



And Then One Day: A Memoir

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Naseeruddin Shah's sparkling memoir of his early years, 'from zero to thirty-two', spans his extraordinary journey from a feudal hamlet near Meerut, to Catholic schools in Nainital and Ajmer and finally to stage and film stardom in Mumbai. Along the way, he recounts his passages through Aligarh University, the National School of Drama and the Film and Television Institute of India, where his luck finally began to change. And Then One Day tells a compelling tale, written with rare honesty and consummate elegance, leavened with tongue in cheek humour. There are moving portraits of family members, darkly funny accounts of his school days and vivid cameos of directors and actors he has worked with, among them Ebrahim Alkazi, Shyam Bengal, Girish Karnad, Om Puri and Shabana Azmi. The accounts of his struggle to earn a living through acting, his experiments with the craft, his love affairs, his early marriage, his successes and failures are narrated with remarkable frankness and objective self-assessment. Brimming with delightful anecdotes as well as poignant, often painful revelations, this book is a tour de force, destined to become a classic of the genre.

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From Reader Review And Then One Day: A Memoir for online ebook

Balachander says

This is a surprisingly good read. Well, not that surprising considering the good reviews this received when it came out. Naseeruddin is... well... makes an effort to be utterly transparent about his life and career, warts and all. He makes it clear that he hasn't been an exemplary individual in his personal life but that he has always been in love with cinema and the acting profession and that he was bloody good at it. And in what might come as no surprise to anyone who has read his interviews, he has few complimentary things to say about "Bollywood", except for a few compliments to Amitabh and Dilip Kumar. Naseeruddin shah delves into great detail about how he approached his roles on stage and is candid about his many failures as a traditional, singing and dancing hero. Disappointingly the book ends somewhere in the mid eighties (I think). It would have been interesting to see what he thought of his post 90s work including some plum roles in mainstream cinema. Racially written, this is of a higher quality than most ghost written bios of Indian movie stars. A must read, if you're a fan of the man.

Devarsi says

The five stars have more to do with my personal enjoyment and engagement with the book rather than some objective "goodness" of it. First up, I only read autobiographies of people I admire or am a fan of in some way. As a result, in 2014 I had the great luck of reading autobiographies of people who couldn't be more different from each other - pro wrestler, "meathead" Brock Lesnar and the great Indian thespian, film actor and absolute riot of a person - Naseeruddin Shah.

If you are a "fan" of the person, you'll love this book, even more so, because he writes exactly like he speaks. If you have seen him or read him giving interviews, well that's exactly how he's written the book and for once the blurb (by Ramachandra Guha) "..joyous, funny, searingly honest" is true. If you are not really a fan but are acquainted with his work somehow, you'll probably never be bored because *And Then One Day* gives fantastic insight into the mechanics of acting, how theatre works, the art film movement of the 70's and how a young, aspiring "film star" grapples with the day to day challenges of film acting, stage acting, stardom (albeit, of a certain kind, within certain circles for a then-young Naseer) and plain old life - things which I feel are really worth knowing and understanding.

Lots of film and acting stalwarts make interesting cameos in the book: Girish Karnad, Ebrahim Alkazi, Jerzy Grotowski (in one of the book's most exciting parts), Geoffrey Kendal and one "Jaspal" (once Shah's inseparable bosom-buddy who really f***ked him over when things between them went haywire). Naseer's romance with Ratna is a breeze to read and has that "old world charm" we all love talking about. All in all, *And Then One Day* was a great experience and I genuinely felt a little bad when the book ended not just for my blossoming and overwhelming love for all things Naseer but, of course, the book only chronicled his life till the time of his marriage (circa *Masoom*) and thus we don't get to read about the Nasser who was actually getting some mainstream attention thanks to Rajiv Rai in the late 80's and later in the 2000's (*Main Hoon Na*, *Krrish*, *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*).

Mrinal says

Brutally honest, blatantly effusive and spectacularly engaging work, that will stay with you for the rest of your life. It is more than a memoir. It is a dialogue between two strained relations. A choice between believing in oneself and follow the herd. It is a text book with no chapters from syllabus yet prepares you to face life in the world of film. A theater of words that draws you in and leaves you craving for more. Naseer's introspection and self-deprecating analysis of his work reflect his passion for theater and desire to improve. His harsh criticism of his work easily puts his criticism of other's work at higher pedestal. His analysis is not a mere facade, but a detailed description of why certain things qualifies as a good film or theater while others are not worth mentioning.

Anyone interested in reading an actor's memoir esp. of Indian Cinema, this be the must reads.

Ambrish Mithal says

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this candid autobiography of my favourite actor. Nishaant and Manthan were movies that had an everlasting impact on me, and right up to Ishquiya I have enjoyed and admired Mr Shah's acting skills. He is 'different' as an actor, but the book confirms that he is truly 'different' as a human being too. His descriptions of his childhood, family issues, his troubled relationship with his father, are elaborate and interesting. He was born in Barabanki, a small town near Lucknow, and had strong roots in Sardana, another small town near Meerut, both in UP. He went to a boarding school in Nainital (of which he does not have very pleasant memories- he had to be withdrawn in class 9) also spent a few years in Ajmer. He completed his formal studies in Aligarh Muslim University, and subsequently trained at the NSD and FTII for theatre and films respectively.

Mr Shah's struggles in the initial part of his career, when he was battling his westernized but middle class family (read father!) as well as trying to figure out his way through life, make for riveting reading. His admiration for theatre, which remains his first love, comes through clearly and repeatedly. His impulsive first marriage at the age of 19 with a woman 14 years his senior, that too in the conservative town of Aligarh, illustrates his independent streak and scant regard for conventions and traditions. His description of his first marriage and relationship is brutally frank, and he does not hesitate to acknowledge his insensitivity following the birth of his daughter.

He has little admiration for mainstream Hindi cinema, and makes no bones about it. He has a few kind words for the acting prowess of Dilip Kumar (in whose house he stayed for few days during his first, unsuccessful sojourn in Bombay, courtesy a relative!!), Balraj Sahni, and Amitabh Bachhan, Pran, Mahmood and Yakub, but this is limited to specific roles or periods, and he considers none of them inspiring. He ridicules movies like Sholay , and feels that almost all mainstream Bollywood movies are poor remakes of Hollywood movies.

Throughout his school and college days spent in small towns of Northern India, he watched every conceivable film, but always enjoyed Hollywood movies far more than Hindi ones. His academic performance ranged from indifferent to miserable, with the solitary exception of English literature, in which he excelled consistently. His other fondness was for sports- cricket and tennis. His love for the language reflects in his easy, elegant and often humorous prose. Occasionally , however, his language becomes convoluted and sentences become long winded, at least to an ordinary reader like me.

His days at the NSD, Delhi were exciting, challenging and stimulating. His interaction with teachers and

colleagues are described in detail. His stint at the FTII Pune was ridden with controversy, as he got involved in a massive strike which contributed to the ultimate demise of the institution. In these institutions he came in touch with his contemporaries, some of whom, like Om Puri, he truly admired for their talent and devotion. He considers himself totally indisciplined, moody and arrogant as compared to Puri- who apparently was more disciplined and gentle. Yet both became the best actors of their generation. Throughout his life, he continues to struggle with himself , tormented by what constitutes the best style of acting, and discusses these aspects in detail.

Shah is forthcoming about his marijuana and LSD experiments. He is unabashedly honest about his 'ordinary' looks, which are not typically 'Bollywood' handsome. He describes his not inconsiderable, but often disastrous, mainstream Bollywood experiments with honesty and humour.

A refreshingly honest, readable book from one of the greatest actors of our times.

Abhijit says

Frank and honest but one can give it a pass...

For an actor with his stellar performances that marks his acting repertoire and a frank and honest opinion that he carries on everything, I thought it to be an interesting affair to read this memoir. If the autobiography written by Naseeruddin Shah was anything it was honest. He is honest in telling his story where he didn't try to and didn't contradict the great actor that he is and mixed it up with showing himself as a great person too. He is quite frank about the personal follies that he has committed.

Consumed by his passion for acting and the desire to make his own mark, he let his personal relationships suffer, and his moral responsibilities unattended without any self realisation. All he was committed to what his acting.

But there comes a time when these forgotten imprints come back as some form of guilt, when a person after travelling the road he had to and successfully so, starts judging his actions and weighing the right and wrong. Most people tend to justify their actions. The honest person that is Mr. N chose to write about his follies, his early marriage to a woman 12 years elder to him, denial towards responsibilities of having a daughter, his differential equation with his father, and all of this at the age of twenty one.

It is not an autobiography to inspire you to do great things but more about how a focused desire to be what you want to be demands a certain degree of selfishness and probably heartbreaks to your near ones who might not have been dear to him at that point in time. But if not for these mistakes and sole focus bordering on selfishness how would us the audience would have got an actor like Naseeruddin Shah.

Naseeruddin accepts all of this with humility knowing full well that some wounds never heal if not tended well in time and for him there are plenty. What he has ensured may be is to cleanse his system of the guilt that he carries.

Through his autobiography one can understand certain nuances of human relationships but nothing more than that. I am sure he has a lot more to tell which could be of value but it seems Naseeruddin Shah has knowingly restricted himself to get the guilt that he carries out of his system. Although filled with details of his life in NSD, FTII and filmy anecdotes, the main theme is that of presenting a factual account of his relationships where he shied away from his responsibilities and commitment.

Every book has some learning to provide in ways that we know and also don't know about. The hallmark of this memoir is that it sheds light on some aspects of human relationships. The life in NSD and filmy anecdotes is quite passable.

Should you miss something if you don't read the memoir? I don't think so.

Judge the price and, the alternatives and buy only if you are a compulsive reader of autobiographies like me. Try Dev Anand's autobiography or the biography on the Kapoor's instead if you are looking for an alternative.

Mr. N has good command over his English though, something you would expect from a theatre actor for life who probably knows Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw by heart.

Namitha Varma says

I love Naseeruddin Shah's acting prowess, but the one time I saw him up close, I realised he wasn't audience/fan-friendly and frowned at him, while continuing to adore his films and acting. I thought he was arrogant, and that his arrogance would carry into his writing - but his autobiography 'And Then One Day' was surprisingly (for me) humble and grounded, full of self-deprecatory humour, peppered with some funny and interesting tidbits, almost a thesis on dramatics, cinema, theatre and acting, and I loved it.

It takes a lot of strength of character to confess that one is narcissistic, proud of oneself and don't give a shit to popular culture. The film industry – nay, the world – is full of pretentious people. Shah accepts his faults, admits to being less than “good”, and makes no bones about where he went wrong, why he did certain movies, and why he held certain beliefs or perceptions. He, I realised as I was reading, was not justifying anything to the reader – he is merely “letting things go” so as to say. It is almost like he was talking to someone – to Ratna, to a friend, or himself even. The epilogue admits that was the point of this writing - to unburden some things from himself.

The book is an honest and committed piece of writing. Unlike memoirs of celebrities that are often written to explain and exonerate the self from some 'embarrassing or controversial' public incidents, or catering to popular tastes and talking narcissistically about the public self with a few “so far unknown” tidbits about self and other popular people thrown in for entertainment, Shah's autobiography is written for himself, for the people who know him, and for the people who want to know him – he the individual, the normal human, as opposed to the actor.

I went back to my classes on Autobiography as a literary form from III B.A. as I read this. Shah uses this book as an exercise in many things – none of which is to popularise himself a little more nor aimed at his “fans”; he talks mostly about his early life, thereby unburdening from his soul the not-yet-well-expressed feelings he had towards his parents, esp. his father, his brothers and his friends; his earlier relationships with women; and most importantly, his thoughts about Indian cinema and theatre then and now. This is a tale of his journey in acting and life – so synonymous does he make it seem – his experiments, his successes, failures, stumbling blocks, strengths, weaknesses, opinions, likes and dislikes.

The language of the book is contemporary and “cool”, not burdened with cliches, archaicness or roundabouts, and I was psyched to see that the book opened with lines from Pink Floyd! The narrative being so honest and lacking in unnecessary ornery, is easy to read and follow. I'd recommend it to anyone who likes Shah and his brand of acting.

Tahera says

I really liked this book by Naseer especially because of the way it is written. Very candid and unabashed. Although a huge star in his own right, he never shies away from accepting his shortcomings.

Veera says

What a fantastic read, I finished the first 140 pages without a break. Easily one of the most honest autobiographies I have read. Poignant, funny, delicious and all at the same time, it keeps you enthralled throughout. This is the life of a man who experimented with everything and yet did now allow any of it to come between himself and his dreams. At the end of it, you love him more for his imperfections than for his talent.

Swati Garg says

If you are looking to read a book about/on Bollywood this should be one. More than the travails of Shah's life its about the searing honesty with which this book has been written. He hasn't minced words in describing his reaction to pseudo fans disturbing him or his relationship with the daughter whom he abandoned when she was a child. The purity with which he describes his love story with Ratna Pathak Shah is beautiful. His friendship with Om Puri is another beautiful aspect. The fact that he knows he was not suitable for popular hindi cinema and acknowledges his "defence mechanism" working overtime in his hatred for it makes this book even more readable. If only everyone was being this candid when they wrote autobiographies, the world would be a better place.

Samir Dhond says

I read about this book in a newspaper and decided to buy it. I am a fan of Mr. Shah's acting prowess. I consider him to be one of the best in India. Having seen many of his films, I wanted to read his thoughts, the emotions and the perspectives he has had on his own body of work. I must say, I was disappointed to read this book. The first part of the book where he writes about his childhood, growing up years and his first marriage, all of it reads well. His interest and enthusiasm in sharing his experiences comes through that writing. However, after this part, as he begins to express his thoughts about his films, I felt that Mr. Shah was hurried, he did not share any of his experiences working with some stalwarts. That writing is shallow, devoid of his interest and enthusiasm. He only sulks.

Moreover, I felt that in his writing, I sensed a deep disinterest in sharing. May be, he has nothing more to share but that part of the writing seems like it is written in he recent past and that too with a sole intent of completing his book. The book ends abruptly. This was not expected of a thespian such as Mr. Shah.

I wonder if he would read this review, but if he did, I would like to ask him if he had any great connect or any such experience that touched his life in any way working with some great people in the last one decade. He has not even mentioned the names of some of the great artiste in his book. Well, read it if you have to but don't take it in your hand thinking it to be a great piece of literature. Mr. Shah is not claiming it either. The

fact is that the after taste of this book is like that of a half baked cake.

Gopal Vijayaraghavan says

“ And Then One Day A Memoir” , a candid and open account of the life of Naseeruddin Shah, establishes that Shaw is not only one of the most talented and gifted theatre and film actors but also an extremely entertaining writer. On reading the book, one really is surprised as to how much little is known about the personal life of Shaw. This makes the biography more interesting as Shaw traces his fascination for theatre acting which he got at a very young age inspired on seeing the performance of nautanki. This obsessive interest theatre leads to his estrangement with his father as he falls short of his father’s expectations of becoming a well educated citizen. The troubled relationship between the father and son is told in moving terms. He confesses the influence of the English movies which he saw in formative years, rather than Hindi movies for his quest. Though he had acted in so many popular Hindi movies he is frank to confess that in most of such films his performance was below par. His critical writing does not leave such legendary figures as Alkazi, Peter Brook and Grotowski - whose experiment of theatre made Shaw feel himself a guinea pig. His trip to London on a promise to be offered the role of Gandhi by Attenborough is told in the most hilarious tone. Shaw ultimately “played Gandhi on the stage in a hugely successful production; and merely repeated the performance in a film with so much prosthetic on his face it could have made a Mongolian actor resemble Gandhi if his head shaved and he wore granny glasses” - Does he refer to his role in Hey Ram. Based on a bitter personal experience of his encounter with film puffs Shaw says of the Hindi popular film which should apply to popular films of all Indian languages “

“ It was a reminder of how seriously the Hindi film audience takes their dreams, and what piffling dreams these actually are, and how deeply they have bought into the sham world these movies create. Let us not drag out the long-exhausted argument that the common man needs these films to get away from his drudgery etc.; what I find terrifying is the degree of dumping down of these films have managed to achieve, I daresay intentionally. A habit for consuming junk has over the years been created in the audience. They are now irrevocably hooked on that taste, they crave it so they swallow anything that comes thus packaged, and ironically they are blamed for having to be pandered to. The films we make reflect no one’s taste but our own”

Gauri Pandit says

This book deserves every bit of praise it has received. Naseeruddin Shah is an unabashed narrator - both candid and self-aware of his talents and shortcomings. His frankness coupled with his sometimes unperturbed and sometimes amused outlook on life and such made this a wonderful read.

Something I genuinely enjoyed was the way he described Bombay at a time when it was a hub of counterculture; when Indian cinema was just peaking -- a sort of modern renaissance for urban artists.

And yet, not once did I feel like he was looking back at his time in Bombay with rose-coloured lenses. It was a very unglamorous but nonetheless fascinating account of the cultural atmosphere and his experiences in it.

Sukanya says

This is a wry storyteller's story.

A reluctant conversationalist. Someone who keeps observing himself. Not without a fair bit of amusement. (At some point he must have been really tough on himself, but now he has sort of made peace with the blunderbuss that he is and has to live with.)

Why did I like this book?

Well apart from the fact that the writing was soufflé light, it felt like being a listener to an avuncular NS recounting his childhood and student days.

In fact, yes, the strongest impression one is left with is that of NS as a student - in UA, in Ajmer, in Aligarh, in Delhi, in Pune, in Poland, in Benegal's Productions, in hindi potboilers and finally in Theatre.

That and his extremely difficult relationship with his father.

I wonder, if he ever feels that it is this mutual antipathy that they shared that helped him stay motivated about pursuing a career in theatre and cinema. Had his dad ever slackened a bit, I suspect, he would have not persevered as much as he did.

Again, why did I like this book?

Because, NS inspite of being THE NS, it felt he was still trying to make sense of acting as a craft and that his legendary arrogance is more of disgruntlement and unease with the fact that, there are many fundamental questions about his craft that still eludes him. His genuine regard for the work of his contemporaries like Om Puri, Azmi and others would almost make one forget that the first person voice expatiating inside one's head, on so and so's work, is actually that of THE Naseeruddin Shah's.

About acting, he almost says it at some point that, it is easier to know what this craft is NOT, than to figure out what it is.

Reading about his years in NSD, in FTII and later as a professional actor, one is left with this feeling that all throughout, he kept trying to 'crack the code', unravel the mechanics of his craft. Because going by instinct and winging it (something that came easily to him)to deliver a convincing performance that the world would gush over, is satisfying only for so long.

Knowing why one is doing what one is doing, and more importantly working systematically at the many pieces of one's craft - movement, pronunciation, diction, casting, carriage, etc. is far more giving, more satisfying, and prolongs one's interest in one's work.

But even then. Even. Then. One sort of gets this idea from NS that there is only so much that one will ever 'know'. That there will continue to be ever so many frustrating things that will niggle one endlessly and there will be nothing to do about them, except live with them and live them out.

And that is why I liked the book so much.

Because it is honest. About how things are in life. There are no fade-outs or open-ended endings, left to interpretations in life. Life is to be lived out. The pleasant parts and the unpleasant parts as well. There is simply no other way of getting around things. And accepting this basic fact is perhaps the sanest recourse.

We need more people telling us this basic truth.

Sneha says

The simplicity in his writing kept me glued to the book. It may not be the best, but he connected to the tiny, uneasy facts of life (the struggles are real alright!) , it's very humbling.

I love the way he puts forward his shortcomings and there's no GRAND gesture to profess his love for his wife, Ratna. His love and respect is radiated in all the memories that he has penned down. What stood out is this last picture of them as couple, and his strong conviction.

It's not a MUST read book, but if you do read, it leaves you with a good feeling :D

Vivek Tejuja says

There are times you take stock of life. You evaluate what is there and what is not there. Perhaps one day we will all go through this. It is but eventual I think. While reading Naseeruddin Shah's memoir, "And Then One Day", this was my foremost thought. The book of course is written I guess keeping that in mind and at the same time, the tone of Mr. Shah is unique to him – sometimes brash, others haughty, sometimes also hypocritical, at other times contradictory and mostly funny and true. This is probably one of the reasons why I could not stop turning the pages.

"And Then One Day" to me is a mix of both, the man and the actor, after all one cannot separate one from the other, or maybe one can, which I am not aware of. The book chronicles the life of Naseeruddin Shah – from his childhood till his marriage to Ratna Pathak Shah. I think it is the candor with which it is written is what attracts the reader to the book and perhaps the credentials he holds as an actor.

The magnificence of the personality shines on every page. There is the struggle of becoming an actor to unabashedly admitting to roles done because he needed money. I must admit that sometimes I thought the tone was condescending and patronizing even, but the writing was so good that one can ignore that.

While I was reading the book for the first time (yes, I have read it twice), I thought it was ghost-written. However, it is not. The writing is clear, crisp and almost makes you picture incidents as you turn the pages. There are also a lot of times when Mr. Shah indulges in some self-deprecating humour which is also quite brilliantly written.

It is not easy to talk about one's life. I am sure it is very cathartic and sometimes also brings back memories that you do not want to encounter. At the same time, there is a lot of clarity in the thought process of the writer about this book. Yes, there are times when there is a lot of back and forth between the past and

present, but then I also think that this is the only way to write a memoir.

Mr. Shah excels at this book and it does not seem that he does not know how to write, like I mentioned earlier. The book is practical, it is real and it also comes from the heart so many times – especially when he is speaking of his daughter and his relationship with her. “And then One Day” is a book which talks about acting, the actor, the man, the human being and it does so with no holds barred.
