BBC

BY **VIVEK VERMA**
PHOTOGRAPHS **ABHISHEK ANUPAM**

INTERVIEW

Abhishek Anupam

Raised in Eastern India during the liberalised 90s, Abhishek grew up on comics, cricket, and classic rock. He discovered photography during engineering, thanks to his brother's camera, sparking a lifelong passion that later extended to documentary filmmaking. Trained at the University for the Creative Arts, UK, his work now explores themes of power, representation, and identity.

I. Your early work focused on questioning the medium of photography, while recent work explores themes like power, representation, and identity. How did this shift occur, and what inspired it?

I think my training as an engineer shaped me to approach things analytically. So when I moved into the arts—and photography in particular—I was trying to understand the medium itself, almost as a way to develop a personal philosophy. One that could guide how I think about the act of seeing and making images. My early projects, Banality and Banal Reflections, were part of that inquiry. They were essentially asking: *What is an image?*

Around 2019, there was a radical shift in my personal politics. Engaging deeply with the work of thinkers like Noam Chomsky, Arundhati Roy, and Ramachandra Guha helped shape a clearer understanding of how society functions—who holds power, who gets to represent whom, and where each of us stands within those structures. That shift naturally began to reflect in my work, moving from medium-specific questions to more thematic explorations of power, representation, and identity.

II. You pursued an MA in Photography at the University for the Creative Arts, UK, which must have significantly shaped your artistic journey. In an era of abundant online learning resources, how does a traditional photography education remain relevant?

While online resources today offer incredible access and speed, the real challenge isn't access—it's curation. There's an overwhelming volume of content, but developing a discerning eye, a sense of taste, takes time and structured guidance. That's where traditional education still holds relevance.

III. How did this experience in the UK enhance your growth as an artist and enrich your creative perspective?

The course structure at UCA gave me the freedom to choose my direction, to form opinions, and—importantly—to question them. It encouraged a culture of self-reflection and critical thinking, which was new to me at the time. I wasn't just learning how to make images—I was being asked why I wanted to make them, for

whom, and to what end. That kind of intellectual rigor, paired with the support of some phenomenal mentors, expanded my understanding of what photography could be—not just as a medium, but as a tool to engage with the world.

IV. Can you tell us about the "Re-imagining the Family Portrait Residency"? What was it about, and how has it shaped your creative process or added new dimensions to your work?

It was a month well spent in Chennai. The residency brought together artists from across the Indian subcontinent, and we were collectively reimagining what a modern family portrait could look like. Through this, we explored questions of identity, belonging, and the evolving idea of 'family' in contemporary contexts.

For me, the most valuable part was learning from my peers. Being part of a space where people genuinely want to engage with your ideas—and offer theirs in return—is rare and incredibly enriching. That kind of exchange sharpens your thinking and deepens your own perspective. It reaffirmed how collaborative processes can be as creatively nourishing as the outcomes themselves.

V. How do you approach building connections or securing projects with renowned brands and companies like Google, BBC, and Decathlon?

A: For me, it's always started with reaching out. The tools keep evolving—when I began, cold emails still led to meetings if the message carried genuine character. Today, social media often plays that role. What remains consistent is the need to consider the recipient—what they might appreciate, what would resonate with them.

One connection often leads to another—a reference, a recommendation. Persistence plays a huge part. Knowing people helps, of course, but for the rest of us, it comes down to consistently showing up with your work. That's how I got my foot in the door. Beyond that, it's about client servicing and relationship building —making sure you continue to deliver your best, not just once, but over time.

VI: What role does storytelling play in your lifestyle photography, and how do you ensure authenticity in your images?

A: Lifestyle photography is perhaps the most enjoyable kind of commercial assignment I've worked on. It gives you the opportunity to create images from the ground up—there's a brand context, of course, and specific business objectives to fulfil, but within that, the creative challenge is to find moments that evoke a feeling—aspirational or functional, depending on the brief.

Authenticity, for me, is a by-product of an honest approach. It comes through when the composition, lighting, model positioning, and expressions are all thoughtfully considered—but also when the intent behind them is grounded. A lot depends on the worldview the photographer brings to the work. Contextual research plays a huge role. For example, shooting for IndiaFirst Life Insurance made perfect sense to me—I could imagine myself or people I know in those situations. But I couldn't quite imagine myself as Shobhaa De at the Taj Colaba. So, for me, authenticity lies in recognising where your perspective aligns with the narrative, and making creative decisions that reflect that alignment.

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VII. Running a media and branding communication agency in Mumbai while pursuing independent photography is no small feat. How do you manage these dual roles effectively?

Honestly, it's a necessity. I do feel that the number of commercial photography jobs in the market is shrinking, and making a reasonable living in an expensive city like Mumbai requires multiple income streams.

Fortunately, neither of my commitments is full-time in a conventional sense, which gives me the flexibility to take three or four days off for shoots and manage post-production when assignments come in. It's a bit of a juggle, but I've found a rhythm that works, where both practices feed into each other in unexpected ways.

VIII. Are there any new societal themes or visual narratives you're particularly excited to explore in the coming years?

I hope to create more work that helps me understand how systems function—while also critiquing their design. No system is perfect, and while refinement takes time, it's essential that we keep asking questions. That's how we build more resilient structures.

In that sense, I often look back at photography's history as a political tool. I'd like to continue that legacy—exploring the nature of the society we live in: its hierarchies, its victories and failures. Hopefully, future projects will reflect deeper inquiries into these questions.

IX. What advice would you give to aspiring photographers trying to navigate the balance between artistic growth and commercial success?

There's no sugar-coating it—it's hard. And it's become increasingly harder since the time I first made my way into this space. While the ideal scenario is to have commercial success grow out of artistic development, in the early stages of one's career, the two can feel mutually exclusive.

It's crucial to ensure you have a stable source of income. And that doesn't necessarily have to come from within the photography industry. What's important is to continue creating work and gradually finding your voice. In my case, as my professional practice evolved, I began getting hired for the kind of work I had already done. That's a double-edged sword—it helps to be known for something, but it also risks you being boxed in. That's why making personal work, free from a client's brief or expectations, is essential. It's the clearest route to both artistic growth and, eventually, the kind of commercial success that feels aligned with your vision.

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X. Reflecting on your journey, is there a particular project, client, or recognition that stands out as a defining moment in your career?

Working with Mirchi Komachi was probably the most fun I've had on a project. Yoshiko, who runs the brand, creates funky Indian streetwear with a distinct personality, and our creative wavelengths matched from the start. It felt like we were just running around the streets of Versova in Mumbai, chasing ideas inspired by Kiki's Delivery Service, the Studio Ghibli film.
There was a sense of freedom in that shoot—playful, instinctive, and full of energy. It reminded me how powerful a project can be when both client and creator are equally invested in the imagination behind it. That spirit has stayed with me.