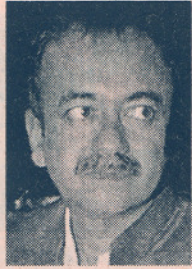


"I want everyone to feel good... success will follow"

He makes his audience feel good. At least, his last two films, the *Munnabhai-Circuit* series, brought smiles—and a few tears—and took *Gandhigiri* to a new level. Now, **Rajkumar Hirani** is back



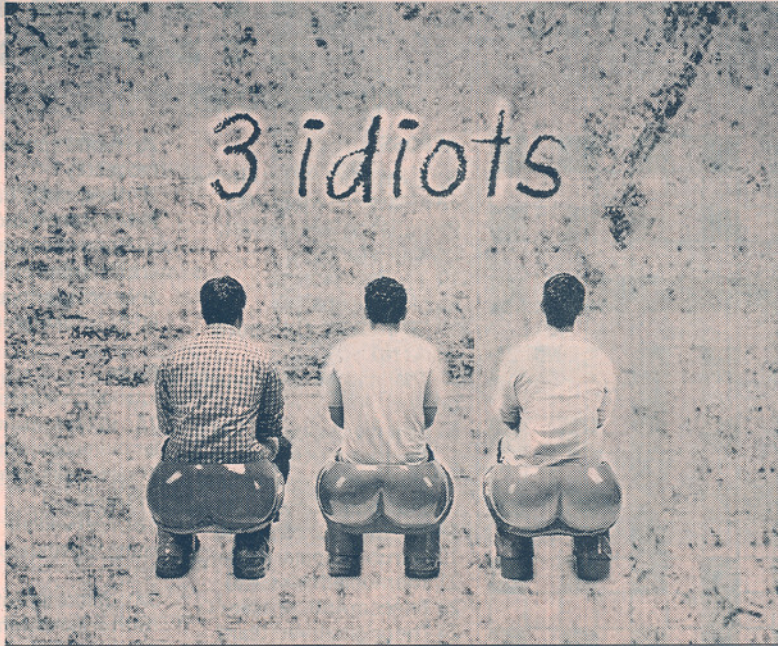
with *3 Idiots*, a story that takes a swipe at our education system and promises to send a message—chase excellence, success will follow—interspersed with laughter and tears, and never preachy.

This Nagpur-born, FTII-bred and Mumbai-based film-maker had to take a break from his ad films-making days to write *Munnabhai*. "I had money but I wasn't doing what I wanted to do, tell stories through films," he tells **Sudipta Datta** in between post-production. A lot is riding on *3 Idiots*, shot on campus at IIM-Bangalore and also at Leh, which releases on December 25 with the film industry craving for a mass hit. In a freewheeling chat, Hirani talks about his FTII days, how Aamir Khan wasn't the first choice for *3 Idiots* and why there's a crisis of content in the industry. Excerpts:

The film industry is pining for a hit that has been few and far between this year. What are your expectations from *3 Idiots*?

As a film-maker I want everyone to feel good. And I think if I make them feel good, they will want to watch the film, and we will get the returns. We are upbeat about the film. We have a fairly decent film on our hands.

You attack the education system in the film. What prompted you to do so?



There's too much pressure on kids and somewhere the real education is getting lost. We spend one-third of our lives studying and end up spending the rest of our lives chasing something which is of no essence. It's a film close to my heart. We chase professions like medicine, engineering or an MBA sometimes without enjoying it. When you pursue something that you liked doing, the returns come automatically.

In a way the story is closer home than we think...

When I went to the film institute in Pune from Nagpur, it was a huge leap. In the first week, surrounded by some pseudo-intellectuals I was made to feel I was not good enough. I had come from a small town—Nagpur was very small then—and I couldn't understand what they were saying. All that changed once we started working, I realised that I wanted to be a film-maker and there was no need to chase anything else. Sriram Raghavan was my batch-mate and together we agreed that we wanted to see Hindi cinema, unlike what the intellectuals were saying. We realised it was important to be rooted.

But you did editing at FTII?

Yes, and that has helped me enormously with all my films. I have never had to delete a scene.

Was Aamir Khan your first choice to play a student?

No, I was looking for younger faces, freshers but just couldn't find the right people. These are complex roles and needed a seasoned actor. Aamir came into the picture much later. I had heard horror stories about working with him, but it's been a pleasure to have Aamir on board.

You have also resorted to many below-the-line activities to promote the film?

I have done it with my other two films as well. We have shown *3 Idiots* to a lot of people, different groups, from college students to workers to parents and had a question and answer session at the end of each show. If various groups have pointed out a problem, we have even resorted to changes. For example, many people wanted the *Munnabhai* gag added to the film, not as a background score as we had initially done, we have made that change.

Why do you think Bollywood has had so few hits this year?

Well, I agree that there's a crisis of content in the industry. After *Munnabhai MBBS*, I was hoping to get scripts because I didn't want to write, it took too much of my time. Unfortunately, though I got a lot of scripts, they were not satisfying. Perhaps part of the problem is that we have to reach out to talent, writers need to be tapped. Most of the writers in Mumbai seem to be geared up for television—writers think two drafts are good enough.

But the industry has opened up to new genres, themes with the multiplex boom?

Yes, now a lot of different cinema is happening which is fabulous. We are opening up to new genres and that's good for cinema.

When will we see *Munnabhai* going to Amrika?

I am going to start work on that. But first I want to travel across the country, the North East too. We had plans of shooting *3 Idiots* in the North East, but ended up shooting in Leh.