



COVER STORY

*It was rather late at night when we landed in Kolkata. But we still called up Joya Ahsan. Around two in the morning, we were at Srijit Mukherji's house. It was the first time we met this fabulous filmmaker in person, and truth be told, we felt awkward showing up at such an odd hour. But he was such a friendly host that we soon sank into an 'adda'. Rajkahini is the latest movie of Srijit Mukherji. Joya Ahsan is one of the artists in this film, whose bold role, which she magnificently performed, earned her kudos as well as controversies. Here's a glimpse of the 'nocturnal interview' Star Showbiz took.*

# RAJKAHINI

## DRAWING THE LINE

**Tell us about Rajkahini.**  
(SM): When it comes to the subject of the partition of 1947, popular culture has focused mostly on Punjab. This has been the dominant image. But obviously there is the Eastern side of it, which is rather neglected. So, I had wanted for a long time to make a film regarding the partition.

I got inspired reading works of people like Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai and many scholarly articles on partition. And I sought to make a movie about the marginal, subaltern people during that time. Rajkahini is about those who have not made it to the history books.

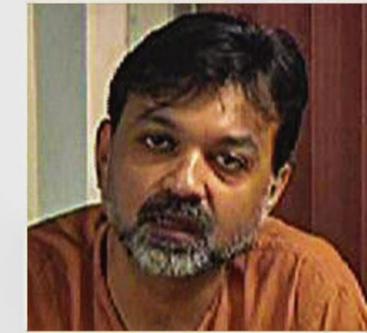
The film is based on the historical premise that a man named Sir Cyril Radcliffe was given the difficult task of drawing the border to split a country, and that he had to do it hurriedly. He did it with little concern for the demographics and cultures of the people, basing the criterion on majority-minority population ratio in terms of religion. And, the line he drew went through rivers, forests, villages and even houses. With these facts in mind, Rajkahini takes off into a fictional story of such a house and its people. The house is a metaphor for the country.

**How did Joya Ahsan become a cast of this movie?**  
(SM): We met in Singapore. It was there I told her the plot. By then I was already aware of her work. I loved her performance in *Aborto*. Then, she gave me some of the telefilms she had done. Among them, *Tarporo Angurlata Nando Ke Bhalobasey* blew my mind. I have referred this tele-film to a lot of people. After watching it, I knew I

should cast Joya Ahsan. Given the right script and the right treatment, she can do wonders.

Jaya also helped me understand the various Bengali dialects. Since it is a movie about borders, different dialects were called for, and Jaya contributed immensely into dividing the script according to the dialects of people of different regions.

**Jaya, what is your take on Srijit Mukherji as a director?**



Srijit Mukherji

**Jaya Ahsan (JA):** The way he managed this humungous project has really impressed me. The main cast itself was a huge ensemble of 11 female and 9 male artists.

**SM:** And there were numerous others. Meanwhile, villagers flooded the area. It wasn't easy managing the crowd. And it's a huge zone.

**JA:** So much so, vendors came to the area selling things like *pani puri*, *jhal muri* and what not! Before we started shooting, I was

concerned whether I could get into that character - someone who lived at that region in that era. But given the set - the house we see in the movie - and the intensive training the artists went through brought the necessary ambience and mood for it.

**SM:** From gun fighting to horse riding, a lot of things were taught.

**What do you think of joint ventures between East and West Bengal?**  
I would love that arrangement. There're brilliant makers and artists in Dhaka and Kolkata. And let's not forget that Bengali is a language that is spoken by a gigantic population. I think the legal, logistical and financial details of such joint ventures are unclear to many. If that can be worked out, the possibilities are endless.

**Anything else you guys want to add?**  
**JA:** *Rajkahini* ought to be brought to Bangladesh. We are part of the history of partition, and people should know about their own history.

**SM:** I want to go to Dhaka as soon as possible because the last time I was there, I couldn't eat *hilsa*! I think good food and cricket are two very important things, if not more important than cinema! And I also want to visit different places, such as Mymensingh, Chittagong and Bikrampur. I have read so much about the cultural roots we Bengalis share. I want to go to Bangladesh and experience that for myself.

Interviewed by Rafi Hossain and narrated by Himadri

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