



Action girl Akira

IS FIGHTING FIT IN HER NEW THRILL-A-MINUTE FILM



What was the experience of working with director AR Murugadoss again on *Akira*?

The first film we did together was *Holiday*, which the audiences loved. He is a fantastic director to work with, I felt that from the very first film I did with him. I was pleasantly surprised when he came to me with this.

He said we are going to turn it around and make it a woman-centric hard-hitting film about this girl's character. I was like: 'You want me to do it?' He was like: 'Yes for sure, I think you can pull it off'. He's a very trusting and good director to work with. I don't think I could have asked for anybody else to do a film like this with.

How do you feel after doing all the action scenes in *Akira*?

(Jokes) I feel like beating someone up right now! It feels great, there is always an adrenaline rush when you do scenes like that on set with all these amazing stuntmen, fighters and action directors, who I have worked with a lot in the past. It was quite exciting and really awesome.

It must have helped working with action heroes like Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar and Ajay Devgn in the past?

For the past five years I've been working with these guys, and from them I learnt all these fighting skills. It is truly a pleasure watching them do the action on-screen. I love action films and love being a part of them. I am really happy, thankful and grateful that I did all the action in this film myself.

Did you take any martial arts tips from Akshay Kumar, who you worked with on *Holiday*?

(Laughs) The biggest tip he gave me was to be aware of injuries, but even that I wasn't able to follow. I think he is a very sensible person when it comes to understanding proper form about martial arts and stuff.

Even watching him do all the action when I was shooting with him on all the movies I have done, you get to learn a lot. He's always very involved with it, so he automatically teaches you without it kind of being intentional.

Was it difficult prepping for the eye-catching action in *Akira*?

It was not easy for sure, but I have played a lot

of sports at my school and college days. So athletically I am capable of doing that. I did training for three or four months before the film started and while we were shooting.

It was difficult, I went through a lot of injuries and it was painful as hell. You wake up sore every single day and some part or the other is always hurting, but it was all worth it. I trained quite a bit for this film.

Tell us a little more about the injuries you sustained in the film?

Yes, there were plenty of injuries, including three that were major. A nerve in my wrist got twisted and I couldn't straighten my hand. I hurt my knee while doing one of the kicks in one of the cable action sequences. I hurt my back also; it was very strenuous and gruelling. I did go through a few injuries but I am back with a bang. (Laughs) The pain was all worth it.

'The pain was all worth it'

Director Anurag Kashyap acts in *Akira* as a villain. What was it like starring alongside him?

Fantastic. If you look at him in this role, you will get surprised. He has done such a great job. He truly fits the character, like a hand fits a glove. He is so menacing in the film. He is perfect for this role and is a really good actor. (Laughs) I told him: 'You should just stick to acting now!'

Your character in *Akira* is a fearless girl who stands up for what is right, but in today's time do you think it is difficult for celebrities to take a stand on anything because it will be seen as controversial?

Obviously there are a lot of instances where things are blown out of proportion and people are targeted or kind of picked on for no reason. But I will tell you personally I always stand up for what I feel is right. I think every girl in today's day and age should do that.

This film has a lot of incidences a lot of girls today are put through and (shows) how you should basically be able to handle it yourself. So I hope, wish and pray that when people see this film, girls especially, understand that.

Institutions like schools and colleges should incorporate self-defence martial arts as a subject for girls from a very young age because I feel it's very important in today's day and age.

We have already seen woman-centric films, but very few action-led ones. With *Akira* and *Force 2*, you are now doing two back-to-back ones. Are you hoping it leads to more such films in Bollywood?

Well, I sure hope so, because I am very happy to be a part of a film which is kind of a path-breaker in its own way. It's the first kind of action woman doing action kind of film. I am really happy to be a part of it!

Of course, filmmakers should consider pitching more such roles to women. Even *Force 2* that I'm doing has got a fantastic role, and there is lot of great action for me in that as well. So yes, I guess the path should open up.

How different is the action in *Force 2* compared to *Akira*?

Very different. *Akira* is very raw, hand-to-hand combat and very rustic action. *Force 2* is a bit more stylised, more chase sequences, technology and all of that. (Laughs) It is very different, don't worry!

We are now seeing Bollywood actresses like Deepika Padukone and Priyanka Chopra doing Hollywood films. Do you want to do the same?

Right now, I have no intention. I feel they've got some really good characters and roles to play in Hollywood; if something like that comes my way, I will think about it. But right now, I don't really intend to as such.

Akira is your first release in over a year and-a-half after *Tevar*. Does the long gap affect you as an actor?

No actually, because I have been super-busy in that gap. I have been shooting for my films like *Akira* and *Force 2*. I am starting *Noor* tomorrow as well, so I am very excited for that. I have been super-busy and just been doing my work.

Honestly for me, it's all about that. I concentrate on my work. I wear my blinders, do my work and do it well, and when it has to release, it releases.

Finally, with *Akira*, you are carrying the film on your shoulders. Do you feel any anxiety?

It feels more than great. It feels amazing, it feels that I was waiting for this moment and I was born to do this.

Akira is in cinemas now.

Priya Mulji



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The importance of online dating safety

A SINGLETON cannot escape digital dating in 2016. Whether it is a website or via popular apps, dating in a digital way is rising day by day. Unfortunately, so is the increase of cat-fishing (people pretending to be something or someone they're not), online stalking, meeting already married people and many more scary situations. With that in mind, it is important to practice online safety.

I myself have met many a weirdo, but how do we make sure someone is genuine? It isn't that easy, but there are some steps you can take to practice safety online.

So you have been speaking to someone and think: 'Hey, they seem nice'. The next step would be to meet. But before that, make sure you are completely comfortable with the person you are planning a date with.

The way I go about preparing to meet someone I have interacted with online or on apps is pretty simple. First of all, it is important to get a good feeling about someone. They say your gut feeling is always right, so make sure your inner self is telling you the person is normal.

Then make sure you speak to someone on the phone. This will give you a good guide into the way they communicate. If they only call at certain times, it could be a sign that they are married or not what they appear. If they refuse to speak on the phone, this is also a bad sign.

After you have communicated, it's important to set a date and time to meet. I would say meet in a busy, public space like a restaurant, bar or coffee shop. Do not give them your home address or let them pick you up if you have met them online. If it gets past a few dates, then perhaps go ahead.

When you have decided where and when to meet, make sure someone knows the exact details. You may think this is being overly cautious, but believe me it is better to be safe than sorry. When you are on the date, it's okay to probe a little; where they grew up, about their family, relationships etc.

In a world where I have met perverts, married men and commitment-phobes, it's important to protect your own safety and well-being. Before you meet them you could even see if they are on Facebook - just a browse of their pictures can give you an insight into their lives (but DO NOT tell them you have done this, as they could think you are a stalker).

Overall, don't be put off by a few horror stories about digital dating. So many people I know have met online and I think it will grow. I have met some idiots, but on the flip side I have met some wonderful people online and even made friends.

But just by taking a few precautions, you can be safe and happy online. Take a few precautions, follow my tips, and if you don't get a good vibe about someone, then don't go on the date. Happy dating!