

"I WANT five years for myself. I want to go to Mumbai and see if I have it in me to become a singer. If I'm not successful I'll come back home and take up the usual 9-5 life." It was 22-year-old Arnab Chakraborty trying to convince his father to let him walk towards his dreams. Today we all know him as the voice of Akshay Kumar in movies like *Khakee* and *Family*.

This 1977 born Bengali was inclined towards music since his childhood. Participating in contests and winning them was a routine for him. Little did he realise then that he probably had it in him to make it big in the field of playback singing. Like any other student, he paid more emphasis on academics and pursued singing as 'just another hobby'. Encouragement from well wishers egged him to pursue singing full-time and become a playback singer. "Today music is not just my hobby but my passion," he says with a twinkle in his eye.

Arnab gave his first live performance at 15. With a strong base in Hindustani Classical Music from Gautam Mukherjee and a Diploma in Light Hindustani Vocal under Pandit Achyut Thakur, this Commerce graduate surely knew what lay ahead of him. "The struggle was not easy but life has been kind to me because I humbly accepted every opportunity

without considering it to be big or small," says Arnab when asked about his five year tryst with destiny.

He began with singing jingles for TV commercials like AirTel, Parachute, Samsung, Britannia, 7UP, Vimal Suiting, Asian Paints, Odonil and a host of others. While assisting the music duo Jatini-Lalit, he also recorded many scratch tracks for them. However, the big break came when Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy signed him as one of the singers for the title track of *Yeh Kya Ho Raha Hai*.

The fruit of success was ripening and Arnab struck gold with music director Ram Sampath. Recalling the incident that gave him 'Wada raha' in *Khakee*, he says, "I had recorded the scratch track for this song and it was to be dubbed by a senior artiste. But surprisingly, Ramji decided to retain my voice for the film." The song not only catapulted him to the much awaited and well deserved recognition but also earned him the Zee Cine Award (2005) for Best Male Playback Singer. Arnab's association with his mentor did not stop with *Khakee*. He went on to do three more songs in his next film, *Family*, out of which 'Qatra qatra' and 'Quick bite' went on to become huge

hits. In fact 'qatra qatra' still rules the charts. These two films earned him the title of Akshay Kumar's voice. Working with eminent composers like Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, Ram Sampath, Shantanu Moitra, Salim-Suleiman, Pritam, Raju Singh, Jatini-Lalit, Nikhil-Vinay and many others enriched Arnab with valuable experience and immense exposure. It even fuelled opportunities like working down South with MM Kream for his Telegu movie *Nannamma*. "Working with such great musicians helped my music to mature," he says with humility and gratitude.

Arnab's latest solo Indi-pop album *Naam* on Times Music is reminiscent of his childhood and echoes memories of his beloved Kolkata. The heart-touching lyrics by Amit Singh plays on the tunes of Dony Hazarika's mix of Indian folk music with western beats. Waiting in the wings is Meghna Gulzar's next where his soulful voice brings to life lyrics by the legendary Gulzar. Basking in glory and celebrating the clearance of his five year test of fire, this man is here to stay. **EW**

Arnab Chakraborty's five year tryst with destiny ends in success, glory and fame.

By Neha Ved

Wandering Minstrel

