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TICKET TO BOLLYWOOD

Saturday, 26 September 2015 | Shrabasti Mallik



Although he will be sharing screen space with Akshay Kumar in the forthcoming Singh Is Bling, Arfi Lamba still considers Slumdog Millionaire, where his role lasted only a few seconds, as his trump card. He tells Shrabasti Mallik how he left a government job for acting

You know those actors who make tall claims of how they knew acting was their true heart's calling before they started writing with a pen but not Afri Lamba. He is almost four films old but it does not bother him much that he was never cast as the lead. One might remember him as Aditya or Fattu from Fugly but he feels that the few second of screen space that he got in Danny Boyle's Oscar nominated movie Slumdog Millionaire as Badri was what put him in the spotlight.

As of now, the actor is trying to throttle down his excitement before his forthcoming movie Singh Is Bling hits the screens. He plays Akshay Kumar's friend and quite candidly confesses, "It's a comic role, something that I have never done before. See, it is comparatively easy to enact a serious scene or romance someone but it is very difficult to maintain a straight face while delivering a hilarious dialogue or a witty comment because you know how funny the situation is going to get at the back of our head and you have to really keep yourself from giggling. Give me a romantic role and I will bring it home because I know that like the back of my hand but for this, I really had to practice."

There were reports of a certain fall out with director Prabhu Deva but before we could ask him about what went wrong he rubbished the news. "Those were false reports. Yes, there was a scene where Akshay hits me and I had to have a certain expression on my face which I could not do. The reports said that Prabhu sir lost patience but that was not the case. He has tremendous patience with his actors," he pointed out.

As a kid Lamba was shy and confessed that he did not have the guts to even think that he was acting. "Leave alone dreaming of Bollywood," he told us. A student of engineering from a small town Moga, in Punjab, he had relocated to Mumbai because of his job. Not even then did the industry allure him. He did start exercising though but not just to stay fit but, "because my girlfriend was a model."

Eventually he received an offer for a photo shoot and it was during that time that he decided to give acting a shot. To hone his skills he trained under Dinesh Thakur, whom he considers his mentor. Lamba started his career with the theatre which he feels has made him stronger and more confident as an actor. He echoed veterans like Om Puri and Naseeruddin Shah when he said, "A movie is a director's medium while theatre is an actor's medium."

His family, however, was not very comfortable with his decision. "I left my job and parents were upset because I was a Government employee. They kept telling me to reconsider my decision and when I went ahead with it, they were mad at me for almost two years," he said during a telephonic chat. But there were not many projects that were coming his way. With every passing he was loosing hope and he recalled the day that he almost wanted to give up. "It was a day before that I had to shoot for a music video with Tips when I had a very bad accident and broke my wrist. It was so bad that I said to myself that this was not my line and called up my parents and told them that I was coming back," he recalled. One good thing happened due to that accident — he made up with his parents. "Not all bad things are bad, I guess," he chuckled.

Bollywood came his way when he was offered the role of Badri, and he considers the character as a "blessing in disguise." "It was a short lived role and it brought me much recognition — it changed my life. The role of Badri made me realise there is no such thing as a big role and a small role," he added. He recalled an incident from Cannes that same year. "The entire team was supposed to fly out but Rubina's (the girl who played child Latika) shack in the slums caught fire a day or two before that. Everyone decided to stay back but I went because the tickets were expensive and I could not afford it a second time. So, I was almost the sole representative of the movie for a day before the crew joined. I met so many people and that broadened my horizons and also, perhaps, my reach," he shared with us. That gave Lamba much needed exposure at the international level.

"I am just beginning to find my footing in the industry and I believe I have a long way to go," he said. As audience, we can wait and see the stars he hits.

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