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increase the warmth and passion that the cast and crew brings to the film and assigned specific entrances to be used by specific stars. The last, she says, was to enhance and encourage their talent. Bhansali is known for his attention to detail and while it's not easy or recommended to make radical changes in his frames, Sinha says her ideas are more to balance out the energies on set. "Bhansali's sets always have a mandir. It's critical that this is located in the right spot. I usually choose the North-East direction for the mandir. Colours also play an important role. But it may not always be possible to incorporate a shade I recommend in the frame. So, I use spaces that are out of camera range, like the pathway used for the movement of the crew."

Sinha, whose clients include Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Karan Johar, Ambika Hinduja and Kumar Mangalam Birla, says, "it all started with Kirron Kher". Kher was hosting a television show back in the '90s called Jagte Raho, which explored alternative practices and science. Sinha says she was keen to get on the show because vastu didn't enjoy mainstream awareness at the time. "Most people believed that we'd break down their home. I was keen to be on the show to argue that structural changes aren't mandatory [to align the vastu of a home]. I reached out to her and that's how it all began."

While the direction of rooms and structures, placement of plants are important, so are the names of people and places. "When Bombay was renamed Mumbai, I had argued [in an article in Debonair magazine] that the grace of South Bombay and Nariman Point would fade with the change, and the prestige would move to the east of Bandra. At the time, Bandra Kurla Complex didn't exist, but it is Bandra East, isn't it?" she shares. Sinha claims Bachchan named his bungalow Jalsa at her behest, as did Shah Rukh Khan, when she suggested that he choose a name with the letter M for his Arabian Sea-facing mansion at Bandra Bandstand. "When he said 'Mannat', it sounded good to me."

Sinha, who is a graduate, says it was the time she spent under the mentorship of her neighbour and homeopath late Dr LN Kusuma, who held a deep interest in vastu and astrology, that led her to develop her skills. While working for celebrities is Sinha's high, it's when her suggestions are able to solve a regular man's challenges that she says she feels truly valued.

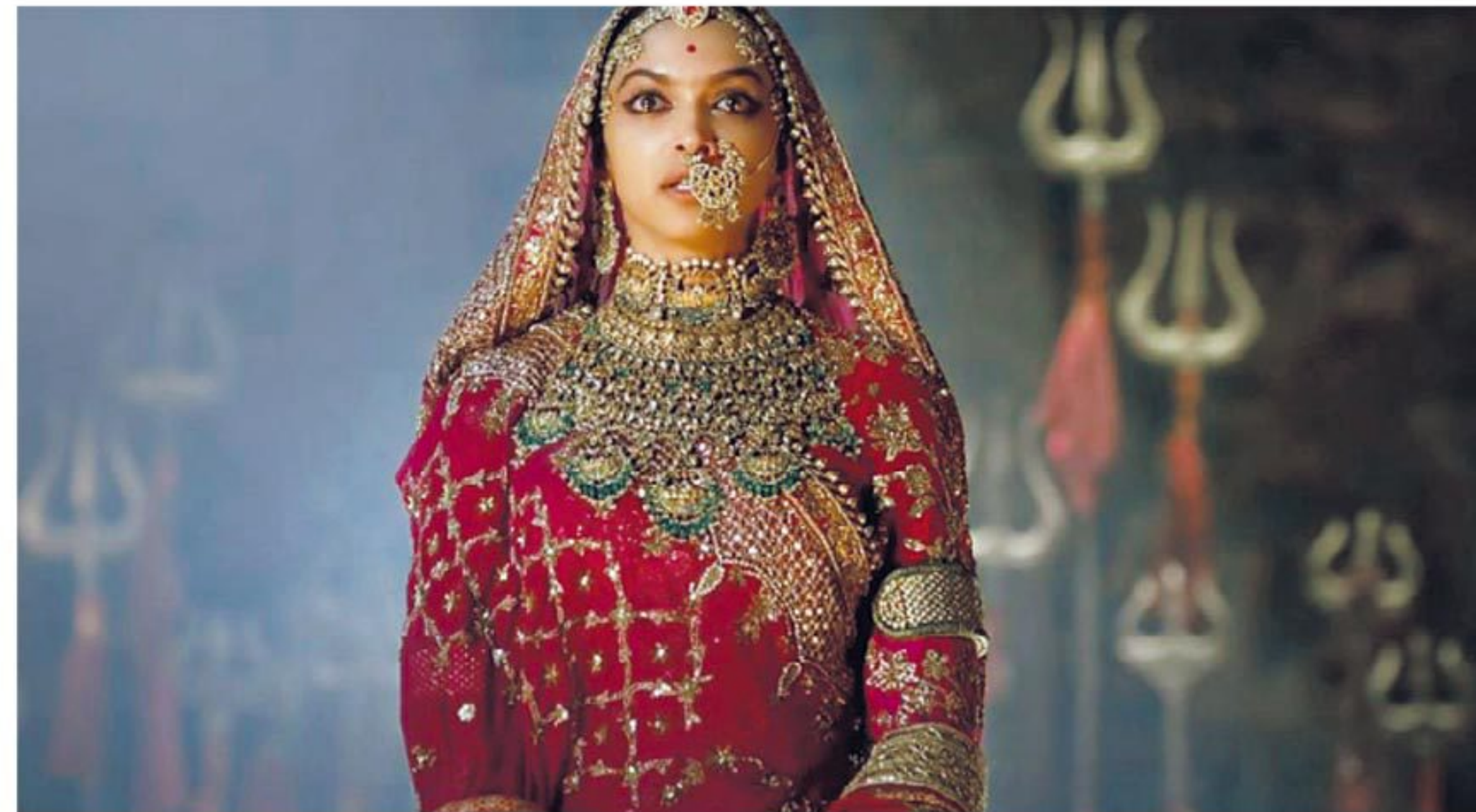
"Someone was unable to conceive, another person's child wasn't landing a job despite all efforts. Someone else's family member was repeatedly falling ill. I call them up later to see if they've managed to incorporate what I suggested and if they are seeing any difference. People facing health challenges get my appointment on priority," says Sinha, who claims she also advises hospitals since "they also want their patients to go back healthy".

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Set dola re

The warm reds in the frames from Gangubai Kathiawadi are as much a result of Neeta Sinha's intuition as Bhansali's vision. Meet the woman who's shaking spirituality with architecture to serve a cocktail of peace and prosperity

HEENA KHANDELWAL AND ANJU MASKERI



A LITTLE over two decades ago, Hindi film writer-director Sanjay Leela Bhansali was working on his ambitious project, Devdas. Mounted on a budget of ₹50 crore, the film found itself mired in one controversy after another. Its producer, diamond merchant Bharat Shah, was jailed for 16 months; crew members died in two separate accidents on the set and some reports said that even a part of the set caught fire on more than one occasion.

Some believed there was more to this tragedy chain than coincidence. Kirron Kher, who was playing Paro's (Aishwarya Rai) mother, suggested that Bhansali meet Neeta Sinha, who believes that just like people, living spaces also have a horoscope, and the individuals who inhabit the place have a relationship with its energy. They prosper when they are in harmony with their environment.

Perhaps short of choices, Bhansali took up Kher on the suggestion and consulted Sinha. She says, thereafter, the movie wrapped

up without any incident. Since then, Sinha has been consulted by Bhansali for every film, including Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela, Padmaavat and the recently released Gangubai Kathiawadi starring Alia Bhatt.

"The film [Devdas] was facing problems, and the actresses were falling ill. I realised that the entry to the set was in the wrong direction. I suggested they block that entry, add some money plants at specif-

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← Neeta Sinha at her Juhu residence. She says it's a myth that vastu demands structural changes. PIC/SHADAB KHAN

ic spots—that drooped downwards—and change the name of the protagonist's home from Paro ka mahal to Paro's haven," recalls Sinha, 62. Since then, Sinha has been called not just to rectify the wrong, but ensure no wrong happens to begin with. "I'm usually on board when they are conceiving the drawing [of the set]. The set designers are respectful

of my suggestions," says Sinha, adding that her ideas can be easily incorporated into their larger vision.

Sinha calls herself an astro architect, who specialises in Vastu Shastra or the ancient India science of architecture that some believe dates back to 6,000 BC.

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↑ Sinha credits Kirron Kher for introducing her to Sanjay Leela Bhansali during the filming of Devdas. PIC/INSTAGRAM