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# *Into the*

## *A Spotlight on a Worthy Cause*

For a few years now, Fagun has been an international spokesperson for SAHARA, South Asian Helpline And Referral Agency, [<http://saharaorg.org/>] a nonprofit organization that helps women of domestic violence. Fagun became involved with SAHARA after doing a movie in which she played a woman beaten and killed by her husband. "I wanted to raise awareness to women. We support women who are in this situation. We educate them. We empower them. We give them a home."

# Limelight

*While on the road to medicine,*

Words by Vanessa Pascale

*Fagun Thakrar experienced a twist of fate*

British actress Fagun Thakar is looking forward to spending more time stateside, particularly Los Angeles and New York, for a number of projects this year. (At the time of our interview, late October of last year, she was living in London.) The 5'6" exotic beauty is dressed warmly in a comfy vanilla-hued turtleneck placed beneath a light pink sweater. Her long, dark, voluminous hair falls loosely around her shoulders. We are in a deserted bar inside Dream Midtown NYC.

Fagun is in town doing press for the historical drama, *Bhopal: A Prayer For Rain*, starring Martin Sheen, Kal Penn, and Mischa Barton, inspired by the world's worst industrial disaster that killed over 10,000 people in 1984 and has affected up to half a million people to this day, she tells me. In the film, Fagun plays the fictional character, Rekha. "You know that *National Geographic* image of the girl with the green eyes?" Fagun asks in her British accent. "It's loosely based on that, 'cause it's around the same time... Her husband works in this Union Carbide, and is the first one to die. And you see how Rekha's life changes dramatically... Everything is watched through her eyes." Being that Fagun is a relative newcomer to the industry, filming this movie was a "wonderful experience" for her, since she was onset for the entire shoot surrounded by "senior actors." "To work with people like Martin Sheen, watching him perform take after take, you learn so much by watching someone like that."

Before her foray into acting, Fagun was headed in a much different direction. After graduating high school, the England-born actress moved to London to study medicine at University College London. "I always wanted to act. Always. But I was really good at science. I was on a plane one day, I was about 16, and they were like, 'We need some help! Is there a doctor?' I thought: I wish I could help. It kind of made me realize that I'm good at sciences and I like helping people, so why don't I just do medicine, right? And so I did it. I was good at it... I always wanted to become an actor, but as a child I couldn't go and study that officially because of my parents..."

Then fate stepped in. Her friend told her about the BBC putting out a nationwide casting call in search of new acting talent through their TV show, *BBC Bolly Idol*, (modeled after *American Idol*) and on a whim,

Fagun auditioned. "I just auditioned thinking: I'll never get in..." While in the spotlight, the audience fell in love with her. "I just kept getting nominated and nominated." Against all odds, she won the competition and was presented with the golden opportunity to sing and dance in a show that toured all over the United Kingdom. She took to the limelight with such great ease, it became even more evident that this is what Fagun was born to do.



## **What is the best part about acting?**

"When I'm doing either stage or a movie, it's being in the moment of a different character you normally aren't. Put that hat on, be that person, and come home, take it off and be yourself. Like when I was doing Cleopatra, there were so many things I could do that I would never do as Fagun."

To sate everyone's wishes, Fagun pursued acting and medicine simultaneously. She dove into portraying "strong women" like Cleopatra, Lady MacBeth, and Miss Julie on London's West End Stage. While studying acting at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (the equivalent of Julliard), she took on a hefty course load toward her medical degree. And then another serendipitous opportunity came along. "I was at school doing A-levels: biology, chemistry, math, sociology. All these subjects... more than average, so I had a lot of exams going on at the same time... The biggest news channel in London came and did a segment on me 'cause they were like, 'Oh, how interesting, you have all these subjects,'" she explains.

A film director saw the news broadcast and called her in to audition for him. This fateful incident resulted in her first film job.

Fagun appeared in the first British Bollywood movie in the UK, comprised entirely of British cast members, she tells me, and went on to appear in a number of other UK-based movies. This year, Fagun stars in *Basmati Blues*, alongside Donald Sutherland, Scott Bakula and Brie Larson. "It's about genetic-modified rice. I'm actually an editor-in-chief — your character! — of this huge made-up magazine in India. I make Brie Larson's character's life complete hell when she comes over. She comes over to do good stuff. I'm Team Farmers and I want it to be the new revolution of the rice, so I'm for that, so I play a complete bitch in that. Very high fashion," she says with a smile.

Fashion is another one of Fagun's passions. She would design her own clothing and handbags as she was growing up. While out and about, people would stop her to ask where she bought her purse, and she would reveal that it was her own creation. There was such a demand for her unique handbags that she decided to create her own line, The Fagun Collection. She pulls out her laptop to show me some samples. "It's so intricate the design. They're full of Swarovskis," she says as she scrolls through the images. "I've had people wearing it to the Oscars, Cannes Film Festival." She points to a photo of Serena Williams carrying her purse at the Oscars. "I actually have a waiting list of three months now. My new collection is to-die-for. This Princess from Dubai was like, 'I really like that but can I have it in real diamonds?' so I made her a whole purse in real diamonds." How much did that cost? I ask. "A lot of money actually."

Just as multi-faceted and brilliant as the diamonds on the purse designed for the princess, it's crystal clear that Fagun will continue to shine just as brightly. Watch for this star on the rise. **ML**

For more on Fagun, visit <http://fagun.net/> and [www.faguncollection.com](http://www.faguncollection.com)  
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