



Akshay is targeting kids

THE ACTOR TALKS ABOUT HIS UPCOMING FILM JOKER

• JOGINDER TUTEJA

Akhay Kumar feels that comedy has to be an inherent element in each of his films. Starting off with a 'family comedy' *Housefull 2* and then an 'action comedy' *Rowdy Rathore*, both of which also facilitated an entry for him in the 100 crore club, he is now jumping genres with 'sci-fi comedy' *Joker*. Moreover, the promos have pretty much indicated that this is a new world that Shirish Kunder has created with the film. One can well expect a different experience for Akshay to be finding himself in this world.

"It certainly was a different world for all of us," says Akshay. "The first day when we all walked on to the sets in Chandigarh, we were all blown away. The structures by themselves were so magical but to build an entire story around a desolate village was enchanting. Shirish had a vision that we all understood. This was his new world and we knew that we had to throw ourselves into the characters written for us and help make them all come to life."

While his earlier released this year were aimed at families and youth respectively, it now seems that *Joker* also has

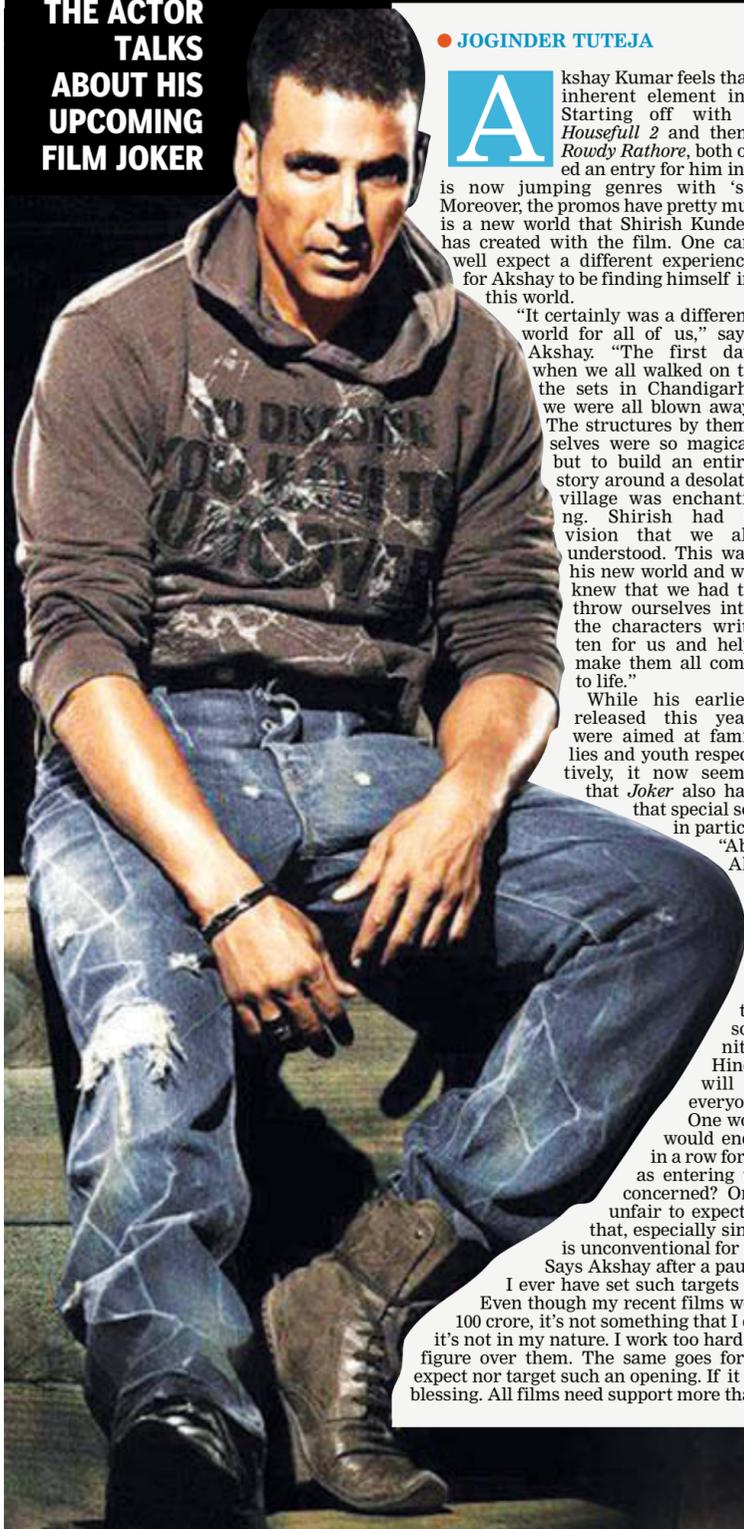
that special something for children in particular.

"Absolutely," says Akshay. "It's very much a film for the young ones with a tad of entertainment for adults of course. Basically it was made for anyone with a vivid imagination and a passion for sci-fi fiction. It's definitely not your average Hindi film concept so it will be refreshing for everyone."

One wonders whether *Joker* would end up making it three in a row for Akshay Kumar as far as entering the 100 crore club is concerned? Or would it be rather unfair to expect film after film to do that, especially since the genre of *Joker* is unconventional for a Hindi film?

Says Akshay after a pause, "I don't think that I ever have set such targets for any film of mine. Even though my recent films were expected to target 100 crore, it's not something that I declared myself since it's not in my nature. I work too hard on my films to hold a figure over them. The same goes for *Joker* too; I neither expect nor target such an opening. If it happens, it's always a blessing. All films need support more than they need figures."

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KHALID MOHAMED
ACCLAIMED JOURNALIST, FILM CRITIC AND FILM DIRECTOR KEEPS TRACK OF THE LATEST IN THE WORLD OF CINEMA

Cinema paradiso

Flicks made with thought

A movement is on, small but significant. Okay, so it's not exactly a New Wave lashing an arid horizon, like it did in the 1970s, with the emergence of filmmakers with something meaningful to say, and with either an inborn skill or a Pune Film Institute-education to say it loud and clear. Yup, I'm talking of an era when directors bucked the system and became such a vital force that they were reviled by Bollywood's top movie moghuls.

If Smita Patil was shown on the posters of *Chakra* bathing under a slum water tap, it offended the big guns' sensibilities. "Not in our culture," they protested.

Much tap water has flown under the Mumbai bridges since then. Young pathbreakers like Ketan Mehta, Kundan Shah and Saeed Mirza double-tasked between feature films and TV serials. NFDC, the government's funding agency turned turtle, harping on commercial viability rather than promoting quality cinema.

Indeed, that's the very quick backstory to the fiercely independent attempts on today, abetted considerably by the relatively cheaper means of digital film-making.

Anurag Kashyap leads the helm of the decidedly different directors who can bend the formulaic rules and can get away with it. Sudhir Mishra from an earlier generation, Vishal Bharadwaj and Dibakar Bannerjee are the other role models of aspiring filmmakers, and believe me, one lurks around every corner at Mumbai's buzzy Lokhandwalla-Oshiwara stretch.

The upbeat news is that there's renewed signs of life. Evidence: Three films which I've had the occasion to preview. Film Institute graduate Ajita Suchitra Veera's *Ballad of Rustom* is the most adventurous of the lot, venturing into the deep interiors of a hamlet encircled by hills, vales and lakes. Yet, urbanisation is making its inroads here. A young man (Sunny Hinduja, likeably restrained), slaving away at the post office, nursing tiny dreams in his heart, strives to settle there. His equally romantic friend sells novels on trains, often giving them away for free.

The pace of *Ballad of Rustom* is leisurely, suiting the subject, and unconditionally warm towards all its characters. If the senior postmaster is vulnerable to bribes, there's a reason. And if his subordinate plans to invent a bicycle with attached lights, it isn't a pipedream. Who knows the wonder bicycle could be a reality some day.

Elegiac and wonderfully photographed by Shanti Bhushan Roy, this little jewel of a film should appeal to anyone who cares for uncompromised cinema.

Ajay Behl's *B.A. Pass* is pure film noir, complete with a femme fatale controlling the men around her, without a shred of apology. Extremely well-acted by Shilpa Shukla and Shadab Kamal in the role of her innocent victim, this indie feature also wanders off into the neon-lit sleazy streets of New Delhi, like



MUST WATCH: Chandan Roy Sanyal in *Prague*; (below) Shilpa Shukla and Shadab Kamal in *B.A. Pass*

Dev D did. Yet while examining the racket of gigolos supplied to bored housewives, Behl establishes a distinct style which is alternately feverish and cool. An impressive debut, to put it mildly from a director who should be in the epicentre of Bollywood.

Ashish Shukla's *Prague* sprints out of control, but you're still inclined to keep pace with the case study of a gifted architect who descends into the vortex of booze, drugs and babes in the Czech capital. Chandan Roy Sanyal in the lead role is excellent, conveying the mental turbulence of a young man driven to fits of jealousy in his quest for love. Shot on the HD format, it has a grungy style which coalesces with the story content.

Now don't ask me where you'll be able to catch *Ballad of Rustom*, *B.A. Pass* and *Prague*. Hopefully, they will catch the eye of distributors and marketed appropriately.

Till then, cheers to the terrific three!

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RAM GOPAL VARMA
THE ACE FILM DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER DIGS INTO ALL THINGS GOOD, BAD AND UGLY IN REAL AND REEL LIFE

Shooting straight

NEGATIVITY AND NEGATIVE PEOPLE CAN GIVE US GREAT PLEASURE IN LIFE. SO DON'T BANISH THEM FROM YOUR LIFE

Worry, don't be happy

This business of attaining happiness — or the ultimate state of nirvana — fascinates me. Everyone desires to reach a state of absolute bliss. No worries, no anxieties, no responsibilities, no guilt. In this condition, life means absolute pleasure without an iota of pain.

This sounds great but give this a rethink. Because the terms pleasure and pain cannot be absolutely defined. They are relative terms. Let me offer you an example. Suppose a man is accustomed to eating stale bread as his daily meal. If his diet is suddenly changed to something like *biryani* which tastes much better, he experiences pleasure.

His degree of pleasure is in direct proportion to the improvement in the taste of his everyday meal. If he is offered still better food, his pleasure increases further and if one day suddenly, he has to satisfy his hunger with stale bread, he experiences misery.

This is because, he has



HIT IDEA: A still from the film *Company*, which was based on the underworld

obtained the knowledge of something which had enhanced his pleasure.

On the other hand, if stale bread is the only available food

on earth, the terms pleasure and misery will be meaningless. There will be no scope for comparisons. Even if the supply of a wonderful meal is con-

tinued over a long period, without any variation, the man will get tired of it. Conclusion: Pleasure can be derived only through compari-

Speaking for myself, I would have starved to death if Dawood Ibrahim was not born. That's because I designed my entire career on my study of goons, gangsters and terrorists

son. Consider another example. If a man feels he is good looking, it is only in comparison with other men who are not as good looking as he is. If he is sad about this aspect, it is because of men who are better looking than him.

According to my understanding, then a world of absolute happiness is a world where all people are identical in appearance and can boast of an equal amount of intelligence. Differences in the degree of intelligence would merely give rise to certain complexes. Also in a perfectly happy world, everyone should have equal power and an equal quotient of artistic ability.

To sum up, each and every

individual's tastes, behaviour, appearance, intelligence and capacity of doing work must be the same. Since everyone will have the same kind of thought, there will be no need to speak to each other or even be interested in or curious about the other. It would be an utopian world alright. But it would be a world devoid of competition, initiative, backbiting and short-changing. It would be a world of the living dead.

I'm glad I'm not dead. So whenever I'm asked if I'm a happy person, I either look away or say to myself for the umpteenth time, "What a stupid question!" The fact of life is that only the negative things are primarily responsible for creating positivity.

People are more interested in Hitler than in Gandhi and in Phoolan Devi more than in Mother Theresa.

Speaking for myself, I would have starved to death if Dawood Ibrahim was not born. That's because I designed my entire career on my study of goons, gangsters and terrorists. If not for them I would have been leading the life of a boring civil engineer. I sincerely thank God for creating negativity and negative people, thus making my life so pleasurable. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!