

She stood there on a huge stage all alone. But she filled up the space with her charm and mighty presence as only she could. That's my last living image of Sridevi as she graced the International Film Festival of India in Goa last November.

As I thanked her for her gracious presence in this celebration of cinema, she said something that would stay with me forever — “where else would I be if not here?”

That was Sridevi, the epitome of grace and a legend who conducted herself with humility. When I saw the legend up close at work at IFFI, I held her in awe not only for her capacity as an actor but also the discipline with which she approached her craft. Sridevi never demanded protocol — no entourage, no frills.

My memories of Sridevi are built through my journey from being a fan girl to an actor and then my role as a politician. I have had opportunities to meet Sridevi in public engagements and industry events, and each time I went back knowing a little more about her.

She was a woman who knew her mind and despite the challenges that came her way, she approached life with a lot of dignity. The actor in me was influenced by her work in movies like *Chalbaaz*, *Chandni*, *Sadma* and the effortless performance in *Lamhe*.

Described as the first female superstar of the Indian film industry, she shouldered many '90s blockbusters alone. That her male co-stars had to depend on her magic for their box office success was an ode to her calibre.

It was not just her dance move that dazzled many, her comic timing is worth a study. The versatility with which she could oscillate between making her audience cry and laugh spoke volumes of her strength as an actor.

I jumped with joy as a child when she donned a Charlie Chaplin disguise in *Mr India* to sweep the villain's casino and help a poor old man pay for his daughter's wedding. It's then that she became a female version of Robin Hood for many young girls. Her comic timing as a reporter riling her bumbling editor played by Anu Kapoor is still etched in my memory. It is only when I became an actor myself could I fully appreciate how difficult it was to create magic on screen and how effortless Sridevi made it look.

As I bid farewell to my favourite star who defined joy in my childhood, I pay homage to an actor who through her body of work ascertained that a female actor's place in a commercial Hindi movie is not only to compliment her male counterpart. It's farewell to a star whose last words to me will ring true forever — ‘where else would I be if not here’.