



REIGNING THE UNIVERSE WITH HER WIT, GRIT & CHARM

A lethal mix of beauty and brains, Ms. Lara Dutta Bhupathi is one such famous personality whose popularity has no bounds. Besides conquering the universe as an international beauty queen, she has also tasted immense success as an actress especially renowned for super hit films like No Entry, Housefull and others. She has recently donned the garb of an entrepreneur with her skin care line 'Arias'. Skin care and grooming have always been a significant part of her journey to name and fame and thus the prospect of starting her own line came quite naturally to her. Made for the modern woman, Arias is curated by her and currently includes 11 products. AsiaOne wishes her immense success in all her endeavours!

BY **RICHA SANG**

You are renowned all across the globe as Miss Universe 2000. It is indeed a matter of great pride for all of us. Please describe your emotions post winning the crown and your odyssey thereafter as Miss Universe.

Well, it's been a very long time, it's been 19 years ago. Yeah it's obviously been a wonderful journey given the fact that I was fairly young. I was 21 years old and I won Miss Universe. While I look back today, I feel it is somebody else's life. But, obviously as a 21 year old winning something like that — you know, you are going there firstly with so much of pressure on you because it had been six years since India had won, since Sushmita Sen had won and for any 21 year old thinking the kind of hopes and dreams of a billion plus population — is very very engrossing. So you try to put your best foot forward and do the best you can and winning it absolutely changes your life. So, I have to be very honest and say — I think it took a while just to sink in. I don't think anything ever sank in. The day after the day I was crowned or even the week I was crowned and moreover finally when I moved to New York after I won and was based there and I would say about 2 weeks after I was crowned, I would say "Oh My God! Ok! I just won Miss Universe and I am going to be living in New York City — away from my family. My travel would be around 230 days a year, so the entire year. And I always say that it was an experience like no other including joining the film industry. I had some incredible moments in the film industry but I don't think anything beats those 6 days of Miss Universe. So I think for a lot of young women it really is a dream come true and there is no other way to describe it. It sounds phony and clichéd but that's what it is.

What has been your childhood ambition? Did you always wanted to become a beauty queen? Do you think your upbringing has a role in your success?

Sure, I think as a child, I had a very vivid or a very you know an overactive imagination. So, I remember as a child I never wanted to be any one thing. If anybody used to ask me what I would want to become, I always wanted to be at least three things and none of them had anything to do with each other. So I would always say an astronaut or a ballerina and an archeologist, you know something either this or that. I think if I look back honestly, I would say I grew up in an environment where I was told the possibilities are endless. You know we were told, I was youngest of 3 girls, both my sisters left home quite early in life (they are much older than me). My middle sister is already the first female helicopter pilot in India in the Indian Air Force. So we were never told being girls that there was any kind of thing that we couldn't achieve. And I think that I had the best environment for any kid to grow up in and I really give my parents credit for that. So, I would not really say about as if I really wanted to be a beauty queen or I wanted to be an actress; definitely never thought that I would gonna be a Bollywood actress. Also because our backgrounds are different; we came from a service background. My dad has always been in the Air Force. Yeah, but when I think in a way when I look at environment that I grew up in mainly because of being an Indian Air Force kid, we had been moving over the years to so many different places. It just gives you a slightly wider view of the world, you know I didn't grew up; I didn't just come from just one small town or just one small city. We

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grew up at different Air Force camps but it gave me the opportunity to adapt to various different places, different people. I mean every couple of years if I had to move schools; so you learn to make friends much more easily. You learn to become or you are forced to become a people's person. So I think all of them definitely helped that goes into, you know, coming together and creating that X-factor I think I had when I participated at Miss India and Miss Universe. I just gave me a little bit of an edge.

You have been a popular actress, with some really big entertainers like No Entry, Housefull, etc. Did you enjoy your stint as an actress shooting for these films as much as we enjoyed watching you on screen?

Yeah, you know so when I joined the film industry, I found that I came from a glamour background, so I came as a form of a model, a beauty queen. I met people who kind of see you as a glamorous face and they can't see beyond that and I didn't want to get typecast into the same old roles that we have seen 3 songs and 4 scenes and you know, you are just playing the glamour portion of the film time and time again. And as an actor, I really, I suddenly enjoyed comedy. I think I am really blessed to have the ability to perform, to have the comic-ability onscreen and at the point when I came to the industry it was not about the comic actresses. You know there was an era when Madhuri ji and Sri Devi ji were there, those kind of actresses who were brilliant at comedy, Kajol, and that was the era that had paved out of, was ending, but there was nobody new on the horizon who would have the ability to do comedy. So that came very naturally to me but also allowed me to be touchy, goofy, you know just be myself and break that mould of being looked back just as glamorous. And I thoroughly enjoyed it and I likely set up the environment of being in a comedy film. It's just so different, so much lighter, fun doing, and the very drama kind of films are not my cup of tea anyway. So, yes I really enjoyed being part of pretty much all the comedy films that I have done.

Your have been associated with

"ALL ARIAS PRODUCTS ARE ABSOLUTELY CHEMICAL-FREE, PARABEN-FREE, SULPHATE-FREE, ANIMAL-CRUELTY FREE AND ARE VEGAN. SO NO MATTER WHAT I AM DOING IN LIFE, I JUST THINK THAT I NEED TO BE SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE WITH IT AS WELL"



the UN with regard to many social causes. Please share your views on giving back to society.

Know, for sure, you know even before I ever became Miss India or Miss Universe, I grew up in Bangalore and most of the schools that I went to were convent schools and you know right from the start they get you interact with and get involved with a lot of NGOs. So, I mean, if I look back in my life I think from the age of 10 or something like that I have been constantly working with some NGO or the other and of course that got taken to a completely different level when I won Miss Universe, you know and I ended up being the ambassador for the United Nations for almost 13 years and worked extensively on gender equality and Women's reproductive rights and the HIV AIDS Crisis, I mean there has been so much human trafficking and so much work that has happened in these many years and its very much a part of my life. You know that's very much the kind of person I am. Even till today there are a lot of celebrities who do much charity work but they don't go screaming up from mountain top, they just do what they need to because it comes from the heart. And I think it's very easy to give money especially if you are somebody who is blessed to have enough of it in life. But the easiest thing to give is your money. The hardest thing to give is your own time and your own energy and your own effort. So, I try and find as much as I can you know a balance to be able to do all of that – not just give financially. Even with Arias I mean all are products – you have to be today just very very socially and environmentally aware – all of our products are absolutely chemical-free; they are paraben-free, they are sulphate-free. You know they are vegetarian; they are animal-cruelty free. So no matter what I am doing in life I just think that I need to be socially responsible with it as well. It's not just about being you know how much profits did I make but also the difference I can add while I am doing it as well.

Your prenatal yoga DVD received an overwhelming response. What motivated you to embrace yoga?

Well, I have been a yoga practitioner

for almost 20 years if not more of my life and it came to me I just felt because I am somebody who has been fitness conscious throughout. You know it's not just about fitness – it's a union of body, mind and spirit, and you need to keep intact that balance and that's how yoga comes in. I think when I was pregnant with Saira, I wanted to continue working out especially during my third trimester and I reviewed within the Indian market and I couldn't find a single yoga workout that was created within India itself. I mean there were workouts but they were all imported DVDs, but foreigners had done those kinds of DVD workouts but there was nothing in the pre-natal market and therein I find the idea to really do something that allows Indian mothers to be able to work out through their entire pregnancy no matter in which semester they were in but were safe and I could really kind of guide them and help them and kept them flexible in a way. So I had a fantastic yoga pre-natal coach whom I worked with Sonia Bajaj and both of us came out with that routine. I was doing that routine right from my pregnancy and when I sorted I was 8.5 months pregnant and it worked really well and I am always so glad and I am always so thankful when I hear women writing to me and tell me that it really helped them in their pregnancy and I think that for me is the best reward.

Besides Yoga, which activity or sport do you indulge in for keeping fit?

Sure, like I said I have always been working out so I like going to the gym, sometimes I do High Intensity Training, I do Circuit Training and the other times like for a moment I stopped going to the gym because I felt that my body wanted something else so now I do pilates and yoga. I like doing cardio and sometimes I like doing it outside, so being in Mumbai, there are very few parks and things like that to go to but you have the Sea Face. So you would find me a lot of times in the morning doing like a walk, run along the Sea Face. And I think it's just really important to get up and get moving. It doesn't really matter what you are doing. You just need to find what suits you. I mean I have

done everything from Zumba Classes to Kick-Boxing to Belly Barre. You just need to find something that you want to do and get your body moving. It will change your life. It doesn't have to be hectic, it doesn't have to be fancy Gym membership or some trainer. You just need to start moving your body and your body will treat you so much better.

Which parenting style is the most apt according to you as a mother?

Well, I honestly think I am a parent but my daughter teaches me far more than I teach her. So, you know, it's there is no hard and fast rule to being a parent and each parent-child relationship is so very individual that you really need to find, you know, what works for you. So I found for me that the less fussy I am, the more I just go with the flow with my kid the easier it is. I think for sure one thing I would say that I found with most children and especially mine that it's very important to set a routine for a child right for the time when they are really small and they really strive when they have a routine to walk with them. And it makes life easier for you as well. So, it's wonderful to be a parent raising a child in an environment where you are supposed to be so overly conscious about what they are doing and washing their hair and all of that and it is fine. But, sometimes you just need to follow your mother's, your grandmother's advice and be easy on yourself and automatically you your child also will settle into a routine work that will work for both of you. So, I think with us, both Mahesh and me, we are both very hands-on parents and I think I am very blessed that Mahesh, as a father, as an Indian man, is very involved in his child's life. Because I didn't see that, you know, my dad is somebody who is very involved in our life. So, I grew up in that sort of environment, but I don't see that in India. I don't feel fathers doing or sharing the work load as much, you know, equally with their mothers. And I didn't give Mahesh a choice, so since the time Saira was an infant, he is brilliant at keeping her, changing her diapers, you know the work. And it makes life so much easier, it creates a bond as a family that is irreplaceable.

How do you feel when you have an

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equally famous person as a spouse? How do you tackle the paparazzi?

Honestly, both Mahesh and I are extremely private people. We have never been people who enjoyed being in the lime light and at the same time we both understand who we are and the social responsibility that we have and we also understand that there is a culture within India, of media, of paparazzi, of all of that. But it's important, for our own sanity to maintain a balance. So, I can't shut that out completely, but yes I am protective about my child when it comes to media intrusion into our lives. But having said that, I honestly have to say, in Mumbai, whenever we had been out and my daughter is with us and we had ever encountered any paparazzi, we might have requested them to not shoot Saira, they had really respected that request and they backed off. So I can't say that I have ever had an experience with the paparazzi where they haven't listened or they have crossed the line. So it honestly depends on the kind of relationship that you build with the media, what you allow them and what you keep secret. And I don't believe in leading my life for anybody else. I never made a big show of my life – I don't want to be clicked for any restaurant that I go to, or every gym class I am coming out of. That is not my life and that is not who I am. And I am fine with the fact that they clicked me a little bit or under the radar as long as it allows me to live my life as I want to.

