

Harnaaz Sandhu: Beyond the Crown, Embracing Beauty, Balance & Purpose

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Harnaaz Sandhu captured global attention when she won the Miss Universe 2021 title, stepping into a world of fans, cameras and elevated expectation. However, the cover story for ELLE India reveals that the journey didn't stop at the crown—it only began. She reflects: *"Miss Universe was a milestone, not a finish line."*

In her cover interview, Sandhu talks candidly about the challenges of fame—how the applause fades and leaves space for the individual behind the image.

Roots of Strength & Advocacy

Sandhu traces her understanding of confidence back to her upbringing. Growing up in Punjab, she was influenced by her mother, a gynaecologist, who treated women walking miles for care. Sandhu observes: *"Confidence doesn't come from perfection; it comes from purpose."*

As a teenager, she began door-to-door work on menstrual hygiene and waste management—an experience she describes as her first lesson in advocacy: "It taught me that impact begins with one conversation across a doorway." Later, when she partnered with Plan India for a menstrual equity initiative, it was "less like a campaign and more like coming home."

By intertwining her public platform with purpose, Sandhu elevates her role from beauty icon to change-maker.

Despite her success, Sandhu faced the harsh realities of public scrutiny. She endured bullying and body-shaming about her weight. "It really hurt—but it made me stronger," she says.

Thus this openness about vulnerability isn't for pity—it's about agency. In refusing to conform quietly, she transformed criticism into clarity and replaced apology with assurance. Her story sends a strong message: resilience does not mean perfection.

The Shift to Cinema: Embracing Imperfection

Sandhu views her transition from pageants to films as more than a career move—it's evolution. She explains the difference plainly: pageantry teaches her "how to be seen," while cinema teaches her "how to feel."

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