

The Real Star of Jassi is the Dad

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– Manohar Khushalani

The television serial “**Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin**” has become a mega-hit and is holding out its own against “**Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi**” not only because of good marketing and packaging but also because most common people can relate to it’s theme of an ordinary looking girl surviving by the dint of her intelligence and inner qualities. The lead actress, Mona Singh, who plays Jassi, is actually an attractive looking girl disguised as an ugly duckling. As an actress her inexperience shows, with repetitive expressions and a limited range of emotions. Apurva Agnihotri, the actor playing Arman Suri, is too wooden with similar limitations. The real performer is Virendra Saxena (Known as Veeru amongst friends) who plays Jassi’s father.



*Above:- Virendra Saxena
Saxena on the sets of Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin*

Above:- Virendra

He lights up the atmosphere with his energy whenever he appears on the small screen. I have had the pleasure of having directed Veeru when he worked with me in the play Empire Builders in early eighties. Having known him intimately, I can vouch for the fact that some of the dialogues he delivers in the serial appear to reflect his own approach to life. This I was able to confirm with him when I met him in Mumbai last week. He admitted he often improvised the dialogues whenever he felt that the written script needed improvement. The result is his own inimitable style of dialogue delivery which gives Mr. Wadhwa a charming but humorous personality.

Saxena comes from a modest background and hails from a small town – Mathura. Veeru and I also worked together in Badal

Sircar's *Spartacus* in the eighties – a play he also translated. While I did the role of Batiatus – the slave dealer, believe it or not, Veeru, despite his wiry frame, did the lead role of Spartacus. So it is no surprise that he has risen so high, the real surprise is that he after his stellar performance in *Tamas* he has taken so long to get where he is. While there is a mind boggling list of TV serials, films and plays that Saxena has acted in he has translated and adapted 18 plays, Two of his adaptations are published. He also wrote the dialogues of the feature film ' *Tunnu Ki Tina*'. Little known to most people, Saxena is a science graduate who has developed a computer database of 2000 actors. A near miss was an offer to act in Spielberg's ' *Terminal*'. Saxena was very disappointed when at the last minute it was decided to replace Veeru with a Pakistani actor. In an industry dominated by stiff wooden faced models, Saxena, an NSD graduate, is one of the few performers holding fort for the real acting professionals.

The original Latin story from which the serial has been adopted, is a father daughter story, and the romance with the boss is secondary. One subject that interests most TV viewers is when will Jassi be made to look beautiful. An intelligent guess is that it will only happen when TV ratings start falling for the serial. However a rumour floating amongst some knowledgeable moles is, that the viewers will have to wait for Juhi Chawla, whom Mona Singh resembles, to come on screen like Saif Ali Khan did, before the transformation takes place. The difference is that Saif taught Jassi how to handle relationships and Juhi will teach her how to dress up and look gorgeous.