

“My work has gone to another level” – Sammir Dattani

By: Steven Baker

Big in Bollywood and a star in the south, Sammir Dattani has delivered hits in Hindi, Karnataka’s Sandalwood cinema, and in Tamil film. After an eight year innings it looks as though things are going to skyrocket further for Sammir who has been seen on screen in *Pyaar Mein Twist*, *Corporate*, and *Mukhbiir*. At the box office recently, Sammir can be caught next to Boman Irani and Minissha Lamba in Shyam Benegal’s film festival hit *Well Done Abba*. Wrapped and ready for a Summer 2010 release, the versatile actor’s next outing is with Imran Khan and Sonam Kapoor in *I Hate Luv Storys*, courtesy of the Dharma Productions stable. Gung ho about his soaring career, Sammir talks about playing a double role in real life, his talent for languages, and his first day first show ritual.



boy from Andhra Pradesh who speaks in *Dakani*, a certain dialect used in that region. He’s a progressive Muslim boy working two jobs as a garage mechanic and a typist at the high court. He’s an orphan so he’s always trying to fit in and win people over with his enthusiasm as he doesn’t know where he belongs. This is what happens with Abba (Boman Irani) when my character falls in love with his daughter Muskan (Minissha Lamba), and tries to decide what he has to do to convince Abba to give the hand of his daughter. He also comes up with some of the solutions to the problems in the film, using his knowledge and education to fight for justice.

CM: What is your ritual on the Friday the film hits the box office?

SD: I go out and watch the film with the audience and try to sit back and enjoy the whole process. I try to disconnect from the film as my job is done by

CM: Sammir, along with acting in Bollywood, you are also big in the south Indian film industry where you are known by the name Dhyani. Do you feel like you are playing a double role in real life?

SD: I do have a parallel career down south where I’m known as Dhyani, from the character of my first film and that name has stuck - although they do also know me as Sammir. I think I’m lucky to have the best of both worlds in having careers in both industries, as it gives me the time to make the right choices and wait for the right kind of offers.

CM: You have two major releases coming up with Shyam Benegal’s *Well Done Abba* and *I Hate Love Storys* from Dharma Productions. Is your career about to sky rocket with such films?

SD: *Well Done Abba* has already started to do that as we’ve gone around some of the international film festivals. Looking at Karan Johar’s past record, his films do become box office successes, as they excite the audiences. As an actor I feel my work has gone to another level already from just working with Shyam Benegal or in a Dharma Productions film. I feel my career is already moving on to greener pastures, and the outcome is just a small aspect I guess.

CM: Tell us about your role in *Well Done Abba*?

SD: In the words of Shyam Benegal, he wanted my character Aarif to be a symbolic take on the youth of India today. He is a young village

then. And after the film comes out your friends, family, people you haven’t spoken to in ages, people you don’t know all come up and give their opinion. Every department of filmmaking has done what they think is correct, and it’s out there, so you stand back and see it all happen in front of you like a circus.

CM: Dharma productions have a strong track record of successful debut director films (Tarun Mansukhani’s *Dostana*, Ayan Mukherji’s *Wake up Sid*); there must be high expectations from *I Hate Luv Storys* Punit Malhotra’s first film?

SD: I mean obviously my expectations are sky high! Dharma productions have a great track record. All of us have grown up watching Karan Johar’s movies. I remember when *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* came out I was in my first or second year of college, so I was the ideal target audience and obviously was totally taken up with the film like everyone else my age. It’s my first film with Dharma Productions and it’s a rom-com like the title suggests. We were three youngsters (co-starring Sonam Kapoor and Imran Khan), who had a great time making the film. Well four youngsters as I would put director Punit in the same category, he pretty much had the best time making *I Hate Luv Storys*. Though we’ve only just finished shooting for it, so the whole expectation stuff really begins at a later stage.