this huge Sai Baba painting on the wall, almost 7ft tall. Instinctively, I knew it must be done by the artist I was looking for. I just knocked at the door and introduced myself and asked the residents if the painting on their wall was done by the artist I was looking for. The painting was indeed done

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by him and I got his whereabouts through those people. It's all been destiny. It just kind of worked itself out. I just made the first move and everything else just fell together."

A self-confessed shifty person that Hinesh is, one wonders if once he is done with this business, these artists will become jobless again. He defends, "I believe that won't happen, because this business gives me an incredible amount of creativity to just get into any area I want to. For instance, I am already bored doing these standard products. So, we are going to phase out some of the furniture and make furniture only if we are commissioned to. We now plan to get into t-shirts. We are going to have whacky t-shirts with humorous twists to iconic Bollywood dialogues. This is going to be a new product line. We will design the t-shirt but the range will not be hand-painted because we want it to be accessible to everybody. Every artist who designs this will get a royalty on every t-shirt sold. They won't get a one-time payment for the design. They will get remunerated lifelong."

"I do miss the lack of connect between work and personal life. I have been consciously trying, but haven't succeeded. I am way behind in the social game."

The fact that all of Indian Hippy's current products are hand-painted makes them exclusive as well as expensive. However, Hinesh intends to make his products more accessible in the near future. He wants to see even the common man using and enjoying his product. Recently, his company was commissioned to create a hand-painted poster of *X Men* on canvas which was gifted to Hugh Jackman on his recent visit to India. He says, "We want to make Bollywood poster art a mainstream art, something that people from all walks of life can enjoy. And, that is not happening because hand-painting these products involves huge efforts, therefore the price."

Not into retail as of now, Indian Hippy's products need to be bought online. Citing a reason for this, Hinesh says, "The reason we focus more on online purchase is because, like it or not, the demand for Bollywood posters is more abroad than here. And, the demand for paintings is also great abroad. Since our business is now mainly tilted towards customised and made-to-order stuff, it is more suited to online transactions."

All of 30, the workaholic streak in Hinesh is quite evident. While most people his age limit their responsibilities to a nine to five job, he engulfed himself in businesses when he was meant to lark around like others his age. Ask him if he misses things people his age do, and he says regretfully, "I do miss the lack of connect between work and personal life. I have been consciously trying, but haven't succeeded. I am way behind in the social game. I do realise that it is very difficult to maintain a balance between the two. And, when one has one's own business, the divide between professional and personal life blurs. One cannot switch off easily."

Being someone who believes in risking than never trying at all and regretting later, Hinesh refuses to shy away from failure. "It's better to get failure out of my system than to not do anything at all," says he before retiring into his dreamy world of Bollywood. <<

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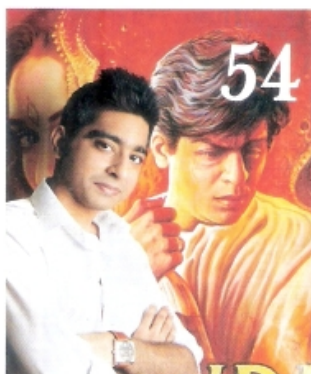


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Bollywood Revisited

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