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post on September 6 says, "When you've lived so long in darkness, the sunshine can feel unbearably bright at first. I have been flooded with so many messages of love, support, and encouragement that it felt weird."

"I have a hard time taking it all in," he tells us, "This thing that I posted about seeking negativity, for instance. When I started reading positive things [about me recently]—one article said my movies were ahead of their times, and found a cult-like audience—it felt like a rug pull. It's like they are luring me in, and then, they will say, 'haha, you fell for it'. I feel like it's a trap."

Khan grew up loving the movies, and it continues to be a big part of him. "I have felt moved and touched by my cinematic heroes—they have given me happiness and comfort. I know the value of that. I was watching a documentary on Michael J Fox's life [Still], which is about him living with Parkinson's. I see him fight this with so much grace. It did a thing to me, where I said, 'look at his strength. If he can do that, I can do that.'" He pauses, and chuckles, "...and then comes the really crazy part. People are messaging me—I grew up with your films, your films moved me and touched me. And I am thinking, can it be that I was a part of something that was a formative experience for someone, that moved someone, that touched their hearts, the way my heroes touched my heart? That's the mind-boggling thing."

Khan hasn't signed a new film yet. "Since this has happened, calls have been coming." OTT? "Yes. I want to do what I [once] loved doing." And what's his state of mind right now? "I am suddenly re-engaging with the world, my fans, my own films—I am trying to heal my relationship with my own work. And that's happened because of all these people, who are messaging me. I want to feel this feeling of nourishment and I want to say—yes, this is my life; rather than look at all of it with embarrassment, I want to look at it with love and pride."

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'I'm running to keep up with the audience'

Filmmaker Sujoy Ghosh speaks of adaptations, choosing too-pretty-to-leave Kalimpong as location and keeping up with audience tastes in the build-up to his Kareena Kapoor-starrer Jaane Jaan

SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY

IT was a doomed love story and I loved it because the only other love story I could think of in comparison was King Kong," filmmaker Sujoy Ghosh tells us about his upcoming Netflix film Jaane Jaan, which is based on the 2005 Japanese novel The Devotion of Suspect X by Keigo Higashino. It's a book brought to him years ago by friend and screenwriter Kanika Dhillon. He recalls being drawn to it instantly. "You don't know whether it's a good story or a bad story, but it's a story you have identified with," he explains. "It really got to me because I saw characters in that book who were big [and] honourable. It was something I was not used to. In Japanese culture, honour is a very big thing and [people are] big hearted. I wish I was like Naren [Jaideep Ahlawat's character]. I wish I had that kind of honour instilled in me, the values, beliefs and morals that he has."

Since Anukul, Ghosh's 2017 short film starring Parambrata Chatterjee and Saurabh Shukla, based on a short story written by Satyajit Ray, this is the first time that Ghosh has adapted a story for the screen. "I was dying to,"

he tells us excitedly. "These people are experts in what they do. They're born to write stories. I would love to have all my films based on books if I had my way." Aranyer Din Ratri, Bengali author Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel, which was famously adapted for the screen by Sayajit Ray in 1970 has been on his mind for long. "But it is too scary." There is the burden of responsibility and the need to be loyal and respectful to the source material because there is the looming sense of someone having worked very hard to put the story together. "I shouldn't be messing with a story just because I can." Rabindranath Tagore's short story Kabuliwala is a work he says he hopes to adapt one day. "I will do it before I retire," Ghosh smiles. "Have to do one Tagore, at least."

Jaane Jaan is set in the hill town of Kalimpong in West Bengal, a location that Ghosh has used previously in 2016's Kahaani 2: Durga Rani Singh. But the Kalimpong of the new film is different. "That's how it should be," he insists. "Even the Kolkata of Kahaani versus the Kolkata of Te3n [which he produced] versus the Kolkata of Bob Biswas [which he wrote and co-produced] are different. At least I hope



Jaane Jaan is set in the hill town of Kalimpong in the Himalayan foothills. It opens with Kareena Kapoor Khan's Maya, who is suspected of murder



Sujoy Ghosh says the Japanese novel that the film is based on was one he identified with when a screenwriter friend had gifted it to him. PIC/GETTY IMAGES

they are. That's the whole trick. You should shoot in the same city, but the city should also be a character. The city should reflect the story that you're telling. My world is very important; it should be a character in the film."

Misty and far away from the city bustle, Kalimpong in the Himalayan foothills, Ghosh tells us, lent itself perfectly. "I feel any character within a story is believable if the world in which they are is believable. Now, if you're showing somebody who's academically inclined, who wants a quiet life, who is looking to restart her life, you would need a world which is smaller. It's a smaller community where people know each other." His own familiarity with the terrain also undoubtedly contributed to his choice. He recalls a time when he and a friend hired a car and went to Kurseong and from there to Kalimpong and Darjeeling. "We kept falling in love with the places and didn't want to leave, and then my wife had to call us back," he laughs. "I could do a whole film by the banks of the Teesta."

While creative concerns and a director's sense of discipline remain largely the same while making a film for the OTT space, what changes for Ghosh is the way the film is presented. "If I know that you'll see my film on a mobile, an iPad, a computer or a television screen, my framing would change a little," he says, explaining that for a theatrical film he can include more wide shots. "I try to keep that in my mind, but don't let it dictate me. In Jaane Jaan, you'll know that the framing is a little different from, for example, a Badla or a Kahaani." The

process he finds pushes him to think differently, an important requisite "to move with the times". "We have to learn to serve people who watch films on their mobiles. Whether we like it or not, they do."

Ghosh began his filmmaking career in 2003 with the 'cool' indie musical comedy Jhankaar Beats and has since gone on to make several hit thrillers starring industry A-listers. The biggest change in his life he feels, however, is technology. "When I started out, technology was never a faculty of filmmaking. Now, it's as important as editing or cinematography or directing because you have so many possibilities if you know how to harness technology in your film, to create the world, to tell your story. And it's changing rapidly. A lot of my friends do some amazing things with technology and I don't know how to, but I would love to learn." There is also the matter of the audience's evolving tastes. Ghosh says that at the time when he started out, people were not that exposed to global cinema. "But now, I'm competing with the evolution of taste. When you see my film, your benchmarks are different. You're not just seeing a film, you're also assessing it. Technically, is it sound? How well has he shot it? How good is the VFX? If I give you a lazy film, you'll be able to spot it a mile away. Their expectations and demands from a film are changing, and I am just running to keep up with them."

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of money during his first job at a restaurant.

"The owner called me for a day. It was a very busy restaurant and I worked from 3 pm to 11 pm. without a single second's break. I worked so hard that the owner of the restaurant asked me to become a regular employee of the restaurant. This extreme hard work was like a sudden shock for me, and I was not mentally prepared to accept this job offer. Seeing that I wasn't interested, the owner refused to pay me. I went to the station to go back home and cried a lot at the station," he recalls. Roychand went on to work as a taxi driver till 2008, during which

time he also got his citizenship, and then worked as a structural engineer at a private firm. Research, however, was always his calling.

"I was always fascinated by the research field, so in year 2013, I decided to do my PhD at RMIT University, Melbourne," Roychand says. "The focus of my research was developing a low carbon footprint alternative to the conventional Portland cement. By the time I completed my PhD in year 2017, I was successful in developing a high durability zero cement concrete utilising different industrial by-products like fly ash, slag, silica fume and some chemical additives." The road to Roychand's Eureka moment in his latest project, fun-

nily enough, started over a cup of coffee, when the research group he is part of at RMIT met to discuss transformation of different waste materials to strengthen concrete.

"We decided to start with coffee waste, taking it as a challenge. We worked on this project for about a year, and finally we came up with a solution that could transform this waste into a valuable additive for strengthening concrete," he says.

For the benefit of the lay reader, he breaks down the research into simple words.

"Concrete is made up of cement, water, sand, and gravel. In this project, we found that heating spent coffee grounds at 350°C temperature in the absence of oxygen sig-

nificantly improves its properties. When this treated coffee waste is used as a replacement for sand, it provides a 30 per cent improvement in the strength of concrete," he explains.

The team, guided by Professor Jie Li and comprising Roychand and his fellow researchers Shannon Kilmartin-Lynch and Mohammad Saberian, Roychand, made their findings public earlier this month, leading to widespread fame. Apart from several research enthusiasts and experts who spoke about the feat, even the official account of the Australian Consulate in India lauded their achievement.

But for them, the most exciting part is that the waste that was end-

ing up in landfills is now ready to be tried out as a high value by-product for construction applications. But that's not all. Roychand's research might soon be coming to India, he reveals.

"No doubt, India could immensely benefit from this research. I will be the happiest person if any of my research could benefit my motherland. We are in consultation with one of the companies from India," he shares, adding, "I still do miss a lot of things, like Amritsari food, and visiting friends and relatives during festivals. But my world revolves around science," he concludes.

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