

The Art of Storytelling: Farhan Akhtar Shares His Journey at WAVES 2025

Farhan Akhtar reflects on storytelling, self-belief, and evolving with the craft

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Acclaimed filmmaker, actor and writer Farhan Akhtar took centre stage at WAVES 2025 in a masterclass titled "The Craft of Direction", moderated by Gaurav Kapur. The session offered an intimate glimpse into Akhtar's journey as a storyteller, exploring the evolution of cinema, the challenges of direction, and the need for authenticity in filmmaking.

Opening the conversation, Farhan called WAVES "a very empowering event" and reflected on his creative roots. When asked whether he preferred any particular facet of his multifaceted career from singing and acting to directing, he likened it to "choosing a favourite child," acknowledging that while there may be a quiet preference, every role carries its own joy.

Revisiting the making of *Dil Chahta Hai*, a film that redefined contemporary Hindi cinema, Farhan said, "I wanted to write something real, about friendship, about people like us. You shouldn't imitate others. Audiences can sense when something lacks integrity." He credited honesty and empathy as essential traits for any writer, encouraging young creators to stay focused and embrace setbacks as part of the journey."

The session was filled with anecdotes, from the difficulties of casting his debut film to the use of sync sound, which was a new experience for most of the actors in the film. "They were used to dubbing. Sync sound made them nervous," he said, emphasizing the importance of adapting to new technology in filmmaking.

Talking about *Lakshya*, Farhan described the physical and emotional toll of shooting in Ladakh and the heartbreak of discovering technical issues post-filming. "We had to go back. But when we did, we got some of the most stunning shots," he recalled, adding, "Everything happens for a reason."

On *Don*, he shared how the idea came while listening to the original score on a train ride. The challenge was not remaking the film, but reimagining it. "What new meaning could I give to *Don ko pakadna mushkil hi nahi...*? That was the real test." He said he wrote the film with Shah Rukh Khan in mind, noting that he himself was a big fan of the original.

He spoke fondly of his father Javed Akhtar and sister Zoya Akhtar, both key sounding boards for his scripts. "My dad is the most brutal. He'll just ask, 'Why are you making this?'" When asked about his father's favourites, Farhan mentioned *Dil Chahta Hai* and *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* among others.

Recalling his transformation for *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, he said it was Milkha Singh's spirit that inspired him. "Milkha ji wanted the story to tell the next generation to work hard and focus on skill. That energy pushed all of us."

To a packed audience, Farhan's advice was clear and resonant: "Don't be a character in someone else's story. Write your own. And never underestimate the value of discipline."

The session ended with questions from the audience, rounding off an engaging, honest, and inspiring masterclass that celebrated not just cinema, but the courage it takes to carve one's own path.

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