

## TELEVISION

# 'I feel like a winner'

With *Bidaai* regaining the top slot and *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai* off to a rocking start, producer-director RAJAN SHAHI is the big man of prime-time television. A t2 chat...

Two successful shows in the primetime slot. How does it feel?

It's pretty unbelievable, to be honest. I am elated with the reception that the audience has given — first to *Bidaai* and now to *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai*. I want to thank each and every viewer out there who has contributed towards the success of these shows.

When you started out with *Bidaai* a year-and-a-half ago, did you expect it to be so big so soon?

Not at all. I always knew that I wanted to make a good show that a family could sit together and watch. I never knew that *Bidaai* would bring in such mind-boggling TRPs. As a director, I have been associated with some popular shows like *Jassi Jaissi Koi Nahin*, *Saat Phere* and *Mamta*, but the huge viewership that *Bidaai* has garnered has been unprecedented. The fact that it was my debut serial as producer has made *Bidaai*'s success all the more special.

Looking back, what do you think worked in *Bidaai*'s favour?

For starters, a very strong and fresh script. Also, *Bidaai* was the only primetime show that came in minus any gimmicks and that is something that we have stuck to. The plot and situations are drawn from real life. Everything about the show is very earthy, very rooted. The average viewer can relate very easily to the show. Direction, the performances, the music, the editing, every department came together beautifully in *Bidaai*. Also, I was always very clear about the fact that I wanted girls-next-door for the central characters of Sadhana and Ragini. And Sara (Khan) and Parul (Chauhan) were the perfect choices. Every Indian woman —

whether in the small towns or the big cities — identifies with these girls. And yes, *Bidaai* is the only show where the camera doesn't move or act more than the actors! (laughs)

For *Bidaai*, you must have been swamped with positive feedback. But which is that one feedback that stands out in your mind?

I think that would have to be the one from my dad who lives in Delhi. He had never watched any of my previous serials, be it *Jassi* or *Saat Phere*. But he once managed to catch an episode of *Bidaai* and he called me up after the show to say how proud he felt that I was associated with a show like this. That was the best reward for me. Also, whenever a viewer comes up to me and says how *Bidaai* has helped him to value human relationships and instilled *sanskaar* in his children, makes me feel like a winner.



Sara Khan and Parul Chauhan in *Bidaai*

How are you planning to sustain the interest factor?

With the audience already having forged a strong bond with the show and its characters, we really don't have to resort to gimmicks like killing off someone or throwing in a thriller angle to sustain interest in *Bidaai*. Thank God for that! With Ragini's wedding which is being aired currently, the show will move into a new phase. When I first sat down to pen the script of *Bidaai* a year-and-a-half ago, the story actually began with Ragini's wedding and her life after she enters a new home. So, the real story of *Bidaai* will only start now and the audiences have a lot to look forward to.

Coming to *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai*, do you expect it to go as big as *Bidaai*?

The TRP in the opening week has been 6.1 which is huge for any new show. *Yeh Rishta...* is a lot like *Bidaai* in terms of the values that it propagates and the treatment of the plot and characters, but is set against a more lavish backdrop. It is the story of how two strangers discover love in an arranged marriage. The simplicity of the show should appeal to the audience. It has a lot of expectation to live up to, but I am a firm believer in the fact that good work and sincere intentions are always rewarded.

What next?

All my time is now taken up with these two shows. I have, however, started work on a third show which would be in the same genre, but would be vastly different from both *Bidaai* and *Yeh Rishta*. The announcement for the show will be in March.

Priyanka Roy



RAJAN SHAHI (RIGHT) WITH KARAN MEHRA AND HEENA KHAN OF *YEH RISHTA KYA KEHLATA HAI*