



DEBI

Emerges!

COVER STORY

Anam Biswas and Jaya Ahsan have recently made a film adaptation of Humayun Ahmed's popular novel Debi. The movie of the same name is set to hit the theatres later this month. In a lively adda with Rafi Hossain, the Debi stars talk about the making of the movie and discuss the philosophies of the eminent novelist.

Rafi: Today I am very excited, as I have the whole team of *Debi* with me! I cannot wait to hear all the stories behind this grand project. So let's start with Jaya, shall I?

Jaya: (Laughter) Why me?

Rafi: Because you are the producer of the film! I know you are quite busy with the promotions of the film.

Jaya: I am a bit tensed, but I am really enjoying the whole thing. This was my first attempt, so everything seemed challenging. But I absolutely loved dealing with this challenge.

Rafi: Animesh, you are not in the director's chair this time! Let me ask Jaya, how has Animesh been as an actor?

Jaya: Animesh is a professional and he has been a constant support during the shoot. He has been a director's actor. When you have such a tested and experienced director, he is bound to be professional in whatever he does. The whole thing comes from mutual understanding.

Chanchal: We don't have too many director's actor in the industry right now.

Jaya: That, and such a handsome director's actor, too!

(Laughter)

Chanchal: Animesh has been very cooperative throughout the whole time, so we would often bother him with this and that, but he would never complain.

Jaya: Animesh and I go a long way back. Those were rather different times. I was told that I have an 'urban look', that the modernity in my appearance cannot be erased by makeup so I am not suitable for simple, non-glamorous roles. Animesh was the first director to overcome this preconceived idea by giving me the role of a village girl in his telefilm *Hatkura*. I still remember having to pick the dirt off of used kitchen utensils to apply on my face and body, as our makeup was finished. So working with Animesh has been a very different experience for me. Even if we hadn't done *Debi* together, I would name Animesh as my most favorite co-artist, if anybody asked.

Chanchal: So Animesh is turning out to be a threat for us regular actors, I see! (Laughter) Seriously, after *Debi* I haven't signed another movie yet. But Animesh has already done that!

Animesh: All I can say is that I have been extremely lucky to get this acting opportunity. The offer came to me just three days prior to the shooting. Jaya suddenly called me and said, "You just have to do this!" I didn't even read the script thoroughly, though I always instruct my actors to read their scripts multiple times before shooting. About the film, I would say that 'Misir Ali' is a very unique character who has a distinct personality. It would never be easy to adapt one such character. Yet Chanchal pulled the job exceptionally well, his performance and dedication throughout the production have been outstanding. Naturally he is a very good actor, and our team also placed him perfectly with the set-plan and everything. For example, the house we selected as Misir Ali's residence seemed very close to the Misir Ali we find in the novels. Humayun Ahmed himself did not confine his creation Misir Ali within a certain set of personality traits. Misir Ali appears to the readers in diverse ways in different novels. Abul Hayat was the first person who said to Humayun Ahmed that Misir Ali seemed more like Satyajit's Professor Shanku. The author worked on his creation over and over again until his

last days, so we should never show the audacity to brand Misir Ali as a static, constant being.

Rafi: Animesh, would you pick Jaya Ahsan for the character 'Ranu' if you made the film?

Animesh: Well, every director has their own different interpretation of a particular story. Since I have been working with Jaya for quite a long time, I know that I can put my faith on her for almost any kind of role. Here we have to keep in mind that the original plot of *Debi* is based in 1977, and our interpretation of the story has been based in 2018. So a lot gets changed and modified because of the way of interpretation.

Chanchal: I am interested to know whether Animesh himself would play the role of Misir Ali, if he had made the film!

Animesh: No, definitely not! (Laughter)

Rafi: So you would also give it to Chanchal?

Animesh: Maybe. Actors like Chanchal and Jaya are the kind who knows how to take control, how to own the characters they are playing. This is a very strong quality for any artist. So had it been me or any other director, the names of Jaya and Chanchal would undoubtedly be among the first few on the shortlist.

Rafi: Chanchal, how did you feel about the offer? Did you already see Animesh's previous works with Misir Ali stories?

Chanchal: I may have caught those once or twice on TV, but I intentionally did not want to see those works once I got the offer. Because I felt that seeing those works might affect my own adaptability, might confine my acting within a stereotype.

Jaya: Our collective goal was to make Misir Ali seem unique and one of a kind. I also try to avoid watching similar characters so that nothing affects my originality. I followed the same principle when I did the role of *Charulata* in my first Kolkata film *Aborto*.

Chanchal: I would like to put *Devdas* here as an example. It has been adapted into movies in both Dhallywood and Bollywood, in two different unique ways of interpretation.

Rafi: And I think that is just how it should be done to avoid repetitiveness. Let me come to Faria now. What was your experience? Did you read the novel beforehand?

Faria: Yes, I had already read the novel *Debi* before the offer came to me. I was not entirely prepared for big-screen filming, since it is completely different from what I am used to. In TV dramas we can overlook the small issues. But in the movies, you have to be one hundred percent prepared to deal with every single detail. Everything has to be perfect. So I thought I still needed more time and experience before accepting film offers. But once I was told that it was based on a novel by Humayun Ahmed, I could not resist the temptation. I was aware that Jaya

apu was about to make a film with government support. But little clue did I have that it was going to be this very film. Once I received the offer, I requested for some time before I said yes or no. And I bought the book again, read it thoroughly, and assured myself that it is doable for me.

Rafi: And then you met Jaya and confirmed?

Faria: Actually I met Jaya Apu much later after accepting the offer. I was reached by the casting director, and after that I had multiple sessions with Anam Biswas about the film and its requirements. But the whole time I did not meet Jaya Apu.

Rafi: Jaya, was it your decision or a total team decision that you took Faria for the role?

Jaya: It was a team decision. We did consider a number of actors, but in the end Faria seemed to suit our requirements perfectly. I requested Anam to give her time and see if she would be compatible with everything.

Faria: I still remember, on our second meeting Anam Da told me that I will not be allowed to take any kind of makeup. It was very intimidating for me, as I never appeared without makeup on TV shootings. But Anam Da assured me that there is nothing to be worried about.

Jaya: Well we have to follow the script's requirements. Each role has its own demands. And the credit goes to the artists only when they do justice to the script by delivering precisely as per the requirements. Faria looked quite pretty without makeup. Even my role did not need that much of makeup.

Rafi: Animesh, was it your first time working with Anam?

Animesh: No, Anam acted in my TV dramas before. It was almost 12-14 years ago!

Jaya: I also worked with Anam as a co-artist before! We worked in 69 which was Anam's first TV fiction. We worked together in another drama where he played the role of a saint.

Animesh: Anam and I go way back. He would often come to *Charukola* to join our adda and sing. Our get-togethers continued for years.

Rafi: Can we say that Jaya Ahsan has been successful as a producer?

Jaya: (Laughter) I shouldn't make any such claim. I will let the audience be the judge!

Rafi: Of course, there is no absolute parameter based on which we can judge a movie's success.

Jaya: Definitely. Many well-directed films with amazing scripts failed to bag commercial success. Even the audiences sometimes fail to grasp the depth and dedication behind the films.

Rafi: *Debi* has already attracted a huge number of audiences with its teasers and promotional campaigns. And there is the loyal fan base of Jaya and Chanchal who are always anticipating something special from them!

