

Rereading *Hirak Rajar Deshe*: Political Processes, Institutions, and Resistance through the Lens of Bangladesh

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Abstract

This article reads Satyajit Ray's Hirak Rajar Deshe again, treating it as a film that still speaks about power, obedience, and the uncertain courage of resistance in Bangladesh. The king of Hirak, surrounded by fear and constant praise, does not remain a figure of fantasy for long. He begins to look like a way authority holds itself together, by bending institutions, shaping what people know, and controlling who gets to speak. The rhymes about taxation, deprivation, and not asking questions often sound light, but they carry a quiet pressure, one that teaches people to remain silent. The article stays close to the film's dialogues, verses, and a few key moments, like the brainwashing chamber and the pulling of the rope at the end. It pays attention to how words, images, and repeated actions begin to matter when read alongside Bangladesh's political experience over the last one and a half decades, a period shaped by tighter control but also by moments when people slowly began to speak again. In these parallels, the court poet becomes the figure of partisan praise, the astrologer the voice of fatalism, and the collective chant a living echo that still lingers in the streets and memories of the people. I use Weber on authority, Milgram on obedience, and Gramsci on hegemony to frame the reading. These perspectives helped me see how domination grows out of daily habits and rituals, but also how it can break when people stand together. I suggest that Hirak Rajar Deshe works as a form of political learning. The film leaves a simple lesson: tyranny does not last, and even a small voice, if joined with others, can overcome fear.

Keywords: Authority, Obedience, Political Institutions, Resistance, Bangladesh

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Introduction

Cinema often ends up speaking about politics. *Hirak Rajar Deshe* is one such cinema. Disguised in fantasy, it is in fact a modern fable of politics. Ray, as the ‘Aesop’ of film-folklore, uses rhyme, satire, unreality, humor, songs, magic and performance to strip away the way power hides itself (Rajadhyaksha & Willemen, 1999). Under the veil of innocence of child entertainment, the King of Diamonds ruthlessly rules through praise, fear, heavy taxes, censorship, and thought control which warns us about the danger of absolute autocracy.

This article focuses on Bangladesh’s political processes, institutions, and resistance in the recent authoritarian phase of the last fifteen years. The central question in this article is whether the authoritarian rule and the successful challenge to it can be understood meaningfully through the lens of the film *Hirak Rajar Deshe*, and whether such a reading helps us see Bangladesh’s current political moment more clearly. This present phase of Bangladesh’s politics is not settled. It has not yet been fully explained through theory, history, or textbooks. This is why returning to *Hirak Rajar Deshe* becomes meaningful. At first glance, the choice may seem unnecessary. The film was made about 50 years ago. In fact, it belongs to another millennia altogether in another country with a different political context. Yet this distance is precisely what makes the comparison significant, because the film even in the present time continues to explain the autocratic experience during the last one and a half decades in Bangladesh with striking clarity. If a cinematic text from an earlier millennium can illuminate present realities in a different country, then understanding how and why it does so become crucial. Actually, it does so, because *Hirak Rajar Deshe* is not just about one specific king or a particular historical moment. It grasps and exposes the universal structure of authoritarian system. Corruption, exploitation, class domination, economic extraction, psychological control, and systematic attempts to render people passive do not appear separately. They operate together as a totalitarian package. Across time and space, the tools and contexts of power may differ. Symbols, narratives, and historical references change, but the basic structures and mechanisms tend to remain in place. This is where *Hirak Rajar Deshe* continues to feel relevant. The film’s strength lies in how clearly it captures these underlying dynamics. Ray’s achievement is therefore not limited to representing a single political moment. He captured the core, the universal essence, of totalitarian dictatorship and presented it through a plain fable. This is why the film continues to speak across time and place. It shows that authoritarianism has a shared internal logic, and that cinema can reveal this logic with clarity and force, which in turn may help audience understand the basic mechanics of authoritarianism.

Objectives of the Study

This study has the following specific objectives:

1. To interpret *Hirak Rajar Deshe* as a political text that reveals authority, obedience, and institutional complicity, with reference to the political realities of Bangladesh.
2. To examine the film's recurring discursive and symbolic patterns related to authority, sycophancy, taxation, rhymes, and resistance, focusing on how these meanings are produced through language and representation.
3. To examine how resistance is enacted in the film and in historical contexts, demonstrating how cinema functions as a medium of political pedagogy and collective imagination.

Literature Review

A closer look at the existing scholarship shows that critics have repeatedly resisted treating *Hirak Rajar Deshe* as a mere fantasy (Robinson, 1989; Mitra, 2014). Instead, the film has been discussed as an allegory of power, fear, and compliance where “the king of Hirak is a thinly disguised version of the modern political tyrant. His diamonds mines are manned with forced labor. His peasants are poverty stricken and cruelly taxed.” (Banerjee, 2003: 3) One of the earliest signals that *Hirak Rajar Deshe* deserved to be read politically appears in Robinson's (1989) *Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye*. When discussing Ray's later career, he notes that the shift toward satire in *Hirak Rajar Deshe* seems to grow out of unease with political authority and the pressure to conform. What is striking here is Robinson's insistence that humor does not soften the film's political edge. Instead, satire becomes a way of speaking under pressure (Robinson, 1989).

Later, writing on *Hirak Rajar Deshe* pays closer attention to how the film works through form rather than through direct statement. In his discussion of the Goopy–Bagha trilogy, Biswajit Mitra notes a shift in this film, where fantasy no longer serves mainly as escape but begins to act as satire (Mitra, 2014). What interests Mitra is not fantasy itself, but the way power is staged. The ruler's authority, he suggests, depends more on performance than on any real legitimacy. Roy and Dutta (2023) read the film in a different way, treating it as a dystopian story rather than simple fantasy. What draws their attention is how the film's playful surface slowly gives way to a world organised by fear and discipline. Taken together, these readings suggest that fantasy in *Hirak Rajar Deshe* does critical work by exaggerating power, making it visible, and showing how easily it can begin to crack.

In his semiotic reading of *Hirak Rajar Deshe*, Chinmoy Lahiri spends time with the brainwashing machine, but his concern is not limited to the device as a spectacle (Lahiri, 2009). What matters more in his argument is how obedience slowly takes shape through repeated practices, rather than being imposed only through direct force. In this reading, authority works through repetition, ritual, and display, gradually reshaping how subjects think and speak.

Dutta and Saha (2021) look closely at the language used in the film, especially slogans, chants, and simplified forms of speech. Their study shows how these repeated phrases begin to shape political behaviour inside the story. Their analysis suggests that control operates most effectively when language itself becomes predictable.

Questions of institutional power are addressed more directly in D. K. Banerjee's Master's thesis (2009). Banerjee does not focus on individual villains. Instead, he pays attention to how authority moves through systems and everyday structures. His reading of *Hirak Rajar Deshe* draws attention to the roles played by the police, the education system, and other everyday structures that sustain obedience. What is useful in this approach is its refusal to treat domination as exceptional. Power, in Banerjee's account, becomes routine and bureaucratic. Even so, Banerjee's emphasis on institutions provides an important bridge between film analysis and broader discussions of governance (Banerjee, 2009).

Almost the same line of thought has been pursued by Bose (1995) and Bandyopadhyay (2001). Like Bose (1995) in his book *Satyajit Ray-er Rajnoitik Cinema*, Samik Bandyopadhyay's concern in *Cinema O Rashtra* (2001) is less with individual images and more with the conditions that make obedience seem natural. In passing, *Hirak Rajar Deshe* appears in his work as an example of how cinema can reveal the everyday presence of state power. The argument is not developed at length, but the emphasis on silence and routine loyalty is hard to miss. Taken together, these Bengali readings do not offer a complete political theory of the film, but they do make one thing clear. Institutions, rather than personalities, remain central to how power is imagined (Bandyopadhyay, 2001). That is, what matters more is not individual tyranny but the institutional arrangements that make domination appear normal, even ordinary.

Ray's own comments on *Hirak Rajar Deshe* occupy an unusual place in the critical discussion. They are often cited but rarely examined closely. In *Speaking of Films*, Ray remarked that while the film was meant to entertain, it was "never intended to be politically innocent" (Ray, 2005, p. 94). Though brief, the statement blurs the line between fantasy and political intent. Ray does not present *Hirak Rajar Deshe* as a direct political statement, but he also never distances the film from questions of power. His remarks point instead to a careful balance, where satire creates room for political ideas to move without being locked into a single meaning. What becomes important here is the sense that the film's political charge was deliberate rather than accidental. This helps explain why later critics have continued to return to the film when thinking about power, institutions, and resistance.

If these writings are read side by side, it becomes clear that *Hirak Rajar Deshe* has largely been understood as a film about power, authority, and obedience. Critics have paid close attention to satire, ideological control, and the role of institutions, and many of these readings are careful and persuasive. At the same time, a certain limit begins to appear. Much of this work stays tied to a

single political setting, even though the problems the film raises are not restricted to one national history. The patterns shown in the film, such as fear becoming normal, obedience turning routine, and dissent being managed quietly, travel easily across political contexts. This becomes particularly relevant when the film is approached from the perspective of Bangladesh. Rather than treating *Hirak Rajar Deshe* as a national allegory with a fixed referent, this article suggests “rereading” it as a flexible political narrative that travels across time, space, and contexts. Such a rereading does not replace existing interpretations, but it unsettles their limits to capture the universal core of authoritarianism as exposed in the film.

Methods

This study approaches *Hirak Rajar Deshe* through discourse analysis because the film’s political force seems to emerge less from explicit statements than from patterned language, repetition, silence, and familiar ways of speaking that organize authority and obedience (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 2010; Gee, 2011).

While working with the film, the study did not look at the dialogues, rhymes, or the story structure as simple or neutral parts. I tried to pay attention to how they sound, how they return again and again, and how people inside the film speak in familiar ways. Slowly it became clear to me that meaning does not come all at once. It is built through repetition, through everyday language, and through what is said and what is left unsaid. This way of reading is close to qualitative work in discourse studies, where language is understood as something that shapes power in daily life, not just something that reflects it (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Schiffrin et al., 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2008).

While watching the film, the study also drew on ideas from semiotics. Images, symbols, and allegorical scenes often seemed to carry meanings beyond what was directly shown or spoken. Looking at discourse and signs together helped me see how power and resistance take shape within the film through language, images, and systems of signs. Rather than starting with fixed themes, it followed how these meanings appear, repeat, and shift as the film unfolds (Saussure, 1983; Barthes, 1972; Eco, 1976; Hall, 1997).

Findings and Discussions

Authority and Obedience

The central theme of *Hirak Rajar Deshe* is how authoritarian rule is built and kept in place. The king embodies Weber’s typology of “traditional authority” but in practice his rule is sustained by coercion and consent that is trained (Weber, 1978).

The brainwashing chamber where dissenters are forced to repeat verses of obedience recalls Milgram’s (1974) insights into how individuals comply with authority even when it undermines personal conscience. The king’s subjects internalize obedience not only through fear but also

through loyalty turned into habit. In Bangladesh, similar patterns have been observed during the last decade and a half of authoritarian entrenchment, where citizens were compelled into silence by a combination of bureaucratic intimidation, surveillance, and systemic punishment for dissent. The film thus dramatizes how people learn to obey; it does not come on its own, and how it becomes a key pillar of authoritarian rule.

When this research examines authoritarianism, the study found that it is always present. Authoritarianism is governed through scripture. These scriptures shape how power is exercised and justified. Newton (2013) explains this in his book *Naya Manobotabad o Noirajyo*.

“How, in what way, and why did the general public or the so-called “subjects” come to believe that the entire country belongs to a single king? To answer this question, one must first turn to questions of power as Foucault himself says (Foucault, 1977), and then to questions of weapons. No regime can sustain itself without weapons; power has to be produced and maintained. In that sense, weapons or armed force are necessary for the exercise of power. In this way, a connection between the king and weapons is established.” (Newton, 2013)

In the management of politics, the most effective weapon is the scripture that legitimizes authoritarian authority. In cinema, whenever a king announces a decision of his own choosing and then asks his ministers whether it is right (*thik kina?*), the courtiers respond without hesitation, speaking in unison to declare that it is right (*thik!*). Obedience is a crucial tool of authoritarianism, and it depends on the control of thought and the control of speech, forming a complete system much like an *Aynaghor*, where even speaking becomes a source of danger.

Sycophancy and Flattery: The Court Poet

Among the king’s courtiers, this research found the role of the poet striking. He keeps writing rhymes to praise the ruler. One line stayed with me: “Baki rakha khajna, motei bhalo kaj na” (Leaving taxes unpaid is never a good act). On the surface it sounds like a simple rhyme, but in my reading it works as a tool of control. The scene reminded me how language itself becomes power here. (Hall, 1997)

What becomes clear is that authority welcomes sycophancy and flattery because they make power easier to sustain. Praise removes the need for explanation. When admiration replaces reasoning, authority appears natural and beyond question. Those who flatter do not challenge, and this makes flattery a safe and useful language of rule. It also turns loyalty into something visible, performed in public spaces, meetings, and media. Over time, this behaviour no longer remains personal. It becomes part of how power operates. In this sense, sycophancy is not simply enjoyed by authority, it is gradually built into the system that keeps authority in place.

In Bangladesh newspapers at that time repeatedly used the same kind of official lines, making

citizens believe that paying without protest was their duty. It was also seen how some partisan intellectuals echoed the same voice, just like the court poet. Ministers often gain a particular advantage within power. It is the license to flatter the head of government openly. We watched this happen again and again on television and on the mainstream news. At the time, it was broadcast without hesitation. Later, when similar clips circulated on Facebook and people reacted with criticism, those reactions did not disrupt the system. They were absorbed by it. In such an environment, corruption does not arrive suddenly. It settles in slowly. Over time, it becomes familiar, almost ordinary, until society loses track of when wrongdoing begins to feel normal. The widely remembered speech of that minister, delivered in an exaggerated and almost theatrical tone while praising the then prime minister of Bangladesh, captures this process clearly.

The Royal Astrologer and the Politics of Fate

From the reading it is found that the figure of the royal astrologer felt very telling. He does not use force, he uses belief. It struck me how he speaks about fate, as if the king's rule was written in the stars. That kind of claim makes power look natural, almost sacred.

The fate declared by the royal astrologer always works in the king's favor. It does nothing for the people, and in fact often harms them. This fate is presented as natural and unavoidable, as if no one is responsible for it. Yet it is clearly shaped by a person acting deliberately and selfishly. Once fate is framed this way, people stop thinking about change. Responsibility is pushed onto circumstances, passivity sets in, and power begins to feel normal. Over time, this turns into the idea of a fixed national destiny, where people slowly forget that they can decide their own future.

The more I thought about it, the more I saw how this connects with real life. I remembered moments in Bangladesh when leaders justified their rule by saying it was needed for the nation's destiny or for stability. I thought of how official speeches sometimes turned politics into fate, making people feel that nothing could change. For me, the astrologer shows another side of authoritarian control. It is not only soldiers or police. It is also those who give knowledge a sacred form. What came to mind was that even "specialists" like him, who should speak truth, can be turned into voices that keep people passive. That silence of citizens does not come only from fear, but also from the feeling that power is divinely fixed.

On the other hand, we have seen how the previous government of Bangladesh granted special privileges to its own ministers and senior bureaucrats, including flats, cars, and financial benefits, and how, by supporting such forms of corruption, it continued to justify injustice as normal practice in Bangladesh.

Taxation and Exploitation

For governments, tax is the most convenient source of money because it can be taken by force. Unlike loans or investment, no one has to be persuaded. Creating new tax categories simply means

finding new ways to collect money, usually from those who have the least ability to protest. Tax becomes a form of controllable resource, while the cost of waste and mismanagement is pushed onto ordinary people. Throughout the year, authority keeps praising taxation and tries to turn paying tax into a moral duty. In this way, economic burden is quietly justified as civic virtue.

Under the narrative of development, Sheikh Hasina's government carried out severe corruption across multiple sectors over the past years, a reality that has now been laid bare through a research study presented to the public by Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya.(Bhattacharya, 2024)

During Sheikh Hasina's rule, corruption became systemic through money laundering, the plunder of bank loans, inflated development project costs, distorted economic data, the misuse of social safety programmes, and the dominance of politically connected businesses over state resources, leaving ordinary people to absorb the social and economic damage.

In the film, the king's rule is shown through taxes. One rhyme says, "Bhorpet nao khai, rajkar deoya chai" (Even if you do not eat to your fill, you must pay the king's taxes). What came to mind was how simple lines like this carry a very hard truth. The poor are asked to give even when they have nothing left. While watching, I thought of Bangladesh. I have seen reports where farmers, workers,(The Daily Star, 2024; BSS, 2024)

and rickshaw pullers struggle for daily food, yet still pay different kinds of charges and fees. In those moments, the film did not feel distant at all. It felt like it was talking about our own reality. In recent years, Bangladesh's fascist prime minister often tried to cover the failures of her government by offering bizarre food recipes, as if she herself could not hear what she was saying. At a time when soaring prices were pushing ordinary people to the edge of survival, we saw her appear in the media with a smile, speaking in a light and almost playful tone. She even joked about how, once the price of eggs went down, people could boil them, store them in the fridge, and reduce their nutritional suffering, turning a moment of deep public distress into something close to mockery.

The rhyme also shows how unfair systems become normal through repetition. Paying taxes is made to look like duty, even when it causes hunger. I felt this was very close to how corruption and misuse of resources work in our society. Ordinary people sacrifice, but wealth collects at the top.

Resistance and Uprising

In this cinema, resistance begins through music and magic. When Goopy and Bagha start singing, thought control begins to break. Music and magic stand for awareness, a waking state of the mind. In this state, ordinary human qualities return, such as kindness, helping others, caring for everyone, togetherness, and a sense of what is right. In the film, the king appears very powerful. He gives diamonds to his ministers even in everyday moments, and his behaviour carries a sense of

arrogance. Through these gifts, he keeps everyone under control. On the anniversary of his rule, kings from other kingdoms come and praise him openly. Yet this king is hollow from inside. He lives in constant fear. Even though songs are written comparing him to a god and sung inside his court, a small flame in a distant village is enough to make him tremble, afraid that his throne might be lost.

When the king realises that his system of thought control is no longer working, the entire mechanism begins to collapse. The symbols of his power are broken. A similar process can be seen in Bangladesh. Central symbols of power, such as official buildings, statues, and other icons of autocracy, were attacked and destroyed by people. Once these symbols fall, authoritarian power seems to vanish almost like magic. Soon after, the ruler flees, and people occupy the palace.

The scene in the film where the king's symbols are destroyed begins to look very close to recent scenes in Bangladesh. At times, it feels as if people have almost acted out the film itself. A similar pattern can be found earlier in history as well. Between 1958 and 1968, Ayub Khan celebrated ten years of development with great ceremony. Soon after these grand celebrations, a massive popular uprising led to his downfall. The rope-pulling scene took me back to days when people returned to the streets and began to speak again.

Absence of Women and Political Participation

When I watched *Hiral Rajar Deshe*, one thing kept troubling me. There are no women in the story. This silence is very clear, and it says a lot. Ray shows many forms of power and resistance, but he leaves out half of society. I could not ignore that. It made me think of Bangladesh. In politics and protests, women are always present, yet they are often kept at the margins. They join rallies, face risks, but their roles are not remembered in the same way as men's. The film reflects that same exclusion. Feminist film theory has long argued that the absence of women from cinematic narratives is not neutral, but a structural feature of patriarchal representation (de Lauretis, 1987).

This absence felt significant to me. It is part of the larger problem of how authoritarian systems and patriarchal culture work together. Watching the film, I felt that the missing voices of women are also part of the story of power.

Film as a Space of Political Learning

I have watched *Hiral Rajar Deshe* many times, and it never felt like only a story. Each viewing left me with something small but important, a line, a gesture, or a moment that stayed in my mind. Slowly, I began to see how the film speaks about power and about how people respond to it. Cinema works this way because it uses familiar words and images that people understand without much effort. A rhyme, a gesture, a short scene can reach people more directly than a heavy book. I remembered what Nichols (1991) and Monaco (2009) wrote. They said film is often where ideas meet and clash in public view. I could see this clearly in Ray's work. The rhymes are playful, yet

they carry sharp lessons about obedience and fear. The satire looks simple, but it stays in the mind like a song.

In Bangladesh, many people do not read long political texts. They learn about politics from songs, cinema, or small stories in newspapers. For this reason, I think film becomes a real classroom. It helps people imagine freedom when the real world feels closed. When I think of Ray's film, I see how satire turned into courage. Even today, for me it felt like politics can be understood through culture.

Recent developments in Bangladesh's political life make *Hirak Rajar Deshe* feel uncannily familiar. Many of us have watched the film before, often as satire or fantasy, but when it is approached as a manual, its meaning shifts. Read this way, the film begins to resemble a political guidebook. It does not simply depict authoritarian power; it quietly instructs viewers on how such power operates and, more importantly, how it can be resisted. In this sense, *Hirak Rajar Deshe* cannot be seen as a neutral or detached cinematic work. It functions as a political text, one that offers lessons in recognizing oppression, understanding complicity, and imagining collective resistance. The film, then, is not only about power, but about learning how to struggle against it.

I also thought of how the film was released in 1980, not long after the Emergency in India. For me, that context matters. The playful surface helped Ray to escape direct censorship, but the message still spread. It taught people that obedience is not natural, that it is made and forced. When I connect this with Bangladesh, I see how people also used humor, rhyme, and street slogans to speak against authority. For these reasons, I believe *Hirak Rajar Deshe* should be studied as political cinema. It does not shout, yet it speaks loudly. Even with humor on the surface, the film carries a hard, urgent message.

Rhymes and the Politics of Obedience

One thing that kept coming back to me while watching *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (1980) was its use of rhymes, they sound easy on the ear, almost casual, the kind of lines one might hear without thinking too much. Yet the more I stayed with them, the harder it became to ignore what they were doing. Beneath their lightness, these simple lines were carrying something far more serious. The rhymes do two things at the same time. On one side, they repeat the message of obedience and make people accept what is unfair. On the other side, they leave space for resistance, and this is why they stayed in my mind.

Take for example the rhyme "Anahare nai khed, beshi khele bare med." It suggests that hunger is good and eating well is bad. Hearing this line, my mind went to moments in Bangladesh when rising prices were explained away by asking people to adjust and endure a little more. Those words were familiar, even though the people speaking to them were rarely the ones making sacrifices. Another verse stayed with me as well, "Janar kono shesh nai, janar cheshta britha tai." It sounds simple, almost careless. But it quietly pushes the idea that asking questions is useless, that trying

to know too much only leads nowhere. In that way, the rhyme does more than entertain. It gently closes the space for doubt and inquiry. Such rhetoric functions as a way to stop people from asking questions. As Foucault (1977) has shown, regimes of power frequently discipline knowledge in order to discipline subjects. In Bangladesh I have seen how governments often tried to keep universities and newspapers under control. Teachers and reporters lived with pressure, and often silence felt like the safer choice. Over time, people learned not to ask too much. Hearing the rhyme in the film brought that quiet atmosphere back to me. It shows how simple words can be used to make people accept that questioning is useless.

Another rhyme says, “Jay jodi jak pran, Hiraker raja bhagoban.” Here the king is praised almost like a god. For me, this was striking. It reminded me of how leaders in our region sometimes build an image larger than life, as if their power is sacred. Here, the ruler is spoken of in a way that almost turns him into something sacred. It is not about law or reason anymore, but about belief. This is close to what Weber described as charisma, where obedience comes from reverence rather than logic (Weber, 1978). I have seen this kind of loyalty in Bangladesh as well, where political leaders are often followed with a devotion that leaves little room for questioning. The rhyme in the film stretches this praise so far that it begins to look strange, quietly suggesting how domination can start to feel like divine will.

The rhyme “Dori dhore maro tan, raja hobe khan khan” feels different from the others. It does not hide its meaning. There is a direct call to act together, and that bluntness stays with the viewer. What the rhyme makes clear, without much explanation, is how power can collapse when people stop standing alone and begin to pull in the same direction. When I listened to the rhyme, I felt it was not only about one kingdom in a story. It also showed how a whole culture can be pushed to stay quiet, where people are discouraged from thinking freely. Scott once wrote about the ‘hidden transcript’ of resistance (Scott, 1990). I thought of that idea when I heard this chant. The critique of inequality finds perhaps its sharpest expression in the extended verse:

“Dekho bhalo jon-e roilo bhanga ghore,
Mondo je jon shinghashone chôre;
Sonar fôshol phôlay jahar,
Du-bela jote na ahar;
Hiraker khonir mojur hoyeo kanakori nai.”

This verse starkly contrasts the suffering of the honest and industrious with the privileges of the corrupt elite. It points to an uneven world, where those who do the hardest work remain poor, while others enjoy comfort and authority without producing much themselves. In Bangladesh I often notice how farmers, miners, and factory workers give their full labor but still remain poorly

paid and left out of politics. When I listened to the rhyme in the film, I thought of this same unfairness.

I was reminded that those who create wealth usually live with the least. The rhyme says this in a very simple way.

Hall (1997) reminds us, the same line can mean different things to different people. In *Hirak Rajar Deshe*, rhymes meant to enforce obedience are reappropriated by the people as tools of defiance. Seen this way, *Hirak Rajar Deshe* feels less like a fantasy and more like a film that quietly teaches. It shows how cinema can talk about power and resistance through simple images, rhyme, and humour. This is why the film does not fit neatly into the label of children's cinema. What it offers instead is a way of noticing how authority works, and how people begin to question it.

Manipulating Time and Authoritarian Memory

Authoritarian regimes often attempt to control not only political institutions but also the temporal imagination of their citizens. In *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (1980), the king inaugurates a new calendar system called HIRAKABDA, symbolically rewriting time itself so that history begins with his reign. Anderson once described nations as 'imagined communities.' I saw the same idea in the king's new calendar, where power is legitimized by anchoring collective identity in state defined temporal markers (Anderson, 1991). By monopolizing the calendar, the king asserts himself as the sole point of historical reference, erasing alternative narratives of the past.

Observation of the researcher noticed a close echo between the film and the commemorations with Bangladesh's state orchestrated commemorations launched in 2020 to mark the centenary of the nation's founding leader. Extending until December 2021, the commemorative year was not merely a celebration of national history but also a performative exercise of symbolic politics. Through stamps, monuments, and official programs, the ruling regime sought to bind the nation's temporal consciousness to a singular political figure.

When compared the film with real events, study marked a pattern. Both in stories and in real politics, rulers try to control time itself. They rename calendars, or create special commemorations, so that people remember history only through their rule. It is felt that this was a way of telling citizens how to think about the past and how to imagine the future. In that way, such acts make the power of the ruler look permanent.

Conclusion

Hirak Rajar Deshe never felt like a simple fantasy. The study found it as a film that is thinking about power, about authority, and about what it takes to resist. Through rhyme, humour, and repetition, Ray shows how fear is produced and how obedience becomes ordinary. At the same time, the film also leaves space for something else, moments when fear weakens and people begin to act together.

Reading the film alongside recent political experience in Bangladesh made these questions feel closer rather than distant. Over the past years, institutions often appeared more interested in control than in protection. Silence became common, sometimes chosen, sometimes enforced. Yet this silence was never complete. There were moments when people hesitated, spoke, or gathered again, even when the risks were clear. The film does not explain these moments, but it helps in recognising them.

Ideas from Weber, Milgram, and Gramsci help frame why obedience lasts and how power holds, but the film works differently. It does not argue. It shows. It turns these ideas into scenes, sounds, and lines that stay in the mind. While writing this, I kept noticing how Ray's verses still surface in political conversations and memories. They do not offer certainty, but they remind us that authority depends on consent, and that resistance, once imagined, does not disappear so easily.

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