

Research Article

# Analysis of Socio-Political Discourses in the Films of Srijit Mukherji

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## I N F O

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## A B S T R A C T

This article would be analyzing the selected films of Srijit Mukherji from the perspective of socio-political discourses/ issues presented in those films. Cinema is a literary form which acts as a medium to put forth the socio-political discourses for the public to think and reflect. These literary creations are mainly the reflections of the director of the film. The idea, theme and arguments put forth through the screen of cinema in the form of socio-political discourses become the part of the cinematic art. Thus, this paper analyses this aspect with reference to the nine prominent films of Srijit Mukherji, viz., Autograph, Baishe Shrabon, Hemlock Society, Jaatishwar, Chotushkone, Nirbaak, Rajkahini, Zulfikar and Uma.

**Keywords:** Discourse, Discourse Studies, Srijit Mukherji, Socio-Political Discourses, Cinema, Cinematic Art

## Introduction

Discourses are an important aspect of literary work. Cinema is also not untouched from this, for it is the literary creation or reflection of the director of the film. The idea, theme and arguments put forth through the screen of cinema in the form of socio-political discourses shapes the thought process of the society and how they view their present and the future world.<sup>1</sup> With reference to cultural expression, different socio-political issues become the part of cinematic text. The cinema of Srijit Mukherjee encompasses a lot of socio-political issues of the past and the present to define the society of the times. Srijit Mukherjee is mostly confined to Bangla cinema reflecting the themes, culture, society and polity of Bengal. This article identifies and analyses the different socio-political issues raised in the films of Srijit Mukherjee. In doing so, the prominent films of Srijit Mukherjee like Autograph, Baishe Shrabon, Hemlock Society, Jaatishwar, Chotushkone, Nirbaak, Rajkahini, Zulfikar and Uma were considered for analysis.

Srijit Mukherji is basically a Bengali film director and screenwriter who have also directed few Hindi films. The

director has directed eighteen films till now, among them seventeen films are in Bengali and only one in Hindi. His work started to be recognised from his very first directorial debut of feature length film Autograph (2010). This film got critical and commercial success. His released films<sup>2</sup> are, as of 2021: Baishe Shrabon (2011) Hemlock Society (2012), Mishawr Rawhoshyo (2013), Jaatishwar (2014), Chotushkone (2014), Nirbaak (2015), Rajkahini (2015), Zulfikar (2016), Begum Jaan (2017), Yeti Obhijaan (2017), Uma (2018), Ek Je Chhilo Raja (2018), Shahjahan Regency (2019), Vinci Da (2019) Gumnaami (2019), Dwitiyo Purush (2020) and Kakababur Prottyaborton (2021).

Most of his films were commercially successful and won numerous National Awards and more than 160 total awards. This is not only a list of achievements but actually a mere reflection of his genius.

Srijit Mukherji has put different characters from multifarious backgrounds in his films, thus putting them into different socio-political contexts to define the space and time of the character. In his films, one can see a serial killer poet, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese origin Bengali language folk

poet, a retired government officer who is on a mission to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphic symbols, a rookie film director, an experienced actor, life story of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, story of prostitutes set in during the time of partition and others.

- Srijit's films are a mixture of old 'Bengali Bhadrolak'<sup>3</sup> culture and contemporary neoliberal thought, where middle-class characters play the major role
- For a long time, no one in Bengal made movies<sup>4</sup> with such story consisting of lots of historical and cultural references and artistic influences
- Dialogues and songs are important factors in Srijit Mukherji's movies because it is necessary to tell the story with appropriate dialogues which suit time and space

Some of the films of Srijit can be said to be the best examples of contemporary Bengali commercial cinema. While in other films, it can be said that the ideas are better than the film itself. But one would agree that Srijit Mukherji has transformed the urban Bengali film. He could be considered as one of the most influential filmmakers of present Kolkata.<sup>5</sup> It seems that Srijit works for contemporary audience without undermining cinematic value of a film. His work distinguishes him from other contemporary directors. In most of his movies apart from directing, he has written the script/ dialogue which gives the director more independence.

### Films as Artistic, Cultural Reflection and Director's Vision

On the surface, theatrical film seems most closely comparable to stage drama.<sup>6</sup> We watch a play as we will; we see a film only as the filmmaker wants us to see it. And in film we also have the potential to see a great deal more. "Art covers such a wide range of human endeavor that it is almost more an attitude than an activity. Over the years, the boundaries of the meaning of the word have expanded, gradually yet inexorably."<sup>7</sup> So recording art as we watch through film is not limited to a certain point of view, its diversity shapes its message through director's vision and idea. If one carefully watch Srijit's films, one can easily understand various spectrums a director deals with.

Movie is the straightest and the most understandable way in which the person can perceive the information or idea.<sup>8</sup> Movies can underline social issues and draw people's attention to the problem, and that can change their values. In the present society, movies are an important part of people's everyday life. The film industry is now compared to other kinds of art as the film industry started to develop at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> The popularity of movies has rapidly grown. In today's world, one of the most popular ways of spending free time is watching a good movie. A good

movie is the outcome of director's idea and its treatment to present the written words on screen.<sup>10</sup> Srijit Mukherji is a modern director, mainly associated with Bengali films. He has made movies with such intricacy which pleases fans as well as critics. Themes, music, song, acting are main bounding factors in his films. From a scholar's point of view, Srijit's films have artistic influence, proper narrative structure, lot of elements of composition and deal with different socio-political discourses. Thus, his films are a good source of information and can be analysed for various purposes from entertainment to academic.

As put above, in Srijit Mukherji's films one can easily see the diversity of his work. These films narrate the director's idea and independent thought on various issues. He explores his city and captures it through the lens in his own way with a particular point of view or perspective. Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen both have depicted Kolkata from their point of view in their Calcutta trilogy series. Satyajit Ray in his Calcutta trilogy has used the cinematic media to depict the process of urbanization and its discontent among the people. Mrinal Sen's Calcutta trilogy can be seen from the perspective of the filmmaker's leftist ideology and politics. Srijit Mukherjee shows the city and its lives very differently in all his films. When he shows the mysterious north Kolkata streets, it needs no dialogue to make the scene more cinematic. There is a touch of nostalgia. Thematically his films are always different in nature. One of the important aspects of his film is depiction of different kind of art within a scene. From film studies point of view, one can study the writing and directorial part of Srijit Mukherji as he does both the works for his films. Although many directors nowadays write for their film but everyone has their own distinct character. From using of space to shooting without makeup, he explores the field. His films have musical value which demonstrates his feel for fitting songs into the narrative. It is remarkable that his best film is a musical in the true sense of the term which is Jaatishwar. These facts depicts that Srijit Mukherji's films are rich in content and could be part of a study.

So, this article defines the work of Srijit Mukherji by analyzing his films with reference to the socio-political discourses put forth. Basically the researcher chose those films which were written and directed by Srijit himself. For this paper nine films were analysed as per the socio-political discourse presented in those films. The selected films were: Autograph, Baishe Shraon, Hemlock Society, Jaatishwar, Chotushkone, Nirbaak, Rajkahini, Zulfiquir and Uma.

### Socio-Political Discourses in Srijit's Film

Different socio-political issues/ discourses put forth in the films of Srijit Mukherji are discussed below. In this regard, as mentioned earlier nine films were analyzed and the findings are put below in the form of a Table 1.

Table I. Socio-Political Discourses in Srijit Mukherji's Film

| Sr. No. | Name of the Film              | Socio-Political Issue/ Discourse                                                                                                                                                     | Shot/ Scene                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Time of Occurrence of Dialogue                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.      | Autograph                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Status of Bengali film.</li> <li>Theatre and Impact of Cinema</li> </ul>                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aditi says there are so many mindless cinemas produced in industry</li> <li>Encounter with his mentor teaching acting</li> </ul>                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>36 min - 37 Min</li> <li>58 min - 1 hour 1 min</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2.      | Baishe Srabon <sup>11</sup>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corruption in Administrative System</li> <li>Insufficiency of democracy</li> <li>Education becoming Business</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prabir says every government employees have become servants, nibaran criticizes state about its treatment to tribals</li> <li>Thief trains youth how to cut pocket</li> </ul>                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>29 min - 32 min</li> <li>49 min - 51 min</li> <li>1 hour 10 min- 1 hour 11 min</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 3.      | Hemlock Society <sup>12</sup> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depression and impact on people</li> <li>Modern metropolitan Life and its impact</li> </ul>                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After break-up with fiancée Meghna tried to commit suicide</li> <li>Meghna hates her step-mother and that is why she lives separately</li> </ul>                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13 min - 16 min</li> <li>9 min 10 min</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 4.      | Chotushkone <sup>13-15</sup>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of Bengali cinema and its history</li> <li>Breaking of Family Structure of Stars</li> <li>Humanism and Losing Faith/ Trust</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dipto says Bengali cinema needs change to maintain its quality</li> <li>Dipto and his son have very bad relationship while he has a girlfriend of his son's age</li> <li>Trina, Dipto and Shakyo were separated after the death of producer's wife</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>28 min - 30 min</li> <li>22 min - 23 min</li> <li>1 hour 29 min - 1 hour 30 min</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 5.      | Jaatishwar <sup>16,17</sup>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bengali Identity</li> <li>Rich Bengali Culture and Heritage</li> <li>Questioning of Religion and Sufi Movement</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maya said Rohit, by eating Hilsa and reading translated stories one cannot become Bengali</li> <li>Kobigaan and its history and famous Kobigaan battle</li> <li>Hindus asks Antony, a Portuguese Christian, not to worship Durga</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 min - 6 min 30 sec</li> <li>1 hour 27 min - 1 hour 33 min, 1 hour 36 min - 1 hour 44 min, 1 hour 51 min to 1 hour 56 min, 2 hour 1 minute - 2 hour 8 min and 2 hour 12 min - 2 hour 14 min</li> <li>1 hour 47 min 30 sec- 1 hour 48 min 30 sec</li> </ul> |

|    |           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6. | Nirbaak   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Idea of Love</li> <li>Sadistic and narcissistic society</li> </ul>                                                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different scenes related to each characters love and obsession for another (Tree, Samson Gomse, Sushmita Sen, Dog and Morgue Boy)</li> <li>Samson Gomse's Life, Morgue Boy's obsession with a dead body</li> </ul>                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 min - 14 min, 29 min - 30 min, 35 min - 36 min, 38 min - 40 min, 57 min, 1 hour 19 min- 1 hour 24 min</li> <li>3 min- 15 min, 1 hour 16 min - 1 hour 34 min</li> </ul> |
| 7. | Rajkahini | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effects of Partition and refugee issues</li> <li>Status of women (Feminist Identity)</li> <li>Caste and Religion</li> </ul>                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opening scene inspired from 'Khol Do' written by Saadat Hasan Manto</li> <li>Begumjaan questioning the honesty of police</li> <li>Begumjaan says in brothel no societal distinctions works</li> </ul>                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 min- 5 min</li> <li>22 min- 23 min, 57 min- 59 min.</li> <li>25 min - 26 min</li> </ul>                                                                                |
| 8. | Zulfiqar  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nationalism</li> <li>Organized crime</li> <li>Caste and Religion</li> </ul>                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Country's interest is first for Basheer</li> <li>Market for Smuggled goods</li> <li>All powerful people works together irrespective of their caste and religion</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11 min, 30 min - 31 min</li> <li>6 min - 7 min</li> <li>15 min - 16 min</li> </ul>                                                                                       |
| 9. | Uma       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Terminally Ill Kid and last wish</li> <li>Durga Puja part of Religion or Culture (to spread happiness and bonhomie)</li> <li>Hindutva politics</li> <li>Breaking of family system</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uma want to witness the Durga Puja at Kolkata</li> <li>Mahitosh Sur questions the timing of festival Durga Puja, Maharam</li> <li>Mahitosh continuously tried to disrupt puja by his illogical point</li> <li>Brahmananda's wife and children left him as his main priority was work over family</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 min - 4 min</li> <li>53 min - 57 min</li> <li>53 min - 54 min,</li> <li>36 min - 39 min</li> </ul>                                                                     |

As put above in the Table 1, the different socio-political discourses put forth in Srijit's films are discussed. As one can see that he is pressing different societal issues either through his characters or by the issue raised within the film or through the basic philosophy/ essence of the film. In most of the films, Bengali culture, Bengali cinema, women issues, caste, religion and other socio-political discourses were present.

As reflected through the films of Srijit Mukherji one can see that he continuously deals with the Bengali history, culture and its identity. It is this idea and the nostalgia of the Bengali culture which becomes the intrinsic part of Srijit's narratives. He further brings other social issues and weaves his main narrative to make audience question and reflect upon the norms of the society. As it is seen from above table Srijit voices women issues which are seen in the films like Uma, Rajkahini, Nirbaak and Hemlock Society. Also, being from the Bengali film industry, he deals

with the history of Bengali cinema, its politics and the different influence through which it has grown. This can be seen in the films like Hemlock Society, Autograph and Chotushkone. In Baishe Srabon, Srijit raised lots of issues that are important in our lives. In Rajkahini large concerns like women issues and partition highlight the disparity of view among People. He also questions religious dogmas and cultural practices through his films like he portrayed the character of Antony Phiringi referring to the proud Sufi movement of Bengal. Also one can see in the film Uma, he builds a narrative around a terminally ill girl whose last wish is to see Durga Puja but her medical condition would not allow her to live till the festival comes. So, the director builds the narrative of organizing the festivity for the girl prior to the real festival. In doing so, through different characters in the films, he raises the issue of organising festival as part of culture rather than a religious political event. Overall one can say that in the films of Srijit Mukherjee, a lot of

different societal issues are raised. So, it can be said that Srijit Mukherji is very sensitive to the society and his own Bengali culture which is reflective in all his films.

## Conclusion

Films of Srijit Mukherji show huge research points as he uses various artistic as well as theoretical influences from all over the world. The deep researches for the story and cinematic presentation done by the director are not near superficial but it delves into history, culture, polity, economics and broader social development. One can see the world history and history of Indian subcontinent along with the different ideological movements developed throughout the world underlining the different social science and film theories reflecting through the themes and narrative of Srijit Mukherji's film.

Further lots of contemporary issues are found in Srijit Mukherji's film. Some notable issues are gender issues, impact of modern economic development on human and society. Srijit uses films to criticize society, myths as well as film industry. Locations used in Srijit's films are mostly nearby Kolkata and some even in Kolkata itself. This reflects his own association with the city and a bit of nostalgic connection of director with the space to which he belongs. Srijit gives special treatment when he tells a story based on Kolkata.

Poetic and authorial influences are common in many films. He deals in detail with psychological aspects of the characters too in his films. Like the character of Parabr Mukherjee in Baishe Sharabon and Begum Jaan in Rajkahini, Meghana in Hemlock Society, Arun Chatteerjee of Autograph, Kushal Hazra and Hensman Antony of Jaatishwar, Samson Gomes of Nirbaak. He deals beautifully with the intricate relationships among the different characters within the film, like in Autograph, Uma, Rajkahini and others. From this study it can be inferred that Srijit Mukherji has his own worldview reflected thorough his stories with the very distinct cinematic style of his own. Although he is criticized for being a bit more melodramatic in terms of the treatment of story but it is equally visible that he never stops himself from making a bold socio-political statement. Overall his leaning towards the critical school owing to his education from one of the premier institutes of India in the area of social sciences quite gets reflected in all his films. This is reflected in the idea of critiquing the history, culture, society and political aspects of life. One can say that his films are a commentary on the society of the times which he has depicted in his cinema. In this regard he can be considered as an auteur telling his own story reflecting his own world view and raising the socio-political issues of the times.

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