

Sidhartha Mallya on his mental health journey

He talks about his book on living with OCD, a famous surname, his parent's divorce, and his plans to start a foundation in Bengaluru

BARKHA KUMARI
TEAM METROLIFE

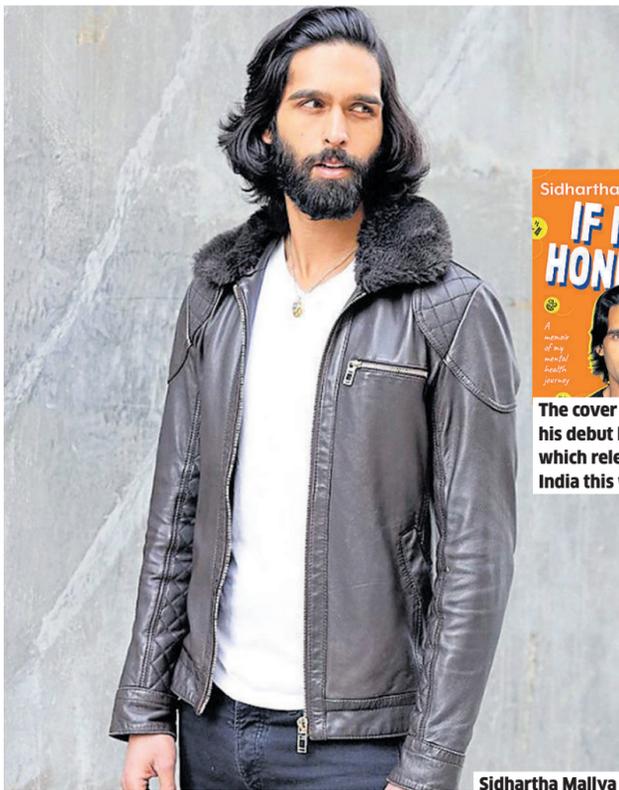
Mental illness doesn't discriminate. It doesn't see rich or poor. Sidhartha Mallya makes that case in 'If I'm Honest', his debut book on his battle with depression. The Indian-American actor and model, who's better known as the son of beleaguered liquor baron Vijay Mallya, started therapy in 2016.

His struggles began with the divorce of his parents, which left him longing for a family and stability in relationships. As an only child of about nine years, he felt lonely and would yearn to stay and play with the kids from his father's new family. At the same time, his father, his hero, grew irritable towards him and their relationship became a rollercoaster.

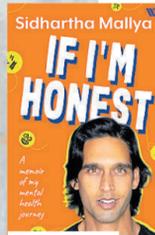
Later, his famous surname would cause him immense guilt. From his nanny to his school teacher and an immigration officer to the press at large, everybody judged him, mocked him because he was a Mallya. So he quit his family business of alcohol to carve his own identity, as an actor. He would also quit alcohol realising it had become an escape from his reality.

Then there was the distressing behaviour he could not shake off. He would avoid cracks on the road to dodge bad luck. He would open and shut the door 'even' number of times, again to avoid bad luck.

He would wash hands and feet 20 times to escape god's wrath. He would call up friends to confirm he hadn't hurt anybody in a drunken state. He had Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), he would later learn.



Sidhartha Mallya



The cover of his debut book, which released in India this week

HELPING HAND

Diving deep into the past has triggered some of Sidhartha's OCD and he is back on anti-depressants, he admits over a Zoom call from his apartment in California. "But it was my choice. If by talking about my mental health journey, I could help even one other person, it would be worthwhile," the 34-year-old reflects on his decision.

His honesty has struck a chord already. "After seeing one of my interviews about the book, a woman messaged on Instagram to say her soon-to-be ex-husband and his family have apologised for the emotional trauma they have caused her. That's the closure she needed, she wrote."

Or, sample these: "Someone who used to work for my father messaged saying, she would see me engage in obsessive behaviour as a kid but wasn't aware it was because of OCD. Another messaged that he could see the demons (of the divorce) from afar and he's glad I have

come through it."

His family WhatsApp group from his mother's side is also abuzz with congratulatory messages. His dad has so far sent him a photo posing with the book.

On the other hand, his book has been dubbed as a PR stunt to reclaim his image and that of his father, who's facing extradition from the UK for financial crimes in India. "It was a one-off question, probably for a platform that likes to give readers a bit of masala (news)," Sidhartha says. He was disappointed with the question because it digressed from the important topic of mental health and seeking help.

Moreover, it was untrue, he says. The book is an extension of coNSIDER This, an Instagram video series he started last year to talk about his struggles with loneliness, guilt and OCD, why he quit alcohol, and how he deals with online abuse (like 'I hope your family dies').

The series has clocked more than a million views and Sidhartha "screen-

shots" all the messages he gets and responds to as many as he can.

PRESS TROUBLES

Sidhartha didn't quite enjoy his time in India, when he was here to learn the ropes of his family business UB Group and to work for the Royal Challengers Bangalore IPL cricket team. This was partly because of the media, which splashed him on the GQ cover but also wrote vindictive stuff and rumours, like he flew to Tanzania to select a specific diamond for an engagement ring. The scrutiny took a toll on his mental health, he writes in his memoir.

This got us thinking about the vilification Aryan Khan has been subjected to in the drugs raid case by a certain section of the media, because he is Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan's son. "This happens all over the world," Sidhartha says and draws the example of Prince Harry who was caught smoking marijuana at age 16.

"He was a child, he made a mistake and he should have been punished accordingly. But newspapers wrote things like 'The future king of England caught smoking marijuana', some called him 'Harry Pothead'. Later, we saw him step back from public life because of mental health. We forgot that at age 12, he had to follow his mother's coffin in front of the world. People did not give him the empathy he deserved (to process the loss)."

Sometimes media can be as bad as trolls on the Internet, he points and urges them to be responsible.

PLANS FOR BENGALURU

Sidhartha is in a better mental health space today, in that his therapy sessions have come down to once a month. He practices transcendental meditation twice a day and is glad his mum has taken it up too. He runs around his neighbourhood and loves going out for coffee and conversations.

The actor, who was seen in 2016 English-language sex comedy 'Brahman Naman', had more projects but then came the Covid. It also put on hold his plan to start a social foundation in Bengaluru, where his family empire is headquartered. He had envisioned it as a center to help people quit drinking but "now I am inclined to turn into a foundation for OCD awareness," he says.

'If I'm Honest' by Westland Publications is available for Rs 350



Nakul Abhyankar

Krishna and Milana fell in love with 'Ide Swarga': Nakul Abhyankar

The song from 'Love Mocktail 2' was initially composed as a single

TINI SARA ANIEN
TEAM METROLIFE

Composer and singer Nakul Abhyankar is in the spotlight for his latest creation, 'Ide Swarga', from Kannada film 'Love Mocktail 2'. The film featuring Darling Krishna has been appreciated for its noticeable tracks. Abhyankar has composed all songs in the film.

He has worked with A R Rahman for the music of Tamil film 'Sarkar' and Hindi web series 'Tandav', among others.

In a freewheeling chat with *MetroLife*, he reveals more about the process and his journey so far.

How was the experience of working on 'Ide Swarga' for 'Love Mocktail 2'? 'Ide Swarga' was one of my and the team's favourite songs. I had initially composed the song as a single, which I wanted to release in multiple languages.

Krishna and Milana were asking me about my compositions and as soon as they heard this song, they fell in love with it. Raghavendra Kamath wrote wonderful lyrics for the piece, which has turned out well. Sanjith Hegde has done a great job singing it.

Having crooned two songs for the first part, how was it to work with the same team for 'Love Mocktail 2'?

Both Krishna and Milana have exceptional taste in filmmaking and the music which should represent their film. I could see that clarity in their mind right from the beginning. They sureshot know what they want.

It was easy to work with the team. In

BOTH KRISHNA AND MILANA HAVE EXCEPTIONAL TASTE IN FILMMAKING AND THE MUSIC WHICH SHOULD REPRESENT THEIR FILM

NAKUL ABHYANKAR

the first part, I sang two songs and programmed and arranged background score under Raghav Dixit. In the second part, the entire responsibility came on my shoulders. I was very excited as I could relate to the story well.

Honestly speaking, Milana could have opted for anyone else. I think they chose me because I knew the brand well.

How many Kannada films have you worked in? How has the experience been?

I've composed for films 'Kannada Gothila', 'Bicchugathi', 'One Cut Two Cut' and 'Love Mocktail 2'. There are a lot of people coming up with new scripts in the Kannada film industry. They have innovative ideas. Better team and financial support is needed to execute the film and I can see that happening in pockets.

You have received recognition worldwide for singing in the Hindi, Tamil and Telugu versions of 'Frozen 2'. How was it to work with Disney?

Disney was a dream come true. All of a sudden, I got a call for auditions. Even before I could release anything, the recordings happened. After the recording, when I was sitting relaxed at home one day, I reflected on my work and that's when it really hit me.

Every day I would go to the studio and there were so many versions to be worked with. Listening to the original English number and trying to recreate them in our native languages was a different journey. The way words are stressed and pronounced in English is very different (sic).

What challenges have you faced while singing in different languages? When I was new in Chennai, I didn't know anything about Tamil. I took around six hours to record my first Tamil song, because I had to understand how to pronounce and mean what I was singing. Now I can manage Tamil, Telugu, and even Malayalam with proper guidance.

Who does Nakul love being more – singer or composer?

I love being both. However, I am a bit lenient towards composing as I love taking up responsibilities and composing tunes. Once I come up with a tune, I make my wife listen to it.

There are infinite ways to make a tune, but to make and strike the right chord of emotion can be hard.

Sci-fi films teach us lessons about loneliness

They underline the value of human warmth, and show us why we should live like one big family

ANIRUDH

In 'A Kind of a Stopwatch', one of the episodes of 'The Twilight Zone' series (1963), a man is given a stopwatch. It can stop time for everyone and everything, except for the one who owns it. The man uses it to rob a bank. While carrying out bundles and bundles of cash, he accidentally drops and breaks it. Everything in the world comes to a standstill forever. He



Gravity

is shocked and runs around in panic, but in vain. We then hear a closing narration, "The man had a gift of time. He used it and he misused it."

With no one around, no one to love or talk or to be with, what would he do with so much cash?

Suddenly the value of cash, the importance of being rich, richer, and richest becomes completely meaningless. So what is more important? Cash or people? If the answer is 'people', then why do we always try one-upmanship? We always want to prove

that we are superior and go to any extent to assert it. We fight battles and wars and divide ourselves into rival groups. Tomorrow, if humans, who rule the earth, become extinct, you can be sure they are themselves the cause.

This terrifying thought reminds me of the story of the demon Bhasmasura from the 'Puranas'. The demon is granted the power to turn anyone's head into ashes with a mere touch of his hand. Mohini, Vishnu's female avatar, tricks him into touching his own head. Human fate could be similar if we are so bent on destruction. Astronauts are stranded in space and there is absolutely no one else, no sounds whatsoever in the

science fiction film 'Gravity' (2013).

Terrifying loneliness is something you experience with the astronauts. When they return to planet earth, we start to hear different sounds. The sounds are so soothing. You feel comfortable hearing them. You are home finally.

When you see the audience walking out of the hall after watching the film, you feel a tremendous connection with them. You don't want to notice or observe their colour or race, caste or religion. You realise the meaning of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', that we are all one big family. (The author is an actor, writer, singer and director)

RUNA RAY

The United Nations has declared 2021-2030 a Decade of Ocean Action, calling on us to use our water resources responsibly. And the fashion industry has a significant role to play to foster what is now being called blue economy – the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth.

Fashion as an industry has been linked to the water bodies since 2600 BC, when dyeing was first introduced. It would later be used to decorate skin, jewellery and clothing.

Originally, dyes were made by mixing natural pigments with water and oil. Different colours often signified different geographical locations because they were extracted from locally-available plants, insects or sea life.

But today 90% of our clothing is dyed synthetically. It is estimated that over 10,000 different dyes and pigments are used industrially and over 735 tons of such dyes are produced annually worldwide. The WHO estimates that 20% of industrial water pollu-

Solutions to dye for

According to WHO, 20% of industrial water pollution happens because of textile manufacturing



Runa Ray

tion comes from textile manufacturing, which releases dyes and other chemicals into waterways in manufacturing countries and puts the local wildlife and human communities at risk.

Up to 2,00,000 tons of dyes are lost to effluents every year during the dyeing and finishing operations due to inefficiencies.

Unfortunately, most of these dyes escape conventional wastewater treatment processes and persist in the environment. The wastewater from textile plants is classified as the most polluting of

all the industrial sectors. More worryingly, some dyes are highly toxic and mutagenic. They also decrease light penetration and photosynthetic activity, causing oxygen deficiency and hindering downstream uses such as recreation, drinking water and irrigation.

Workers working with these chemicals are not always given adequate safety protection, exposing them to diseases.

Alternatives aplenty I believe the fashion industry can solve the problem of commercial synthetic dyeing by going local, decentralising the process, and using plant-based dyes and their derivatives.

It was for the United Nations that I was inspired. **This outfit has been dyed with turmeric and rust.**



This collection by Runa Ray makes use of chlorophyll as a natural dye. It was unveiled at the New York Fashion Week in 2018.

tions Ocean Conference 2020 that I examined the processes behind dyeing and looked for innovative solutions that could mitigate water wastage, pollution and health hazards.

The idea was to engage industry stakeholders and designers to understand that nature-based solutions held in them answers, if one had to contribute towards saving our seas.

Several innovations in this area are bringing back an-

cient roots such as the Indian Madder, and Turmeric. Fungi are also cultivated for earthy hues like yellow, brown, burnt sienna and orange.

I have often experimented with natural dyes and inks, mostly extracted from petals and leaves. It was interesting to see that some hues obtained from a particular flower differ from the original colour.

For example, the red hibis-

cus gives a black hue when extracted by boiling while the rosy periwinkle turns indigo. Certain barks exhibit yellow and orange while some leaves turn up the blue colour.

Let's talk about chlorophyll. It is a natural pigment and has the ability to bond onto natural fabrics, which is why grass stains are so difficult to remove from your linen pants after a walk in the park or when you accidentally slide down a grass patch.

Another innovative printing process is one where objects are placed on the photosensitive fabric coated with chlorophyll. By using the light and energy of the sun, the shadow or image of the object is transferred and printed directly on the fabric. This method can also be used to create a negative or positive of an image on the fabric.

It contains no added fixers or chemicals. Water used in the process is minimal, used only as a solvent for the chlorophyll inks to coat the fabric.

Such techniques harboured by scientists and indigenous people allow us to create clothes sustainably. My

own experiments with design and science-based solutions have blurred the lines between fashion and biology. As an environmentalist, I have realised that every atom is interlinked. And it is only when we respect nature that we can connect the dots.

At this point, I am reminded of the collection I had done for my college graduation. The inspiration was the life cycle of a salmon fish, one that begins at the spawning grounds and moves into estuaries and blinding oceans.

As we enter the Ocean decade of innovation and sustainability in 2021, I watch the salmon while it jostles, twists and dances, migrating through the foamy waves to meet its ancient spawning grounds that have seen the sun rise for over 6 million years.

And I can't help but wonder about the universal truth that binds us, the law of the universe, the law that permeates and creates life, the invisible law that we must heed.

The law, if we only understand, then we can see. (The writer is a fashion designer)