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## **THEORIZING THE MOVIE HIRAK RAJAR DESHE THROUGH THE LENS OF ANTONIO GRAMSCI'S CONCEPT OF HEGEMONY**

*(The qualitative film review and political analysis)*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

"Ideas and opinions are not spontaneously "born" in each brain: they have had a centre of the formation, or irradiation, of dissemination, of the persuasion—a group of men, or a single individual even, which has developed them and presented them in the political form of current reality."  
 — *Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks.*

The word "hegemony", is a concept of dominance over the knowledge, mind, and culture to some extent full society, which was developed by Antonio Gramsci. He was an Italian post-Marxist thinker and an active politician also. Antonio Gramsci raised his voice against the vehement exploitation of the Italian fascist government and tried to build up a revolution, but as a result of it, he had got imprisonment for 30 years by Benito Mussolini. This time he realized that people have active or passive support for fascist rulers or regimes after having such dominance and exploitation, and this poked him for an intense theoretical study work on human nature as well as society. Furthermore, "The Prison Notebooks" is the fruit of this enormous hard work during 30 years of imprisonment, where

he explicated the term hegemony and gave a new dimension of Marxism along with the implementation also.

Whatever, being a Marxist thinker Gramsci had a distinction from Marx, in my sense whether both are talking about social change or revolution, Marx's thought was a little utopian because communism is an ideal state, which is impossible to achieve. Karl Marx emphasized the economy as the base of the social structure, and here Gramsci took a shift from orthodox Marxism, he never accepts only the economy as a social determiner. According to him, there has a reciprocal relation between base and superstructure, one can control the other, but Marx stated that change in base only reflects on super-structure where super-structure can't control the base. So if we want to change the society then we have to make some change in the base (economy) and this will be reflected in the super-structure (other determiners).

**Hence, the point comes that, what do I want to do in this paper?**

Actually, through this paper, I am trying to establish a co-relation between Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Satyajit Ray's Bengali masterpiece dystopian movie Hiraka Rajar Deshe. In 1975, Valentino Gerratana edited

and published the first complete and critical Italian edition of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, entitled *Quaderni del Carcere*, published by Einaudi. Since its publication, Gerratana's edition has become the standard edition of the Prison Notebooks throughout the world.

Whether, in 1980, the great Indian film director Satyajit Ray made his dystopian film *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (Kingdom Of Diamonds) sequel to the 1969 film *Gupi Gyen Bagha Bayen*. In this Satyajit Ray tries to portray the image of hegemony and make a satire against the state oppression. If make a critical analysis of the movie frame to frame, then we can understand how Mr Ray conveys the message of Antonio Gramsci. He shows how a king (Hirak Raja) rules repressively and suppresses the anti voices by using his army as well as by making ideological dominance with the help of Mastisko Prakhyalok Jantra (brainwashing Machine).

Antonio Gramsci discussed broadly counter-hegemony and the role of the intellectuals in his book. He divided intellectuals into two-manner – traditional intellectual and organic intellectual and also told about the class struggle. In the movie, Satyajit consciously takes those subtle ideas and signifies them. Furthermore, both are described rigorously the revolution and in the end, both Gramsci and Ray try to establish equate by making a classless proletariat society.

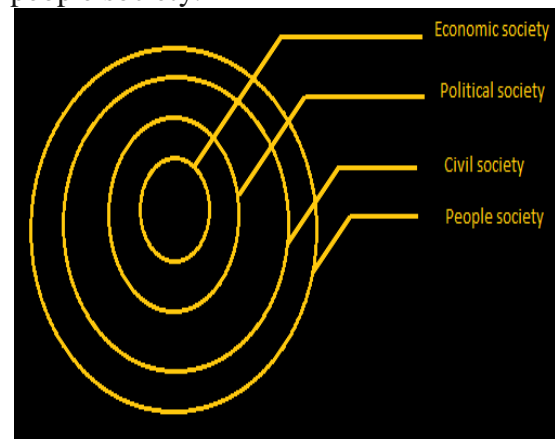
**Context and theorizing Hegemony:**

Antonio Gramsci was a post-Marxist thinker in Italy and a political activist also. He was a member of the Italian Communist Party and witnessed the fascist oppression in the regime of Mussolini during his protest Gramsci was imprisoned by the Italian fascist government. But this time he noticed that despite all those repression and suppression the people (citizens) had passive or active support to the

government, so the revolution couldn't emerge properly and got success.

So during his prison days, he focused on human nature and society and tried to find out the reason behind this support, where he made a rigorous work on it through his 32 notebooks as known as "*Prison Notebooks*". Hence, he understood that in developed society legitimacy and the consent is the most important thing for any government, ruler can gather this consent and legitimize his or her power in two ways, either through coercive action by using repressive tools like police, army etc or make the ideological predominance by expanding the ruling ideology. Because consent has two types, coercive consent and consensual consent, in coercive consent there has a chance to form a revolution. Therefore, Gramsci used the term and gave the concept of hegemony, where the ruling class or group hegemonies the society by expanding the propaganda of ruling ideology and assimilating the consensual consent.

Whatever, through Gramsci's meticulous study of the developed society and apropos the consent as well as legitimacy we can find four types of society- economic society, political society, civil society and people society (subaltern society). I try to make a diagram of it, where economic society is in the centre, political society surrounded it and protects it also, civil society encircles it and the last peripheral circle is people society.



Antonio Gramsci was a Marxist thinker so he accepted the concept of base and superstructure, but he was distinct from the orthodox Marxian thought. According to Marx, society is divided into two parts base and super-structure, where the economy is the base and all other elements of the society are in the super-structure. The base only can control the super-structure and any change in the base is reflected on the super-structure. Therefore, change must happen in the base and this will reflect on the super-structure, in this way change will come in all over the society and revolution can get the success.

Whether Gramsci accepted this concept of base and superstructure, he denied the economic determination. According to him, the economy is the base but; super-structure has played also a significant role in society, it is like a double way reciprocal relation where each can control the other. According to Femia, hegemony is the ideological predominance of a particular group or class, and this dominance culminates through several social institutions in the society like educational, religious institutions etc. Joseph V. Femia stated in his book that, "... domination is realized, essentially, through the coercive machinery of the state, intellectual and moral leadership is objectified in, and mainly exercised through civil society, the ensemble of the educational, religious, associational institution." (Femia Joseph V. – "*Gramsci's Political Thought*" (1981) p.24)

Hence, through this diagram, we can observe that the economic society, as being base; is situated in the centre, and political society encircles as well as protect it like armour. So Gramsci mainly focused on civil society, as the intellectuals belong here. Furthermore, political society tries to hegemonies the civil society, but they also have the chance to generate the counter-hegemony. Therefore, revolution evolves in the civil

society, which escalates in the people society and after that, the revolution can break the armour of the political society, consequently, change comes in the economic society.

In the movie, Satyajit Ray framed the same picture, where Hirak raja was a dictator the symbol of the economic and political societies, and his minister council played the role of the traditional intellectuals. Udayan pandit (the teacher), Gupi, and Bagha represent the civil society as organic intellectuals and the farmer, the worker of the diamond mine belongs to people society.

Antonio Gramsci discussed broadly counter-hegemony and the role of the intellectuals in his book. He divided intellectuals into two-manner – traditional intellectual and organic intellectual and also told about the class struggle. In the movie, Satyajit consciously takes those subtle ideas and signifies them. Furthermore, both are described rigorously the revolution and in the end, both Gramsci and Ray try to establish equate by making a classless proletariat society. In the movie, the king is dethroned by a bloodless revolution and this is the perfect example of the *war of position*.

#### **Film review and analysis:**

In 1968, Satyajit Ray made a children's film titled *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*, based on a short story written by his grandfather Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury. The film was about the adventures of two village idiots — Goopy, who loves to sing, and Bagha, who loves to play the *dhol*. Blessed with three magic boons by the King of Ghosts, Goopy and Bagha successfully stop a war between two kingdoms — Shundi and Halla. The film went on to become one of the biggest commercial successes of Bengali cinema, and the characters of Goopy and Bagha became so popular that the inevitable happened. Twelve years after the film was made, Ray decided to

follow it up with a sequel — *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (The Kingdom of Diamonds).

In 1980, the great Indian film director Satyajit Ray made his dystopian film *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (Kingdom Of Diamonds) sequel to the 1969 film *Gupi Gyen Bagha Bayen*. In this Satyajit Ray tries to portray the image of hegemony and make a satire against the state oppression. If make a critical analysis of the movie frame to frame, then we can understand how Mr Ray conveys the message of Antonio Gramsci. He shows how a king (Hirak Raja) rules repressively and suppresses the anti voices by using his army as well as by making ideological dominance with the help of Mastisko Prakhyalok Jantra (brainwashing Machine).

In the first scene of raj darbar, Hirak raja distributes the diamond necklace among his minister council, but on the outside farmer, the worker is arrested due to unable to pay taxes. The singer punished due to sing the line -

*“Valo jone roilo vanga ghore / ar mondo seje singhasohne bose*

*Sonar fosol folay je tar dui bela jotena ahar*

*hirar khonir mojur hoeo kanakori nai”*

*(The good one stays in the broken hut, and the bad one sits on the throne. The farmer who produces the golden crops, has nothing to eat/ the miner who works at a diamond mine, is too poor) and the bourgeois capitalist culture has been reflected through this.*

In the meantime, a scientist comes and informs Hirak raja that, he has made a machine which can wash anyone's brain and can put any new thing (mantra) that he wants. Whence, the farmer and worker come and gets a pardon for being unable to pay taxes then raja makes a particular rhyme or codifies some rules with the help of raj Kobi (royal poet) for them and says-

*“baki rakha khajna / mote valo kaj na Vor pet nao khai/ raj kor dewa chai*

*Jay Jodi jak pran / Hiraker raja vogoban”*

*(Pending tax is the worst thing, despite all starvation tax should pay all time, if you have to sacrifice life for it, and then do – but the king is like a god) and also the same thing he makes for the worker, like- “Je kore khoni shrom, jeno tare dore jom Anahare nahi khed besi khele bare medh, Dhonno shromiker dan / Hiraker raja vogoban”*

*(Who works at mine, death afraid them. Starvation is no issue, if you eat more then you will be fat, worker is thankful for his work and the king is god)*

Furthermore, Hirak raja put this worker and farmer in the brainwashing machine and put those rhymes or rules (mantra) in their mind, as an example of ideological dominance, and the most significant thing is; that before putting this machine they speak in the normal way, but after brainwashing, they speak in rhyme like a king and his minister council.

According to Gramsci, many social sectors play a vital role to make ideological dominance and the education system is one of them. So, Hirak Raja closed the school, set fired all books, and tried to arrest Udayan pandit (teacher), as there had a chance to generate the ideology of counter-hegemony. Another salient feature of the film is that almost all its characters speak in rhyme, except for the rebellious teacher Udayan Pandit, his students, worker and farmer — perhaps symbolizing that they are different from the rest of the lot, as well as they represent the civil society and the people's society.

Hirak Raja tells his education minister that takes a bold step against the teacher and his student, so the minister comes into the school and says-

*“poralekha kore je / anahre more se, Janar kono sesh nai / janar chesta britha tai”*

(Who studies well, dies in starvation. There have no limits to know, so it is worthless)

He codifies a certain set of rules for the peasants, labourers/workers and teachers. He wants to resist the anti voice and stop the questioning power by manoeuvre the teacher. He closes the school and burns down books and proclaims,

*"je joto besi jane, se toto kom mane"*

(The one who knows more, the less he obeys)

That means if people become educated then they can throw questions about the system, they will be aware of their rights. Along with this, if we carefully listen to all those rhymes then the common thing is that the last line of every rhyme claims that Hirak raja is as superior as a god.

Whatever, during this crisis period two fellows, Gupi Gayen and Bagha Bayen come to the Hirak state for celebrating a ceremony. They had some special power, as they got three goons from Bhooter raja. Hence, coincidentally they meet with Udayan pandit; the rebellion, they acquaint with all those oppression and the reason for concealments of his identity, even the promise to help the teacher to reopen the school and brainwash the king and Udayan pandit vow to them — *"The school will open again. I will open it."* The strength and grit on his face when he utters those few words are perhaps the same emotions with which Ray himself had set out to write and direct such a powerful film against the ever-deteriorating condition of state administration and public welfare in the country.

Therefore, it becomes too important for the king to brainwash the rebellion teacher as his ceremony comes close and equally his oppression increases, so the possibility of the revolution intensifies, which would be a big face-off in front of the guest. But,

according to their plan Udayan pandit, his students and Gupi, Bagha put the king and his minister council in Maistishkyo Prakhyalok Jantra (brainwashing machine) and successfully brainwashed them.

At the end of the movie teacher and his students made rhyme for the king –

*"Dori dhore maro tan raja hobe khan khan"*

And they successfully brainwash the king and then the fascinating scene comes, when the king destroys his statue and becomes the proletariat. They dethrone the king by a bloodless revolution, which is a perfect example of the war of position. So, in the last scene, prominently we can understand the correlation between Gramsci's theory and Ray's movie, as they both try to portray the image of pure communism, where everyone is equal; with no class division.

#### **Role of the intellectuals:**

Gramsci discussed briefly the role of the intellectuals in the civil society, as he distinguished intellectuals in two different manners; traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals, and he gave more importance to the intellectuals because ruling ideology expanded through them and in some way the ideology of the counter-hegemony also generated by them. Therefore, we can say that intellectuals have an important role in hegemonies the society and also make the revolution.

According to the Estave Morera, "...we can distinguish two types of intellectuals: traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals, or those intellectuals that inherit and continue to collaborate the general philosophical, political, scientific culture of the past and those who express the new experiences of emerging social groups." (Morera.Estave *"Antonio Gramsci: Social Theory; Hegemony, Civil Society"*. In Basu. Pradip. Avenel Companion to Modern Social Theorists Kolkata: Avenel Press. (2011) p.185)



In the movie, the minister council plays the role of traditional intellectuals and Satyajit Ray signifies this by using some nice humour, as the council never protest any decision of the Hirak raja and gives their consent, along with this all-time Hirak raja and they speak in rhyme. Furthermore, in one scene raja asks the astrologer to find a good time to inaugurate his statue, and the astrologer says -

*“Jodi Hirak rajer kache dhora hoy sora /  
tobe rat hobe din... e r emn ki kothin,  
Lagno to samrater hate / panjika ki bole  
... ki ar ese jay tate”*

These few lines easily convey the message that how traditional intellectuals actively support the political society as well as economic society. But in the other hand Udayan pandit, his students and Gupi Gayen , Bagha Bayen represent the organic intellectual, who tries to develop the new ideologies to protest the oppressive king, by making the counter-hegemony, as the new type of intellectual encounters other, pre-existent intellectuals, for instance, the teacher tells the story of 'Sanjibak' to the student and discusses brutal state oppression, also says that,

*“Proja k jodi mortei hoy, tale anistokari  
rajar adesh manno kore morar cheye,  
protibad kore morai sreyo”*

(If citizens have to die, then it's better to sacrifice their lives to protest the king, instead of obeying the king's word)

The essence of the revolution, the ideology of counter-hegemony is reflected through this line. But in the Ray again use subtle humour, whence everyone obeys Hirak raja due to his diamond, so Gupi and Bagha stole the diamonds and use this against the king by distributing the diamond among the army and scientist. Therefore, Gupi, Bagha as an organic intellectual occupies the control over the base or economy (as a diamond), so the change reflects. But this change was not their ultimate goal, as they use this power to change the mindset

of the king and his disciples and put the new ideology of the counter-hegemony, because this is the ultimate solution to all problems.

As with his previous film with Goopy and Bagha, in *Hirak Rajar Deshe* too, not once does Ray artificially sweeten the message of the film to make it suitable for children. He makes the best use of the opportunity to pass on a very important message to children — that the only war worth fighting is the one against oppression — a bloodless war, and yet one that aims to dethrone the greatest enemy of the common man. The film's biggest asset is that it does not treat its primary audience — the children — as any less intelligent than adults. It makes them understand the difference between right and wrong and urges them to rise in rebellion when the need arises.

In this way, they dethrone the king with a bloodless revolution, and make an example of a “*war of position*”. Ray highlights several important issues in the film — the tragic ‘creation’ of a terrorist, the dangers of state-sponsored scientific advancements, the angst and frustration of talented people in the regime of tyrants, and the importance of education and enlightenment.

#### **Literature review:**

Joseph V. Femia broadly discusses the hegemony of the predominance ideologies in his book – *Gramsci's Political Thought*, where he stated that - “whenever certain Marxist analysis come across a situation involving (what they deemed to be) the ideological predominance of a particular group or class, the term hegemony is immediately adopted – as if the notion of ideological predominance were itself free of ambiguity.”

He also focuses on the civil society and the role of the intellectuals as well as the contribution of the several sectors of the super-structure in making the consent and expanding the ideological dominance, as he says, "... domination is realized,

essentially, through the coercive machinery of the state, intellectual and moral leadership is objectified in, and mainly exercised through civil society, the ensemble of the educational, religious, associational institution."

In the book *Antonio Gramsci: Social Theory – Hegemony, Civil Society* by Estev Morera, says that "a strong state is not the one that is always brandishing its weapons, its military power or police, but rather the one that has little need for them." So in this way, he tries to analyze the nature of the state and the importance of the hegemony over the ideology to expand the ruling propaganda.

Furthermore, according to him "... Gramsci thought that the more cooperative, humanistic and egalitarian values of socialism would at some time in the future be the moral basis for new hegemony and eventually a classless society". The above quotation is fully reflected at the end of the movie HIRAK RAJAR DESHE and conveys the same message.

Dvid Forgacs elaborates extensively on ideologies in his book *"The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935"* and gives three points –

1. Ideology is identified as distinct from the structure, and it is asserted that it is not ideology that changes the structures but vice versa;

2. It is asserted that a given political solution is 'ideological', i.e. that it is insufficient for changing the structure, although it thinks that it can do so; it is asserted that it is useless, stupid, etc.;

3. One then passes to the assertion that every ideology is 'pure' in appearance, useless, stupid, etc.

David Forgacs also discussed the ideologies and hegemony, he stated, "... ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is 'physiological'; they 'organize' human masses, they form the terrain on which men move, acquire

consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.

Bhaskar Chattapodhaya makes a literary review of this film and says, that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is 'psychological'; they 'organize' human masses, and they form the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.

He also says, "Tapen Chatterjee and Rabi Ghosh are once again effortlessly brilliant as the lovable duo of Goopy and Bagha, respectively. Veteran actor Utpal Dutt plays the king of HIRAK with the right mix of humour, callousness towards his subjects' plight and seething fury at being unable to quell the mutiny." He also says that Satyajit Ray put his word into the Udayan pandit's mouth and tries to convey his ideology through him. As he made this film to protest against the regime of Indira Gandhi and the emergency period.

#### **Research gap:**

I followed that there have so many film reviews about the movie HIRAK RAJAR DESHE, but I couldn't find any literary review of this movie from the political aspect, where it is one of the best political satire movies in India against state oppression. So I try to review the movie through the lens of Gramsci. Because the concept of hegemony is too important in present days and this movie adequately explains this concept by using subtle ideas adequately.

#### **Research question:**

How the Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' reflected in the Bengali dystopian movie "HIRAKA RAJAR DESHE" by Satyajit Ray?

Whatever, many ones can criticize that, why I am only reviewing the movie through the lens of Antonio Gramsci? In the 1970's India had witnessed the emergency period in Indira Gandhi's regime, so they can argue that maybe Ray made this film basis on this incident. But I have only one point, if we

focus on the theory as well as on the movie then one similar thing we can find out; ideological dominance. Furthermore, Indira Gandhi was a dictator and used coercive instruments in the state, moreover, HiraK raja had done the same thing also but there has a distinction.

During the emergency period, the Indira government was fully repressive and they only used the coercive power like the army, but were never concerned about the ideological dominance; so, as a result, it Indira government was unable to secure the majority and their victory in the next general election, and faced so many protests. Here, HiraK raja is too much repressive dictator and vehement torture is done on him, but after the invention of the scientist coercion become secondary and brainwashing becomes the primary motive; as raja arrests peoples and put them into the brainwashing machine and suppress the anti-voice for forever.

**Research methodology:**

My research methodology is a fully qualitative film review and political analysis. The primary data source is only the film HiraK Rajar Deshe.

- **Producer:** Government of West Bengal
- **Director:** Satyajit Ray
- **Editor:** Dulal Datta
- **Art Direction:** Ashoke Bose
- **Sound :** Robin Sen Gupta, Durgadas Mitra.

Character	Actor(s)
Goopy Gyne	Tapen Chatterjee
Bagha Byne	Rabi Ghosh
HiraK Raja	Utpal Dutt
Udayan Pandit	Soumitra Chatterjee
Shundi'r Raja	Santosh Dutta
Gobeshok Gobochondro Gyanotirtho Gyanorotno Gyanambudhi	Santosh Dutta

Character	Actor(s)
Gyanochuramoni A.K.A. Scientist	
Prohori (Sentry)	Kanti Mukherjee
Udayan's Father	Promod Ganguli
Udayan's Mother	Alpana Gupta
Charandas	Rabin Majumdar
Fazal Mian	Sunil Sarkar
Balaram	Nani Ganguli
Bidushak	Ajoy Banerjee
Sobhakobi Court Poet	aka Kartik Chatterjee
Raj Jyotishi Court Astrologer	aka Haridhan Mukherjee
Ministers	Bimal Deb Tarun Mitra Gopal Dey Sailen Ganguli Samir Mukherjee

**Conclusion:**

In the conclusion, I would like to say that the movie *HiraK Rajar Deshe* is much more than a children's film. It is, by far, one of the best satires against state oppression that the Indian film industry has ever produced. It was relevant then, way back in 1980, and it is relevant even today, and will continue to be so, over the years – reminding us, again and again, that every time an evil king or leader attempts to exploit the farmers, the labourers, and the rest of the very people who make the kingdom (country) a kingdom of diamonds, the common man will rise in rebellion, and pull him down, and will say-

“নহি যন্ত্র নহি যন্ত্র, আমি প্রাণী  
 আমি জানি  
 রাজা দুষ্ট, রাজা মন্দ  
 রাজা ধুষ্ট, রাজা অন্ধ  
 রাজা নিচ, রাজা কুর, রাজা খল  
 রাজা অনাচারের সীমা ছেড়ে  
 অভাগারে ভাতে মেরে  
 আনে দেশে ঘোর অমঙ্গল”

[Not an instrument, not an instrument, I am a creature, I know. The king is wicked, the king is evil, King is arrogant, King is



*blind, King Nich, King Cruel, King Khal, and The king leaves the limits of incest. In the country, it is horrible]*

Hence, if we look at the present situation of the country then the scenario is quite the same, where a particular party or group of the society tries to expand their ruling ideology through many institutions of the super-structure. In the last 1 year, so many movies have been released, but most of the movies has made based on some particular propaganda. Even the media and new papers also support the existing regime despite all repression, and equally the protesters are harassed and assaulted brutally by the state's repressive apparatus. Furthermore, ideological dominance is one of the best instruments of this regime as well as a developed society, for instance, the recent controversial issue is the Ayadhaya verdict, where very poor people who can't secure their food daily, stand for the Ram mandir and celebrate the verdict, even spent money also. Therefore, base or economy is not the only determinant of the society, educational institution, and religious institution has more impact on the society, so the relevance of the Gramsci's theory is still un-ignorable. And here Satyajit Ray highlights several important issues in the film — the tragic 'creation' of a terrorist, the dangers of state-sponsored scientific advancements, the angst and frustration of talented people in the regime of tyrants, and the importance of education and enlightenment.

Gramsci was the first, who focused on this issue and give the concept of hegemony, but due to the extreme torture by the Italian fascist government he had to leave the work half-hearted, and after that Louis Pierre Althusser shaped this concept properly. So, in present days this theory, concept and the movie "Hirak Rajar Deshe" by Satyajit Ray, becomes too pertinent. Maybe one day, this theory and movie will be the assets and inspiration to make the counter-

hegemony. Therefore, we can expect that one day the future organic intellectuals like Gupi, and Bagha will be raised their fearless voice and shouted, as poet Nirendra Nath Chakraborty says –

সে এসে একবার এই উলঙ্গ রাজার সামনে  
নির্ভয়ে দাঁড়াক।  
সে এসে একবার এই হাততালির উর্ধ্বে গলা  
তুলে  
জিজ্ঞাসা করুক:  
রাজা, তোর কাপড় কোথায়?

(The boy, just comes once and stands in front of the naked king, raises his voice over the claps and asks the king once – king where are your clothes?)

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