

Goopy Gayen Bagha Bayen: The Latent Contours of Caste: *

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Like the blurred speck at the edge of one's vision that disappears when looked at directly, the everyday ceases to be every day when it is subject to critical scrutiny. (Felski 15)

Goopy Gayen Bagha Bayen is a 1968 release Bangla fantasy directed by Satyajit Ray. It is written by Upendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury (Ray's grandfather), an author renowned in the genre of children's literature in Bangla. Based on rural Bengal the cinema revolves around the lives of the two male protagonists Goopy (the singer) and Bagha (the drummer). Goopy is a young villager with a dreadful voice and an itch for music. His intolerable intonations banish him from the community. Driven out of his natal village Goopy ends up meeting Bagha, the drummer sharing just the same fate, in a cane forest. The King of Ghosts (an occupant of the forest) relishing the Goopy-Bagha song-drum concert bestows them with three boons of plenitude— limitless food, boundless travel, and a magical flair of music. They set out to explore and reach the musical contest at Shundi. The king of Shundi, enchanted by their music, appoints them as court musicians. The neighbouring king of Halla (brother of the Shundi king) under the spell of his wicked minister plans to attack Shundi. Goopy and Bagha reach Halla, stop the war with their magical powers, and marry the daughters of the two kings.

In this paper I read a specific moment of *Goopy Gayen Bagha Bayen* as an instance of everyday caste experience. I consider the introductory section of the text involving the story of Goopy as a moment of caste- (also class-) based humiliation of a humble young man in a village of Bengal. Before going into it, I want to make two initial points. First, as reflected in the works of Anjan Ghosh (1994, 2001), Dwaipayan Sen (2013), Uday Chandra and Kenneth Bo Nielsen (2012) and many others, there has been some negligence to the understanding of caste as it operates in Bengal. Scholars of all major historiographical schools, including the Subaltern Studies, hold that caste is not a specifically significant category of analysis in the Bengali society (Sen 2013). There has also been a steady shift in this unanimity. Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal (1981) analysing the specific caste structure of Bengal indicated the existence of untouchable castes like *asprisyasudra*. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay ("Partition and the Ruptures in Dalit Identity" 11) reflecting on the politics of caste in post-colonial Bengal emphasizes that there are multiple narratives unfolding how the Dalits had negotiated the hegemonic state and society. What still intrigues me is how do we trace the real-discursive presence of caste in Bengal? How do we comprehend the dynamics of the 'invisibilization' of caste in the state? How do we design the methodologies to grasp the multiple stories of the lower castes? How do we tell that caste, although sometimes in a clandestine manner, has always functioned as a substantial mode of exclusion and humiliation?

Second, scholars often consider *Goopy Gayen Bagha Bayen* and also its sequel *Hirak Rajar Deshe* as children's fantasy films (Ben Nyce; Andrew Robinson). Darius Cooper observes that these films have rarely raised any debate or "are very rarely shown abroad or, for that matter, even outside Bengal" (14). Scholars have failed to see that the world of fantasy, magic and adventure that Ray has created for children, bears a strong social footing (Ajanta Sircar 1999). Satyajit Ray puts fantasy together with the real power relations operative in the caste-class-gender stratifications. A group of scholars also argue that Ray

was indifferent to the contemporary political turmoil. Chidananda Das Gupta asserts – “Calcutta of the burning trams, the communal riots, refugees, unemployment, rising prices and food shortages does not exist in Ray’s films” (72) Also, for Moinak Biswas, “in the wake of the Naxalbari movement and the Vietnam war, in that hour of the youth, Ray seemed to be disconcertingly removed from the historical present” (3). I would try to relate the two apparently disparate observations I have made. I would juxtapose the reactions against Ray’s films with the academic presupposition that caste simply did not matter to the Bengalis in the way it did in other parts of India where politics has allegedly not been capable in transcending such allegiances. Both the observations are symptoms of a serious epistemic failure. This is the failure to read what is not evident. I read this failure as a work of ideology. Overlooking the corners and negating the concealed we only see the ostensible. The juxtaposition of the two observations is significant in yet another way. It hints both at the theoretical and methodological possibilities that literature and film, engaging with allegories and metaphors, open up for social sciences to see what tends to remain invisible.

I move on to the opening sequence of the film *Goopy Gayen Bagha Bayen*. The credit scroll is followed by a fifteen-second freeze frame presenting Goopy, a young villager in a short *dhuti* and a *chador*, in an open field with a *tanpura* on his shoulder. This holds a subtitle - ‘Kanu Kyne’s son Goopy was very fond of singing’. Goopy is introduced to the audience in terms of two pieces of information: the name of his father and his attachment to classical music (symbolized by the *tanpura* on his shoulder). The name of the father (Kanu Kyne), apart from bestowing legitimacy to the person being introduced, exposes a different dimension. It draws attention to the caste identity of Goopy. Kyne is a low caste *mudi* (grocer). The freeze frame along with the short caption also hints at the inherent contradiction between low caste identity and passion for classical vocals. The lower caste plebeians are excluded from high art –the patrician genre of classical music. The question remains why does the film begin with this information? In a way it appears that caste identity and love for music are the two key determinants of the forthcoming sequences. The original story written by Upendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury (1863-1915), shared the same information in the introductory paragraph. For obvious reasons, the connotations of the two genres remain different.

With the *tanpura* on his shoulder Goopy walks through the rice field. He is overjoyed with the unlucky broken *tanpura* he has received from Goshai *khuro* in lieu of a hard day’s labour. He spots a farmer working in the field in a distance. Completely unaware of the price he would have to pay for encroaching upon the space of the patricians Goopy expresses his innocent pride. He foolishly teases the farmer for his ignorance about classical music: ‘*tumi chasa ami ostad khasa*’ (ploughing for you singing for me). ‘*Chasa*’, often a belittling word for farmer, also carries a sense of silliness while used as an opposite to ‘*ostad*’ (Bangla for the Urdu word *ustad* meaning master) who is someone wise. The word *ostad* has a very specific connotation in Indian classical music (Hindu maestros are referred to as *pandits* and Muslims as *Ustads*). The ironic dialogue, in the first scene, upholds the very ideology of exclusion shared both by the perpetrators and the victims. The *tanpura* has granted Goopy a sense of empowerment. He immediately tends to draw a line of distinction between him and the common *chasha* – the binary of enlightened and ignorant is naturalized. Now the film takes its turn to stage a cruel drama. It is about the humiliation of a lower caste ‘idiot’ who has intruded a forbidden space.

Socialized in a Bangla community setting I have watched *Goopy Gayen Bagha Bayen*, an integral part of our popular culture, several times since childhood. The introductory

episode of the film generated a strong sense of injustice in the young heart. The memory had lingered ever painful. The question of caste, embedded in the story, had struck me much later. The delay in this understanding is related to our problematic reading of caste in general. Whenever we think of caste we tend to think of endogamy, hereditary membership, a specific style of life, a particular occupation, a more or less distinct ritual status (Béteille 46), purity-pollution, or untouchability. The point is not to undermine the oppressive relevance of these features tied to caste. It is rather to underscore that in everyday life these indicators take multiple and complex forms. Along with the crude, manifest forms there are latent, subconscious, ideological renderings of caste which are no less dangerous. Again, this is not to draw a binary between real and imagined dimensions of caste. Remaining aware of the mutual constitutivity of the real and the imagined realms this is just to remember the predicaments of the dominant theorizations on caste.

First, in an article entitled “Putting Hierarchy in Its Place” Arjun Appadurai (41) holds that in Louis Dumont’s (1970) conception of hierarchy as the key to caste society in India, we get to see the convergence of three distinct trajectories in Western thought. First there is the urge to essentialize (Orientalist). Caste has been reified as India’s quintessential institution. The second tendency involves exoticizing, by making differences between ‘self’ and other the sole criteria of comparison. The third trajectory involves totalizing (Marxist). Contrary to this there are theoretical approaches to caste which regard it as an extreme form of social stratification comparable to other forms of inequality based on social classes or political power (Berreman 1979; Bailey 1957; Srinivas 1962, 2003; Quigley 1999 to name a few thinkers). These approaches emphasize that, more than a general consensus among the population, caste system is held together by the power concentrated in certain groups (the landholding and dominant caste). Yet a prevailing trend of conceptualization still produces a reified image of caste as the archetypal, monolithic institution with specific pan-Indian characteristics.

Second, as Gopal Guru (2002) observes, the social sciences in their escalating research engagements with caste in the last fifty years, run through an insidious split between the ‘theoretical brahmans’ and ‘empirical shudras’. The institutionalized scholarship on caste systematically effaces the epistemic dimensions of the non-dominant caste and/or Dalit perspectives as inauthentic, non-knowledge. Discourses of social science and history sometimes take resort to a structural descriptive mode of representing caste. Some discourses un-problematically conceive caste as an indisputable signifier of backwardness disrupting the processes of India’s coming into nation and modernity. Also, at the same time, there has been a trend of eliding caste both by the nationalist and Marxist historiographers. These, along with our privileged living as dominant castes, have much distorted our understandings of the social institution. Few scholars have identified that recognition of caste as an oppressive past politicised and reproduced, as forms of inequality, in modern society is a necessary yet not a sufficient condition of amending the discourse. Along with the structural engagements with caste it is imperative to think of its phenomenological dimensions. The shift towards a phenomenology of caste considering the life worlds of the non-dominant has been emphasized by some scholars (Ganguly; Rao; Rege; Sen Chaudhuri).

Theorizations of caste in West Bengal involve yet another story. As has been rightly pointed out by Anjan Ghosh (“Cast(e) out in West Bengal”) - “[I]nstead of overstretched generalizations about the nature of caste discrimination on an all-India scale, it would be more productive...to locate the historically constituted nature of exclusion in different regions”. Ghosh seeks to understand why in spite of the presence of caste-based

discrimination, it is not the principal mode of exclusion in West Bengal. He goes on explicating that the “withdrawal of the upper caste *bhadraloks* from agriculture”, “modernist reforms of the Left” have aided the elimination of caste politics in West Bengal. Partha Chatterjee also explains the “absence of caste articulation” (*The Present History of West Bengal* 81) in West Bengal in terms of the hegemony of the upper castes severed from the land ties. DwaiPAYAN Sen holds a scathing critique of the construal of upper-caste domination through a “series of contingencies” protecting the elites as “helpless supremacists”. He has rightly pointed out that “... the silencing of Dalit agency in Bengal politics was very much a deliberate affair ... the category, conspiracy, performs an important role in Dalit self-understandings” (Sen, “An absent-minded casteism?” 259-278).

I write this paper in complete agreement with Sen. I read the whole discourse of caste, denying the hegemonic and retrogressive role of the elites, as ideological. This is much like a misogynist, completely unaware of his/her patriarchal moorings, conceiving the world as gender just. Uniqueness is not the specificity of caste in Bengal (all caste experiences like any other experiences are unique). One has to probe on what grounds we think it as unique. Also, how we are going to study what we think as unique. We return to Ghosh’s article. He writes “caste discrimination is not a major public issue in West Bengal. Embedded in the customary practices of the civic community it persists unobtrusively. ... Transgression of caste norms invites social sanctions but not violent retribution. Caste based pogroms and massacres are not frequent” (“Cast(e) out in West Bengal”). This does not mean caste oppressions are less in Bengal.¹ Involving both the ideological and repressive apparatuses the caste-class elite would always tend to make caste oppressions appear unremarkable, and protest movements look less vehement. For the time being, if I agree that caste persists unobtrusively in West Bengal, one question has to be addressed right away: What would be the methodology to read such unassuming events of caste discrimination? One has to look into the nooks and corners, every small, out of the way places where something may remain foreclosed. One has to read and address: traces and suggestions, silences and hushed up words, allegories and metaphors, exchanges and interactions, talks and debates in the everyday social. May be this will allow us, as Cooper finds it worthwhile to, “find an adequate theoretical framework to see what interesting insights they [GGBB and HRD] have to offer about Bengal...” (14).

Satyajit Ray has made a Hindi film called *Sadgati* (*The Deliverance*, 1981), based on a short story of the same name by Munshi Premchand. The film involves a straight indictment of the discrimination against the Dalits. Let us remember the language of the film is Hindi and the setting is an Uttar Pradesh/Bihar village. He never translated the idea of *Sadgati* to fit into the setting of Bengal. *Goopy Gayen Bagha Bayne* is a complex multi-layered text filmed in the genre of children’s fantasy. Ray talks about a village of Bengal describing its politics, poverty, landscape, rulers, people, religion and language. Within an inter-sectional arrangement of class-kingship-gender-knowledge caste appears to have a primacy in the diegesis of the film. Caste has a different implication here. Yet, it was never expressed in direct terms. I talk about the film as it hints at one of the ways caste has functioned in Bengal – inconspicuous-ordinary yet oppressive and humiliating.

Walking down the village trails Goopy meets a sedentary bunch of Brahmins below a huge banyan tree. This is a stereotypical image of Indian village where the *bat-tola* (banyan-bed) is a hub of gossip, surveillance and control. Well aware of his horrible voice, for a quick bit of fun, the old Brahmins ask Goopy to sing a song. Initially Goopy declines. The only song he sings is a morning raga, Raga Bhairavi. Without much effort they convince Goopy – the morning was yet not gone. One amongst them even asserts the clout of the Brahmin

mandate – it could control the planetary system – the morning waits till the shadow of his walking stick touches a nearby rock. The alleged ‘illocutionary force’ of the Brahmanic speech act changes the reality in accord with the proposition of the declaration. The cinematic apparatus takes an interesting turn to portray Goopy as a low caste individual placed against the Brahmin community. The Brahmins sit close to each other crowding the elevated banyan bed. Goopy, facing them, sits alone in a lower position. The position of the Brahmins, representing immobile sociality, remains fixed. Goopy has free spaces to make his movements. He is closer to the nature. We see him traversing the village through its paddy fields, open pastures, shady meandering pathways and swampy pools hemmed in by the canopy of trees. Though the Brahmins have labelled him so, Goopy was not a fool as to believe the mandate. It was perhaps his innocent eagerness to sing that has made him sing. With all his vigour Goopy sings an awful song. At once the Brahmin moves his walking stick so that the shadow touches the rock, claiming that the morning is over. It’s time to stop.

How do we read this event of humiliation contrived in a comical overtone? How would we emphasize the aggression that fuels the humour in this scene? Henry Bergson observes that humour is pleasure in incongruity. Anything that threatens to reduce a person to an object — either animal or mechanical — is the prime material for humour. Bergson puts the disciplinary functions of ridicule at the heart of humour. Bergson’s scheme helps to think through the elements of humiliation and exclusion that remain presupposed in the discourse of humour. A large source of humour rests in recognizing human superiority over the subhuman – in excluding the lesser human from the realm of humanity. The simplicity of Goopy, a poor low caste rustic boy, is disparaged to a subhuman imbecilic presence. He is humiliated. Goopy’s identity gets reduced to a helpless fragment of the narrow-pastoral Brahmanic world view.

Let us ponder on the two words humour and humiliation for a short while. The two words are etymologically linked through ‘humus’ –earth, soil, probably from the Latin root *humī* (on/to the ground). Humour comes from Latin *umor* or body fluid (blood, phlegm, choler, and black bile) whose relative proportions were thought to determine physical condition and state of mind. It is related to *umere* – be wet, moist related to humid (from Latin *humidus* - moist, probably by influence of humus earth or soil). Humiliation comes from Latin *humilis* – lowly or humble again from humus or earth. From late 14th century, the word humiliation connotes things lowly in kind, state, condition, or amount, also of low birth or rank. In Sanskrit *bhūmi*, containing the root *humī*. In some states of India *Bhumij* is used to connote the Dalits (Concise Oxford Dictionary Tenth edition 1999).²Juxtaposition of the two words humour and humiliation might help narrating the story of someone who belongs to a low rank or birth. Someone who holds the possibility of being humiliated – being lowered on/to the ground – soiled – polluted, defiled... someone who could be reduced to the object of humour. This is not to think of an originary link between humour and humiliation. Humiliation is but one possibility of humour. Bergson’s observation about the cruelty in humour helps to comprehend this.³

In the opening section of ‘Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic’ Bergson sets out three observations which “we look upon as fundamental” because they indicate the field in which the comic is to be found (Bergson 3). The first observation is that laughter is human. We laugh principally at humans, and only laugh at animals or things to the extent that they suggest human qualities. Bergson notes that philosophers have often called humans ‘the laughing animal’, but they might have equally well-defined humans as the animal ‘which is laughed at’ (3-4). By this reversal Bergson has immediately placed ridicule at the centre of

his field. This impression is confirmed by Bergson's second observation – when we laugh “we must, for the moment, put our affection out of court and impose silence upon our pity” (4). Comic “demands something like a momentary anaesthesia of the heart” (5). According to the third observation laughter is socially shared: “Laughter appears to stand in need of an echo” (5). Bergson's third observation goes further than merely noting that people tend to laugh together. Humour, far from being intrinsically positive has a cruelty at its core while at the same time he is suggesting that it possesses useful functions.⁴ For Bergson “society holds suspended over each individual member, if not the threat of correction, at all events the prospect of a snubbing ...” (135). Laughter, he continues, is “always rather humiliating for the one against whom it is directed”; therein lies “the function of laughter” (135). Laughter thus produces the effect of ridicule. Bergson tends to foreground the punitive function of ridicule as a necessary aspect of humour. The seemingly frivolous act of humour serves as a corrective tool to prevent the repetition of the unacceptable or ‘abnormal’ behaviours.

Yet, the disciplinary mechanism remains ever incomplete and unsure – we observe – the momentary gloom on Goopy's face being replaced by a thoughtless smile. Ashish Nandy (2009) sees humiliation as a mode of relationship which is established only when both the humiliator and the humiliated understand and accept their relative positions. For Nandy perhaps the role of the victim is more decisive in defining humiliation. “No humiliation is complete unless the humiliated oblige their tormentors by validating their desire to humiliate” (Guru 8). What happens when the humiliated does not accept the fact of being humiliated? What happens when Goopy facing the camera, gradually moves towards the Brahmin gathering, stating that with more time he could have sung the whole song? Something graver would follow. A crueller indignity would be pelted in due course. Perhaps it was not pre-planned. It was just an impromptu blow on the face of an intolerable ‘moron’ who cannot even be humiliated. Humiliation is a claim which could throw existing power structures into relief (Palshikar). Denying the humiliation Goopy has clogged the way to such a respite. “Resistance is internal to humiliation. Since humiliation does not get defined unless it is claimed, it naturally involves the capacity to protest” (Guru 18). Goopy has posed such a resistance. Yet, it is not a conscious effort.

Goopy possesses an “undesired differentness” from what the Brahmins had anticipated. They have imputed him with un-humanness – he is not “quite human” (Goffman 14). He possesses a stigma. As Goffman observes, just five years in advance to the release of *Goopy Gayen Bagha Bayen*, in his attempt to see what the social psychological concept of ‘stigma’ can yield for sociology – “[t]he issue of stigma ... arise(s) ... only where there is some expectation on all sides that those in a given category should not only support a particular norm but also realize it. Also, it seems possible for an individual to fail to live up to what we effectively demand of him, and yet be relatively untouched by this failure; insulated by his alienation, protected by identity beliefs of his own, he feels that he is a full-fledged normal human being ...” (16). Goopy bears a stigma but does not seem to be affected by that. Though “shame is a central possibility” of stigma he stands shameless (17). He does not register the fact that he is being stigmatized as a moron. And as there is no acceptance of humiliation, on Goopy's part, there is no effort of self-correction.

The Brahmins entrap Goopy into a deceptive plan. They suggest him to approach the king, a great connoisseur of music, with his song. Before dawn he should reach the broken temple outside the palace wall and sing on top of his voice and wait for the reward. He must introduce himself not as Kayen but as Goopynath Gayen – the singer. Invoking a fake Sanskrit mantra, in sheer sarcasm, the Brahmins re-cast Goopy as Gayen. His caste indicates

the work he would henceforth do. He would sing. In the fixed sense of the term this renaming does not involve caste as such. Perhaps this is more about the work of the hegemonic social in the construction of identity. One can question the efficacy of this reading at this point. Why do we need to read something as caste when it is not caste in a definitional sense? A few things have to be mentioned here. First, the event of renaming appears to work in a structure which is similar to the functioning of caste. The work of recasting bears the verdict of the Brahmins. The Brahmins, on the basis of their ritual superiority, hold the authority to decide upon the life and identity of the marginal castes. Second, renaming of Goopy is implicated in humiliation. The endemic practise of humiliation is inserted in the structure of caste. The low caste/Dalit identity and body is the “play-field of humiliation” (Guru 9). Third, in certain senses, the episode also points at the element of arbitrariness involved in the functioning of caste. Caste system is not fixed in its meaning. Both the everyday and institutional forms of caste have ambiguous boundaries and inconsistencies. This section of the film plays out the fact that caste happens to be far more complex to be operative through fixed and palpable features.

The Brahmins recast Goopy. He is being hailed into the social. This is a work of interpellation. Yet, this interpellation is different. This is a fake interpellation. Let me elaborate on this point. Interpellation is a call from the social. This renders one a ‘place’ in the social structure. It is a possibility of being named. The possibility of being interpellated or named presupposes the possibility of not being named. The lack of the name (denial of social recognition) marks the defining boundary of naming. For the name is just the opposite of what cannot be named. The name constitutes the subject while the abject is that which cannot be named. The abject constitutes the subject through negativity. The declaration of Goopy’s new caste, in the pretence of humour – the fake interpellation could magnify and expose the mutually constitutive nature of the subject and its other the abject. The false interpellation, through humour, simultaneously produces Goopy as a subject and aborts the possibility of subjectivity. Construction of subjectivity of a lower caste individual also invokes a denial within the purview of the social.

Following the Brahmins’ idea, elated, Goopy reaches his destination. He sings. Before long the irate king sends a guard to fetch him in. Goopy has committed a crime – his yelling has awakened the village king out of his slumber. The guard takes him to the court. The king hauls an uncouth hilarity out of the situation. He flings out the *tanpura* breaking it into pieces and, for the first time, leaves Goopy humiliated. The cinema takes recourse to an indoor setting – the court of the king – to stage this drama. Out-door would not have been appropriate for this. Goopy cannot be belittled in the openness of nature as he is a part of it. The king has done what the Brahmins could not do. He has expelled the intolerable low caste moron. The Brahmins could demean Goopy, they could even rename him. Yet, it is the interdiction of the king that could expel him. In the middle of an interminable laughter he announces Goopy’s expulsion. The king’s command puts Goopy on a donkey and drums him out of Amlaki village forever. The whole village, including the jeering Brahmins, enjoy the barbaric event. Goopy leaves – and this is just the beginning of the film. It moves on to the journey of Goopy along with Bagha, another village bumpkin whose deafening drum has banished him from his village Hortoki. Beyond the banal caste-class confines they pass through the world of magic to receive the three incredible boons from the king of ghosts: limitless food, boundless travel, and musical talent. Perhaps only fantasy could move them beyond the boundaries of caste and class. While the human king has disgraced their simplicity, the ghost king rewards their goodness. The gift is preceded by a ceremony of dance. It is a choreographic representation of the stratified social order and its eventual

inversion. “The six and half minute of the exotic dances of the ghost are definitely the four caste systems we have in India” where people work as priests, warriors, farmers and labourers (Robinson 73). At the end of the dance Ray inverts the caste system upside down. While the commoners capture the highest rung the ghost dance demotes the priest to the lowest. This marks the onset of the magic. The low caste boys now move on to achieve what is not meant for them.

The aim of this paper is not to attest Ray’s work as a comprehensive depiction of caste in Bengal. *Goopy Gayen Bagha Bayen* represents caste humiliation as an individual concern. This subjective concern does not belong to the genre of *testimonio* which links up a witnessing individual to the collective. Ray never tends to see how humiliation emerges as a revolutionary possibility for the oppressed people. He does not relate it to the burgeoning caste movements in 1960s. Ray takes recourse to fantasy. What is significant here is that the fantasy transpires from within the real living conditions – a caste stratified village of Bengal. *GGBB* functions both as a serious commentary of the social and a pure fantasy (Nyce). The film has represented other modes of social discrimination as well. There has been a candid reflection of the silencing and humiliation of women in the film. In this paper I have restricted myself to ponder on the issue of caste.

I have read the contours of caste – lying somewhat latent yet significantly bearing on the diegesis of the film – through the structure of humiliation. The mark of caste remains latent as it is ideological. It has been an institutionalized, natural, everyday affair. Caste involves institutionalized humiliation. “Humiliation is also institutional in the sense that it is rendered more acceptable if not natural ... (Guru 11). Gopal Guru has theorized the concept of humiliation reflecting upon the life world of the Dalits. The outline of caste immanent in the film does not per se invoke the experiences of a Dalit individual. Yet, Guru’s conceptualization has been worthwhile to follow the structure of humiliation integral to the introductory episode of the text. I have read the event of humiliation as it has worked through the play of humour. This play could reduce Goopy to an object, assigning a repulsive meaning, it could ultimately exclude him. Goopy has ultimately rejected this rejection. He could do this perhaps through his closeness to nature – the raw simplicity of his persona.

Guru holds that humiliation reduces a person to a thing. “A person is reduced to a natural level through his/her comparison with animal ...” (*Humiliation* 210) s/he cannot be elevated to the human level of culture. The film, in a certain way, has inverted this structure through an im-possible turn of magic. Innocence has provided Goopy a power to exceed the realm of culture. His honesty and true love for music has driven him towards a magical spell. The film begins with his intrusion into a prohibited space (classical music) and moves on to create a magical moment of gift to subvert the prohibitive order. He acquires a gift of music – he overwhelms the *ustads* of classical music. He sings a song, tuned in the morning raga *Bhairavi*, yet close to the heart of the common people. He sings the glory of simplicity. His song transcends hierarchy. In my childhood, I had always asked why Goopy had never returned to his father even at the end while he becomes *Rajar Jamai* (king’s son-in-law). The sensibility of the child denied accepting the impossibility of re-turn from the fantastic future. I failed to understand that crossing the threshold of the banal Goopy has touched upon the wonderful world of magic.

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Notes:

¹ This article however does not focus on the negotiations of the left regime with the questions concerning caste. I restrict myself to a simple observation that after three and half decades of Left Front governance, caste discrimination has not disappeared.

²The turn to the dictionary is not a search for authentic meanings. It is rather to ponder on the marks of recurrent uses, words bear. Generation of meaning involves a constant negotiation of paleonymy and catachresis. On the one hand words become meaningful in terms of their usages while on the other they lack adequate referents to fall back upon. Etymology reflects the histories of sources of the formation of a word and the development of its meaning and helps in imagining the possible paleonymies of the words. Catachresis, the paucity of sufficient referent (ideas that a word symbolizes), is logically linked to the paleonymic traces that the words bear. Paleonymy invokes the insufficient referents that always fail to circumscribe a word.

³ There are yet other possibilities in humour. It can as well be rebellious, kicking against the dictates of social life. In the twentieth century some theorists most notably Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), looked at 'vulgar' laughter of the carnival as an act of riotous subversion.

⁴ Some theorists assume that humour is intrinsically positive and fulfils positive functions both for the individual and society. The negatives are seen as unfortunate side-effects (For detailed discussion see Billig 2005).

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