

# 'Aparajito shows the making of an iconic film'

**Producer Firdausul Hasan talks about the latest Anik Dutta directorial, the challenges involved, what viewers can expect, and much more**

SOMEN SENGUPTA

Firdausul Hasan, former president of the Film Federation of India, and Friends Communication head, is the producer of many award-winning films at both the national and state levels. His latest film, *Aparajito* (*The Undefeated*), which is directed by Anik Dutta, is based on Satyajit Ray's emergence as a filmmaker from being an art director at a commercial firm. Excerpts from an interview with Hasan:

**Q Can this film be called a biopic of Ray?**

Not technically, because the lead character of the film is named Aparajito Ray, who's journey touches upon the life of Satyajit Ray.

The film will cover only the first few years of Satyajit Ray's life in cinema. It will show how the dawn broke in Indian cinema through a man named Aparajito Ray, who is none other than Satyajit Ray. One can say that the characters are shadows of real-life personalities.

**Q What was the issue in using real names?**

Satyajit Ray is the tallest icon of our times. He dominated the cultural space of Bengal for nearly 40 years, and even 30 years after his demise, no one could replace him. So, we did not take the risk of doing a direct biopic, where even a small deviation could create an unwanted controversy. We paid tribute to the maestro in our own way, and that is common in cinema. Our project was explained to his son, Sandip Ray, who himself gave consent to go ahead with it.

**Q What exactly does the movie cover?**

The movie will show Ray's emergence as an illustrator in a British advertisement company and how his inspiration for making cinema came while designing book covers. The key people of his life, who backed and motivated him, and his unimaginable struggle to make his first film will come alive onscreen. In this movie, that film is named "*Pather Padaboli*". I am sure cine-goers will understand what exactly it means.

**Q Which other real-life personalities are referred to in the film?**

Many of those with whom Ray



Producer Firdausul Hasan

Jeetu Kamal (right) as Satyajit Ray in the film

had interacted. Characters resembling Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr B C Roy, Chidananda Dasgupta, Harisadhan Dasgupta, his co-workers in the Calcutta Film Society, D J Keymer, and, of course, his family members will also be seen.

**Q Given that Kishore Kumar helped Ray financially while he was making *Pather Panchali*, will we get to see his character?**

That is the only major character which will not feature in the film. We failed to get an actor who could match the look, and Anik, being a perfectionist, finally discarded the part.

**Q Ray's struggle to make his first film while working in an advertisement company is well documented. What new facts does the movie bring to light?**

Ray's struggle is known but not visualised till now. This is a film that shows the making of an iconic film -- one which rewrites the history of world cinema and places Indian cinema in the international scene.

**Q Does the film go beyond Ray?**

Absolutely. *Pather Panchali* was not a debut for Satyajit Ray only, but many of his team members as well. It was the first film for his cameraman, production manager, technicians and the two child actors, Subir and Uma Dasgupta.

It was the debut for many people who had never worked in cinema before. They all laboured for years and made an ageless movie.

**Jeetu Kamal, who is playing the lead role, is already the talk of the town, especially for his look in the film. Your comments...**

For that, credit goes to Anik and makeup man, Somnath Kundu. The transformation of Jeetu Kamal into Aparajito Ray, who actually looks like Satyajit Ray, was an objective of the movie, and I am happy that the look has been appreciated even before the film's release. It shows that the masses have already accepted Aparajito Ray as Satyajit Ray.

**Q How did Kamal execute his character in the film?**

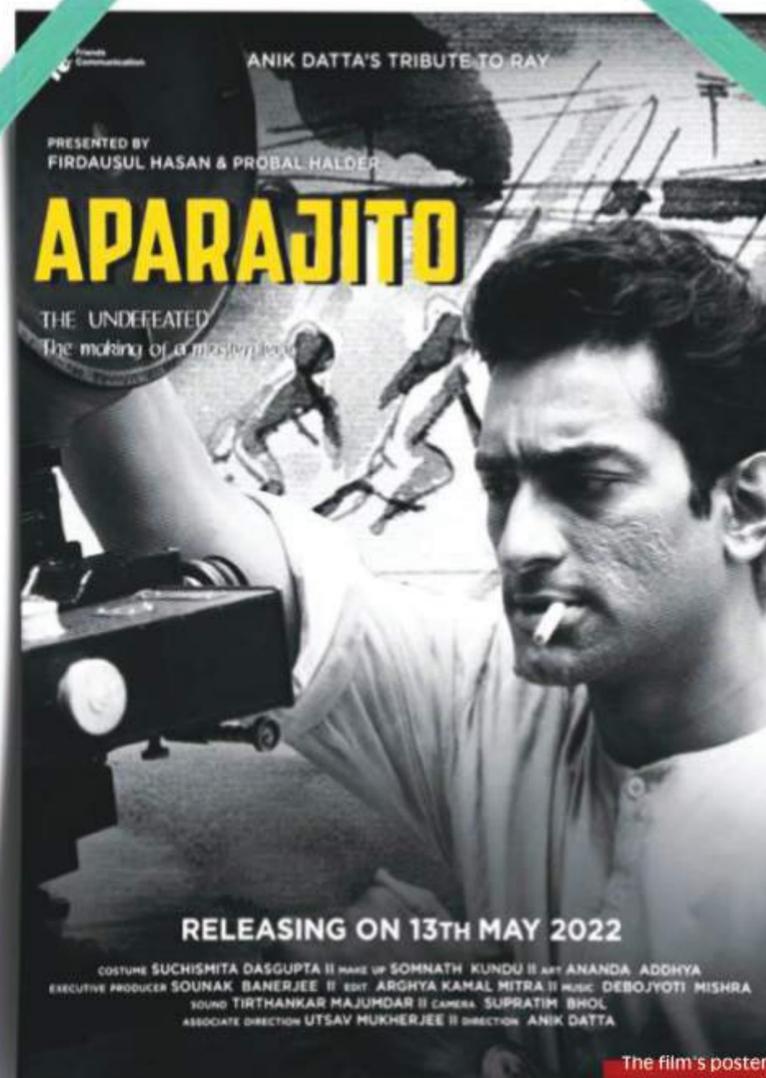
As a producer, I can only say that Jeetu was extremely dedicated and profoundly engrossed with the character, so much so that he did not talk to any of us before the shot. He used to stay in isolation and blend with the character as much as he could.

**Q Anik Dutta engrossed himself in the film too. What would you say about his contribution?**

Anik is already a big name in the industry, and he knows the sensitivity of the subject he has been asked to handle. He undertook extensive research in the last two years before the film went on the floors.

**Q What was the biggest challenge in making this film?**

This is a period piece, which demanded lots of outdoor shooting. The city has changed so much in the last few decades that it was nearly impossible for us to get that mood of Calcutta. We struggled to recreate even



The film's poster

**Lead actor Jeetu Kamal says<sup>a</sup>**

I feel blessed to get this role and I know the onus is on me. Ray -- an institution unto himself, even when he had not directed a single movie -- was a man with extraordinary talent. Knowing that and his influence on Indian cine-goers, acting in this film is just like walking on eggshells. I am grateful to Anik *da* and Hasan *da* for keeping faith in me and I also feel indebted to all crew members, who supported me in every shot.

I silently prepared for the character, without feeling overburdened. This is a once-in-a-lifetime role for any actor, and I am astonished that it came to me at such an early stage in my career. I know that people are appreciating my decision to undergo an oral operation for the sake of the character. But, as an actor, I will be more delighted if after watching me onscreen, they talk about my skills of getting into the skin of the character.

I do not know how the film will be received, but I have no doubt that the learning and hands-on experience that I have gained from it will keep me going.

the historical Senate Hall of Calcutta University, which was demolished in 1960. Ray was felicitated there on 23 September 1955 after the release of *Pather Panchali*.

**Q As a producer, what is your expectation from this film?**

Though I cannot ignore the financial return, still, I must say, this is a venture of passion. I produce films driven by my passion for them, and also for original cultural content that will stay. I look for recognition too.

**Q Will the film see a pan India release?**

Yes, apart from Kolkata, it will hit the theatres in Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Pune, Hyderabad and Chennai. Later, it will have a global release, which is big for a Bengali film.

**Q How did the screening in Mumbai go?**

That was a special screening at the National Film Development Corporation, where we were honoured to have Shyam Benegal. He was overjoyed to watch the movie.

The writer is a freelance contributor

## SNIPPETS

**Extraordinary tale**



A new documentary will uncover the life of Boris Becker, including the moments just before his recent prison sentencing.

The three-time Wimbledon champion was jailed for two years and six months in April for breaking the terms of his bankruptcy by hiding assets. He was declared bankrupt back in 2017 over an unpaid loan of more than £ three million on his estate in Mallorca, Spain.

An upcoming film, directed by Alex Gibney, was made with exclusive behind-the-scenes access to the six-time Grand Slam winner. The feature will contain footage from as long ago as 2019, right up until Becker's sentencing at the end of last month.

Gibney is known for his Oscar-winning direction of the 2007 true-crime documentary *Taxi to the Dark Side*, which explored the American military's use of torture. Film distributor Lorton Entertainment is preparing to launch sales of the Becker documentary at the Cannes Film Festival next week, according to a report by *Deadline*.

Discussing the documentary, Gibney said that it recounts "an extraordinary tale". "It is both a candid insider's look at the world of professional tennis and it is also a poignant portrait of the man himself," he explained, "Like the Rudyard Kipling quote at the entrance to Wimbledon Centre Court, Boris is an individual who appears to 'meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters just the same.'"

The Independent

