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Violence, Nonviolence and Peace in Satyajit Ray's *Goopy GyneBaghaByne* and *HirakRajarDeshe*: A Brief Study

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	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Violence, Peace, Music, Satyajit Ray	In the garb of children's fantasy, in <i>GoopyGyneBaghaByne</i> and its sequel <i>HirakRajarDeshe</i> Satyajit Ray experimented with the manifestations of violence predominant in the contemporary world and sought to provide a utopian, fantastic solution to counter such violence. Although these films have been reviewed often as political films, there is ample scope for exploring objectively the nature of the violence and peace and their negotiation, which this paper intends to do. This paper will attempt to categorise the violence which form the primary tension in the films and the basic premise of argument in the narrative in order to assess the nature of the peace that brings an equilibrium to the troubled society. The paper would examine whether the representation of the means to peace by Ray encapsulates violence itself. The argument would be foregrounded predominantly on the model of peace research provided by Johan Galtung.



It would not be unfair to state that *Goopy GyneBaghaByne* (1969) and its sequel *HirakRajarDeshe* (1980) have not received the amount of critical attention which Satyajit Ray's other films, for instance the *Aputrilogy* (1955-1961), *Jalsaghar* (1958) or *Charulata* (1964), have received, and continue to receive. One reason of this lack of critical attention may be the tag of "children's film". The films not only belong to the genre of children's film but also connect with the temperament of the primary target audience (children) by exploring the world of fantasy. Besides, these are the only two films by Ray which can be called musicals, and therefore come closer than any other of his films to the mainstream cinema of India. Ray's exploration of the elements of fantasy, his excellent use of music, his cinematographic experiments in these two films have been subjects of academic and non-academic discussions since long. Nevertheless, it is a fact that these are unquestionably two of the most politically oriented films made by Ray.

Both films strongly protest against political homogeneity, violent aggression of the powerful against the powerless, warmongering, hegemonic ideology – against violence of all kind, to speak minimally. As an alternative to this violence the films offer a somewhat utopian world of peace and harmony where harmony is symbolised by the music perpetrated by Goopy-Bagha. The anti-war and anti-imperial sentiment of *Goopy GyneBaghaByne* makes it one of the first of its kind in Indian (and World) cinema. *HirakRajarDeshe* even more clearly displays Ray's stance against the hegemonic, homogeneous, oppressive state system backed by capitalist autocracy. Both films recount the narrative of the creative faculties of the human individual being crushed by the organized despotic state machinery from various points of view. But in general, most of the evaluations of the films have focussed on the films' treatment of various facets of the convoluted political systems of contemporary world which seek to shackle humanity.

One lacuna seems apparent in such criticism: it pays more attention to the facets and means of violence against humanity and less attention to the nature of violence itself. In other word, that violence and universal disharmony are at the heart of the film narratives is taken for granted. Both films end in apparent restoration of universal harmony brought about by the supernatural music of the Goopy-Bagha duo, and supposedly peace ensues after violence. But since we tend to overlook to examine the violence *per se*, the nature of the peace ensued also remains unexamined. This paper precisely seeks to examine the homogeneous character of the violence as depicted by Ray in both films and then to assess the nature of the countering 'musical peace' – to explore whether that apparent peace and harmony itself conceals violence. *Goopy GyneBaghaByne* and *HirakRajarDeshe* form the first two instalments of a trilogy, the third of which, *Goopy BaghaPhireyElo* (1992), was directed by Satyajit Ray's son Sandip Ray, not by Satyajit Ray himself. I intend to keep the paper confined within the boundary of Satyajit Ray's political thoughts, and therefore, the third instalment has been kept out of the ambit of the essay. However, in the essay I would refer to them collectively as *Goopy-Bagha* or the *Goopy-Bagha* films.

In order to analyse Ray's understanding of violence and peace in *Goopy-Bagha*, we must examine the concepts as such. Here we turn to the ideas put forward by Johan Galtung, a principal figure in the field of peace and conflict studies, the founder of the Peace Research Institute Oslo and of the *Journal of Peace Research*. According to Galtung the terms 'peace' and 'violence' are interlinked in such ways that peace can be viewed as absence of

violence (1969, 167-168). Thus, the concept of 'peace' depends largely on that of 'violence', but then the conceptual variety of violence itself becomes a barrier to provide a graspable definition of 'violence'. Galtung defines violence as "the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is" (Ibid 168). He remarks that violence not only increases the difference or distance between the two, but also prevents the decrease of the distance. (Ibid 168)

An extension of this of violence leads Galtung to propound, broadly speaking, two types of violence. First, direct or personal "where there is an actor that commits the violence" and second, indirect or structural violence where any such actor is absent (Ibid 170). In both cases victims may be manipulated, physically harmed or killed. The remarkable point in the second case is that there may or may not be a person who harms another directly within the structure, but "[t]he violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Ibid 171). Personal violence may consist of deliberate acts, resulting generally in immediate physical and psychological harm and even death. Structural violence is more subtle and less overt, but is no less destructive.

In connection with the two types of violence, the concept of peace as "absence of violence" refers to two types as well: absence of personal violence or negative peace and absence of structural violence or positive peace (Ibid 183). Principal characteristics of negative peace could be summarised as – resistance of personal violence, curative nature, peace arrived at not always by peaceful means. On the other hand, positive peace largely manifests as and in preventive nature and negation of structural violence – which can be referred to as peace by peaceful means. But the two types of violence cannot be so rigidly compartmentalised. Overlapping takes place where the action and intention of violence disseminates from the individual to the structural level and where continuous interactions exist between the two categories. Similarly, the two categories of peace also are not mutually exclusive. The level of positive peace is to be arrived at from that of negative peace. Traces of the lesser kind of peace are very often recognisable in the higher or positive peace.

Majorly by means of this theoretical groundwork we would explore the nature of the violence depicted in *Goopy-Bagha*, the peace arrived at the end of the conflict, and the means to arrive at the peace. We shall start by identifying the nature, agents, means and actions of violence in *Goopy-Bagha*. First of all, the nature of violence both in *Goopy GyneBaghaByne* and *HirakRajarDeshe* is not only political, but involves direct conflict between the state machinery and human individual. Goopy and Bagha lose their freedom, property and right of living in their own space due to the village kings' wrath at their (lack of) musical ability. The citizens of Shundi are turned to mutes by the supernatural powers of the Barfi, the sorcerer, employed by the evil prime minister of Halla. Together the minister and the sorcerer keep the childish king of Halla drugged, turning him into a monster for their benefit. The greedy robber-turned-minister deliberately robs the citizen of Halla of their food and at the expense of their hunger fills his own belly. He is the warmongering mastermind who eggs the mad king to attack the peaceful kingdom of Shundi. When neither the king, nor the hungry soldiers are willing to go to war, he employs the sorcery of Barfi massively and for one last time to compel them to launch the attack even in the absence of the king. In the meantime, Goopy and Bagha are incarcerated by the minister's men in Shundi.

All these instances of violence are decidedly political as the core of them is the intention of dominance of one single entity over the others, individually (Goopy, Bagha, the king of Halla) as well as collectively (the Halla and Shundi citizens) by hook or by crook. But the violence here falls essentially in the category of direct violence as defined by Galtung as we can point out the actors, actions and victims of violence. The village kings' atrocity deprives Goopy and Bagha of their immediate space and personal freedom. They are imprisoned and their food is regulated as per the minister's wish. The minister wants to control the citizens by brute strength, so he takes the path of depriving them of the basic life resource of food (Halla) and stops their verbal communication (Shundi). He wants the Shundi people to speak only so that they can express their demands in order for him to make them prevent from attaining the demands. By means of unequal distribution of resources he dominates over his victims and assures that the difference between the actual and the potential (level of achievement by the victims) is kept high. The king of Halla is a typical example of direct violence. He is bodily, mentally and ideologically manipulated to serve the vested interests of the warmonger minister. The artistic and human potential of the origami-loving childlike king is never realised as long as he is under the influence of the magical drug of Barfi – much like the Shundi citizens. However, all these various psychosomatic means of violence keep violence itself confined within the domain (but spreading across various levels) of personal violence.

Violence in *HirakRajarDeshe* starts to develop from the conceptual seed of direct violence as portrayed in the preceding film. The socio-political instability in India and West Bengal during the Naxalite uprising and the state of emergency throughout the decade of 1970s had moved Ray and its effect on his film career was inevitable. Ray's biographer Andrew Robinson has remarked that to Utpal Dutta, the noted Marxist playwright and actor who played out the character of Hirak-raj or the tyrant Diamond King, the film was "out and out political" and that in spite of "his aversion for labels and politics, Ray himself did not demur at the notion" (Robinson 188-189). The ruthless Hirak-raj or the Diamond King starts his oppression by physical violence, rewarding the supporters of his violence and taking hold of the natural-economic resource which enables him to manipulate the populace – all conforming with Galtung's understanding of direct violence (1969, 168-172). But his violence becomes markedly different from and superior to that of the minister of Halla in terms of the organised theory behind employing the means of violence. Though he starts with direct violence (most conspicuous in cases of Charandas, the bard and Udayan, the teacher), his experiments with the brainwashing machine reveal him to gradually move on to subtler and surer way of ideological manipulation of the victims of his violence. This is where structurally direct violence starts getting embedded in the state system and personal violence takes a step toward becoming structural violence. We cannot say that the kingdom of Hirak displays structural violence completely as opposed to the direct violence of the warmongering totalitarian state with a subject or actor (as Galtung calls) represented by Halla, because the Hirak king is very much present as the active perpetrator of the violence. It is this violence, characteristically direct or personal as per Galtung, against which Goopy and Bagha find themselves.

The *Goopy-Bagha* films are primarily children's films. Goopy and Bagha are perpetual children with whom every child in the audience, even those lying dormant in the heart of

the adult ones, can connect themselves. The qualities with which Ray has invested them – innocence, energy, love for adventure, creativity and achievement of freedom – are qualities which every child would want to attain. Children have been regarded universally as the fountainhead of innocence, free of all the corruptive influences of the immediate reality, and because of this view have been considered to be the standard-bearers of peace and nonviolence as well. It appears that keeping this connection of childhood innocence and nonviolent peace in mind Ray posited Goopy and Bagha as heralds of universal peace. And it will not be entirely wrong to conjecture that through Goopy and Bagha's association with anti-war and anti-violence activities Ray attempted to convey a lesson of world peace to his target audience, the children. That is why direct involvement of children characters with Goopy and Bagha's peace-bringing mission noticeably increases over the span of the films. In *Goopy GyneBaghaByne* no children directly participate in its actions; but in *HirakRajarDeshe* we find a band of young boys actively taking part, under the leadership of their teacher Udayan Pandit and aided by Goopy and Bagha's magical music, in leading the country from violence to the path of constructive harmony. We can only conjecture that the evidences of student uprisings during the Naxalite movement and the state of emergency (1975-1977) influenced Ray to conceptualise this student revolution in *HirakRajarDeshe*. How far this revolution of theirs keeps to the path of peace and nonviolence and what role Goopy-Bagha play in that revolution are points left to be explored.

The rags-to-riches story of Goopy-Bagha can be considered a retelling of the Cinderella narrative. Despite becoming kings' sons-in-law ('*rajarjamai*') and successors from merely two good-for-nothing rustic youths, they keep themselves grounded in the simplicities of common life, which is easily associable with innocence and goodness. When asked by Udayan whether they would join his side in the guerrilla campaign against Hira-raj, Bagha promptly replies, "We belong to the side of good". Primarily this affinity for goodness and simplicity of them pleases the king of the ghosts and leads him to bestow the magical abilities on Goopy-Bagha, most important of which is the petrifying characteristic of their musical performance. With attainment of this ability Goopy-Bagha are suddenly invested with immense external power supernatural in nature, which becomes their principal means of encountering the violence of war, state-initiated oppression and socio-political injustice. This magical power of Goopy-Bagha and their use of it to curb political violence leads to more than one revelation.

First of all, the anti-war, anti-state-violence situations derived at by Goopy-Bagha are essentially an external process and display immediate results only. In the disturbed socio-political states of Halla and Hirak Goopy-Bagha, with their magical music, operate quite as *deus ex machina*. In the first film the cause of violence was unequal distribution of resources (food) and psychosomatic manipulation of objects (the King of Halla, the citizens); in the second film it was ideological, physical and economic oppression by the Hirak King. The musical duo finds antidotes of all these specific facets of violence and immediate curative results are achieved. Thus, the narratives comply perfectly with the "diagnosis-prognosis-therapy triangle of peace" propounded by Galtung (1996, 1). Moreover, not the real ideological-philosophical root of violence, but merely the actors of violence are eliminated, that too using the very psychosomatic means they themselves earlier exploited. At the climax of *Goopy GyneBaghaByne* war is stopped when Goopy-Bagha magically bring food among the starving Halla soldiers. We do not see a constructive approach toward bringing

stable peace by distributing the existing resources of the kingdom equally among the citizens. The minister is nearly trampled by running soldiers, his pot of sweets is crushed quite violently – and violence is repaid with violence, its root not eradicated completely. Hirak-raj and his minions also get brainwashed like their victims and at the climax they also, along with the towering statue of the king, topple down physically. They are benumbed by the duo's music, manhandled to enter the brainwashing machine, made to bring in a new era to the kingdom in a brainwashed state and we do not know whether in the new era the monstrous machine commissioned by the evil king is destroyed. The active agent of violence is eliminated but the question remains as for violence itself. At least, surely this state-initiated violence is not eradicated in the most non-violent ways. The concept of nonviolence for Goopy-Bagha-Udayan is quite far from the nonviolence of Martin Luther King, Jr. who observed that nonviolent resistance “avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent but he also refuses to hate him” (WSU). Goopy-Bagha's music, most nonviolent and harmonious *per se* as means, holds a queer position in this struggle of violence and nonviolence.

Secondly, association of music with nonviolence in order to encounter violence needs no separate elucidation. But Ray has given the association a unique edge in *Goopy-Bagha*. Goopy's singing and Bagha's drum-playing becomes the primary means of forestalling violence in the films. Seeing them facing an entire charging army (*Goopy GyneBaghaByne*) or a fierce guard of a tiger (*HirakRajarDeshe*) with only music we wonder at the great power of music (symbolising love, harmony, innocence, constructivism etc.) against violence (involved with brute strength, hatred, greed, destructiveness etc.); and we have no objection in considering their music as one of the most appropriate means of nonviolent intervention to arrive at peace. But is that all about their music? The boon of music is bestowed upon Goopy-Bagha by a supernatural machinery, which makes them possessors of (magical) power beyond measure. Its curative power sporadically brings the Halla king back from his spells of drugged monstrosity to childlike, nonviolent innocence. The curative power of peace and peaceful means Galtung speaks about (1996, 1) is once again corroborated. Yet this external, supernaturally powerful music, apparently nonviolent, becomes no less than a deciding weapon of manipulating the violent state in the hands of Goopy-Bagha. In some instances the magic of their music, namely its ability to petrify the audience, is used literally as weapons, i.e., to prevent and cause violence. Goopy-Bagha use this ability defensively against the minister of Halla (the song “O montrimoshai”). In *HirakRajarDeshe* they use it precisely to rob the key of the treasury from the guard (“Dhoronako”) and inside the treasury to numb the guarding tiger (“Payeporibagh-mama”) while they empty the coffers. With the music they deliberately create a chasm between the actual and potential levels of competence of the objects (the guard and the tiger) and thus commit violence. Goopy-Bagha also bribe the guards of Hirak with the looted diamonds while they are in a petrified state and thus their loyalty is ‘bought’, they are not ideologically switched to the revolutionary side. In both films Goopy-Bagha's magic poses as the countering good supernatural element to stall the evil, exploitative magic of the sorcerer Barfi or Hirak-raj's monstrous alchemic machine. If this exemplifies the eternal, manichaeian struggle good versus evil, then arguably the example takes the shape of good violence versus bad violence.

It is noteworthy that the relation between music and violence, namely oppression, has been explored by Ray from the very beginning of the saga of Goopy-Bagha itself. Goopy

and Bagha, both highly ambitious but absolutely worthless musicians, were banished from their villages only due to their “musical oppression” on the villagers and, even more so at least in Goopy’s case, on the local king. And the relation between music and violence is uniquely explored in the dance performed by the ghosts before Goopy-Bagha shortly after their first meeting. Here Ray composed a curious narrative and narrated it through an exquisite format incorporating South Indian classical percussion instruments, namely mridanga, khanjira, ghattam and morsing. The dance consists of four distinct types of ghosts, namely, the royal ghosts, the peasant ghosts, the British or *sahib* ghosts, and the fat ghosts. A distinct socio-political-economic scenario becomes visible here, because these four types represent the types or classes of people who, as history bears witness, changed the fate of India time and again. The royal ghosts have among them kings ranging from the mythological age to the Mughal era; the second or “subaltern” group comprises members from the Santhal, the folk ascetic *baul*, the peasant communities and likewise. The *sahibs* and “the fatsos” (their ludicrously fat bellies betray the typical parasitic, middle class disposition) have that peculiar aura which is associated with the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, a remarkably volatile period in Indian history (Ray GGBB-KK). As Ray himself admitted (Ray Interview 54), what drove him to compose the narrative of this dance sequence with these particular representatives of the ghostly community was the fact that all of them really existed at some points of time in Bengal, and they fought with others and among themselves, inflicting violence on all and sundry, and died. While talking about his conceptualisation of this dance sequence Ray admitted that, “...(t)hen I decided to let [the ghosts] come, let them dance, fight and die” (Ray Interview 54, translation mine). The famous dance sequence of the ghosts therefore actually showcases this narrative of intra-communal violence, where the ghosts (supposedly while living) fought each other (even within their own community), eventually dying only to unite in the afterlife because there can be no disparity among dead spirits. This narrative is made even more interesting with the use of *talavadyakacheri*, a traditional performance of percussions pertaining to Carnatic classical music, which starts at a much slower rhythm but gradually reaches its zenith in four or five movements. Ray experienced this classical musical performance through radio and later at a film festival in Delhi, and eventually decided to use it for the dance of the ghosts (Ray Interview 54). Perhaps it will not be wrong to conjecture that through these movements of the banishment of two aspiring but worthless musicians and the dance of the ghosts Ray very subtly established the unorthodox relation between music and violence.

The discussion leads us to conclude that the nature of the ‘peace’, or rather the anti-violence situation, brought by Goopy-Bagha at the end of each film to fall into the category of negative peace. It stalls direct violence, shows the immediate results of eliminating actors of violence, is restorative and curative characteristically but does not foreshadow a stable peace in the formerly disturbed political state. In these films Ray has depicted prevention of various forms of active violence by apparently nonviolent means, but traces of violence itself are betrayed in the very anti-violence actions of his heroes. The border between violence and nonviolence gets blurred in the *Goopy-Bagha* films. But this can be assuredly concluded that Ray did not explore the very subtle traits of violence beneath the apparent nonviolent means of peace he depicted, especially when he had to keep the children in mind as the target audience of these fantasy films. Cinema is a system of representation which both produces and reproduces cultural signification. Despite all the hide-and-seek of violence and nonviolence, the films do depict a form of peace achieved at the end of socio-political

conflicts. This soothes the humanity enough so as to regain strength to fight the perpetual violence of the surrounding world with love, harmony, music and seek the utopian realm of absolute peace. That is why the *Goopy-Bagha* films hold not only a dear place in the heart of the Bengali audience, but also a unique pedestal in the panel of the anti-war cinema of the world.

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