



# Ready to go

A YEAR ago, almost to the day, tickled about the fact that we shared an office floor with a descendant of the late Morajibhai Desai, we met and interviewed young **Vishaal Desai** and asked him a lot of "how does it feel to be" type questions.

Of the film-maker passionate about his work in the way that young people now are only if they are lucky, of course we wanted to know "how it felt" to be the great grandson of the fourth prime minister of India, now dead for the past 17 years. At the time, we had written:

"Three weeks ago, on April 10, the 16th death anniversary of Morarji Ranchhodji Desai passed un-noticed. Yet if you mention his name, the response (and there still is) is usually equal parts of awed remembrance and affectionate amusement. Single-handedly, the man who was an Indian independence activist, the fourth Prime Minister of India from 1977-79, the first Indian Prime Minister who did not belong to the Indian National Congress and the first Indian to receive the highest civilian awards from both India and Pakistan, the Bharat Ratna and Nishaan-e-Pakistan, did more than anyone else to practice and propagate urine therapy.

"Down the corridor from the offices of this newspaper, a young man who stands a shade over 6 feet 2 inches, with a distinctive face and a sharply designed beard, carries the Morarji Desai legacy lightly on his shoulders. At 28, Vishaal Desai is forging his own path as a maker of short films. A graduate from the London School of Film, he is toughing it out, and loving every minute."

At the time, Vishaal was in the throes of making short films of around 15 minutes duration in a series that he had tentatively titled 'The Seven Deadly Sins'. The idea was to make seven shorts, each devoted to one sin - envy, gluttony, sloth, anger, pride, lust and greed. And he had worked it all out, how to finance the first one, then to use it to drum up interest in the second, so that finally all were completed and set up for marketing.

We are glad to be able to tell our readers that Vishaal is set on his path, and has, in fact, completed two in the series which now runs under the blanket title of Sinners. The first is called Druj and tells the story of a mother interacting over a meal with her two sons and the dynamics of family relationships that run through the conversation. The theme is envy. The second is called Chana, is about a small boy who must weigh up looking after the chana entrusted to him against eating it because



Graphic animator, director, producer, screenwriter, music composer, photographer, Vishaal Desai is all set for Cannes where he will show his short films, 'Druj' and Chana, in the special short films corner of the famous film festival.

he is hungry. (Stills provided).

Which is all very well, but the point here is that Vishaal, now a ripe old 29, submitted the DVDs to the Short Films Corner at Cannes and was accepted. So he is off there by next week, hoping to drum up enough interest in them to finance the rest of the series. The whole thing has taken him 18 months so far, and hopefully, the rest will not take as much time.

We must also point out that Vishaal, with a degree in animation from UCA and a Masters in screenwriting from the London Film School, is no stranger to the genre, or to awards. He has written and directed 12 shorts, including The Booth, which won best director at the International Halloween Horror Channel in 2006, screened at the NFT in London, is a photographer and a music composer as well.

What can we say - except perhaps that Morarjibhai would have been proud.

## The man with two birthdays

SUDHAKAR GANDHI is a cheerful sort, with a smiling face that gleams with good humour. He came to see us a couple of days ago, and that is when we heard how much he has to smile about.

For one thing, for the past 19 years, he has been celebrating not one birthday but two. For another, not a day goes by when he is not aware of the great gift that life is. Or how easily and suddenly it can be snatched away.



Survivor Sudhakar Gandhi

We forgot to ask him when his first birthday is celebrated, because his second birthday is a date that no Mumbaikar will ever forget - March 12. Nineteen years ago, he was standing 20 feet away from a car packed with explosives that went off around 1.30 p.m. in the street at the side of the Bombay Stock Exchange. He had been "giving company" to a friend who wanted to eat the famous Jain pao bhaji and insisted he accompany him.

After the bomb went off, Sudhakar woke 90 minutes later to a scene of absolute

carnage, arms and legs and broken bodies everywhere. He was bleeding heavily from his face and his head which had lots of glass pieces embedded. He couldn't see, but that was because he had lost his glasses.

He got up and wandered off to a man standing near another car and asked him to take him to the hospital. The man said he was "only the driver". At that point, says Sudhakar, he felt a hand on his arm and he was led away to another car by a good Samaritan who rushed him to St George's Hospital. No treatment was given, and he was then taken to J J Hospital, where the



first operation was done at 1.30 am.

"They did not even remove the glass pieces," says Sudhakar indignantly. "By that time my friends had traced me and they tried to get me discharged so I could go to a private hospital. But nobody listened. They were too busy cleaning fans and lights for the visit of L.K. Advani and Sharad Pawar. Finally, on the third day I was discharged and the operations started, six of them". Today, there are slight ridges and dimpled depressions on his forehead and cheek to show where he had been injured.

What happened to your friend, we asked, did he survive? And thankfully, he also did, but with far greater injuries to his back as he was standing in front of and facing Sudhakar when the bomb went off. Also, the reason why Sudhakar suffered injuries almost exclusively on his head and face was because the friend was so short.

And that is why Sudhakar Gandhi now has two birthdays, with every March 12 being one of retrospection, thanksgiving and temple visits.

## Geetanjali Kirloskar

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I  
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THE

Afternoon  
DESPATCH & COURIER

IT'S AMAZING'