

Behind Biplab Goswami's comedy of errors, LAAPATAA LADIES



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

To make a film is to tell a story, and when it's a cumulation of collective consciousness, to find a common social ground, values, ordinary yet telltale stories that creates the base of human thought and psyche is a perfect example of a much needed social and cultural commentary.

DOWEL BISWAS

Creating a visual story, with an intention to attract and aware people from all walks of life is difficult. However, to persist on this thread of storytelling in a varied cultural landscape like India, where poverty, social injustice, cultural stigma and gender discrimination looms over, it's more than challenging.

With Kiran Rao on her first directorial chair, critically and commercially acclaimed comedy drama film *Laapataa Ladies* does it all. What is more intriguing is the mind of Bengali screenwriter Biplab Goswami, who had put a story known to all on a Bihar landscape with subtle nuances and weights put on two distinguishably different women in a patriarchal backdrop.

"If you are a film critic, cinema enthusiast or a socially-aware person, *Laapataa Ladies* will seem like satire to you. If you want to have a good time watching a film, it is a comedy. If you are in for making people aware through entertainment and the magic of cinema, you are like me," said the mild-mannered screenwriter Biplab in an exclusive interview at The Daily Star office.



which influenced Biplab's career choice.

"Although in urban areas, gender disparity has somewhat become tolerable in terms of professional, sociological, and educational sectors, it is still prevalent in rural areas. This thought always prompted me to do something, even if it doesn't make an immediate impact," said the mild-natured Biplab with a polite grin on his face.

After studying at the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute in Kolkata, Biplab worked on various projects in Mumbai, including editing films, producing documentaries, and eventually focusing on writing and directing.

The story of *Laapataa Ladies* began nearly ten years ago when Biplab wrote an outline that deeply resonated with him. He entered a prestigious screenplay competition in Mumbai, judged by industry stalwarts like Aamir Khan and Rajkumar Hirani. His screenplay, initially titled *Two Brides*, won second place out of nearly four thousand entries, catching the attention of Kiran Rao, who decided to direct the film, and Aamir Khan, who joined as a producer.

"The concept for *Laapataa Ladies* emerged from my lifelong observations of gender discrimination, starkly evident from childhood and increasingly pronounced in adulthood. This issue persists in the 21st century. A vivid memory from a village visit

years ago, where I saw a girl alone in fields, veiled despite no one around, struck me deeply. This image epitomized the gender disparities prevalent in our society," Biplab said while explaining his process of narrating a story that resonates with the mass.

Laapataa Ladies is a personal endeavor to illuminate the challenges women face in a manner that doesn't hurt anyone's sentiments, whether they are patriarchal agents of society or feminists. Biplab sees everyone as part of society and aims to explore society's resilience amid pervasive inequality across varied landscapes—cities, villages, and hills. He considers himself a feminist but opposes stereotyping, as he believes it excludes a significant part of society.

"I never thought of making a fiction-only formula film. I wanted my script to be closer to life, corresponding to a truthful social commentary while being entertaining to people from all spheres," he said.

With this idea in mind, Biplab framed the story of *Laapataa Ladies* as a humorous social commentary that can be both entertaining and commercially successful. He believes the film is more of a satire of the current sociological structure.

"The story is about societal complexities, but the complexity itself was the path for the characters to attain their respective independence and empowerment," he explained. "Patriarchal 'male ego' or self-righteousness not only harms women but also harms men, as they fall prey to their own schemes. It's not about patriarchy or feminism; equality is a prerequisite to making a society that is equal and free."

Biplab emphasised that he did not want to make a direct statement through the film but rather to show where the problem lies through ease, simplicity, humour, comedy, and the strength of cinema from a neutral standpoint. This approach allows audiences from all spheres to enjoy the film and make their own judgments without feeling any ideas being forced upon them.

The success of *Laapataa Ladies* has opened doors for Biplab, bringing offers from the Mumbai, Telugu, Tamil, and Bangladeshi film industries. Despite this newfound recognition, he remains focused on creating films that reflect his vision and storytelling style. Passionate about making films in Bengali, he dreams of collaborating with artists from both sides of the Bengal border.

NACHIKETA Insistent on Dhaka concert



Nachiketa Chakraborty's eagerly awaited performance at the Krishibid Institute in the capital, initially set for Friday (July 26), has been postponed to a later date by the event organising body, Ajob Karkhana. They have recently unveiled the new official date to the media. The organisation has now set a new date for the concert, stating that if conditions improve, it will take place on September 6.

The decision came preemptively amid the ongoing turmoil in Bangladesh, where violent clashes resulting from the quota reform movement protests have led to widespread unrest. As the situation begins to become subdued, the organisers have now announced the new date for the concert.

Nachiketa, showing remarkable determination, insisted on performing in Dhaka despite unrest and advice from West Bengal's CM Mamata Banerjee to cancel. Ultimately, the organisers decided to reschedule the concert.

They also assured ticket holders that their existing tickets will remain valid for the rescheduled concert date.

Babita recovers from COVID

On July 18, the iconic actress Babita tested positive for the coronavirus. The news was confirmed to the media by her younger sister actress Champa.

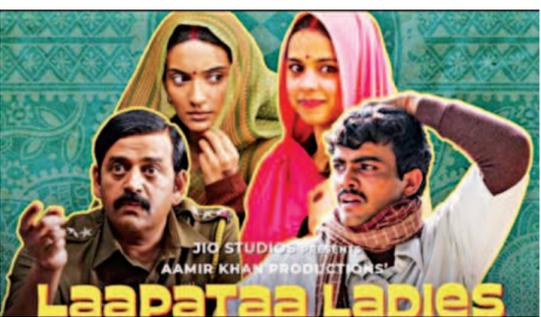
On Saturday, July 27, Champa announced that after four days of treatment at a private hospital in Dhaka, Babita tested negative for COVID-19. Following the doctor's advice, she returned home but continued to experience physical weakness.



Champa shared, "Apa had been feeling body aches for several days. Though there was no fever, she felt unwell. After getting tested, we learned she was COVID-19 positive. Without any delay, I admitted her to the hospital on July 18."

Champa also mentioned, "The situation in the country was quite concerning at the time. Amidst all this, the news of Apa contracting COVID-19 came as a shock to us. Alone, I felt uncertain about how to proceed. Then, after discussing with our elder sister, actress Shuchanda, we decided to get her admitted to the hospital promptly. After four days of continuous care, she returned home free from the virus. We are relieved for now."

This wasn't the first time Babita had been infected with Coronavirus.



Biplab, who considers himself a sociological observer of time, art, and culture, drew inspiration from his early life in Agartala and his fascination with trains, which symbolize communication and connection. These elements add depth and authenticity to his narratives. His father, Karunamoy Goswami, had a deep appreciation for arts and culture,

Could have been my daughter: Iresh Zaker



Six-year-old Riya Gope made headlines nationwide, after being killed by a stray bullet while playing on her rooftop in Narayanganj, during confrontations between agitators, law enforcement, and ruling party supporters. Her death has saddened the country, with condolences shared on social media.

Reflecting upon the current situation, actor and producer Iresh Zaker wrote on Facebook, "Our five-year-old daughter Meha could have been playing on the roof. I wouldn't have stopped her if she were in university and wanted

to protest." During the quota reform movement, many protesting students were injured or killed in violent incidents. Iresh wrote, "If Meha hadn't returned from those clashes, my life would have been destroyed, but I would have been proud. I would have wanted the state to honour her as a hero and bring her killers to justice."

Iresh Zaker and Mim Rashid's daughter, Meha, was born on August 7, 2019, and is now almost five. Her grandparents are Aly Zaker and Sara Zaker.

No sane person can support such destruction: Tareen Jahan

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Following the triumph of her initial film debut in West Bengal, Tareen Jahan is now poised to embark on her second feature film project in Kolkata.

She is all set to be featured in Manasi Sinha's second directorial venture *5 Number Swapnamoy Lane*. The shooting for the project will commence in the first week of August in Kolkata, as confirmed by Tareen.

"My debut film in Tollywood was also the director's first directorial film, she earned praise for the previous one. I am sure that she will be appreciated for this second project of hers as well," shared the actress.

It was her birthday on July 26, but this year's one was especially grim. She mentioned that after her father's demise, she never lavishly celebrated her birthday. Also, the country is going through a critical phase, and this is not a time for celebration. "Despite everything, many well-wishers and fans have reached out to me, and I am grateful to them," she said.

Tareen was a child artiste in Bangladesh Television (BTV) and was the winner of *Notun*

Kuri in 1985. She expressed her grief after learning about the attack on the television station during the violence. "I am an enlisted artiste of the channel; I grew up working for the channel. I never imagined that I would have had to witness such a horrific incident. Those who have attacked the channel are the enemies of the country."

Tareen also remarked, "After many hurdles, we have brought our country this far, and those who are attacking the developmental progress of the country are traitors."

In further explanation of her remark, she said, "Those who have tried to harm the country in various curses are unforgivable. They should be punished by the law. No sane person can support such destruction."

As she concluded the chat she left a message for the readers, "The love for our country comes first. Let's love our country and our people. Violence can never really be a solution to any problem."



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