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Safai spree

MANDVI SHARMA
Times News Network

Vivek Oberoi's making up – with people and for lost time – and starting his B'wood innings afresh

Vivek Oberoi is on a *safai* spree. He's calling this phase of his career his second innings in Bollywood, revisiting his mistakes, and "making his karma clean". "To move ahead, I have to put a lot of things behind me. And that could only happen when I addressed them and made my karma clean. I've been misunderstood and made a lot of mistakes. But I have paid for them," he says. The Salman Khan press con, okay, but what else does he count among his mistakes? "The list of my mistakes is as long as a toilet paper roll! I must confess that I started off in the industry with a lot of passion for the craft. But after some time, I guess all the importance, fame and money went to my head and I started taking everything for granted. I was being negatively influenced by some people in my life and that soon drove me to depression. Once, I had decided that I would quit. That's when my mother brought me a file and showed me the first interviews I had given, my movie pictures and what I had started in the industry with. It brought back to me the innocence and the honesty that I had worked with. And that's when I realised how I could start afresh," he says. After the success of *Shootout At Lokhandwala*, Vivek called and met all the people he had "messed up with". "For about four months, I did this. I had to apologise. I would not have found peace otherwise."

LOOKING AHEAD: Vivek Oberoi. For more pics of Vivek, visit <http://photogallery.indiatimes.com>

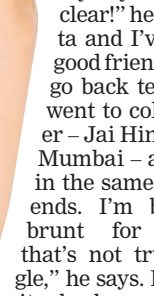
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STICKY wicket?

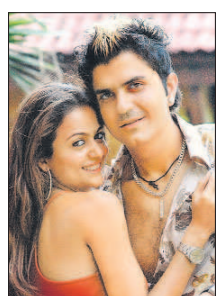
JAYA DRONA
Times News Network

There seems to be trouble in the Amrita Arora-Usman Afzal paradise. Buzz is that the actress and the London-based cricketer have mutually decided to go their separate ways after they realised that the distance was too much of a strain on the relationship. Reports suggesting a link-up between Amrita and model Sahil Shroff didn't help either, apparently.

When we asked Amrita, she said that she did not want to comment on the entire episode, but did not deny the news. Usman was unavailable for comment, but Sahil says there is nothing to the rumour that Amrita is seeing him. "I can't say anything to clear the air because the air is clear!" he says. "Amrita and I've been very good friends. She and I go back ten years. We went to college together – Jai Hind College in Mumbai – and we were in the same gang of friends. I'm bearing the brunt for something that's not true. I'm single," he says. But has Amrita broken up with Usman? "No, she hasn't. She is still very much with him," he answers. But why is he in the middle of a controversy? "I don't know. But it's okay. I guess this is a part of the industry. These gossipmongers have come between my friendship with Amu. They've caused a lot of harm already. However, Amu and I are mature enough to handle this. These rumours don't bother us. She certainly has not broken up because of me. In fact, she hasn't broken up at all," he answers.



Sahil



Amrita & Usman

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Out of the closet?

Despite the hype, colour and *masti*, Delhi's first gay pride parade saw many participants unwilling to go public about their preference. Overall, though, the mood was upbeat...

JYOTHI PRABHAKAR
Times News Network

Photos: Ranjit Kumar

Maybe. But then again, maybe not quite. Though the first gay parade in Delhi saw a large number of participants "celebrating, not protesting", as Lesley Esteves, a gay rights activist, and a member of the newly formed Delhi Queer Pride committee, put it, many were unwilling to come out of the closet in the real sense.

The hesitation of the participants to reveal their names, get clicked and take off their masks said it all. "This is a beginning, nevertheless," countered Lesley. As one masked participant said, "My parents don't know I am here. I wouldn't want to hurt them by announcing my sexuality so publicly." Another 26-year-old was worried about losing his job if he revealed his identity. "I am an insurance agent. I have to deal with many people every day. I'm sure my boss and colleagues will not understand." One lady, who said she's "partially come out", even had her family marching with her. But she was wary of being identified. Even those fa-



At the gay parade in Delhi on Sunday

mous shied away from pushing the point beyond the obvious. Like designers Manish Arora and Gaurav Gupta. "I am here to enjoy. I have always wanted to support the cause. But don't ask me for quotes," said Manish, while Gaurav chose not to say anything at all.

But why, when they're already out in the public, this underlying fear? "This is the first step. That there are so many people on the road today is a testimony of the changing times and attitudes. But you have to understand – every time I come out in public, I know that somewhere, someone in my family is being hurt," said Lesley. As one feisty foreigner put it, "I have participated in gay parades elsewhere in the world too. In Delhi, I was told that people were scared to come out on the streets. But they have, and that itself is a big thing. Give it some time – we will be heard." At that moment, a participant walked past us, carrying a poster that read, "The closet opens here".

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WHAT IS SECTION 377?

This queer parade was also a protest to repeal a law drafted by Lord Macaulay in 1861 – Chapter XVI, Section 377 (commonly known as the Anti-sodomy law) of the Indian Penal Code. This section bans "carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal", and criminalises same-sex behaviour, irrespective of the age and the consent of the people involved.

In December 2002, a gay advocacy group in India filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) to repeal this section in the Delhi High Court. Tomorrow, the High Court will begin hearings on this petition by the gay rights group.



Manish Malhotra at the parade

AROUND THE WORLD

This Pride March, which was held in India in Delhi, Kolkata and Bengaluru, is also held the world over in June to commemorate the 1969 Stonewall riots. In New York, at the Stonewall Inn, on June 29, 1969, the NYPD raided this gay bar, which led to widespread rioting by the community. Surprisingly, there are many firsts here, apart from India... though not all of them went as smoothly as Delhi's.

HAVANA: Cuba's first gay pride parade was cancelled, because it was not sanctioned by Cuba's National Centre for Sex Education, which is headed by Mariela Castro, daughter of president Raul Castro.

BULGARIA: Extremists throwing rocks, bottles and petrol bombs attacked Sofia's first gay pride parade last week. About 60 people were detained for harassing the participants, even as the church went on to say that the march should be banned as it undermines the country's Christian traditions.

CZECH REPUBLIC: The first gay parade of the city of Brno had to take an alternative, shorter route when the marchers were attacked by a group shouting abusive slogans and throwing eggs.

Meanwhile, San Francisco is preparing for the 38th annual gay pride parade – a parade, which activists say, will be the biggest yet. It is in celebration of the recently state-approved right to marry. According to reports, as marriage became legal earlier this month, the San Francisco county clerk said he had 259 marriage license appointments and 284 reservations for wedding ceremonies.

A gay pride parade in California recently



CRICKET AND GLAM? ONLY IN IPL

It seems that the strain of the two high-profile professions – acting and cricket – is too much for the cricketer-actress pairs. It's an almost irresistible combo, the ultimate showbiz merger, but recent link-ups have all proven to be just rumours, or have gone the way of spiltville. Is that what went wrong with these pairs too – Yuvraj Singh-Kim Sharma, Yuvraj Singh-Deepika Padukone and Zaheer Khan-Isha Sharvani?

LOVE LOST? Amrita Arora. For more pics of Amrita, visit <http://photogallery.indiatimes.com>

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