

# Non-smokers get a 'Ghajini' boost

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**Mumbai:** After years of slamming actors who light up on screen, anti-tobacco activists seem to have found something to cheer about in Aamir Khan's latest film, *Ghajini*.

The recently released film is sending out a no-smoking message, earning kudos from long-time crusaders.

According to research, 52% of children have their first puff after watching a celebrity light up. Moreover, Union health minister Anbumani Ramadoss had requested Bollywood film-makers to not show actors smoking on screen.

"We appreciate the efforts of and thank A. Murugadoss, the director of *Ghajini* and Aamir Khan for highlighting such an important issue," said Dr P C Gupta, director of the Healis-Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health, who has been in the forefront of the campaign to ban smoking in public places.

In the film, the character played by Jiah Khan is walking down the steps of a mall when she spots some men blow-

ing smoke in people's faces inside the mall. The camera then pans to a 'No Smoking' board before Jiah says, "*Yahan smoking allowed nahi hain.*"

When contacted, Murugadoss said, "I have never encouraged smoking in my films. If you look at this film, even the negative characters don't smoke. In fact, the scene in the film that does have smoking is actually against it."

The director added, "Youngsters worship actors and follow them blindly. So I always try to project my actors in a manner that his or her character does not glorify things which are not good."

Aamir himself said a balance should be struck between discouraging smoking and ensuring artistic freedom. "I fully support the drive to help people to quit smoking and I would strongly

advise the youth not to get into this harmful habit in the first place. However, I don't think a ban on smoking in films makes sense. Films are a creative medium and are meant to re-

fect different aspects of life, good and bad. Murder is illegal in real life, but we don't put a ban on it in films. But we should def-

initely make every effort to discourage smoking in real life." Regional officer Vinayak Azad of the Censor Board for Film Certification said there is still no official ban on smoking in films. "As for *Ghajini* promoting the ban on smoking in public, it is a good thing and more producers should do this through their films," said Azad.

Director Mahesh Bhatt had filed a case against the health ministry's notification banning smoking on screen. The case is still pending in the Delhi high court. Bhatt said, "My writ has put a roadblock in the path of the government's ban on smoking on screen."

Earlier, the health minister had taken strong objection to Shah Rukh Khan smoking in the 2006 film, *Don*. A notification was sent out that if an actor did have a smoking scene in a movie, he would have to shoot a small audio-visual segment warning people that smoking was injurious to health. This would then be used as a disclaimer prior to the screening of the film.

