



Miss Japan Priyanka Yoshikawa can kick your butt and talk to elephants

She's the first half Indian to win Miss Japan but that's just one side of her.



When she was crowned Miss Japan last year, Priyanka Yoshikawa found herself in the midst of a debate that has gripped the island nation for some time now: What exactly does it mean to be Japanese? In September 2016, the 23-year-old became only the second 'hafu' in as many years to win a Japanese beauty pageant.

Hafu is Japanese for 'half' that denotes someone who is ethnically half Japanese. The previous year, Ariana Miyamoto, who was born to a Japanese mother and an African American father, won Miss Universe Japan. Miyamoto's victory had triggered a debate in Japan over 'lack of purity' and whether racial purity had any relevance at all in the globalised world that we live in. Priyanka's win (albeit in Miss World Japan) reignited that debate.

By official estimates, only two per cent of Japanese are of mixed ethnicity, making people like Priyanka stand out. "But standing out too often is never a good thing," she tells GQ over the phone from Tokyo. "There was a lot of curiosity (about me) among my friends at school. But contending with two cultures when everyone else is so homogenous is hard to adjust to. So I did have a few hard times," she says.

Born in the Japanese capital, Priyanka lived for three years in Sacramento, California and for a year in Kolkata before returning to Japan. Her father, Arun Ghosh, is Indian. His grandfather – Priyanka's great-grandfather – was the leader and West Bengal's first Chief Minister, Prafulla Chandra Ghosh. And while Priyanka is proud of her multi-ethnic roots, she often finds herself reminding her peers and reporters that she is, in fact, Japanese.

Even though she says that all the 31 finalists were equally strong contenders for the title, it wasn't as if Priyanka didn't expect to win. She says she practised her victory speech over 30 times, picturing her winning moment. "The hall where the finals happened is a very famous one and I had been there on other occasions. So at night, I would keep imagining what it would feel like to be standing in the centre of it and delivering my victory speech," she says.

Expectedly, Priyanka Yoshikawa is hoping to make inroads in Bollywood. She was in India in June and will be here again this month to find work. It seems like a natural progression for someone who grew up on a staple diet of Bollywood films. Ask her to name her favourite Bollywood movie and the choice is easy enough: "Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham," she says without second thought.

But it isn't Shah Rukh Khan or Hrithik Roshan that she is a fan of but rather Varun Dhawan. "I really like his movies, and I especially loved Dilwale. His movies are the kind that have good action, but also have a romantic storyline.

That's the kind of movie I'd like to do," she says. Which makes complete sense because she also happens to be a freaking kick boxer!

Later this year, Priyanka is scheduled to attend the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics Forum in Assam, not in the capacity of a pageant winner (or indeed a kick boxer) but rather as a certified elephant trainer. Turns out Priyanka's childhood dream of having an elephant as a pet led her to pursue elephant conservation.

So what else does she plan to do when she arrives in India next? "Play authentic Holi here and attend a big fat Indian wedding complete with song and dance." And what better place where the two come together in India than Bollywood?

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