

Case: The Alchemy of KBC

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Abstract

The case explores the choreography of the entertainment game-show by tracking the key elements and how they have been structured to achieve a successful business model. The case also traces the genesis of the game-show, its adaptation to the Indian context and its evolution over the successive versions. The case narrates how the positioning of the game-show is continuously altered to capture participation of wider spectrum of audience. The case demonstrates how the advancements in technology empower the media to connect segments of the people, and enables them to explore solutions to their socio-economic problems.

Keywords: *Entertainment Game-show, Business Model of TV Game-show, Social Connect of Technology, Digital Connect, Social Transformation*

1. Introduction

On 15th August 2011, at 8.30 pm when Amitabh Bachchan came on the air through Sony Television channel and launched the 5th version of the Kaun Banega Crorepati [KBC], he was making history in the annals of television game-shows in India. KBC has always been a popular game-show in India. Almost all the versions were singularly hosted by the one and only Amitabh Bachchan; only the third version had Shah Rukh Khan as the host which recorded the lowest level of success in terms of audience ratings and reviews. All other television game-shows of similar genre that came up in the last decade since the first version of KBC was aired, were no match to KBC in content, quality, popularity and ability to sustain. What were the factors that made KBC successful over such a long period of time?

2. Genesis

KBC is the Indian adaption of the popular British TV-game-show, ‘*Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*’, that got adapted and aired in more than 27 countries. The

program, ‘*Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*’ originated in the UK with a maximum cash award of one-million-pounds. It was first aired on 4th September 1998 with Chris Tarrant as host; it was produced by Sony Pictures Television and 2waytraffic (previously Celador) for the ITV Network. The program was based on a format devised by David Briggs along with Steven Knight and Mike Whitehill. The trio had earlier devised a number of promotional games for Chris Tarrant’s breakfast show on ‘*Capital FM*’ radio. The initial working title of the TV-game-show was ‘*Cash Mountain*.’

‘Celador’ in March 2006, put up for sale its rights to the formats of the game-show. These were acquired by ‘2waytraffic’ a Dutch firm. In 2008, Sony Pictures Television acquired ‘2waytraffic’ and became the owner of all the formats of ‘*Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*’

The game-show, KBC, consisted of airing a quiz program, hosted by a celebrity, on general knowledge to one participant at a time, seated in hot-seat, with fair amount of rewards at each question, increasing in difficulty and reward as the participant moved up

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the question-chain. To get selected into the hot-seat a participant needed to call up the nerve-centre of the program through designated phone-lines and expect to get selected randomly. Those who got selected would go through a filtering process called the *fastest-finger-first*, in which a question is asked to rearrange a set of words, or numbers or data in a specified logical sequence. From among a set of 8 to 10 contestants, the person who gets the right sequence first would get into the hot-seat. Once into the hot-seat the participant would continue to be there till he/she answers a question wrong or till the last question. The process of quizzing had its own set of innovations and trappings to make the entire process exciting to the participant and the audience.

Star Plus channel aired the first version of KBC in 2000 after fair amount of promotion and with Amitabh Bachchan as the host. The highest prize was kept at Rs 1 crore [Rs 10 million or approximately US\$ 250,000 at the prevailing exchange-rate]. The program was an instant success and was able to transform the television viewing patterns in the country.

The second version of the program was launched on 5th August 2005 after a hiatus of almost four years. The highest prize was fixed at Rs 2 crores, double that in the first version. The format was more or less the same with marginal modifications. After the shooting for 61 of the planned 85 episodes was completed, Amitabh Bachchan, the host fell ill and this caused a break in the continuity of the program. StarPlus promised to restart the program as soon as Amitabh Bachchan was fit enough to resume shooting; but he was not well enough to get back for the next 24 months and StarPlus decided to axe the program.

StarPlus launched the third version of the program on 22nd January 2007 with Shah Rukh Khan as the host. Shah Rukh Khan was at the peak of his popularity as an actor and he was considered to be the ideal replacement for Amitabh Bachchan as the host. The highest prize was kept at Rs 2 crores [US\$ 430,000 at the prevailing exchange-rates]. Contrary to expectations, TRP [Television Rating Points] for the program went down drastically and the program lasted till 19th April 2007.

This version had AirTel, UTI Mutual Fund and ITC Ltd as the leading sponsors.

The fourth version of the program was launched on 11th October 2010, on the 68th birthday of Amitabh Bachchan with Amitabh Bachchan as the host. The prize was fixed at Rs 1 crore with a jackpot question added for a price of Rs 5 crores [approx. US\$ 1 million at the prevailing exchange-rate]. The game-show lasted till 9th December 2010 and an estimated 5 million persons had participated in it in one form or other. This time the game-show was aired by Sony TV not StarPlus; the key sponsors were Idea Cellular and Cadburys.

The fifth version was launched on 15th August 2011, on the 65th independence day of India through Sony TV with Amitabh Bachchan as the host and without any major modifications in the format.

3. The Making of KBC

What were the key elements in the making of KBC? Primarily the ingenuity and the content provided by Sidharth Basu formed the core or back-bone of the game-show. Since the game-show demanded technological support, a broadcaster and telecom facilitations were essential. Then it needed a host to manage the front end of the program. The higher the reputation of the host, the more celebrity he is, the more charming and entertaining are the interactions, the higher is the attraction for the participants to the game-show. Finally the game-show needed sponsors to take care of the finances.

4. Sidharth Basu

Sidharth Basu as Director of KBC heads the research and logistics of the game-show. Sidharth Basu started his career in 1977, as a documentary filmmaker and a director of TV programs after graduating from St Stephens College, Delhi and post-graduation from Hindu College of Delhi University in English Literature. During his studies he was active in theatre; he was one of the founding members of the *Theatre Action Group* [TAG], a theatre group in Delhi under Barry John,

and acted in numerous plays. He also worked with All India Radio as an announcer and hosted programs like *General Overseas Service*, *Yuva Vani* etc.

In the 80s he started “Quiz Time”, the first ever inter-collegiate quiz show on Indian television. This was produced by ITV India and broadcast through Door Darshan with sponsors like Limca and AMUL. Soon enough, he conducted numerous multi-media quiz-contests on the corporate, college and school circuits. He produced and hosted “Spectrum”, the 7-nation SAARC Quiz, “The India Quiz” and “The Beanstalk Quiz Summit” all broadcasted on Door Darshan. He also produced and hosted “Mastermind India” and “University Challenge” which were broadcasted through BBC World. “India Child Genius” is another quiz program that Sidharth Basu produced and hosted on Star World.

In 1989 he along with his wife Anita Kaul Basu incorporated his activities in the media business in the company format, Synergy Media Ltd. Later in 2007 this was renamed as BIG Synergy Ltd after its tie-up with Adlabs Ltd., a company belonging to the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group [ADAG]. Since then Sidharth Basu is the Chairman and Managing Director of BIG Synergy Ltd. Among the significant productions of the company are “Jhalak Dikhla Jaa” (2006), the Indian version of the BBC celebrity dance-show broadcasted through Sony, “Aap Ki Kachehri- Kiran ke Saath”, “Sach Ka Saamna”, “Khelo Jeeto Jiyo” on Star Plus, “India’s Got Talent” on Colors, and “Dus Ka Dum” with Superstar Salman Khan as host on Sony. KBC was one of the prime productions handled by BIG Synergy Ltd. In fact Sidharth Basu has been the permanent element in the KBC right through all the versions of it while every other element – the broadcaster, the host and the telecom partner - had undergone changes. He also had a number of books to his credit.

5. The Amitabh Bachchan Factor

How important is the host for the success of a TV – game-show? Did the histrionic talents and charisma of Amitabh Bachchan had any impact on the success of KBC? The TV-game-show is enjoyed and remembered

for the experience it offered to the participants and the viewers. In this experience the host and the interactions with him on the show constituted a major component of customer satisfaction. This should explain the significance of the host. Amitabh Bachchan has had an iconic presence in the minds of Indian film-goers in the decades of seventies, eighties and to a large extent in the nineties. In the sixties and seventies he had starred in a large number of movies in a variety of stellar roles, each of them excelling the other. He became the first to receive the *Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award* in 1991, which was established in the name of the legendary Raj Kapoor. He was honoured with the *Superstar of the Millennium* award at the Filmfare Awards 2000. Govt of India awarded *Padma Shri* in 1984 and later *Padma Bhushan* in 2001. France’s highest civilian honour, ‘*The Knight of the Legion Honour*’ was awarded to Bachchan by the French Govt in 2007 for “*exceptional career in the world of cinema and beyond*”. In 1999 he was voted “*the Greatest Star of the stage or screen of the Millennium*” by BBC online poll pushing behind many Hollywood legends. The Alexandria International Film Festival conferred on him the title of “*the Actor of the Century*” in 2001.

Bachchan is known for his deep, baritone voice. In fact he made his debut in the entertainment industry, in 1969, as a voice narrator in Mrinal Sen’s national award winning film *Bhuvan Shome*. He has been a narrator, a playback singer and a presenter for numerous programs. Satyajit Ray engaged him as a commentator in his film *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*. Bachchan has lent his voice to the Oscar-winning French documentary, ‘*March of the Penguins*’ directed by Luc Jacquet.

6. KBC: A Special Purpose Vehicle

KBC has been created as a special purpose vehicle [SPV] primarily under the stewardship of Sidharth Basu as the director and Amitabh Bachchan as the host. The broadcaster and the telecom partner who moved into the SPV to provide the logistics became the second tier. The sponsors formed the third tier and then there were the participants and the viewers. The players in the first tier bore the maximum risks; the actors

in the second and third tiers were taking decreasing levels of risk. The contractual agreement among the players in the tier one and tier two defined the levels of risk they were taking. The participants and the viewers were not covered through any contract; they were taking the normal risk attached to playing the game.

7. The Economics

A game-show thrives on sponsorships and advertisement revenues for its sustenance. Each episode of 60 minutes of KBC had 700 to 750 seconds of commercial time. Of this nearly 540 seconds were offered to the main sponsors who numbered about 8. The rest of the time was sold to spot buyers in slots of 10 second each. Multi Screen Media [MSM], the owner of Sony Channel was asking for Rs 4 lacs for every slot of 10 seconds during the KBC-3.

The third version of KBC [KBC-3] is reported to have raked in more than Rs 100 crores in revenue to StarPlus. AirTel as the telecom partner and the title sponsor is reported to have paid Rs 26 crores. UTI Mutual Fund and Hyundai as the associate sponsors are reported to have paid Rs 13 crores each. For KBC-4, Idea cellular had obtained the right to be the telecom partner at about Rs 18 crores. For KBC-4 Cadburys paid Rs 14 crores as one of the main sponsors. There were six associate sponsors each of whom are reported to have paid Rs 8 to 10 crores. The total revenue of MSM during KBC-4 was of the order of Rs 100 to 150 crores.

8. Business Model

What is the business model of KBC? Definitely KBC is the product of the digital age. The traditional live quiz program would be a knowledge-oriented event with little or no scope for entertainment or revenue streams. In the present format of KBC the quiz is carried to the millions of viewer-homes through the digital media. There is a small audience witnessing the event at the venue, which is the studio, and a much larger audience waiting at the viewer-homes. The size of the target audience has been multiplied many fold. By bringing in a celebrity host the emotional value of the event is increased. The participant feels privileged to be with

the celebrity and interacting with him/her. This has tremendous emotional value to the participant; very often a participant cherishes the emotional value much more than the tangible rewards he/she gets through participation. This rich emotional value is carried through the digital media to the millions of viewers and the result is contagious. In a sense the product being sold by KBC is the emotional experience.

So the objective of the game-show is to maximize the overall experience of the participants and thereby enhance the experience of the millions of viewers. The continued rich emotional experience would propel more and more viewers to come forward to participate in the game-show resulting in a continuous stream of people trying to get selected. The process of getting selected is through tele-calling specified numbers; this is where the telecom partner rakes in a fortune.

Viewership would be measured through TRP, despite all its short-comings. The higher the emotional experience, the higher will be the viewers. This would have direct impact on the advertisement-rates and the revenue-streams of KBC. The higher the emotional experience, the larger will be the number of persons trying to participate in the game-show. This would mean more calls through the specified telephone lines and hence more revenue to the telecom partner. This would push up the bids for becoming the telecom partner. That would be another revenue-stream to the KBC system.

9. Bottom-line

Financial success of the program depended on the viewership. Viewership influences the willingness of firms to take up sponsorships, slots for spot advertisements and the rates thereof. So the focus of the back-office-teams would be to enhance the viewership. Viewership is dependent on the experience that the participants in the game-show as well as the viewers get through the game-show. The experience of the participants through the preliminary selection process, the experience on the hot-seat, the rewards they get etc will determine the experience of the participants [Experience-Type-1]. One of the key elements of this experience is the

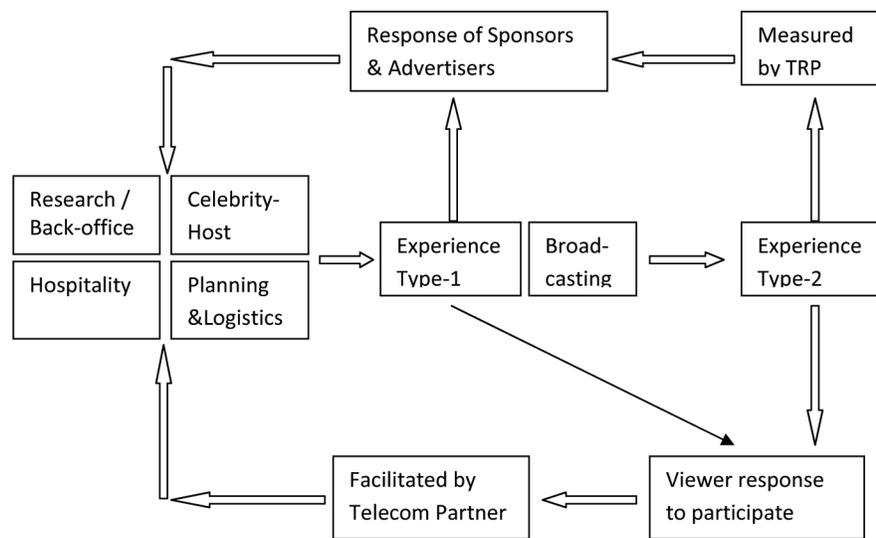


Figure 1. Business Model of KBC.

(Developed by the author)

interactions they get with the celebrity host. Their agony and ecstasy would trickle down to other aspirants of the game through word of mouth. The excitement that the television-viewers get is another kind of experience [Experience-Type-2]. The organizers have been very careful in cultivating these experiences.

Over the decade that KBC has been on the air, the organizers have been inducting newer value-adds to enhance the excitement of viewers. For instance the game-show started bringing in other celebrities as guests on the show; the game-show started posing a question, one in each episode, to the viewers and offering a prize for the first correct response through specified telephone-lines. This added excitement to the viewers, frantic calls through designated telephone-lines to be the first to hit the post to win the jackpot. In a country of a billion people the number of calls would definitely be many and that made the telecom partner happy. Little drops of excitement to every viewer made the mighty ocean of cash to the telecom partner and the game-show!

Apart from these, the credibility of the game-show needed to be sustained; this meant robustness of the processes, the content and quality of the quiz and finally the hospitality to the participants during the game-show.

10. Tail Piece

Over the different versions and over the years, KBC has been undergoing a gradual transition in terms of its positioning. The first version was perhaps more intellectually rigorous than the latter ones. That version was more focused on intellectual stimulation and hence used to attract the educated class – professionals, students, executives etc - as participants. The language used to be predominantly English. These ensured viewers from middle class and above. The interactions between the host and the participant were also focused on the intellectual context of the questions being asked. In the latter versions of the KBC there is a gradual but definite shift towards attracting the lower middle-class as viewers and participants. The language used is predominantly Hindi; the host seldom used English in his interactions. There is a perceptible dilution in the intellectual content of the questions to make them attractive and accessible to the lower middle-class thereby widening the audience. The interactions between the host and the participants were rarely on intellectual topics; they revolved around the social background and living conditions of the participants. There is invariably a clip showing the participants family and social background, aspirations etc. The game-show became less of a quiz on the general knowledge; it is projected as an opportunity for redemption to the main

participant on the hot-seat from the miseries of day-to-day life. Consequently you would find people from varied professions and background as participants – a police constable, a house-wife, a security-guard, a farmer, a trader, a technician, a primary school teacher, an ad-hoc teacher etc. Many or most of them seem to come from small towns rather than the metros. Truly, KBC has penetrated deep down the social pyramid and enhanced its mass-base. How far can KBC stretch this trade-off? Can KBC sustain without intellectual rigour?

Post 2011, KBC has launched regional versions in almost all Indian languages with carefully selected celebrities from each of the regions as hosts. Each of these celebrities has prominence in the respective region, but is least known in other regions. This initiative can be seen as an attempt at reaping full brand-awareness of the KBC brand. Did this mean that KBC had entered the maturity-stage and the organizers were trying to harvest the good-times near at hand? Or was it that the organizers were trying to minimize the hold that the legendary Amitabh Bachchan had over the audience across the country?

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About the Author

Dr. Bala Bhaskaran is a management professional and teacher with active interest in the areas of Finance, Entrepreneurship, Business Strategy and Knowledge Management. He is a graduate in technology from IIT, Madras, a post-graduate from IIM, Bangalore and a doctorate from S P University, Anand. He has 18 years of corporate experience in various capacities in India. Later he moved into management education and has spent 20 years teaching and institution building.

He was associated with IBS Ahmedabad for 15 years, initially as founding member and later as Director. Between 2010 and 2015 he held senior corporate positions in an educational and incubation firms. Since June 2015 he is the Director of Shanti Business School, Ahmedabad. He has travelled across Europe, UK, USA and South Asia. He has published several research papers and cases in peer-reviewed journals and also published 4 edited books. He has been conducting case-workshops for management teachers and has been a mentor to many entrepreneurs in nurturing their ventures. He is on the board of few companies as a non-executive director.

Annexure

Annexure-1: KBC: Brief Description

Full Name	Kaun Banega Crorepathi? Indianized version of British game-show "Who would be a millionaire?"
Produced by	BIG Synergy Productions [Managing Director: Sidharth Basu]; Major share-holder; Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group
Distributed by	Sony Pictures Television International (Global)
Broadcasting Channel:	Initially (2000 – 2007) STAR Plus 2010 onwards Sony TV
Picture Format	480i (SDTV); 1080i (HDTV)
Presented by	Amitabh Bachan (In versions 1,2,4,5,6,7) Shahrukh Khan (In version 3)
Language/s	Initially bilingual; English and Hindi Later Only in Hindi
Running Time of each Episode	90 Minutes

Annexure-2: Sidharth Basu, A Brief Profile

Sidharth Basu [Born 1954], a well known television producer-director and quiz show host, is the Chairman Cum Managing Director of BIG Synergy Media Ltd.

Sidharth Basu is a graduate of St Stephens, Delhi and a post graduate of Hindu College, Delhi University in English literature. In 1973, he founded the *Theatre Action Group*, a theatre group in Delhi under the guidance of Barry John and acted in many plays and eventually in some television serials also. He has sustained his acting talent – recently (released on 23rd Aug 2013) he played the crucial role of Robin Dutt in John Abraham's critically acclaimed film *Madras Café*. In 1977 after post-graduation, he ventured into making documentary films and television programs. During this period he also associated with All India Radio as an announcer and hosted programs like *Yuva Vani* and *General Overseas Service*.

In the 1980s, he started *Quiz Time* on Doordarshan. This was a quiz-show produced by ITV India and sponsored by Limca and Amul Milk Chocolates. Sidharth Basu was the Quiz Master in this series. He also conducted a number of live multi-media quiz contests for corporate, school and college circuits. He later went on to host and produce "Spectrum", the 7 nation SAARC Quiz, "The India Quiz" and "The Beanstack Quiz Summit" (all on Doordarshan), "Mastermind India" and "University Challenge" on BBC World in 2003 as well as "India Child Genius" on Star World. He also conducted quiz shows with Encyclopedia Britannica for school students. Eventually he, along with his wife Anita Kaul Basu, incorporated "Synergy Communications Pvt Ltd" in Delhi in 1988 as a media business company. In 2007 this became BIG Synergy and still later tied up with Reliance Mediaworks (in 2007) to become part of the BIG Reliance Entertainment Group Ltd. As Chairman and Managing Director of the company Sidharth Basu is the main driving force of this company.

Among the various programs produced or launched by Sidharth Basu, KBC recorded the biggest success for Basu. Some of the other programs produced and aired by BIG Synergy are *Jhalak Dikha Ja*, *Aap ki Kachehri*, *Kiran ke Sath*, *Sachh ka Saamna*, *India's got Talent*, *Dus ka Dum* etc.

He has the following books to his credit:

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Annexure-3: Amitabh Bachchan, A Brief Profile

Amitabh Bachchan (AB), a living legend of Indian film industry, was born on 11 October 1942, to Harivansh Rai Bachchan a well-known Hindi poet and Teji Bachchan. His first appearance in a movie was in 1969 in a multi-starrer film made by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, titled *Saat Hindustani* which had Utpal Dutt (who became a well-known actor in Bengali films), Anwar Ali (brother of comedian Mehmood of Hindi films), Madhu (who became a great actor in Malayalam films), and Jalal Agha (who became a prominent actor in Hindi films) as co-starrers. His role in *Anand* (1971) gave him a firm standing in the Indian film industry. After this AB was an unstoppable tidal wave in the Indian film industry. He has acted in more than 200 films till 2013. His dominance of the Indian movie scene was so total in the 1970s and 1980s that the French Director Francois Truffaut called him the "one-man-industry".

The peak period of Amitabh Bachchan in the Indian Cinema was during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1984, he entered politics at the behest of his long-time friend Rajiv Gandhi; AB contested the Lok Sabha seat from Allahabad against H N Bahuguna a former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. AB registered a record win with 68 % of the votes polled in his favour. However, after three years, in 1987, AB was disillusioned with politics and resigned from Lok Sabha; he announced his withdrawal from politics forever. In the early 1990s he seemed to have lost his star-power: most of the films where he acted tended to fail commercially. In 1996 AB turned to production by incorporating a company known as Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Ltd. This company was scheduled to introduce products and services covering the entire spectrum of India's entertainment industry. Despite valiant attempts and huge budgets ABCL got embroiled into controversies, legal battles, poor market performance and eventual collapse in 1997. It took a long-time for Amitabh Bachchan to disentangle himself from the liabilities and legacies of ABCL.

In the post-millennium period, AB's fortunes began to turn positive. He acted in limited number of movies; but almost everyone of them did well commercially and the charisma began to re-emerge. At about this time KBC happened where his charisma played a significant role in its success.

In 2013 AB had a small role in the Hollywood movie *The Great Gatsby*. The movie is based on an American novel written by F Scot Fitzgerald in the 1920s, set in the decadent New York of that era. Baz Luhrmann was doing a re-make of the movie with John DiCaprio in the lead role of Gatsby. AB was cast as Meyer Wolfsheim, a gambler and a well-connected bootlegger of Jewish origin, who acts as a kind of benefactor and father figure to Gatsby. Despite his role being very brief - he is seen on the screen for about two minutes only - AB, according to critics, has been able to bring in the sophistication and poise that was intrinsic to the character.

AB is well-known for his deep baritone voice. He has been a narrator, play-back singer, and presenter for numerous programs. Satyajit Ray was so impressed with Bachchan's voice that he decided to use Bachchan as a narrator in his movie *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* (1977). Many Indian movies had engaged AB as a narrator; notable ones are *Bhuvan Shome* (), *Balika Badhu* (1975), *Tere Mere Sapne* (1996), *Lagaan* (2001), *Parineeta* (2005), *Jodha Akbar* (2008), *Swami* (2007), *Zor Lagaa Ke ... Haiya* (2009), *Kahaani* (2012), *Krrish* (2013) and *Mahabharat* (2013). In 2005 Bachchan had lent his voice to the Oscar-winning French documentary '*March of the Penguins*', directed by Luc Jacquet.

AB has been in the forefront of supporting social causes. He has been donating funds regularly for people in distress: be it beleaguered farmers in Andhra Pradesh or debt-ridden farmers of Vidarbha. He had supported medical foundation initiated by Resul Pookutty at Kochi. AB donated significantly to the family of Delhi Police Constable Subhash Chand Tomar; Subhash Chand Tomar had died succumbing to injuries suffered during anti-gang-rape protest in 2012. AB Opened Harivansh Rai Bachchan Memorial Trust (HRB Memorial Trust) in 2013 in honour of his father. In 2013 AB was made UNICEF goodwill ambassador for Polio Eradication Campaign in India in 2010 when 1556 polio cases were detected in that year. In March 2014 WHO declared India a polio-free country with no case of polio was reported in the previous three years. In 2013 AB's family donated Rs 25 lacs (\$39,000) to charitable trust Plan India, that works for the upliftment of the girl child in India. In 2013 AB donated Rs 11 lacs (\$17,000) to Maharashtra Police Welfare Fund. He was the face of "Saveour Tigers" campaign that promoted the importance of tiger conservation in India.

He is among the most awarded actors in India. Has three National Awards as Best Actor; 14 Filmfare Awards and 39 nominations. Govt of India awarded him Padma Shree in 1984; Padma Bhushan in 2001 and Padma Vibhushan in 2015 for his contributions to the performing arts. Govt of France honoured him with its highest civilian honour "Knight of the Legion of Honour" in 2007 for his career in the world of Cinema and beyond. Amitabh Bachchan is the greatest and most influential actor in the history of Indian Cinema. In 2001 AB was honoured with 'the Actor of the Century' award at the Alexandria International Film Festival in Egypt in recognition of his contribution to the world of cinema. In 2010 Asian Film Awards, AB was awarded the Life time Achievement Award. In 2000, he was the first Asian to have been modeled in wax at London's Madame Tussauds Wax Museum.