CONDITIONS OF VISIBILITY: PEOPLE'S IMAGINATION AND GOOPY GYNE BAGHA BYNE[*]

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1. *The disappearance of the female*

The only members of the female sex in *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (henceforth *GGBB*) happen to be the two princesses offered as prize to the two plebeian adventurers. The girls do not speak, nor do they act; they appear to have neither any volition nor agency; obedient to the strict coding for women, they do not in fact look at any one, including their prospective grooms (much to the disappointment of Bagha, who is keen to have a reality check on the object of his dreams), and they lift their veil only when they are startled by the magic change of costume by Goopy and Bagha. Incidentally, that is the only occasion in the narrative when the viewer catches a glimpse of the girls' faces, because the earlier long shot of Manimala, the Shundi King's daughter, was kept deliberately indistinct. Appropriately enough, she is placed high on a balcony of the lofty palace, glimpsed by the two commoners standing humbly on the ground. The spectator has to share the point-of-view of Goopy and Bagha, both physically and psychologically. It is thus that a traditional material goal (the princess usually comes with half a kingdom)[1], which will formalize the closure, enters the narrative. And it is here that the inescapable logic of the folktale, which ordains the princess as a distant prize to be won by a plucky - and lucky- adventurer, meets the diegetic demands of suspense articulated by Bagha at the moment of

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[*] (aka *The Adventures of Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*),1968. D, S, M, Satyajit Ray; Ph, Soumendu Roy; E, Dulal Dutta; AD, Bansi Chandragupta. C, Tapen Chatterjee (Goopy), Robi Ghosh (Bagha), Santosh Dutta (King of Halla and King of Shundi), Jahar Roy (minister), Harindranath Chattopadhyay (magician).132 min, b&w/ col.

their success. He is the smarter of the two homeless wanderers,[2] a man passionately devoted to his drum, but with feet firmly planted on the ground, and he manages to keep a cool head in times of crisis or joy. At their triumphant encounter with the kings, though, he finds himself in danger of being deprived, and is rattled, because the available princess is assigned to Goopy on considerations of relative height. 'I've always wanted one', he wails and demands a princess for himself .[3] Bagha places himself in the position of a folktale hero, ordinarily humble and far away from the seats of power and plenty and beauty, but made extraordinary by the intervention of the otherworld, so that his subjective desires coincide with the logic of the narrative and determine the course of events. Bagha's self-conscious merger with the directive principles of folklore politics pulls the attention of the viewer towards the possible intervention of collective desire in the imaginary of narratives. The passage into the formal world of wish-fulfilment is instantaneous. The Halla king must therefore have a daughter of marriageable age, appropriately shorter of stature to match Bagha, though one also notices the time-honoured symmetry which generates a story of two brothers with their two daughters[4.] When Bagha wishes to catch a glimpse of the intended bride's face, he inscribes his subjective drive, occurring normally in a different discursive universe, into the trajectory of this collective desire, for the beauty of the female prize is an essential condition for the closure of the story.

Bagha's desire for a glimpse of the face of the princess is understandable because he comes from a world in which the humblest young man has a bride chosen for him from among a number of suitable girls, and being the smart fellow he is, it is natural for him to demand a trial gaze. What he forgets, however, — and this is where Ray weaves his strand of realist discourse with the space-time-defying logistics of folktale narrative — is the customary / obligatory nature of the gift of a princess to the successful adventurer. You cannot be a folktale hero and demand the usual civilities of a mundane arranged match. The text is full of such foregrounded mismatches between two contending principles

of narrative construction. The director is proposing that, even after paying full respect to the basic logic of the people's story and constructing a joyous version of an old narrative, it is necessary to subject this logic to an incisive set of interrogations in order to make an interesting text. One source of this interrogation is the allegiance to the realist principles he had inaugurated in *Pather Panchali.* The other source is a kind of inflation of folkloric values which draws attention to itself. It is well-known that a great many of the adventures in folktales are initiated and carried on by male protagonists, for the folklore community is very much seized of the consensual understanding that large areas of action are normally reserved for men. This logic is of course reversed time and time again, for the other principle of the most neglected triumphing over the most pampered will often bring a female of the species into the foreground. Ray accepts the initial proposition, though, and proceeds to depopulate the folk landscape drastically and systematically. Goopy and Bagha have no mothers. The Amloki king has no queen, either in bed or in the court. There is no woman in the village from which Goopy is expelled. The two kings of Halla and Shundi have no wives. There is no female singer in the assembly of artists. The fair at Shundi has no girl-child. For all practical purposes, the two princesses constitute the entire female population of this world. It is as though a principle of femininity has been established by decree in which desirability/ marriageability alone exists as a *raison d'être*. This is not customary in the folktale, which recognizes both major and minor female characters. Upendra Kishore's version has its customary quantum of female presence, though the narrative proceeds on the assumption that men will dominate its articulation. But if we look at the entire corpus of folktales in a language, we find that there are very striking instances of major female participation in these stories; in contrast, a very large class of literature for the young people of Bengal in the twentieth century effectively shuts out the girl-child. Satyajit Ray's own fiction, like that of his illustrious father, is a case in point. That can be seen as a strategic submission to the social demands for a particular genre of fiction, boys' stories, in the corpus of

national narratives. *GGBB* is the filmic retelling of a folktale, but it continues the habits of the polite class of children's fiction in this respect.

This exaggerated depopulation of a large body of texts constitutes no mystery, for it is customary to hold that boys have more interesting lives, and that the majority of the readers will be boys, and that boys constitute the more precious half of the child population. The problem for the viewer of *GGBB* lies in relating the bareness of its human geography to the radical moment of its construction. One aspect of this exaggeration relates to interrogative possibilities; the other involves the history of representational regimes. Goopy and Bagha are shorn of all social and familial ties before they start their adventure, as Bagha makes clear in his account of his own life to Goopy. That means, in terms of the minimality of motivation characteristic of the folktale, a convenient elision of the furniture of normal biographical orders: no mother, sister, aunt, wife or even male relations apart from the father who is needed for functional reasons. All their affinities are elective, acquired in the course of an eventful number of days. As free agents, particularly after the magic gift, these destitute men have to reconstitute their social existence, and the business of marriage comes in handy at a particular point. Bagha is quick to set the agenda. After the first taste of the benediction, he lists his preferences: eating, travelling, making music, and the first choice outside the bundle of specific gifts, marrying a princess. Goopy is taken aback, 'Who will you marry?' Bagha assures him, 'It's such a large country, and there are so many kings with daughters, we can pick and choose.' Goopy repeats with delighted surprise, 'Pick and choose! Right!' This conversation takes place after their first magic meal and Bagha throws out these hurried hints about their future on his way to the river for washing his hands. The visual and auditory material constantly oscillates between the extra-temporal order of the folktale and the poor-peasant world-view of the two adventurers who are firmly embedded in the thickness of social space, gingerly checking out the reality of their good fortune. The mock-heroic technique, traditionally used in satire, opens up all kinds of interrogative and negative possibilities. Goopy's

speculation about the source of the excellent clarified butter which came with the meal has a prompt reply from Bagha, 'Probably from the milk of ghost-cows.' The sumptuous guest-room of the palace elicits a grave comment from Bagha, 'Not half bad.' Visual gags reinforce this principle of mismatch. Bagha picks up a banana from the fruit-bowl and does not know what to do with the peel, and since the king is already in the passage leading to their room, he throws it into the fountain which is one of the features of the apartment. The camera draws our attention to the floating banana-skin for a moment before moving on to more important business. It is obvious that the pomp and circumstance of the palace and the court are being put in their place by the contradictory rules of the game brought into the reserved ambience by Bagha and Goopy. The speculation about the possible breach of etiquette is submerged under the supreme air of authority assumed by Bagha, who is quick to understand the implications of their piece of luck. Goopy brings up the matter of the princess, and in a very short while confirmation comes from the king that a princess is available on condition that the mission of peace succeeds. As they leave the palace to accomplish the allotted task, they catch an indistinct glimpse of the princess on the balcony, as already mentioned. Goopy looks up in long-shot, cut to the princess on the balcony in extreme long-shot, cut to Goopy beckoning to Bagha, pan to Bagha coming to join Goopy, cut to balcony, zoom in to find the princess, cut to Goopy and Bagha, cut to the balcony, another zoom-in, the princess discovers the strangers and moves away. Goopy wonders whether they have really seen the princess, 'You don't think it could be a maid, do you?' Bagha answers that a maid could not be so fair of complexion. The distant prize, marked by fairness of skin and dazzle of dress, and placed far from their reach in a guarded palace, now looks distinctly attainable. Their *possession* of the princesses at the end of the day is an index to the changed order of the world, the mighty going down and the humble coming up, as it happens almost invariably in folktales. Their intervention in the public sphere (singing contest, politics, war) enables the world to restore meaning to the more valuable private sphere (marriage, brotherly love, gift of speech, prevention of violence). The girls may be

obligatory prizes, but the reader/ viewer knows Goopy-Bagha's worth, and therefore the singularity of the princesses repairs the barrenness of the landscape and interrogates the world's treatment of the two young men. Ray in fact takes advantage of the conventions of boys' stories to propel the narrative into tackling largely political questions, as he himself would say about *Hirak Rajar Deshe*, and that means an inscription of the affective into the vital interstices of the action. Part of the politics also involves interesting questions of representation.

The princesses exhibit an exaggerated measure of *lajja*, modesty/ shame/ humility, which is not always demanded of girls in a folktale, but which is *de rigeur* in classical and popular narratives. In fact, *lajja* is a key example in the classical literary theory of *dhvanivada* [5] which proposes an elaborate taxonomy of *bhava*, mental state, as a finite class of signifieds against the theoretically infinite class of signifiers, poetic images. Anandabardhana cites this verse from Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhavam*:

> *evangbadini debarsau parsve pituradhomukhei*
> *lilakamalapatrani ganayamasa parbati.*[6]

> (While the divine sage was speaking thus, Parbati, who was sitting with bent head next to her father, went on counting the petals of her play-lotus.)

The sage has come with a proposal of marriage for the nubile girl, and her action, bending the head and counting the petals of the lotus, signifies the emotion, *lajja*, appropriate in a young maiden when she hears her own marriage discussed. This *lajja* or its equivalent is of course a globally well-established device for the elimination of women, setting up a myriad systems of exclusion: *chaoar, barka, purdah, ghomta*, bathing machine, separate or no education and profession and representation, confinement to the familial space beyond the reach of the public sphere. This exclusion comes from the deep-seated problem generated by the

patriarchal training for men who perceive women as a bundle of erotic use-values constituting the other of the male, and forever threatening him with castration. The physical removal of women seeks to eliminate this anxiety. And since men have this problem, it becomes entirely logical to transfer the onus to the victims and construct an appropriate ethic which will annihilate the subjectivity and agency of women and leave only the raw physicality under the veil. When the veil is taken off in a representational regime, the bundle of use values alone will remain and can be appropriated by well-known stratagems emanating from voyeurism and scopophilia: seduction, rape, motherhood, violence, adoration, domesticity, religion, law, pleasure. The logic of classical proprieties in the representation of women continues to this day in popular narratives, including commercial films and advertising shorts, which exploit to the hilt the socially approved coding of conduct suitable for a young girl. In many parts of India this code is still alive and socially enforced, varying according to class, religion, location, etc., but the interesting point is the pervasive duality (and duplicity) in constructing the female subject. The working female among the labouring poor is expected to be shy and obedient, however back-breaking the combined weight of domestic and wage- earning labour and however onerous the daily burden of decision-making. In a similar fashion, the traditionally expected coyness in dress, conduct, interpersonal relationships, sexual practices and so on continually invade the closed-off area of the 'uncle tom' modernity of the commercial and managerial stratum, with its characteristically hybrid institutions and values; the disco-hopping 'modern' girl has to revert to type when she is passed on to an approved groom. The representational regime in such a setting demands that the code of the modest maiden must co-exist happily with the other code of the alluring and available single woman, and this results in many curious mixtures like the chaste whore and the voluptuous maiden (both essentially available to one man alone), identically got up in the approved costume which defies any socially existing dress code, and getting forever embroiled in the tyrannical song-and-dance routines which substitute affective passages, common in realist narratives. The

narrative desire for romantic love, so characteristic of the first generation of novels in India, gets thwarted by the fuzziness and infirmity of cultural codes for types of man-woman relationship when it moves to popular cinema in particular. It is possible in all Indian languages to construct a grammatically correct version of 'I love you', but very difficult to have a young man say this to a young woman in a filmic representation. The courting is perennially conducted in song-and-dance routines. Ray, so sensitive to the nuances of man-woman relationship in his realist films, decides to avoid the terrain altogether in *GGBB*, and follow the line of his grandfathers version of the folktale in gendering his narrative. This, as it appears, involves a gesture to the classical proprieties.

2. *Patriarchy, boys' story and disorder*

The folktale in Bengal has been forced into the confines of the polite boys' story genre very early, following the bowdlerizing efforts of English writers of children's literature.[7] There are many traditional female types in Upendra Kishore Raychoudhury's version of popular Bangla folktales [8] and Dakshina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar [9] offers a number of female protagonists in his collection [10], but one can see the direction towards 'boys' story' from the beginning. In the famous preface to Majumdar's *thakurmarjhuli* (The Grandmother's Sack,1907), Rabindranath Tagore seals the double equation with consummate ease; he proposes folktales as indigenous children's literature and the child as a *boy*.

Is there anything so greatly indigenous in our country as the grandmother's sack? But alas, even this lovely sack is being manufactured for us in the mills of Manchester these days. The "Fairy Tales" of England are threatening to become the only recourse for our boys. The native company of grandmothers is entirely bankrupt. ....

When the boy of Bengal listens to folktales he is not only pleased with the story, but he is also affected by the love which the whole community of Bengal bears towards him, and his young heart is saturated with the essence of Bengaliness. [11]

Majumdar himself wrote stories for children, many of them thinly disguised manuals for the correct upbringing of middle-class children. This 'moral' story genre had started in the second half of the nineteenth century, largely under the inspiration of similar stories printed in England, and it would involve a token presence of a girl or two, but the reader was left in no doubt that she was only being trained for her domestic responsibilities, whereas the boys would go out and shoulder the burden of running the world.[12] This didactic tradition did not really die out, but a realist genre emerged quite early, led by sporadic but consistent efforts by Tagore (who else?), and brought to a triumphant maturity by Sukumar Ray. [13] Tagore's lifelong interest in children had a component in his representation of the deviant/adventurous/ truant boy (commonly perceived as the result of having been a school drop-out himself, though he turned out to be a superlatively strong man of affairs in later life), and one can trace a line of development from *birpurush* to *chheleta* in his verse and from *ichchhapuran* to *galsalpa* in fiction. But the truant girl is hardly in evidence, the one exception being Mrinrnoyee in *Samapti*, one of the three stories in Satyajit Ray's *Teen Kanya* (1961). Sukumar Ray (1887-1923) wrote verse, fiction and drama, but apart from an occasional 'bad girl' in verse, his world is wholly constituted by the male of the species. His version of Alice [14] is a boy (*ha ja ba ra la*, written 1922, tr. Sukanta Chaudhuri, *The Select Nonsense of Sukumar Ray*, 1987.   This is a path-breaking text in Bangla, as is nearly everything he wrote in his short life, and his fantasy is of the kind which takes off from the discursive and linguistic resources of the community and extends the limits of the imaginable. For instance, in the dream- narrative of the boy we have two characters, Udho and Budho, who are twins embroiled in an interminable quarrel about a bundle. The episode is developed from a Bangla

proverbial phrase, *udhor bojha(pindi) budhor ghare*, 'Udho's burden on the shoulders of Budho', indicating the ways of the clever man who manages to transfer his responsibilities to someone else. The proverb is expanded into an open-ended episode which is woven into a string of other episodes of a similar nature, and all such episodes depend structurally on a series of extraordinary verbal and visual gags. The twins, for instance, are old, bearded and bald, but Udho declares that his age is thirteen; this gag occurs in a dialogue with the boy-hero in which Udho explains with perfect clarity their system of counting a person's age. This is after he had put down the boy's age as thirty-seven.[15]

'Of course not!' I cried. 'I'm only eight and a quarter, and I won't have you saying I'm thirty-seven!'

The Old Man considered for a moment and asked, 'Upward or downward?'

'I beg your pardon?' said I.

'Is your age increasing or decreasing?'

'How can one's age decrease?' I asked back.

'Do you mean to say it`ll keep going up and up?' he exclaimed with a shudder. 'Good heavens, that way you'll end up sixty or seventy or eighty, and even grow old and die some day.'

'Of course,' I told him. 'One's very old by the time one's eighty.'

'But that's stupid!' he answered. 'Why should you ever get to be eighty? Over here, we turn our age back when we're forty. Then we don't go on to be 41 or 42, but start growing younger at 39, 38 and so on… When we've got down to ten in this way, we turn upward again. I've quite lost count how often I've grown young and old in this way I'm thirteen now' he added.

The oxymoron (old man claiming youthfulness) is verbal as well as visual and it is brought as a closure to the exposition of the system of aging. But

rhetorically the gag comes first because the system explains the occurrence of the oxymoron. This particular oxymoron and its analogues (the marriage of January and May, for instance, in 'The Merchant's Tale' of Chaucer, filmed with extraordinary verve by Pasolini in his *The Canterbury Tales* 1971) will be found in most cultures, and will routinely evoke laughter, though the perenniality of the motif is surely worth exploring. But what is neither routine nor perennial in the Sukumar Ray text, and belongs to the realm of invention, is the discursive universe which has been built as a contrast to the mundane linearity of time. There is a touch perhaps of the popular utopia which fends off death with an alternative system of time-management, but the utopian solution is a freeze on the subject, singular or collective (the visitor does not age), and a rotatory proairesis of desire (an eternal circulation of flying roast pigs and fountains of wine). Ray, on the contrary, moves the subject into an eternity of cycles, up to forty years and then back, incidentally to match the perpetuity of the fight between the twins over the mysterious bundle. The timelessness of the proverb (syntagmatic segments of individual time merging into the paradigmatic eternity of the collective) is preserved by the open-ended-ness of the narrative episode, so that its relationship with other episodes can never appear motivated, that is, causally linked. The Udho-Budho story weaves in and out of the Croworthy Cole-Black story, the body measurement story, the telling of the folktale story and the courtroom story without losing its original lineaments. The entire narrative of *ha ja ba ra la* is a bricolage of segmental elements in which invention is often based on a pastiche of different discursive blocks cleverly fused together on the principle of inconsequentiality, something akin to the dream narratives deploying the devices of compression, displacement, symbolization and secondary revision. Udho's folktale is instructive. [16]

Meanwhile the Head Vizier had swallowed the Princess's spool of thread. Nobody knew about it. And just at this moment along came the man-eating giant, roaring as he rolled off the bed in his sleep. At once there was a hideous din of drums and bugles and

cymbals and bassoons and guards and gunners and dragoons and cavalry, clash, clash, bang, bang, boom, boom, rattle, rattle — when suddenly the king cried out : 'What's this magic horse doing without a tail?' And the pastors and masters and doctors and proctors began telling each other, 'A very good question. What's happened to its tail?' Nobody knew the answer: they all tried to slink away.

The principal characters belong to the familiar world of the Bangla folktale —Vizier, Princess, Giant, King, Magic Horse. The court people, however, are listed in terms of verbally organized binaries: *patra/mitra, daktar/moktar, akkel/mokkel* in the original Bangla, roughly equivalent to minister/courtier, doctor/lawyer, sense/client. The first pair of terms is conventionally linked to the folktale universe, but the next one alters the series completely by departing from the expected order (which might include *mantri*, minister, *shantri*, sentry, *kotal*, chief of police, *senapati*, general, etc.) and introducing an echolalic set which denies the logic of the first pair's association with the court. The series is shown to be constructed largely on the repetitive demands of homomorphic sound-clusters — reminiscent of children's echolalia — which are picked up from recognized registers but delinked from folkloric associations (*akkel* is not even a person, which the others are). The effect of unmotivated alliteration is enhanced by the complete elimination of narrative functions, nodal elements which propel the story along conventional lines. In this story actions come from a different universe: the minister swallows the princess's ball of thread, the giant falls off the bed, and the king asks the non-question about the magic horse's tail. The three major acts come from the world of children, in which swallowing non-food objects, falling from heights and asking null questions are frequent happenings, though inexplicable and undesirable to patriarchal order. Folktales usually subvert the world of authority in their characteristic fashion (inversion of accepted political/ familial orders, displacement of space-time determinants, incursion of otherworlds, subversion of

causality, etc.), but here the normality of children's actions has been coercively projected into the axis of the law of the father, thus dealing a double blow to the familiarizing and legitimizing strategies of dominant discourse. The comic, classically defined as a species of the ugly, [17] turns out to have a version which entails a reversion to innocence. Chaplin's tramp, who introduces a succession of singularities into the known order of things, proposes this particular kind of reversion which results in slapstick. It is noticeable that Laurel and Hardy would often mimic the conventionally recognized ways of children. [18]

Sukumar Ray wrote a good number of school stories and boys' stories in which the deviant male child is the principal figure. Pagla Dashu ('Madcap Dashu') features in some of them. At first sight, in terms of narrative foregrounding, there is a reversal of the good boy / bad boy pattern which the first phase of children's literature in Bangla had proposed. [19] But looking beyond this very important step, which inaugurated the realist phase in Bangla children's literature with a certain 'depth' model of characterization, one has to look at the narrative itself, the arena of action, in which systems of representation come into collision. There is a justly famous story, much anthologized these days, which describes the happenings on an end-of-term day's theatrical showy. [20] The children are staging a play of which we have excerpts in the story, as we have excerpts from the last year's play. Now, both the end-of-term function and the stage-play are relatively new institutions in Sukumar Ray's Bengal (first decade of the twentieth century), for though the school-system and amateur theatricals (on the proscenium stage) were rapidly naturalized, both had started taking shape late in the nineteenth century. Apu's education in the trilogy provides a graphic illustration of a boy's journey through the system, which adapts the European model of education to the poor resource base of colonized Bengal, and comes up with a disciplinary system for the training of land-owning/ traditional service/managerial/white-collar/rentier stratum of the middle class (including the indigent hangers-on marginalized by a crumbling economy) so that their sons can prepare for the new servicing professions which the colonial regime

demanded. The trappings of the westernized school system included the end-of-term festivities, for it was held that discipline must be tempered with a regulated scope for self-expression and creativity. Sports and drama were important group activities generally encouraged at this level. This is why the boys are given a free run with their annual drama. There are two stories on the theme, *Bishubahaner Digbijay* ('The Triumphal March of Bishnubahan'), 1918, and *Dashur Khyapami* ('Dashu's Mad Capers'), 1922, both printed in *Sandesh*, the children's journal edited by Sukumar Ray In the first story, Bishnubahan produces a play called *Chandradviper Digbijay* written by his uncle. The story involves two royal brothers, one of whom goes to war in order to rescue the other. There is a great deal of ranting and violent posturing which appeals to the simple hearts of the schoolboys, and though the play ends in the extradiegetic discomfiture of the hero because of the intransigence of other participants, a very good time is had by all. In the second story, Dashu supplicates for a role but is denied because he had spoiled last year's production by unseemly conduct. However, he manages to induce a youngster to drop out at the last moment and thus bags a part. The two successive productions are based on similar narratives. The first one involves a duel between the general, played by Dashu, and the spy from a rival kingdom, and the general, presumably after his valorous conduct of the campaign, is rewarded by the king. The current year's play features a messenger of the gods who appears to rescue a kingdom from trouble; the last scene has the minister informing the king of the good angel's departure for heaven, and ends with the king's ringing peroration about the end of poverty and oppression in his kingdom. The proscenium stage may be a novelty, but both the play-text and the style of acting are deeply embedded in the indigenous cultural habits of traditional Bengal. Bibhuti Bhusan Bandyopadhyay has an interesting description of a traditional *jatra*, the indigenous theatre of Bengal, in his *Pather Panchali* (1929), which is set in the first decade of the twentieth century; while Dashu's play is small-town, not metropolitan, Apu watches a purely rural affair, performed by an itinerant professional company. One must remember, however,

that in terms of text and acting style, there is hardly any difference between the proscenium production and the open one.

> When the king is ousted by the minister in a coup, he goes into the forest with his wife and children, accompanied by the tearful strains of a violin. … ...The faithful general trembles so much in anger that it might cause envy in an epileptic patient. ... ...

> What a sword-play takes place in the fight between the King of Kalinga and Bichitraketu! There goes the flashing sword, threatening the chandeliers or the eyes of some hapless spectator. Cries of 'Save the lights! Save the lights!' rend the air. But the swordcraft is wondrous, it avoids everything! Bravo Bichitraketu![21]

Bibhuti Bhusan is bracketing a particular kind of text in order to distance and valorize his own kind of narrative. This is also an enterprise in cultural hegemony, showing up the primitiveness of a set of practices which realism leaves behind in its search for an appropriate telos. In terms of the particular narrative, the *bildungsroman* structure allows Bibhuti Bhusan to allude to three distinct historical styles: Harihar's *kathakata* and *pala* narratives, [22] Apu's juvenile attempts at romance, [23] and his pre-figurings of the novel which he eventually got around to writing. [24] The last allusion becomes a self-reflexive commentary on the novel itself, projecting Apu as some kind of an identical subject-object of history. Sukumar Ray, with his comic purpose, tries a different tack.

> Dashu is excessively fond of play-acting, and has in fact memorized several roles in the play from which he is initially excluded. But he cannot act because he does not have the discipline of total absorption in the task of make-believe and his attention-span is limited. When the make-believe is literal, as in a

child, there are easy passages from the assumed role to the perception of the self and the world, because the discipline of pretence, of performance for an entire occasion, is the result of constant practice, frequently under sustained supervision. But a child operates under a different regime. She pretends to be a princess/ bird/ train/ superman/ doctor/ mermaid under the condition of the literality of the pretence; the train is only a pretended one, therefore provisional and contingent, ready to be jettisoned when a stronger pretence or the demand of the reality principle beckons. The pretence is also formal for the child: the *langue* is the imitation of the engine-noise and of the movement, whereas the *parole* of the physical reality of the train in action lies outside the confines of performative space-time. Dashu in the theatre-story embodies this contingency of the performative. He tugs at the buckles of his belt and moves back into 'real' time in his instant annoyance. He forgets his part and admits it on stage, moving into real time again. He delivers extra dialogue, changing persona. He does not heed the rules of the game and insists on appearing onstage to usurp someone else's speech. This intransigence is dug up from the forgotten recesses of childhood which boys at school are trained to leave behind. Dashu is thus an index to the childhood of children, as opposed to the state in which the child is the father of the man. The male children in the stories of Sukumar are constantly tackling the contingency of their basic, bare, unvarnished childness, working out the means of escape from institutional conditionalities, inventing every moment newer forms of fantasy—life leading to disorder. The tradition of boys' story continues in the next generation of writers, the Ray family providing two of the most distinguished and popular among them, Lila Majumdar and Satyajit Ray. But it is only in the later stage of Majumdar's career that the transgressive girl-child makes her appearance, [25] whereas Satyajit is exclusively concerned with boys and men. Another very successful writer, Narayan Gangopadhyay, hardly acknowledges the existence of girls. Shibram Chakravarty alone among the notables has a sprinkling of girls and women in his fiction. It is not particularly relevant to bring charges of sexism against the writers of children's fiction in twentieth century Bengal; in fact, the literature for the young is dominated by the

figure of the boy in almost every culture even today, matching most often the texts of adult fiction. It is not very useful either to merely mark the dominance of patriarchy in the culture of all historical formation; gender, race, caste and class will always be relevant to the discussion of culture. What is at issue here is the linkage of specific narrative elements with the codes prevailing in particular cultures. And this means that the problem with which this essay began can be summarily disposed of by demonstrating that the set of realist codes with which the modern children's fiction began in Bengal would not permit the girl-child to come in as a protagonist, for the simple reason that the institutional and social space required for the fiction is largely unavailable to girls. You cannot, in the nineteen-twenties, envisage a female Pagla Dashu. Alice, who steps out of a presumed 'real' world, has to be turned into a boy by Sukumar Ray. The girl does not fulfil the conditions of visibility in fiction precisely because the girl in real life has been made invisible for a very long time. Meanwhile, urgent tasks on the cultural front had to be taken up, new kinds of texts had to be written, and these can take off only from the available repertoire of conventions. The agenda of indigenous modernity had taken up the woman question, but representational strategies have to adjust to the demands of history. The conditions under which particular kinds of events can be made visible, the rules which decide the representability of categories of agents and actors, the textual inventions which are relevant to community expectations — are some of the areas which Satyajit Ray's intertextual explorations may illuminate. The theme of war takes up a large part of the narrative, and violence has been perceived historically as a male preserve. *GGBB* follows the accepted prescription for male and ruling-class agency, and is able to avoid the frequent folkloric ascription of violence to female agents.

3. Fantasy and the realist desire

One way of tackling the question of visibility would be to have a close look at what Roland Barthes has called the proairetic code[26] as it operates in

GGBB. This code, culturally variable and empirically accessed by the reader/ viewer, makes sense of sequences of action in a given narrative: '... whoever reads the text amasses certain data under some generic titles for actions (*stroll, murder, rendezvous*), and this title embodies the sequence; the sequence exists when and because it can be given a name, it unfolds as this process of naming takes place, as a title is sought or confirmed …' [27] As Goopy Gyne moves through his adventures, the Bangla-knowing viewer confirms to herself that, serially, the low-caste and poor and foolish Goopy is besotted with the idea of becoming a singer (*futile ambition/ off-key singing*), he is leg-pulled by the powerful clique of idle brahmans of the village (*comic deception*), he goes to sing to the raja (*seeking a patron*), who insults him (*villainy*), and throws him out of his domain (*departure/forced exile*), he meets Bagha Byne (*finding a friend*), and they both together please the king of ghosts with their music (*being tested*), who grants them three boons (*receiving magical gifts*), and so on. It is clear in S / Z that Barthes is trying to move beyond the confines of structuralist analysis, because the proairetic code belongs to the relative values of culture, not to the universalizing certainties of syntagmatic narrative functions or paradigmatic binary dualities. In the preceding summary, some of the proairetic codes look suspiciously like Propp's narrative functions (villainy, departure, testing, magical gift),[28] and there is definitely a touch of the Aarne-Thompson motif-index of folktales;[29] it would not be very difficult to do a Levi-Straussian job either, given the recurrent oscillation between nature and culture, movement and stasis, etc. ('raw' cacophony transformed into 'cultured' melody, static nobles versus mobile plebs).[30] But, as Barthes demonstrates in the body of his analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine*, all his codes are contingent and cultural, and therefore demands history. Ray's proairesis demonstrates precisely how this code operates in folktales (and other fantasy genres) : there is a dual axis of narrative logic — fantasy and realism — which enforces a unified trajectory, and though the two tracks are conceptually separable and continuously contrasted in reception, they are so threaded together that one will collapse without the other in the particular ensemble. Behind the codes, separate but connected reception communities may

be envisaged, with varying demands which are met by language games / representational regimes which evolve and mutate from the existing resources of the culture in question.

Goopy is no singer in the pre-benediction part of the narrative, but he is consumed with the desire for musical artistry, and wishes to be a recognized maestro. When he first appears on the screen, he is carrying a *tanpura* on his shoulder, with a broad grin on his face. The instrument — not a *dotara* or a *gubguba* of humble origin and proper to folk music — is a signature of the sophisticated world of classical music and entirely incongruous with Goopy's peasant clothes and bare feet and rustic accent. It is of course a well-known symptom of folly to desire musical recognition when one has no talent in that direction; Cacofonix of the Asterix comics and Bhisma Lochan Sharma from Sukumar Ray are immortal specimens. There is a generalized theme, familiar in everyday life and in representations, of the unendowed aspiring after glory, and inviting ridicule; the particular field of intended eminence may be immaterial in that case (beauty, strength, wit, youth, riches). But the gift of music and poetry appears to be a special case, possibly because of very early mystical and magical associations (Orpheus), and the later valorisation of individual talent in the separated terrain of high culture (Nero with his fiddle). Goopy's case is even more special because he transgresses clearly established social rules determined by caste and class considerations. High culture, of which classical music is an important component, (is reserved for the elite, marked by ritual and economic status. The group of village Brahmans demonstrate the easy superiority with which claims to their particular terrain can be dismissed. It is money and leisure which determines the acquisition of the expertise for appreciation, and it is money and status again which sustain the patronage system for artists in pre-modern societies (Ray's *Jalsasghar*, 'The Music Room', 1958, provides a vivid example). The king who banishes Goopy is a qualified patron and would not tolerate a peasant boy's laughable imitation of reserved grace, as Goopy's battered old father had pointed out to his son in an irate encounter. Realist

assumptions pervade the folk tale at every turn and invite the reader's participation in working out the logic of the narrative. The proairesis, then, like any other cultural code, can be cracked at different levels of specificity; there is a transcultural level accessible to any community with music among its repertoire of practices (it is difficult to imagine one without), and at this level ringing singing off-key would be a generic title under which a very large class of actions can be represented. But at another level, a knowledge of the specific social configuration has to be brought in. A transnational text like the Asterix comics, supported by a very powerful global network of market apparatus, comes equipped with this embedded knowledge to its postcolonial readership, for whom the ways of Europe are familiar terrain due to prolonged and coercive exposure over centuries. It is not difficult for a reader (from that small segment of the elite who have access to French or English or Spanish, etc.) in Nigeria, Pakistan or Panama to imagine a tribal village in France's prehistory and to respond to the comic transactions between this imagined prehistory and the consensus on present fashions. The generalized transcultural level is always realized in the specific articulation of the reader's responsive proairesis; otherwise Cacofonix would be a skeletal off-key performer and things which mark him off in the symbolic regime of the present-past dialogue, his chivalry and his deadly seriousness and his affinity with pop-performers, for instance, would be lost. In the action code it is never enough to envisage a man slipping on a banana peel; one has to imagine his girth, his clothes, his language, his location in time-and-space, his social position, his relationship with the witnesses to his discomfiture, and so on. Goopy's off-key singing is embedded in a complex interrelationship between the folklore setting and the demands of a specific set of realist practices.

Consider the first Goopy-Bagha encounter. In Upendra Kishore's version of the folktale, both have been forced to find shelter in the forest, unknown to each other, after they were chased away by villagers fed up with their music. They are not threatened by anyone in the forest, not even by tigers and bears, and they practise music to their heart's content. This *going to the forest* is another

pervasive proairesis in the Indian regime of representations, with complex ramifications in theology, philosophy, classical literature, folk culture and everyday life. Any text can invoke a large body of associations by a mere allusion to the topos. In the story there is an instant transformation of the forest from a perilous place to a *locus amoenus*, and then again to a site of mysterious fears. [31]

Bagha was having great fun. No one chased him with sticks any more when he played his drum. No fear of being devoured by tigers, for there was neither tiger nor bear in the forest. But there was a terrifying creature whom he had not caught sight of yet, and whose fearsome roar made him tremble and think, 'Oh my God ! If it catches me, it will swallow me whole, drum and all!'

This terrifying animal is none other than Goopy Gyne. The roar which sets Bagha trembling all over is Goopy's singing-practice. Goopy too hears Bagha's drum and trembles in fear. At last he thinks, 'I'd better escape right away, otherwise I might get killed.' Goopy slinks away from the forest and discovers that another man is coming out with a huge drum on his head. He is astonished and asks, 'Hullo, who are you?'

Bagha said, 'I am Bagha Byne. And who may you be?'

Goopy said, 'I am Goopy Gyne. Where are you off to?'

Bagha said, 'I am going wherever I can find shelter. The people of my village are asses and don't appreciate music, so I had come away to the forest with my drum. But, listen, man, there is a frightful beast which roars in the forest and it will surely kill me if I ever come its way. So I'm escaping.'

Goopy said, 'You are right. I've heard a fearful monster too, and, I'm running away for dear life.'

They discover eventually that they had heard only each other and got frightened. They have a good laugh over it. After further adventures, which include the upsetting of a ferry-boat full of people who get an earful of their music, they fetch up at an even more frightful forest and meet the posse of ghosts.

Satyajit Ray relished the problem he faced. It was not an adaptation exercise, but a generic transformation that he was after, and what he does in this particular segment may illustrate the nature of his inventions in constructing a particular kind of 'realist' text. The specific rules of folkloric fantasy are respected, but the narrative ensemble invites the viewer's participation in a double articulation of consensual desire. As Goopy fetches up at the edge of the unknown forest after his humiliating expulsion, there is little trace of bitterness in his demeanour, though it has been a long day and a frightful ordeal. The extreme long shot is in deep focus, with a vividly painted earthen pot as the head of a scarecrow in the right foreground, and Goopy gets off his donkey in the background, dismissing the animal with a mild tone of petulance: ' Go on, get back to Amloki'. He exclaims that his limbs are aching. There was scope here of a certain trajectory of the 'depth' model of realism, much used in Hollywood, in which many close-ups would reveal the injured protagonist's inner fury masked under a set, hard, taut expression (imagine a 'western' sequence of victimization or expulsion) and/ or rapid cuts mirroring explosive physical action (kicking the donkey, for instance) ; another option, the 'progressive' realism of a great many 'mythological' melodramas, making Goopy a victim of class and caste oppression, and involving a certain amount of ranting and perhaps a song and a tight sequence (the pathetic underdog singing his way into the audience's heart having gone out of fashion), will demand an equally well- known array of technical devices. The comic turn too would happily deploy these techniques. This little juncture in the sequence points up the rejection of these options and proposes the twining of a folktale thread around a core narrative constantly allusive of history. In the folktale the gaps between episodes produce 'wiper' effects, obliterating the causality of narrative memory, foregrounding the here

and the now; choosing to escape the tyranny of consistency; a boat may capsize and you may get a dunking, but the moment you are ashore, you decide to sing and play the drum; the subjects of a kingdom have been struck dumb by magic, but they do not come into the picture to help their king in removing the curse; the magic gifts are themselves narrative wipers, playing with space, tinkering with time. When Goopy enters the forest he leaves behind him the immediate links with the traumatic day. The subject of a folktale is a bundle of traces weaving in and out of the thickness of events. Satyajit Ray proposes to inscribe a local habitation and a name on this subject, but the touch is very light, because otherwise the fragile fabric of the fantasy might tear. Goopy's father and the Amloki king and the village brahmans carry some of the vital traces of Goopy's history, which, obviously, is not the history of political chronicles, but of the continuity of inequality and injustice. The son listens to the old grocer's bitter insights into the realities of power relationships, but he escapes the weight of reported unfreedom to keep his very own appointment with the same. His morning tryst with the king is meant to be an object lesson in keeping one's place, but he seems to retain very little of the memory of this unfreedom, which bows down his father and which provides the king and the brahmans with their ease of manner and sophistication, when he moves to his next appointment. The *tanpura* on his shoulder is the index to this escape from unfreedom. The physical destruction of this sign, at the hand of the connoisseur king, releases him incidentally from the disciplinary bind of apprenticeship (Gosain Khuro's corporeal regime, typical of the classical training for musicians), till the otherworld intervenes to confirm his freedom. But this man had always carried his freedom around with him, however off-key his music. We have many chronicles of the poor man who leaves home, opts out of the iron bounds of community, in search of music or adventure or God. We hear of women who join minor sects or settle in Vrindaban and Varanasi and are never heard of again.[32] The trajectory of history, woven into the unrecorded chronicles of everyday life, meets and meshes with the narratives of folklore. The history behind the story of Goopy and Bagha is constructed by Ray and made the fulcrum of the narrative.

In his version, the otherworld confirms the historical place of the man who chooses to walk out of history.

Goopy is in long shot, slightly off-centre, as he approaches the unknown forest. There is a cut to the bamboo grove which marks its border, and one must say that it does not look particularly forbidding, though which forest as such can be frightening? It is the collective mind which peoples the expanse of trees with imagined creatures, including wild animals. Goopy's approach is cautious, for he is carrying in his mind the inherited baggage of rural Bengal's fears, and as he is framed in mid-long shot, inquisitive and apprehensive at the same time, there is a rhythmic noise on the sound-track, which grows louder as Goopy moves, still in mid-long shot, across the frame from the right to the left. The camera pans slowly and zooms out a little, to match the stop-go-stop rhythm of Goopy's walk. He has heard the sound and stops to listen, then moves- again, in long shot, diagonally from left to right this time to match the contours of the land and the disposition of trees, the camera panning slowly again and zooming out to hold him in the frame. There is a cut and Goopy appears in long shot in the fork of a large tree, looking to the right of the camera position, alert to the sound and trying to locate its source. A cut to the close-up of a big drum on which drops of water are falling rhythmically clears up the mystery for the viewer, immediately after which Goopy appears again in long shot and there is a slow pan to reveal Bagha crouched on the ground under a tree, asleep, cut to a close-up of Goopy who smiles at the sight, cut to a mid-close shot of Bagha, from a top-angle to match Goopy's point of view, then the camera zooms out for a two-shot, and Bagha is jerked out of sleep at the sound of Goopy's amused chortle, he jumps up and shouts at Goopy, who points out with glee the wetting his drum has received, Bagha takes care of his beloved instrument and sits on the ground, Goopy follows suit at a distance, still in the two-shot, Bagha cracks his fingers and the camera pans to Goopy to show him doing the same, Bagha yawns and Goopy mimics him, Bagha beats a tattoo on his knees and Goopy imitates, Bagha now springs up as if to attack — both are in long shot — but cools down

enough to exchange names and personal histories, which match in approved folktale fashion. Then comes the tiger episode, and as they recover from their fright and proceed to a desperate, defiant exhibition of their craft, ghosts come crowding in. Realism proceeds here from a position of respect for the poor people's ways, and when fantasy intervenes, it follows the lines of people's imagination.

Satyajit Ray does not merely depart from Upendra Kishore's version, which would have been normal, but proposes a different tenor of the story, demanding a viewer's adjustment to the new narrative regime. For instance, it is possible to imagine the original Goopy's singing only in the comic world of folklore or fantasy; the verisimilitude demanded by Ray's realism will render the out-of-tune-ness, but neither the raucousness nor the decibels will ever exceed the acceptable limits of human capability. In a literal transfer, Tansen's singing of the *deepak* raga will light up a hundred lamps in legend as well as the filmic 'mythological', a procedure followed in innumerable Indian films. There is an inevitable mismatch between the performance and the effect which only a very conventional and credulous fancy can bridge. Ray keeps the fantasy within the strict limits of the *as if* proposed initially, and follows a particular kind of consensus regarding causality for the rest of the events, and it is not very difficult for him to twine the two systems together. The three gifts are an assumption which will yield a particular set of narrative functions, just as the existence of kings is an assumption which will generate a specific series. As the 'kings' series involves a set of material conditions and events — the courtroom, the attendants, the robe, the affairs of state, the envoys, the army, and so on, the 'gifts' series will similarly generate its own specific set: the various meals and the plates on which these are served, the costumes fitting each particular occasion or change of climate, the various people and their poses when they are immobilized by the magic music. Ray is in fact following the clever prescription of the folktale community: if the tiger could speak, how would he propose to a human girl? The technical solution is the interesting part of the exercise, and Ray surprises his

viewer with his ingenuity, starting from the consensus of his intended audience, building on it, and taking off in directions not envisaged in the collective, conventional repertoire.

4. Ghosts and the machine

The king of ghosts would not be a familiar notion to a western audience. The devil, yes, as a kind of remote authority, for ghosts are generally evil in European thought, but since ghosthood is contingent on the prior existence of mortals, the revenants are forever doomed to an extension of merely the 'beast' in man. Indian ghosts are more fun. There are many versions of the community of ghosts, which would include departed souls as well as free spirits, and both will be commensurate with the presence of other mythical creatures like demons and ogres and giants and witches from the popular end , which are a class apart from the more classical creatures like *gandharbas* and *apsaras* and *kinnaras*. Parashuram (Rajshekhar Basu) provides a succinct account of the complicated world of ghosts.[33]

> Everybody has heard that men turn into ghosts after death. But how do heaven, hell, rebirth, etc. fit in with this theory ? The real facts of the case are as follows. — Atheists do not have souls. They are transformed into gases like oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, etc. after death. The believers among the white people have souls but they are not reborn. They turn into ghosts after death and gather in a large waiting-room at first. After a prolonged purificatory wait they are brought to the last judgment. And when the sentence is out, some ghosts go to heaven for eternity and the rest find shelter in hell for ever. The freedom which white people enjoy in life is considerably reduced in the state of ghosthood. The European spook cannot leave the waiting-room without a pass. Those who have had experience of a séance will know how

difficult it is to call a European ghost. On the other hand, there is a very different arrangement for Hindus, for we believe in rebirth, heaven, hell, *karma*, faith, *nirvana*, liberation and the lot. A Hindu is made into a ghost after death and can move freely and settle anywhere, and even have transactions with the living world when necessary. This is a great advantage. But this state does not last for very long. Some are reborn within days, some have a wait of a few years, and some have rebirth after a couple of centuries. The ghosts are periodically sent to heaven and to hell for a change of air. This is good for their health, for a sojourn in heaven is very relaxing, and a stay in hell reduces the sinfulness of the soul and it gets slim and fit; moreover, you are likely to meet some of the best people there.

What Parashuram does not take into account is the independent category of beings collectively called ghosts. They are not necessarily transformed human entities, though they have frequent transactions with the living world. Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay gives an account of this select group, in the words of one of its eminent members. [34]

People say of somebody that he has died and turned into a ghost. That is not true. No man turns into his own ghost. When a man is dead, one of us goes and serves as his ghost. There are millions of ghosts in the world. Some are employed as ghosts, some are apprentices, and some are unemployed. Employment is in the hands of our leader. He calls a ghost and says, 'Go to this man and stay as his shadow. When he is dead, you can become his ghost. I bestow this ghost-job on you.' From that day the ghost accompanies the man. When the man has a mere headache, his delight knows no bounds, because as soon as his client is dead, the ghosthood is his.

Ghost stories are legion in Bengal. Both Trailokyanath and Parashuram have the skeptical affection of the kind which moves beyond the enlightened hardness of the first generation of the preachers of modernity. Upendrakishore's king of the ghosts is a genial soul, fond of music (with plenty of loud noises, as in the original performance of the duo) and of simple people, and he himself speaks in the rustic accents of the labouring poor. Ray stylizes his speech into a performance in musical verse, with a brilliant recourse to electronic distortion (he recorded his own voice and speeded it up), and the distancing itself sets up the transactional model for the commerce between the two worlds. The ghostly apparatus is the other of mundane authority, with powers to override the latter's dictates, though arbitrary in its appearance and incomprehensible in its practice. As a machinery for reparative justice, it does not insist on retribution, though many other folkloric agencies do, and its endowment of the duo is contingent on the latter's initiative, motivation and enterprise for the direction the gifts will take. One of its principal narrative roles is in the direction of providing the initial impetus and the permanent means for a regime of pleasure. The other comes in the long dance sequence, in which the theme of war is woven into a historical narrative, and provides an important commentary to the main story of Halla and Shundi.

When the offer comes, Goopy and Bagha ask for three boons, which are actually four (a perpetual and inexhaustible access to food, apparel, mobility and the gift of music), but since the Bangla phrase habitually compounds food and apparel (khaoa-para), the boons can be fitted into the powerful number symbolism usual with folklore.[35] There are innumerable instances in folktales of this kind of utopian insertion in the normal run of everyday life, and the key element in such breaks in the narrative is in the direction of constituting a special regime of absence of labour. The ghosts of departed cows may yield a ghostly milk out of which real butter is made, but Bagha's fancy merely extends the materialist thesis that ghosts use their supernatural knowledge and mobility to

ferry things from one place to another. What matters to the liberated heroes is that they do not have to work for the things which they desire. Food, in the experience of the likes of Bagha and Goopy, has to be produced with enormous, complicated and exhausting labour, performed largely under duress, and consumed mostly by those who are born to enjoy the fruits of others' labour. Tilling, sowing, watering, weeding, manuring, tending, guarding, getting rid of pests and vermin, raising stock, catching fish and game, gathering foodstuff and fuel, reaping the harvest and picking fruits, cleaning, storing, grinding, curing, preserving, cooking — this enormous round of strenuous labour will yield the food which will be divided according to the strict rules of entitlement governed by the imperatives of class, caste, status, gender and so on. Add to this the labour for the production of clothes, shoes, houses, roads, mines, quarries, carts, boats, utensils, furniture, weapons, supply of water, drainage, lighting, pens, books, musical instruments, medicine, army and navy, trade and commerce, administration, schooling, domestic service, prostitution, religion, science, technology, entertainment and so on, and the list of goods and services for which backbreaking labour is essential grows to staggering lengths in a pre-modern society. This is the everyday world from which the duo wished to escape into music. Attempted escapes are of course common in such a universe: slaves, soldiers, sailors, serfs, wives, apprentices, workers, domestic servants, prostitutes — the list is very large. The most characteristic utopia for the labouring poor in such a society would invariably be marked by the absence of labour, and its obverse, the access to plenitude.[36] The intervention of the otherworld in folktales is most often a utopian break which directs the narrative into a wholly restructured order.

5. *Pleasure and history*

Pleasure is not an innocent concept. Desire is hopelessly complicated. One way of making sense of the story of Goopy and Bagha would be to see a libidinal drive in the paired men (seeking a mother-substitute in the princess),

trying to evade the threat of castration (living down the breaking of the tanpura by the authoritative figure of the king), and the fantasy would appear to be one more re-working of the common desire for a permanent and irrevocable (gifted from a perpetually acting otherworld) union with the mother (plenitude, affection, sex). Moving from the Freudian to the Lacanian model, the Goopy-Bagha story may appear to be a phantasmic solution to the intractable antinomies of the symbolic order (the double articulation of cacophony/ music, the literal law of father, guru, king) and a journey back to the illusory wholeness of the imaginary (mirroring in Goopy/Bagha duo, immediate satisfaction of desire from the gifts).[37] One has to assume something like the historical unconscious, working in and through language or other signifying systems, and binding the construction and reception of such texts with uniformly functioning deep-structure technologies of the psyche. The special case of cinema, with its due emphasis on the gaze, will have to invoke the apparatus of scopic regimes.[38] But without avoiding or bracketing the deep insights of psychoanalysis, now constantly used in cultural studies (including this reading of *GGBB*), it may still be necessary to see pleasure as implicated in history, desire involved in the class struggle. Surely the meanings to be found in literature, cinema, theatre, music and so on cannot be exhausted by the model of one story infinitely repeated in the trajectories of a billion separate narratives. Both the construction and reconstruction of a text being intertextually therefore collectively determined, it makes sense to say that a story will tell many different tales and that a billion lives have billions of narratives, each articulated in history, weaving in and out of their interconnected existence. It is one thing to say that a woman bears a child and brings her up — and this is being repeated *n* times in *n* number of lives — but quite another to discover the infinity of events and their meanings in the social existence of mother and daughter. The mother-daughter relationship cannot be captured by the structural properties of the basic datum of parturition, just as the structural configuration of the Oedipal situation cannot address the *parole* of an entire human life. When the Oedipus story is represented in a text, and when that story is read by at least one reader, it enters a history from which

the narrative cannot be extricated. Ray takes full advantage of the non-realist representational devices of the folktale, as we have noticed, but these are not merely confronted by the repertoire of 'reality' effects ; the relationship between the two is secured by very light and very deft touches which sketch in a version of the history of the underdog.

Why should ghosts, powerful supernatural beings, be attracted to Goopy and Bagha and offer them gifts? Ghosts have often been represented as being addicted to music, which in turn is seen as an element in an ensemble of fun. They also seem to have a penchant for rhyme and rhythm.[39] When they descend on the desolate bamboo grove in the gloaming, embodied in floating, shifting, shadowy shapes in the half-light, the two friends were singing away in an abandon of desperate joy, for they were both frightened (of tigers and ghosts) and elated (at the chance to make music together without interference), and the music is largely noise. In the Upendra Kishore version the ghosts are delighted with the sheer volume produced by the two, who are then invited to the wedding of the ghost-king's son (*godar betar be*). Ray cannot reproduce the duo's unearthly pitch and volume (imaginable extension of observed behaviour) on his sound-track (merely mechanical increase in volume will not do), but the homology between the dance movements links the abandon of the mortals with the carefree whirl of the ghosts. It may well be that Goopy-Bagha's anti-authoritarian passion for music has a peculiar appeal for the otherworld, for its gifts always come to the weak and the humble, particularly those who opt out of the scurry for material goals and who are incapable of guile.[40] It should be noticed that their musical goal transcends utility or personal gain: all they want is to please people with their music (*gaan bajna kore lokke ektu khushi korte partam)*. The fact that the gift overruns their expectation, compelling people to remain static while the music lasts, is an index to the narrative negotiation between fantasy and realism. The words used in the ghost-king's sing-song benediction are *loke shune bhabachaka/ sthir haye theme jabe*, people will be struck dumb and stand still as they listen, and this is not quite appreciation,

though decidedly useful. The set formula of folklore politics does not completely comprehend the human desires of the two men, though the impartial apparatus of ghostly justice does its work readily enough. There is a necessary element of play, the rules of which may ignore particular wishes, in the moral economy of ghostlife. Folktale conventions are language games which are moved around from story to story and these compositional elements often constitute paradigmatic blocks which are useful for proairesis. The entry of ghosts, for instance, will entail a set of actions — dancing, detaching limbs from the torso, speaking in a nasal tone, asking for fish, frightening mortals, etc. — which will serve as referential and proairetic codes in a large body of narratives. The dance ordered by the king of ghosts does not therefore surprise the viewer, for it is very much a part of the expected ensemble, both as an expressive event and as an exclusive show for Goopy-Bagha. But what Ray does with the pre-figured set is indeed astonishing.

The king of ghosts is very dark, with a thick white sacred thread bisecting his naked torso from the left shoulder to the right side of the waist; this is the mark of a brahman, therefore the king is identifiable as a *brahmadaitya*, a superior category among the ghosts. He orders in four separate groups of ghostly performers, each of six members, and the bamboo grove is obliterated for the duration, as a stark featureless white performing arena springs into existence, into which shadowy groups dance their way. Each group appears four times separately, camera positions are changed, and the tempo increases with the music. The final shot in the sequence is the simultaneous appearance of all the dancing groups together, filling the screen in horizontal strips. This was a technically difficult shot because only two rows could be shot at a time (due to the limitation of logistic resources), half of the frame being masked so that the shot of the next two rows could be placed there after reversing, and a fast zoom-out from a close-up had to be repeated at a precise moment of the musical score. This was possible because the director himself had composed the music and handled the camera for the shot. This technical ingenuity is part of the artistic

demand of the job; as Ray himself points out, there was absolutely no precedent for what he wanted to do in some parts of the film. The dance of the ghosts may have had precedent in folklore and literature, but the medium of film demanded an imaginative break. [41] Ray speaks at length on the work he had done in preparation. He had a 'tremendous desire to do something new and was prepared to work hard at it'. He describes the process of thinking out what the job was and how it could be done.

> The entire affair of ghosts does not exist in their countries (i.e. the West). In fact, what we understand by ghosts, that is *bhoot*, is not the same as their ghosts and spirits. And, moreover, they cannot have anything like the king of ghosts. Therefore *I could not fall back on precedents* (in English in the original interview) — there was no model or anything — I mean it was an entirely new thing, and whatever came to my head had to be executed with the technical ingenuity needed for the job.[42]

Ray carefully demarcates his own practice from the models available in 'their' cinema, meaning largely Hollywood in this context; his exposure to American cinema has been wide, deep and continuous, which was only to be expected for someone who had grown up in colonial and post-colonial Calcutta, though the title of his 1976 collection of essays, *Our Films Their Films*, points to Soviet, Japanese, Italian, British and French films as important personal as well as objective landmarks. He talks about the Hollywood musical comedy being the nearest instance of what he was after, because the other way, that of the opera, deployed the song itself as a narrative means for the unfolding of the chain of events on the stage. But he envisages his own work as decisively indigenous. He engages with the imaginative resources of his own people, and the history of his own part of the world, to put together this little cameo.

The story says that the ghosts come and dance — but you have to concretize it. Now there is a convention that ghosts have ears like winnowing fans, teeth like radishes, and backs like something else, and I thought that I could not carry on with that for long, because I don't know that there is any convention for that kind of dance. I suppose there's a kind of spooky dance, a free-for-all, but I didn't think that anything artistic could be done with that. Then I started thinking about ghosts in a different way. I thought that ghosts could be actually the departed, classes of people who had obviously lived in Bengal — kings and rulers who had been there from the Buddhist period, the peasants who had been always there, and the Europeans who had come in large numbers — there was a cemetery within ten miles of where we were shooting in Birbhum — some of them had died early, and another group of fat people just for a visual contrast, consisting of *banias* (i.e., men from trading castes), ritually-fed *brahmans*, a padre or two. Then the affair is organized in four classes of ghosts — rulers, peasants, Europeans and the fatties. [43]

There is negotiation here between the resources of people's culture and the demands of realism, which Ray links to a historical enterprise. People's culture is obviously different from 'popular culture', by all accounts dominated by market-driven rules of construction, dissemination and reception; this has been the growth area in cultural studies for decades in the west. [44] Films have naturally been a major component of this new academic enterprise, along with television, newspapers and magazines, pop music, football, thrillers and romances, fashion, advertising, etc. This is, of course, a very important move, and once culture is seen to be a very large area and not coincidental with 'high culture', particularly literature, many new disciplinary avenues are opened and the lived life of all classes of people can be linked to cultural practices. This understanding has resulted in a great deal of very exciting work and has brought

in major changes in intellectual and academic institutions in the west. One must understand, however, that, with very few exceptions, this area of popular culture coincides with what has been called 'mass culture', produced usually by large (transnational, mostly US-based) conglomerates, and marketed all over the globe by money power backed by coercive means. What the various 'peoples' make of this culture is obviously a complex matter; even such obvious instances as Hollywood films and western news media have not inspired much research into the reception of such texts in India or Sri Lanka, for instance. Popular culture is largely a given in the west and its links with the 'people' are taken for granted. Whatever the people consume, whatever they are compelled to buy in the market, happens to be labelled popular: Britney Spears, *Baywatch*, Coca-cola, *Titanic*, Macdonald's, Superman, Disneyworld, ATP tennis. The list need not be extended. This is not at all surprising, because it is difficult to imagine something in advanced capitalist societies largely created, disseminated and received by a sizeable group of people outside the market.

What is at stake is power, control, capacity, entitlement, enabling, not individual so much as collective. When a *gambhira* performance takes place in Maldah, you can still be sure that the play has been written by a 'master' who has imbibed the rules of the game and can write the appropriate dialogue and compose the expected songs in the traditional manner. The performance takes place in the area demarcated by the community, which throngs the function, often marked by religious rituals. There is no entry fee to the performance, the expenses, including wages, being met collectively. The performers, including the master, are largely poor peasants and agricultural labourers, just as the audience are. It would appear that in some sense the people are in control of their culture in such instances, and if you take the whole of India, these events of people's culture may still outnumber the events which are organized under the auspices of various kinds of markets. In a fairly simple sense people have more control over, and have more choices about, a folktale, a *kabigan*, a *tamasha* performance, a wedding-song event and so on, compared to a film melodrama made in Mumbai /

Kolkata / Hyderabad / Chennai, or a soap opera made for Doordarshan and the difference is not merely about the medium. What Ray negotiates with is people's culture in this sense, and not the popular culture of Hindi films and suchlike, sometimes held up as embodiments of group sanction and collective desire. The astonishing naivete of the view can only be explained as inspired by a derivative and reactive peasant romanticism, fed by post-structuralist visions of dystopic darkness.

6. Construction work

There is no reason to assume that a folk performance as such is superior to a film melodrama or that a realist film is superior to both. But there is a great deal of reason to think that *Pather Panchali* for instance, as a realist text, offered a fresh choice to the viewer in 1955 (or in 2001, for that matter), and opened up another way of making films in India. This phenomenon may simply describe a paradigm shift in the making and reception of films in India, usually associated with a teleological project, and therefore frowned upon. But it is neither illogical nor unhistorical to think that a small group of people interested in the cinema had thought of a possible goal which *Pather Panchali* had approximated to, and much more important, a fairly large group became aware, after the fact, that such a cinematic experience could be pleasurable and meaningful. To defend the rights of a minority is always fashionable and may offer a rationale for the particular realist inflections of *GGBB*. And it was a sizable minority which patronized the film for a record run of 102 weeks. Even avoiding formalist and essentialist aesthetic arguments, one may point out that a certain kind of training is needed to respond to *Charulata* or *subarnarekha* , and that this training is more demanding than that for the response to, say, *Awara* or *sholay*, just as you need more rigorous training for the production or reproduction of the *Eroica* than for *A Hard Day's Night*. The work done on the text demands a corresponding quantum of work on the part of the reader/ viewer, and if one has to think of author and reader as having access to the same collective and intertextual

universe of discourse, one has to set up some kind of a model for the quantity and quality of work done on the text in question. This work, in both construction and reconstruction, may be thought of as comparative and collective. It is difficult to translate Marx's emphasis on the centrality of labour into aesthetic terms, but things are even more difficult if one does not think of work and discovery in consensual (which is always provisional and historically shifting) judgments on aesthetic matters.

Satyajit Ray, as we noticed, did some fairly hard work on the making of *GGBB*. Much of the work can be described as discovery and invention. In the previous excerpt from his interview it was obvious that his attempt at inventing a dance for the ghosts led him to discover a certain inflection of history. In the next excerpt, one notices that a discovery of a certain kind of music governs the invention of a particular narrative.

> When the four groups were decided on, I immediately thought of a classical musical form which I had listened to a couple of times, and heard also on the radio,…a Karnatic percussion ensemble from the south, called *chalavadyakacheri*. ...[45]

> The four instruments are the classical Mridanga, the popular Ganjira, the sharp-sounding Ghattam — which is nothing more than a claypot, and the quaint, twangy Mursring, a tiny instrument which is held between the teeth and plucked with the forefinger. [46]

> They do something extraordinary with these four instruments, which is absolutely unique and to my knowledge does not exist anywhere else in the world. There is no other quartet with only percussion and no melody. Then I thought I could identify the four groups of ghosts with these four instruments. The Mridanga

goes with the rulers, because it is really a classical instrument. Therefore the dance-form was kept in the classical mould. The Khanjira (Ganjira) was associated with the peasants, really common people, and the dance was semi-folk. The Europeans got the Ghattam, for its rigid, rough sound-effects. And the camera was under-cranked for this group, shot in sixteen frames per second, so that the entire performance would look a little wooden and mechanical. For the fatties, the preferred accompaniment was the fantastic Mursring, which is entirely a folk instrument, held in the teeth, and goes twang-twang. So the thing was organized, and the form had to be decided. The form was: a start in slow movement, all the four instruments beating a slow tempo, then they gradually reach the middle level, and thus the tempo goes on increasing till it comes to the fastest in five movements. Then the question cropped up: what are they supposed to do to justify the increase in tempo? Why should the movement get faster, the tempo go up? The decision was that they would come in and dance, then let them be involved in clashes, let them fight each other violently and perish. Automatically the affair reaches a frenzy. There, my story was complete. Finally, I thought I that I needed a coda of sorts, in which they must all be in harmony with each other, because there can't be any internal conflict among ghosts, and a time would have to come when the union takes place easily, which is not the case with humans — whereas the music does it for the ghosts. The entire thing emerged in this fashion. [47]

The work done on the text by Ray makes the people visible at particular moments of their historical existence . If we decide to work with the author on his voyage of discovery, we are constantly rewarded by the sustained process of defamiliarization which works at different levels of the text. He works under some constraints, the elimination of women, for instance, but that is a price to be

paid for the pleasures of the journey. The visibility of women had demanded another kind of history and another field of work, attempted notably in *Devi, Teen Kanya, Kanchanjungha, Mahanagar, Charulata* and other texts. In *GGBB* the common man, the underdog of folklore, is made visible against the background of deceit, oppression and war. The dreamlike narrative makes the common man's desires manifest at every turn, but that could be done only if the dream traversed the hard terrain of adversity, danger and violence. It is not very easy to laugh at war. Chaplin needed a Jewish barber, a poor common labouring man, to do so in *The Great Dictator*. Ray brings in the timeless wanderers of the folktale to narrate for us the story of resistance to voices prophesying war.

Notes:

1. 'Half a kingdom and a princess' is a proverbial in Bangla, and partitioning of kingdoms is endemic in the world of folktales, as in the story of *King Lear*. In Upendrakishore's version, the Halla king has two daughters, and half of the Shundi kingdom is assigned to the duo.

2. In Upendrakishore, Goopy is the cleverer man.

3. Bagha says: 'E amar anekdiner saadh'. Desire and fantasy are cross-generative.

4. Apart from the exigencies of number-symbolism, folktale closure itself often demands quantitative parity, such as seven brides for seven brothers.

5. As expounded by Anandabardhana (c.9th century) in *Dhanyaloka*, and Abhinabagupta (c 10th —11th century) in his commentary *Lochana*, (ed. with a Bangla translation by Subodhchandra Sengupta and Kalipada Bhattacharya, 1949). The best short introduction is by Atulchandra Gupta, *Kavyajijnasa*, 1963.

6. Kalidasa, *Kumarasambhavam*, VI. 84.

7. English school stories from Thomas Hughes' Tom Brown,s School Days, 1957, onwards and adventure stories (Marryat, Ballantyne etc.) had provided models. Folktale collections like the Grimm Brothers' were invariably revised for young readers.

8. Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury (1863 — 1915), father of Sukumar Ray and grandfather of Satyajit, retold many traditional folktales for Bengali children largely on the pages of *Sabdesh*, the children's magazine he founded in 1913. *Goopy Gyne o Bagba Byne* is one such story.

9. Dakshina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar (1877-1957), published the celebrated *Thakumar Jhuli* in 1907, the result of several years' labour of collection, collation and revision of Bangla folktales. This was followed by other collections.

10. Apart from the remarkable story of Kiranmala, there are many others which foreground the female of the species, including very interesting monsters and ogres.

11. Reprinted in *Dakshinaranjan Rachanasamagra*, Vol. I, 1981.

12. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, *Gopal-Rakhal Dwandasamas*, 1991, pp 164 ff.

13. Manabendra Bandyopadhyayg, *Rabindranath: Shishusahitya*, 1970.

14. One remembers, of course, that Alice is not particularly gender-marked.

15. *The Select Nonsense of Sukumar Ray*, tr. Sukanta Chaudhuri, 1987, pp 50-51.

16. Ibid. p. 51.

17. Aristotle's definition seriously contradicts the usually recognised revel element in comedy. The interest has definitely shifted from plot to episodic or verbal play.

18. Not only body movements, but speech patterns (including tempo), are allusive of childhood in many comic acts.

19. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, *op. cit.*, pp 192 ff.

20. All boys are day-scholars, but the action is concentrated on the school, and their familial/ social existence is largely elided, much in the manner of English public school stories.

21. *Bibhuti Rachanabali*, Vol. I, 1970, p. 133.

22. Ibid., pp. 190-192.

23. Ibid., pp 141, 161-162, 177.

24. In *Aparajito*, 2nd Part. *Bibhuti Rachanabali*, Vol III, 1970, pp. 99 ff.

25. Most of her stories and novels are largely about boy children. There are a few school stories.

26. Roland Barthes, *S / Z*, tr. Richard Miller, 1974.

27. Ibid. p.19.

28. V Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, tr. Lawrence Scott, 1968, pp. 25 ff.

29. Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols. 1932-36.

30. Claude Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology tr. Claire Jacobson and Brook Grundfest Schoepf, 1968, pp. 206 ff.

31. *Upendrakishore Samagra Rachanabali*, Vol I, p. 560.

32. Barbara Fass Leary, *In Search of the Swan Maiden*, 1994. Malini Bhattacharya, The Hidden Violence of Faith: The Widows of Vrindavan', Social Scientist, 332-333, Jan-Feb, 2001.

33. 'Bhushandir Mathe', *Parashuram Granthabali*, Vol I, 1987, pp 53-54.

34. 'Loolloo', *Trailokyanath Granthabali*, Vol II (n.d.) p. 35.
35. Alan Dundes, *Interpreting Folklore*, 1980, pp.134 ff.

36. A.L. Morton, *The English Utopia*, 1952. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* , 1972.

37.   Sigmund Freud, *Two Short Accounts of Psycho-Analysis*, tr. and ed. James Strachey, 1962. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, tr. Alan Sheridan, 1979. Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, 1984.

38.   Patricia Erens (ed), *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, 1990.

39.   Upendrakishore has a story, 'Knujo aar Bhut' (The Hunchback and the Ghost), which is based on the simple ghostly pleasure of song in dance. *op. cit.* pp.544-547.

40.   Stith Thompson, *The Folktale*, 1946, has many examples.

41.   *Ekshan*, Annual Number, 1988, prints interviews with Satyajit Ray on *GGBB*.

42.   *Ekshan*, Annual Number, 1988, Supplement, p. 87.

43.   Ibid, pp. 85-86.

44.   Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (eds) *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks*, 2001, has many examples. See Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, 1998, and Tania Modleski (ed.), *Studies in Entertainment*, 1986.

45.   *Ekshan*, Annual Number, 1988, Supplement, p. 86.

46.   Ibid. p. 79

47.   Ibid. pp. 86-87.