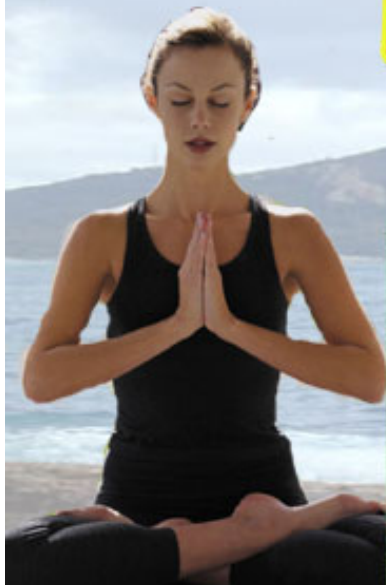


# LIFE STYLE



## LIFE STYLE

### Conversations with American Indian Actor- Pooja Kumar



Pooja Kumar represents the new age acting professional from American India. She has been in front of the camera both in the US and India. She was last seen in Flavors as one of the central characters in the popular film. Pooja's next feature, Night of Henna, has hit the big screen last week and promises to further showcase the acting talent of this young performer. For sheer acting talent, Pooja is one of the highest rated, if not the highest rated actors in the Indian American scene.

**Q. Pooja, a little about your creative journey till date?**

A. I began doing plays and musicals while growing up, but never thought of it as a career. I was Miss India USA and the doors to the entertainment world began to open. I was chosen among 40,000 participants to be launched in feature films by Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Limited and they put me through vigorous training. Acting with Roshan Taneja, dancing, and learning how to read and write Hindi. It was a life changing experience because the techniques I learned in India were a little different than here. I then did a Tamil film called Kaadhla Rojave, I hosted the

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pre-show at the Miss World in Bangalore, India and then I began to Veejay for Channel V's show "BPL Oye". I did commercial campaigns for Cadbury's, Pepsi, and Arun Ice Cream. After being in India for 1 1/2 years I decided to come back to the states and do projects here. I moved to NY attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and began going out on auditions. My film "Flavors" released last year which was loved by audiences all over the world.

**Q. What's up with you currently and what's coming up?**

A. I have been hosting a show called "Movies for the ImaginAsian" which is on IATV. I introduce Japanese, Chinese, Bollywood movies to the younger generation. It's a great show for the second generation to watch to get them engrossed in these movies. I just finished shooting a short film for Mira Nair's niece, Saira Nair. That will be coming out fairly soon.

**Q. Tell us a little about your formative years?**

A. I was born and brought up in St. Louis, Missouri and graduated from Washington University in political science and finance. My ties to India are extremely close because my parents took us to India every year. My mom was from Lucknow and my dad is from Dehra Dun. We are Mathur's from Uttar Pradesh and most people do not know who Mathurs are. They are Hindi speaking North Indians who were the administrators during the Mogul era. I would go to India during my summer vacations and learn Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi, and Kathak. While growing up my mom would choreograph dances and we would have full fledged productions during Holi and Diwali time. Our dances had sets, props, and costumes from India so I have been making mini movies all my life. I always loved the arts and knew I would be involved in it some way. My mom was always very supportive and she always wanted my brother and I to strive for excellence in anything that we did. My first play was in the fifth grade and I performed "Taming of the Shrew" and played Petruccio. My teacher asked me if I would be okay with playing a man since there weren't enough guys auditioning for the play. A mustache and a hat later, I was rehearsing for a Shakespeare play.

**Q. Tell us a little about "Night of Henna?"**

A. "Night of Henna" is about a girl who comes back from Pakistan and wants to continue to study and have a career. However her parents have arranged her marriage and she is caught between her own aspirations and abiding by her parent's wishes. This is the director's first film and he has written, produced and directed it. I'm very excited about this film because there are few South Asian films that talk about the woman's perspective. This story has to do with love and respecting your family. The character I play was born in the U.S. but was sent back to Pakistan so that she would not be influenced by the American teenage life. It was hard to play this character because I am not from a South Asian country and have never been brought up in a strict household. Hassanji and I worked towards making this character real and for the audience to go home and fall in love with this girl. With my family being from Lucknow, it helped quite a bit because I can speak and understand Urdu.

**Q. What part can the South Asian Americans play in this creative journey?**

A. We can make a difference by going to the theatre opening weekend. We can continue to write good stories from our own experiences. We can promote South Asian films by word of mouth. We can produce our own projects. There are so many things we can do to make South Asian actors part of the U.S. landscape, so let's start now!!!! I believe as Indians we have such a love for our county and for our people that the support system we have is insurmountable

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