

# Dealing with the end of an epic role

## GAUTAM'S EXCITED ABOUT HIS NEW SHOW *SURYAPUTRA KARN*

by ASJAD NAZIR

**IN-DEMAND actor Gautam Rode continues his golden run on television with a starring role in one of the year's most interesting serials *Suryaputra Karn*.**

The mythological show tells the story of Indian epic *Mahabharat* from the point of view of his character Karn, charting his journey towards becoming a great warrior.

The award-winning actor says he is relishing the challenge of portraying a revered character and putting his own unique spin on it in the Sony Entertainment Television series.

*Eastern Eye* caught up with Gautam to talk about *Suryaputra Karn*, inspirations, challenges of working on TV and his formidable fan base.

**What did you like about *Suryaputra Karn* to say yes to it?**

What I liked about it is that I got to play another dominant character, like in *Saraswathichandra* and *Maha Kumbh*. That was my first reason to say yes to the show because there are very few shows made on television that are male centric.

It was also a different genre, as I haven't played a mythological character, so this is the first time for that. *Saraswathichandra*

was different to *Rudra*, which is very different to *Karn*. That was my motive to do the show.

**Were you aware of this character before you came on board?**

Karn was the most interesting character in the *Mahabharat* and the story is told from his point of view.

Many of his beliefs are still very relevant in today's society. He believed that a person should be known by their capabilities and qualities rather than anything else. So in the modern context for example, if you are an actor's son or daughter, it is not necessary that you should become one unless you have that capability. Or maybe a lawyer or doctor's son or daughter; it isn't necessary that you follow in their footsteps unless or until you have that capability. His whole plight took him on an interesting journey (to prove himself). That is why it makes it very real because that thought process still exists today. So the storyline is contemporary even though it is a mythological tale.

**How much preparation did you have to do for this character?**

To be honest, television doesn't give you much time as it just happens and you start shooting. So whatever you have to do, you do it on set. You have to rely on your experience – you use that to build a character again. It's practically impossible to prepare because often you get the script on the same day, but you get it done. That is why I believe television is the most difficult medium of all. And if you are considered a good actor on TV, then you can work anywhere.

**I think Indian TV is the most difficult in the world. How do you cope with the pressure?**

You are completely right, Asjad, about it being the most difficult. We shoot a minimum of 12 hours, but usually it's more. Then when you do a character like Karn, it's more difficult because you only have a few hours to pick up the dialogue – because it's mythology and it's in Hindi, Sanskrit, the language is very difficult. It's not easy-going like today's language where you can just improvise. I can't change the words, sentences or flow. People know about the characters you are playing, so you have to rely on your experience to do the role well.

**How do you cope as an actor when**

**you don't know what the storyline is going to be?**

You do have to be mentally strong. I will not deny that the pressure is enormous and for some people, it can be too much to handle. But there is no other way. If you have picked up a job and taken on a character, you just have to jump into it and give your 100 per cent. (Laughs) Just as long as you don't break.

**You just won a Best Actor award for *Maha Kumbh*. How much do honours like this mean?**

It encourages you and gives you a boost as an actor. I got awards for *Saraswathichandra* and now for *Maha Kumbh*. So the hard work that I put in again to build a character is definitely paying off. People acknowledge it – they liked the show and voted for me, so that definitely boosts me.

**How much does it help that you have such a loyal fan base?**

It's the best. It's all because of them that I keep going. So whenever you are feeling low or stressed out, you just have to look at their tweets and messages, which are superb. It picks you up.

**You enjoy doing other things away from TV serials, like hosting shows and films. Are you getting a chance to do that?**

(Laughs) No, once you sign a show, it makes it impossible to do anything else at that particular time. So there are things in the pipeline, but the show is what's going on right now for me. Nothing else can really happen because this is a job of minimum four or five months. Right now I am playing one character and that's why I am happy. Television is evolving; you play one character for four, five or more months and then you move on to another. It is like doing a film and moving onto the next one.

**You must like the fact that there is now a solid bridge between television and cinema in India?**

Definitely, that's the way forward. The kind of experience we have on television, the kind of hours we shoot and loyal fan base we have gives us certain credibility in the market. So it is much easier for a producer to cast us because we already have loyal supporters and we know our work.

**Have you got used to your big female fan base after all these years?** (Laughs) I am totally not used to it.

**How do you feel about being voted into *Eastern Eye's* 50 Sexiest Asian Men list every year?**

(Laughs) That's so nice. What can I

say? Again it's really nice that people consider me worthy of being in the list. But you do want to be recognised for your talents as well as your looks. I would like to be known more as an actor than just as good-looking or something like that.

**What inspires you today?**

Just playing a different character and trying to pull it off. I hope people like the work I'm doing right now. I am just waiting to see how well this serial will be received by audiences. If it does then I'll be very, very happy.

**What do you like to do when you get free time?**

Honestly, there is absolutely no free time! Once you do TV and a character like Karn or Rudra it's very difficult to take time out for yourself.

**Which Bollywood actor do you like?**

I like Aamir Khan at the moment a lot, because he experiments in terms of his characters. That's one really good thing about the guy. His body of work and the way he plays characters are definitely what I want to follow. I like that path.

**What about the leading ladies? Who do you think is hot?**

Deepika (Padukone). She's done really well for herself. She is picking out good work and doing great.

**What are some of your greatest unfulfilled ambitions?**

I definitely want to get into business somehow, maybe with restaurants or cafés. It's something we have been planning. I will do it once I have got a break from television. Every year I say that, but another interesting character comes up and that break goes for a toss. But this time I will definitely try and do something in terms of business.

**Why do you think we all should tune into *Suryaputra Karn*?**

Because of the character, the *Mahabharat* is told from Karn's point of view. He is the most interesting character in the epic, so because of him you should watch the show. I tried to add as much as possible to the character. The *Mahabharat* has never been done from Karn's point of view, but television is doing that for the first time. That is one definite USP of why you should watch the show.

**Finally, would you like to give us a message for your fans?**

Please, please watch the new show. This is a new role for me and something I have never tried before. It is an experiment for me. I scared myself, to be very honest, but I'm trying 100 per cent to play this and trying to do justice to the character. I hope all of you like it. Watch it if you like it or don't, but watch it and let me know what your views are.



**Wildflower's KITCHEN**

**With Neelofer Mir**



## Having your cake and eating it too

CAKES are big business. From the explosion of the *Great British Bake Off* as prime time viewing to a significant uptake in home baking and sales of luxury cupcakes, everyone, it seems, loves a bit of cake.

Anything you can imagine that is possible to do with cakes is probably already being done. You must have heard of cronuts? Please, that's so 2014. This is 2015, we are a people of the future, and we deserve something more cutting-edge when it comes to desserts.

I introduce you to the water cake. To the naked eye it may look like a giant bubble of water when, in fact, it's a transparent piece of Japanese rice cake commonly known as mizu shingen mochi. The best, most futuristic, part about this dessert is that if you don't eat it within 30 minutes, it disappears. Currently shingen mochi is made and sold only in selected places in Japan. The cake is clear and jelly-like, served with a sugar syrup and kinako, and a roasted soybean flour often served with other types of mochi.

## Next big dessert trend

IF WACKY ice cream flavours were last summer's frozen treat of choice, then Taiwanese shaved snow is poised to be the latest big hit. Already popular on the West Coast of the US, the speciality has made its way to cities like Boston and New York city, where east coasters are getting their first taste of this fluffy hybrid between ice cream and shaved ice.

Unlike snowballs and Hawaiian shaved ice, which are typically flavoured with syrups, this new shaved snow has cream and ingredients like matcha, strawberry or coconut infused directly into the ice. Once frozen, the blocks are shaved into thin, melt-in-your-mouth ribbons with a special machine, then topped off with everything from fresh fruit to cookie sticks.

## Healthy alternatives

I WAS delighted recently to discover a healthy and tasty alternative to ice cream. I don't think I've met anyone who doesn't enjoy ice cream, but with more of us becoming health conscious and trying to change our eating habits for the better – while still being able to enjoy the things we love – it's great to know there are products out there for us.

This new luxury healthy ice cream is called Oppo. Instead of the traditional recipe, it is made of virgin coconut oil and super foods like baobab, spirulina and lucuma. It replaces sugar and cream with stevia leaf (sweet, natural, zero calorie) and virgin coconut oil. This product has only recently been launched and is available in Waitrose, Ocado, and also in Holland & Barrett. It retails at £5.49 for 500ml and £1.99 for 120ml.

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