

# LIKE A PHOENIX, FROM THE ASHES

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HEY SAY SHOW business is embedded in the DNA and a testament to this is award-winning emcee and television personality **Gitikka Ganju Dhar**. In the trade for 18 years, and masterfully juggling her equally demanding roles of motherhood and professional emceeing, Gitikka recently hosted her 3000th event marking her comeback as one of India's most coveted emcees. Getting candid with **Yamini Singh** she unravels her eventful life.

**Did you always want to be an emcee? Tell us how you began emceeing?**

While doing my post graduation from Mass Communication Research Centre at Jamia Millia Islamia where I was training to be a cameraperson, a producer saw me at college and offered me a television show, so, technically I started with TV. Post that I hosted my first event as an emcee for one of Subhash Ghai's movie premiers. Anuradha Prasad of Bag Films managed the event at The Hyatt Regency in Delhi. My first corporate event was with Honda Motors at the Auto Expo in Delhi.

**Describe your first professional emceeing episode?**

I remember Subhash Ghai briefed me over three long meetings. I wrote an entire script for the event, they approved it. I remember wearing an orange cotton saree and clicking a photograph with Sonu Nigam post the event. He had just delivered his first major hit song for a film. I spoke from the podium. Was I nervous, I cannot recall, but I remember I had prepared well. Cue cards did not exist then, my make-up was basic, had I even blow dried my hair? I hope so. I must have done well, the client was happy. From there on, I anchored many television shows for Anuradha Prasad's company.

**What has been your experience on television?**

I have done close to twenty TV shows on Star, Zee, Doordarshan, Sony and other channels. I took some time off during pregnancy and after my daughter was born. I am going back to television in a big way this year.

**You are among India's most experienced emcees. How is the general acceptance and perception of people towards the profession?**

When I started out as an anchor, I had to explain to my larger family



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what I do. They did not let my parents hear the last of it. Now, it is a different story. But even then, it was a much-coveted career choice. Not just aspiring anchors, even established models, actors on television wanted to anchor on stage and television. The acceptance has definitely solidified post the great social media revolution. Also the professional fee paid to successful anchors is considerable and the media coverage they receive is noteworthy, I am guessing these factors have significantly contributed to the acceptance of this as a serious career option. The perception though, still requires a great deal of rectification. Especially, when it comes to female anchors in India. Clients and audiences, both need to understand that anchors are anchors, not all-in-ones. End clients need to understand, if you need a dancer, get one, you need a comedian, get one, you need raw sex appeal, get it, you need a beautiful face, get it. An anchor is an anchor. They should not compromise on the presence of core skills in the anchor they choose to work with. A good anchor can take your event or show to a different level altogether.

**What are the reasons for this perception? Has it always been this way?**

No, it was not always like this. I remember when I began, there were a few anchors on television and stage, but they were all very good at their craft. From there evolved my understanding of the role of an anchor. Also, event managers themselves were extremely demanding in terms of delivery and content. Nothing substandard was accepted. Today, this has changed. The emphasis is on the peripherals. The core craft, most of the time, stands neglected. What amazes me is the meek acceptance of the same by members of the live industry, the business givers. I see many competent anchors out there who are not given the opportunities they deserve. I hope in the years ahead more is demanded of anchors. In our industry, we are constantly upgrading technology, innovating concepts, building infrastructure, driving collaborations, then why are we accepting the questionable quality of one of the most important functions on an event, the anchor.

**5. Describe your most challenging episode as an emcee, how did you tackle the pickle?**

Auto Expos were always draining and initially government events made me very nervous. I used to shoot for a Star Plus daily. On most days, I would shoot fifteen hours a day and then would head into an event. I think that is when I developed the rhomboids in my back that trouble me to date.



**Apart from how much you say and how effortlessly you say it, what is more important is what you say and how appropriate is it.**

Recently, I hosted a musical for E Factor, the physical movement between my different entry positions was very challenging. But then, challenges produce a sweet satisfaction. I must mention here that more than the challenges on location, the unfair concept that an anchor is a one-woman army was the most frustrating part of my job. Now things have become better. The support system at events is much better. I guess as the Indian economy gets stronger and money spent on events increases, as the industry gets more organized, things will get better for anchors too.

**How lucrative is the career of an emcee?**

Well, it is lucrative for sure but definitely not easy money. Someone starting out can ask for Rs.15,000 per event. A popular host can charge anything between Rs.1 Lakh to Rs.10 Lakh per event. If you have a strong presence on television or film, you can quote a higher fee. And as the years have passed, the life span of this career has also expanded. You get to travel the world, execute new concepts every time and meet so many interesting, creative people. Once you have proved your mettle, you do get



treated like royalty. But one must always remember to not let that go to your head. You must also remember to invest wisely when the going is good. There will be phases when your inflow will get affected by changes in the government, trends in world economy and influx of new talent. So, one has to constantly toil and reinvent oneself. They say, don't they, evolve or dissolve.

**Is having the gift of the gab enough to explore a career as an emcee?**

No, I would say it is not that crucial a factor. This is a quality that can be acquired with adequate exposure and practice. I talk very less in my personal life. Apart from how much you say and how effortlessly you say it, what is more important is, what you say and how appropriate is it for the occasion. One has to keep in mind

basic reference point like the theme of the event, the message that need to be communicated and the boundaries that the brand image sets. Also, a senior anchor once told me, always keep in mind to add value to the listener's realm of knowledge and experience. Being versatile also helps in balancing your body of work. I enjoy hosting all genres of events, whether corporate, government, social or film.

**What is the downside of being in this trade and the upside?**

The downside is that it is extremely hectic a profession and very demanding, both physically and mentally. Also one is invariably dealing with people and their sentiments all the time. It does take a toll on ones nerves. The upsides are many. It is creatively satisfying, it is exciting and you receive love and affection from people across the country.

**You are a mom and yet an accomplished emcee, a hands-on profession that requires extensive travel. How do you make it work?**

It is not a wrong presumption that it is difficult for a hands-on mother to be successful at what she does. More than difficult, it is tiring. I do not remember the last time I put my feet up without a care in the world. But its a choice we make for ourselves. Yes, I travel. My mother, husband and father take over my daughter's care when I travel. I have two nannies that are a great support. This is a pre-condition I have set for myself. Either I work with a rest assured mind or I do not work. Neither can my delivery be anything but a 100% professional and neither can her care be lacking. It is difficult, but not impossible. Yes, I do not get to socialize a lot, I do not get much rest or recreation, but it is a journey I have chartered for myself. In a few years, I will slow down. I have already begun to expand my team. They will make my life at work, easier. I began pro-actively pursuing business in 2012-13. It has only been four years since my comeback. I need to keep my foot on the accelerator a little while longer.

**According to you, what are the standard attributes always found in successful emcees?**

That depends on what aptly describes a successful anchor. In my humble view, commercial success alone is empty. But that is my personal view and it holds no significance in the larger scheme of things. Having said that, for an anchor to be successful, he or she must have a voice that sounds good on the microphone, should be very good at their core job, must have complete control over language, vocabulary and diction, must be disciplined, professional, well-read, reasonable, of a calm demeanor. He or she must have a good personality, must be physically fit, should be social media savvy, should have a fair sense of content creation and should be able to handle pressure. I feel my biggest strength is the content creation for events. Strictly speaking, content creation is a function to be executed by the copy department of an agency. But most of the time, the quality of what is presented to me is so unimaginative and ordinary that I have to redraft it. And lastly, being grounded also goes a long way. ■