

It is all about the money, honey! Stars, Spills and 'Mausam'!

Award shows on TV? A seamless spectacle of stars, emotions, and dazzling performances. Award shows in real life? A survival challenge featuring overpriced snacks, questionable scripting, and the eternal struggle to spot celebrities from the nosebleed section. Welcome to the unedited version of IIFA 2025!



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It was my first time attending IIFA Live. Naturally, I was excited, and not just because of the glitz and glamour that Bollywood promises. This was my chance to see what really happens behind the scenes, the awkward pauses, the misplaced jokes, the reality of

A Seat with a View (Sort of...)

My seat was not exactly in the front row, which was naturally reserved for the stars, the sponsors, and the who's who of Bollywood. But hey, at least I wasn't complaining, yet. If I squinted hard enough (which I did a lot that night), I could see the actors on stage, though from my vantage point, they resembled well-dressed ants performing elaborate gestures. Thankfully, giant screens were placed all around the venue, ensuring that even those of us sitting lightyears away from the celebrities could still feel like we were part of the action. I looked around and saw a sea of people stretched as far as the eyes could see in all directions. Why? Well, it is IIFA after all, and then, it was a Saturday.



Abu Dhabi. According to her, the Abu Dhabi venue had better seating arrangements, but Jaipur had the more extravagant stage design. (Rajasthan 1 - Abu Dhabi 0). Then, the show began...

Boman Irani and the Great Lip-Sync Disaster



The opening act was hosted by the ever-charismatic Boman Irani, who welcomed everyone with his signature wit. But then came the first unforgettable moment of the evening, one that would have me questioning the laws of sound and logic for the rest of the night.

A group of talented actors, Boman Irani, Nushratt Bharucha, Aparshakti Khurana, Vijay Varma, Jaideep Ahlawat, and Nimrat Kaur, gathered to recite a poetic tribute to Rajasthan. Sounds beautiful, right? Except that there was one small issue, the recitation had been pre-recorded. So, instead of a live per-

formance, the audience watched as these actors lip-synced to their own voices, much like playback singers (the concept overplayed, don't you think?). At one point, Nushratt Bharucha forgot to switch off her microphone, leading to an unintended horror movie moment. As the pre-recorded poem played, her actual voice whispered along with it, creating an eerie, spooky echo effect. If the intent was to recreate a scene from *The Conjuring*, they succeeded. The question that lingered in my mind (and the minds of many), "Why not just recite the poem normally?" It remains one of Bollywood's great unsolved mysteries.



Sambha... ! Kitney Aadmi they!!!!

#IIFA

The 'Gajgami Walk' Contest

If the *mausam* moment was unexpectedly hilarious, what happened next was deliberately absurd, and then parking herself in front of the television to soak in every extravagant, emotional, and star-studded moment. For the first time, I could give her an unfiltered, real-time report, before the editors worked their magic and before Kareena Kapoor's expressions were strategically cut to add 'extra drama' to someone else's victory. So, here it goes...

The Business of Glitter and Overpriced Snacks

Award shows are a spectacle of grandeur, the dazzling lights, the towering stages, the star-studded lineup, and the elaborate sets. But let's be real, all that glamour isn't paid for by goodwill alone. Every moment of an

The 500 Midnight Snack That Left Me Hungrier

As the night wore on and award after award was handed out, I and the girl sitting next to me both realigned something critical, "We were hungry." So, at around 1 A.M., we decided to get some food. Surely, a star-studded international event would have some indulgent, world-class gourmet delicacies, right? Right? Wrong. We walked to the snack counter hoping to get a quick bite, only to be met with prices that seemed to be curated for billionaires on cheat day.

- A taco, which was not even a taco (it resembled a sad, oversized

It is money all the way!

Let's be honest, Bollywood award shows are less about recognizing talent and more about making truckloads of money while convincing us that everything is "celebrating cinema." Behind every dazzling performance, emotional speech, and red carpet twirl lies a corporate cash cow dressed in sequins. These events are so financially optimized that if award shows were a business course, they'd be titled "Capitalism in Couture: How to Monetize Glitter." First, there's corporate sponsorship, because nothing says "artistic excellence" like an award presented by an online shopping app. Every category, from Best Film to Best Star, who blinked twice on camera, has a sponsor.

- "XYZ Presents Best Actor" (because apparently, acting alone isn't enough).
- "Powered by ABC Telecom" (because buffering scenes are the real drama).
- "Brought to you by DEF Streaming" (ironically, the same platform that snubbed half the nominated films).

At this point, even the microphone stands probably have sponsorship stickers. If IIFA could monetize oxygen, they'd brand it "Breath of Bollywood - Brought to you by

Would I attend again?

IIFA 2025 was a beautiful, bizarre, and outrageously expensive experience. Would I attend again? Absolutely. Would I bring my own snacks and a secret stash of water next time? You bet.

Shreya Ghoshal: The Redeeming Angel of the Night

Just when I was recovering from the lip-syncing horror, Shreya Ghoshal took the stage, and all was forgiven. Dressed in a stunning ensemble, she sang her heart out, giving us one unfiltered, non-pre-recorded, no-lip-syncing performance. She performed a mix of her greatest hits, including "Dewani Mastani" and "Sun Raha Hai Na Tu Kesariya Balam." And then, in a breathtaking tribute, she paid homage to the four pillars of Indian music: Mohammed Rafi, Kishore Kumar, Lata Mangeshkar, and Mukesh. It was one of those rare, perfect moments, one where the audience collectively sighed in awe, realizing that no matter how chaotic award shows can get, music will always remain pure and magical.



Shru Kothari

The Hosts and Their 'Low-Key' (Louki) Awards



Ahishhek Banerjee, Vijay Varma, and Aparshakti Khurana were our hosts for the night, and while their chemistry was evident, it felt like they were either dealing with an underbelly script or trying too hard to make up for it. Their biggest 'oops' moment? They introduced a new category of awards called the 'Low-Key' Awards... While holding an actual *Louki* (bottle gourd) in their hands. The audience groaned, some laughed, and the rest of us just sat there wondering if this was really happening!

'Mausam' Steals the Show



One moment that unexpectedly became a running gag throughout the evening came from Shalini Passi, who was accepting the award for *Fabulous Lives Vs. Bollywood Wives*, which won Best Reality Show. After thanking Karan Johar, her parents, and the usual suspects, she paused dramatically, looked up at the sky, and said... "Thank you,

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Tears Laughter Sensation Drama... Our Very Own Movie

The press room soon resembled a full-blown *bhaji mandi*, some laughed at the absurdity, some cracked jokes to cope, but most were just plain furious. And, of course, what's drama without a classic *tutu-main main*? A real-life showdown broke out between the media and PR teams. I swear, for a second, it felt like we were in a high drama action Bollywood scene ourselves.



Shru Kothari

The stage was set, the audience was buzzing with anticipation, and the stars were ready to shine. Jaipur was about to host its first-ever IIFA Awards, a historic moment for the city and Bollywood fans alike.

The two-day extravaganza kicked off with the inaugural edition of the IIFA Digital Awards, echoing the chant, "AA GAYA IIFA APNE GHAR!" Everything seemed picture-perfect. But was it really? Well, let me take you behind the scenes for a little drama before the grand ceremony. Because what's an award show without a little drama, right? This is the story of how my dream of attending one of Bollywood's most prestigious award nights, almost came crashing down... but somehow, against all odds, became a reality (just as in the movies, lovers always get married in the end, hoping for love over after). Like many others who travelled from different parts of the country, I too made my way to Jaipur for the grand IIFA Awards from Kota. I was beyond excited. The thought of witnessing Bollywood's biggest stars, experiencing the glamour, and just being there made every effort worth it. And let me tell you, I was not disappointed. Well... at least not initially.

Because just when I thought I was about to live my dream, it almost turned into a nightmare. The passes that had been assured me, the ones that would grant me access to both main event days, were suddenly denied. Yep, just like that. No warning. No explanation. Just a brutal reality check. I had just covered the IIFA press conference, seen all the celebrities up close, and clicked some amazing pictures for social media, all dressed up in my newly bought formal (I'm a journalist, mentally prepared for what was to come. And then, boom, ACCESS DENIED.

Heartbroken doesn't even begin to cover it. I'll admit it, I actually cried. And I wasn't the only one. The press room turned into absolute chaos, they too had been

A True Bollywood Fan

One of the sweetest highlights of the evening was meeting an elderly couple seated right behind me. In their 60s, they had travelled from Delhi just to attend the show. The husband, as it turned out, was a die-hard Bollywood fan, so much so that he had attended almost every award show held in India over the years. His wife, with a mix of amusement and fond exasperation, told me that back when they had just



denied. Journalists from different media professionals from all over, everyone was in shock. One moment, we were gearing up for an unforgettable night, the next, we were uninvited guests at our own party. The press room soon resembled a full-blown *bhaji mandi*, some laughed at the absurdity, some cracked jokes to cope, but most were just plain furious. And, of course, what's drama without a classic *tutu-main main*? A real-life showdown broke out between the media and PR teams. I swear, for a second, it felt like we were in a high drama action Bollywood scene ourselves. Amid all the chaos, I did the only logical thing, I called my boss and told her I was heading back to Kota. Thank God, she didn't let me. After what felt like an eternity (but was actually just a few hours), things started to settle. Just as the green carpet was about to begin for the first-ever IIFA Digital Awards, passes were miraculously found. Thanks to my incredible boss and colleague, I got mine too. I was over the moon. I heard many 'thank Gods' around me. And with that little detour of emotions behind me, let's move on to what actually went down at the IIFA Digital Awards!

The Miniature Show

By now, you probably already know who took home the trophies at the IIFA Digital Awards, glamour stories travel fast. But what you might not know is what it actually felt like to be there, in the middle of all the action. Like most of you, I had only ever watched IIFA on TV, so the thought of witnessing it live, surrounded by celebrities (and, well, a fair share of wannabes), was exhilarating.

100 ka paani

Finally, let's talk about one of the most jaw-dropping discoveries of the evening, water that cost 100. While exploring the venue with my colleague, we were stunned to see that a single glass of water came with a triple-digit price tag. Before we could fully process this daylight robbery, we found out that the price wasn't just for the water, it was for a personalized IIFA tumbler. A sleek black cup, with IIFA written on one side and Celebrating 25 Years on the other. Were we impressed? Not really. Did we buy it anyway? Of course, we were thirsty. The silver lining? Once you bought the tumbler, you could refill it with unlimited water. So, in a way, it became a souvenir and a

not-so-subtle reminder that we had officially attended IIFA. Because if struggling to get access to the event wasn't proof enough, owning an overpriced water cup certainly was. So yes, if I had to sum up my first-ever IIFA experience in one word, it would be drama, and not just the kind you see on screen. There was excitement, anticipation, heartbreak, chaos, unexpected plot twists, and finally a triumphant resolution. But if you think this was all the action, think again. Because the real magic of IIFA is yet to unfold. The stars, the performances, the moments that make this event legendary, all of that is coming up next. So, stay tuned. *Picture abhi baaki hai, mere dost!*

1.5 lakh tickets

The hosts, Ahishhek Banerjee, Aparshakti Khurana, and Vijay Varma, did their best to keep the energy high. But while they worked the stage, some attendees in the audience were dealing with a different kind of drama, justifying their staggering 1.5 lakh tickets. A group of ladies from Kolkata, whom I met at the Silver Podium section, had travelled all the way to Jaipur just for this event, only to find that their premium-priced seats weren't quite as premium as they had imagined. The Silver Podium was positioned right behind the celebrity and invite-only Gold Podium, meaning that while they were technically close, the stage still felt frustratingly distant. They spent most of the evening asking people around them how much they had paid for their tickets, hoping for some kind of validation. To be fair, they had a point. Watching the show from the Silver Podium felt less like attending a grand Bollywood event and more like watching miniature performers in action. The energy was electric, no doubt, but the lack of a clear view was a bit of a buzzkill. By the end of the night, I wouldn't be surprised if they had given up and sold their tickets.

Now, if watching Bollywood stars from a distance wasn't frustrating enough, imagine having your already limited view blocked by wait for it, security personnel. I understand that high-profile events require tight security. But when you're already struggling to make out your favourite celebrities from afar, the last thing you need is a human wall standing right in front of you. These men in black, stationed near the celebrity seating area, were doing their job, yes, but the audience took a very bad seat, even the journalists. So nobody should mind a bit of ire. Eventually, people had enough. A chorus of exasperated voices started calling out, "Security wale bhaiya, baith jao yaar!" because, really, how were we supposed to enjoy the show otherwise?

"Haan, lage raho!" Another unforgettable moment came when hosts Ahishhek Banerjee and Aparshakti Khurana got a little too carried away with their script. Their banter, while entertaining, started dragging longer than expected. At one point, an impatient audience member couldn't hold back and jokingly yelled, "Haan, lage raho!"



The Awards Go To...



Leading Role Female Kriti Sanon.

- ### Film Category
- Best Film: *Amar Singh Chamkila*
 - Performance in a Leading Role, Female (Film): Kriti Sanon for *Do Patti*
 - Performance in a Supporting Role, Female (Film): Anupriya Goenka for *Berlin*
 - Performance in a Supporting Role, Male (Film): Deepak Dobriyal for *Sector 36*
 - Best Story Original (Film): Kanika Dhillon for *Do Patti*

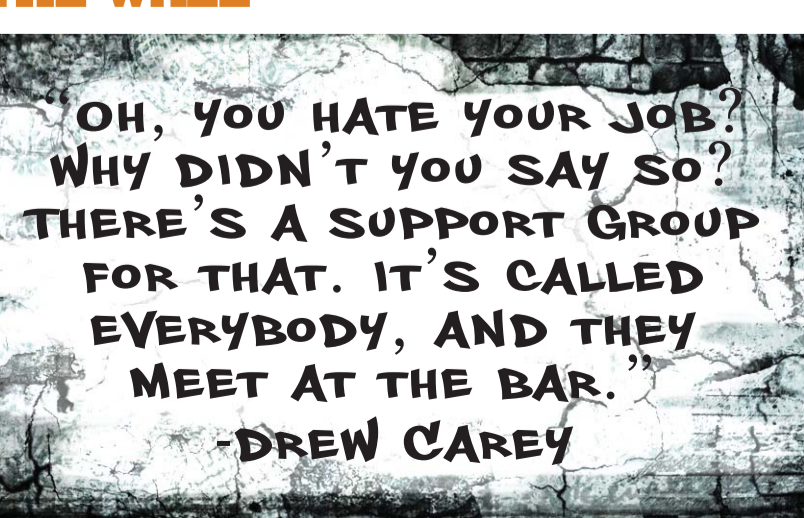
Best Series: Panchayat

- ### Series Category
- Best Series: *Panchayat Season 3*
 - Performance in a Leading Role, Female (Series): Shreya Chaudhry for *Bandish Bandits Season 2*
 - Performance in a Leading Role, Male (Series): Jitendra Kumar for *Panchayat Season 3*
 - Direction (Series): Deepak Kumar Mishra for *Panchayat Season 3*
 - Performance in a Supporting Role, Female (Series): Sanjeeda Shaikh for *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar*
 - Performance in a Supporting Role, Male (Series): Faisal Malik for *Panchayat Season 3*

- ### Miscellaneous
- Best Story Original (Series): *Kota Factory Season 3*
 - Performance in a Supporting Role, Male (Series): Faisal Malik for *Panchayat Season 3*
 - Best Reality or Best Non-scripted Series: *Fabulous Lives Vs. Bollywood Wives*
 - Best Docuseries/Docu Film: *Yo Yo Honey Singh: Famous*
 - Best Title Track: Anurag Saikia for *Ishq Hai from Mismatched Season 3*



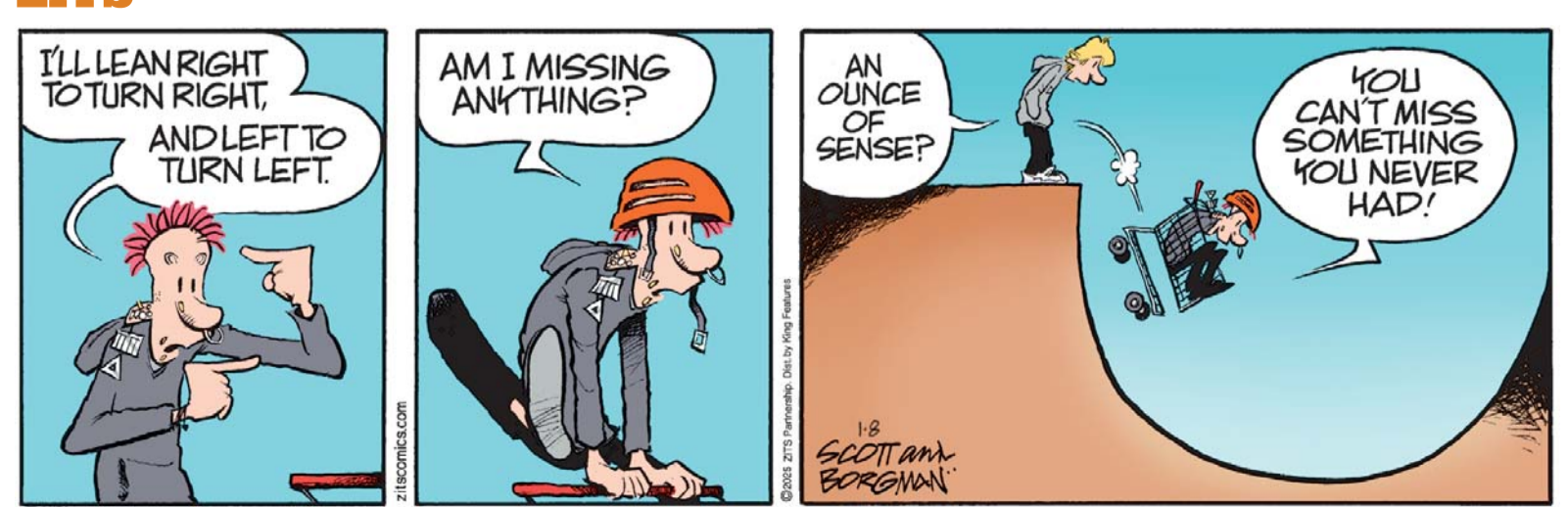
THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman