

LEGACY'S HEIR ADITI MODY



LEGACY, THE TREASURED INHERITANCE OF WISDOM FROM ANCESTORS, HAS ENRICHED THE JOURNEY OF THIS ASPIRING FILMMAKER AND WILDLIFE ENTHUSIAST. SHE SHARES WITH HELLO! THE ABUNDANCE OF LESSONS, FROM RENOWNED GRANDFATHER SOLI SORABJEE'S GUIDANCE ON FORGING ONE'S PATH TO PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER USHA MODY'S EMPHASIS ON FAMILIAL UNITY

With legendary Indian jurist, Soli Sorabjee, as her maternal grandfather and a hotshot corporate lawyer, Zia Mody, as her mother, one can make a case for Aditi Mody's future career being predetermined. However, this self-confessed Daddy's girl charted her own course, pursuing her passion for filmmaking and overseeing the family-owned wildlife retreat, Forsyth Lodge. "There is a remarkable similarity between nature and human beings in terms of our structure," says the effervescent young lady, who has since discovered a profound connection between her two passions: filmmaking and wilderness, a journey she shares with HELLO!



Aditi, tell us about your childhood. I would describe it as pretty normal, except for the stark difference I noticed in the way my parents approached their work with so much focus and discipline. I didn't necessarily see this with my friends' parents; their mothers would stay at home and that was great but it also very refreshing to see my mum to take ownership of her own life. She was making big moves in her career at the time, so my paternal grandmother [Usha Mody, whom I call Ma] essentially raised us. My father was also making strides in his entrepreneurial endeavour. He would come home from the office just to tuck my sisters [Anjali, Aarti] and me into bed and head right back to work. Mum would try to join us for dinner whenever possible and make an effort to see us off to school when she could, but it was our grandmother who watched us grow and shared our interests and mischievous antics with her.

Who has played the biggest influence in your life till date? Ma taught me that standing together as a family can help overcome many struggles in life. She lost her husband early on and wasn't equipped with any skills to pursue a career of her own. Although her daughters were married into very prestigious families like the Piramals and Singhanias, she never asked them for anything, happy to live within her means, prioritising keeping the family together and upholding our values. She believed this would enable our family to overcome any obstacles, and through her, I learned the importance of family, family values and resilience.

Your maternal grandmother Zena Sorabjee was a remarkable woman known for her zeal and foresight, particularly in her role as a dedicated runner for the Bahai faith. Could you share more about her contributions to her community? My maternal grandmother was married to a very prestigious man [Soli Sorabjee]. I believe it's even more challenging as a woman to be married to a man of such stature, as you constantly feel a certain pressure. If I were in her position, I would feel the need to live up to my husband's public reputation, to do more than just care for the children. During the first half of my grandmother's life, she

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(Left) Aditi's remarkable lineage from her maternal side features the esteemed Sorabjee family, comprising (from left) Jehangir, Zena, Hormazd, Zia, Soli and Jamsheed. (Top left) A cherished childhood moment captures Jaydev Mody with his beloved mother, Usha

caption



(Above) The close-knit Modys gather for Aditi and Mihir's engagement; (left) Zia and Jaydev Mody serve as Aditi's inspirations; (below) the Forsyth Lodge in Satpura National Park, MP, has been transformed into an Eco Luxury Lodge, introducing initiatives such as farm-to-table dining and collaborating with local farmers for sustainable practices. Through these efforts, the aim is to raise awareness among villagers and guests about the lodge's commitment to sustainability. As Aditi emphasises, "Hospitality isn't just about faciness; it's also about maximising resources and spaces for sustainable change"



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devoted herself entirely to her children, instilling confidence (particularly in my mother, who was the only girl), and emphasising the importance of hard work and skill, leaving no room for failure. One of my uncles, who is differently abled, required an unimaginable level of patience. As a mother, she showed 110% commitment to each of her children but what I also admire is that in her late 70s, she took all her learnings along with the teachings of the best Bahai instructors to open her own school in Tripura, offering a world-class education at an affordable price, in a location not typically accessible. So I learned from my grandmother that one can do anything at any age, be successful and make a positive difference.

Growing up with your maternal grandfather, the late Soli Sorabjee, former Attorney General of India, must have been an extraordinary experience. What was it like to be around a man of such incredible stature? I hadn't personally spent much time with my grandfather as he was always incredibly busy. He lived in New Delhi and was deeply involved in shaping the country during my formative years. I've read a lot about his accomplishments and contributions. He was incredibly passionate about the law and always encouraged my mother to forge her own path, away from her father's shadow. To be Zia Mody, and not Zia Sorabjee. The anecdotes and stories I've heard from my mother, along with everything I've read about him, show me how enigmatic, charismatic and passionate he was about what he did.

As the daughter of India's foremost corporate attorney, Zia Mody, what does it feel like to carry such a formidable legacy? I would say there are both positives and negatives; personally, I think it's how one views it. Being the daughter of someone well-known can obviously open doors, but it's not handed to you on a silver platter. You still have to earn recognition and prove your abilities. That is something that my mother has always encouraged me to do; she's also taught me that setbacks are opportunities for growth. She never made me feel badly about where she was at my age. She accepts me for who I am and understands my true essence as a person. She doesn't burden me with unrealistic expectations of fame or professional success, which grounds me and deflects the pressure.

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Your father Jaydev Mody carved his own path as an entrepreneur. What impactful life lessons has he imparted to you about success since you began working? My father

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has taught me everything that I know. He is a self-made man, having built himself up from scratch without any inheritance or external resources. The major life lessons he taught me are, one, never lose interest in what you do, and two, with full dedication, anything is possible. He is a big man of firsts, be it establishing India's first mall, corporate park and glamorous casino. His success didn't come overnight. He began working at the young age of 16 and only achieved success in his mid-40s, which speaks volumes about his resilience and determination, values that I deeply cherish and uphold to this day. He is an incredible man whom I will always look up to and strive to emulate.

After an MFA from NYU Tisch, you embarked on a career in filmmaking in India, working with producers like Ronnie Screwvala and Lydia Dean Pilcher. How did you go from that to managing a wildlife lodge in Madhya Pradesh? When I moved back from New York in 2019, I was somewhat disillusioned by the filmmaking landscape in India. It seemed that here, you had to be somebody if you wanted to make anything; it didn't feel like an even playing ground, unlike in New York, where talent speaks for itself. It works differently out here.

I remember as a child, I'd sit with my father and watch the National Geographic or Discovery Channel and he would explain life and its concepts to me. It was a bit like a scene from *The Lion King*, reminiscent of Mufasa and Simba discussing the circle of life. While humans tend to overcomplicate things, nature teaches us that the most valuable lessons are often the simplest, and I think that resonated with me.

My father, who always thinks of my future, had acquired a wildlife lodge in Madhya Pradesh, to provide me with the opportunity to immerse myself further in the world of wilderness. Forsyth Lodge had been run by my brother-in-law Akshay whilst I was away in New York, but was now tasked to me which was always the plan.

At first, I felt scared and apprehensive because I didn't know anything about running a lodge. However, this journey has allowed me to engage in activities I love, such as going for drives, tracking tigers and learning their stories. I truly believe that anyone with tension, problems or questions can find resolution after completing a safari ride. For me, safaris have provided clarity, space and the greatest energy cleansing experience.

It seems like your journey has come full circle, as your experience managing the lodge has evidently played a role in shaping you as a filmmaker! Since I took over the lodge nearly four years ago, I've been working on a show inspired by my true life experiences here, on the lines of *The White Lotus* meets *The Office*. It's about a girl coming in to run this lodge which a group of



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quirky naturalists had been running their own way. The girl is a complete fish out of water in this set up.

My time running the lodge till now has really helped in me finding my voice as a filmmaker and clarifying how I want to make my official debut in this field. I’m aiming to release this production by next year, and have received a lot of positive responses from great producers who think the material is fresh and truthful. Harmonising these two aspects of my work has been immensely fulfilling, and I can’t wait to share ‘The Lodge’ with the world. Stay tuned for its release soon!

Could you elaborate on your plans to showcase protected forests like Satpura and promote sustainable hospitality, as seen in places like Forsyth Lodge, through your production? Previously, I hadn’t seen Indian forests much. My familiarity was mostly with South and East Africa, where I had the privilege to visit and experience those regions. We have a home in Nanyuki (Kenya), where my father often visits to reconnect with nature. Satpura opened my eyes to the fact that our Indian forests are far superior. It made me realise that *The Jungle Book* drew all its beauty from places like Pench, located in Madhya Pradesh, to create the movie.

My parents really pushed me to find a deep appreciation for nature. Today I feel I’m in a position to pass on that love to the next generation and emphasise its importance. India truly is a treasure chest and it’s up to us, as citizens, to explore and appreciate our country without ever taking it for granted.

The show I’m planning will be comedic and entertaining, but above all, it will showcase the beauty of Satpura and its people. My goal is to educate viewers about the boundless beauty of this region and the importance of protecting it from global warming, climate change and the threat to endangered species. As a filmmaker, I never want to come across as preachy, but I do want to share with my audience the same experiences and insights that have inspired me, and I will continue to do so through my filmmaking endeavours.

On a more personal note, you recently got married — congratulations! Besides travel for work and filmmaking, how do you and your husband Mihir like to unwind during your downtime?

It’s mostly Netflix and taking our dogs for hikes in Matheran or Karjat. We also enjoy spending time in Goa at my father’s lodge, immersed in nature. Personally, I admire watching Mihir pursue his talents on the guitar and singing. He’s self-made, like my father, building his digital agency and accounting firm ‘Bregoland’ from scratch. He encourages me to explore new hobbies, from singing to *kathak* and *tabla* practice. I appreciate his simplicity and focused approach to life.

What are your personal and work milestones for 2024? I definitely want to make my show a reality and am aiming for it to be picked up by producers I admire. I have my eye on Zoya Akhtar’s Tiger Baby, as I believe she would be the perfect fit to bring ‘The Lodge’ to life and share it with the world. 🐅

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When away from Mumbai, Satpura, or New York, you'll find Aditi in Goa, where she cherishes the serene beauty, cleaner environment and slower pace of life