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GOOPY GYNE BAGHA BYNE

(The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha) 1969

Produced by
Poornima Pictures,
Calcutta

Story
Based on a story by Upendra
Kishore Roy Chowdhury
Script, Direction & Music
Satyajit Ray
Photography
Soumendu Roy

Editing
Dulal Dutta
Lead players
Tapan Chatterjee (Goopy),
Robi Ghosh (Bagha),
Santosh Dutta (King of
Shundi), Harindranath
Chattopadhyay (Magician)

Goopy, the son of a poor grocer, is prone to singing although he has a hoarse voice and can never get the notes right. A simple boy, he is persuaded by some crafty village elders to sing for the king. As a result, the king orders his banishment.

Riding a donkey, Goopy reaches a forest where he meets Bagha, a drummer similarly unfortunate. The two start singing and drumming to stave off their fear of the night in the jungle. The music attracts a group of ghosts who begin dancing to it. At the end of the dance, the king of the ghosts grants the duo three wishes. They would have enough food and clothes always, they would travel instantly, anywhere, wearing a pair of magic slippers, and they would hold everybody rapt with their music.

Goopy and Bagha first reach Shundi, where the good king appoints them court musicians.

The king of Halla (another kingdom)—who is really the separated twin of the king of Shundi—is also a good king but has been reduced to a puppet by a villainous prime minister. At this minister's instigation, he declares war on the peaceful kingdom of Shundi. Goopy and Bagha decide to help their disturbed king.

In Halla, they do some useful spying until they are overpowered and imprisoned. Without their magic slippers, which are lost, Goopy and Bagha cannot escape.

When they finally manage to do so, the duo retrieve their slippers and arrive singing and drumming. The march-

ing army is frozen to immobility. The couple capture the king of Halla and transport him by magic to Shundi.

The twin kings are reunited and Goopy and Bagha are given the two daughters of the two kings in marriage.

Sketches by Ray



A SERIOUSLY FUNNY FILM

*Marie Seton
The Times/1969*

Nothing in Satyajit Ray's past work has foreshadowed his latest film. Based on a fairy story by his writer-artist grandfather, Upendra Kishore Ray, *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* fits into no recognized category. Some people have classified it as a film for children. If so, then it is also for the grown-ups in the sense that *Alice in Wonderland* has its adult levels. Others have seen a Brechtian quality in *Goopy*. However interpreted, *Goopy* satirizes power and the absurdity of war.

It is the double exposure of reality and fantasy which makes this allegory a seriously funny contemporary film with several levels of meaning and comment.

Ray's humanism ebbs and flows, breaking through the fantastical surface to give the film unexpected flashes of human depth. Everything happens with a reality of its own. The seemingly perfectly realistic slips into the sheerest fantasy and nonsense and back into the credible. The believable quality of what should be unbelievable lies in Ray's handling of characters; for example, the range of the competitive singers and their varying styles; the bombastic General bouncing about, longing to escape from leading Halla's skinny troops into battle; the spy, epitomizing all the shadowy creatures sucked into espionage; the bewildered Ambassadors automatically responding to the King of Halla's wild cry of "War! War!" Suddenly, at the very end when peace comes, and brides for the boys are brought forth, Ray introduces bright toyland colour.

The blend of humour and pathos gives life to what could easily have been the tissue of artificial whimsy or, in the hands of some other Indian director, a gaudy mythological film. *Goopy* can best be described as a breath of fresh air. This explains its enormous success in Bengal. It has caught the imagination.

RAY'S COMMENTS

The first film I made with children in mind was *The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha*, when my son was eight years old. He has been interested in my work since he was three, four, five and he had been complaining to me that I don't make any films for him and one of the reasons why I made my first children's film was because of my son. I wanted to make something for him; and for other reasons also. There are no films made for the young in India — no good films ever.

I suppose it requires a certain kind of flair and not many people have it. Besides, people tend to think if you make films for children, the adults won't go to them. Well I feel that you could make films for the young which older people would also see. It's possible to make a film which exists on many levels.

I come from a family who specialised in literature. My grandfather was a marvellous writer for children, and has written two or three books for children which are now considered classics. My father continued doing that till he died very young at the age of 35 or 36. And he has left behind him two classics of children's literature. Sooner or later I had to make films for children in addition to making other kinds of films for which I am known. In fact I revived a children's magazine which my grandfather founded before I was born. It folded up after my father's death and I revived it in 1961 and it's still going strong I began to write stories for young people for that magazine and do illustrations. One of the things I wrote was a series of detective adventures stories and *The Golden Fortress* happens to be one of them.

Interview:
Muriel Peters

Why is that?

Goopy and Bagha in the kingdom of Halla



I have a series of eight now featuring the same detective. They all take place in different parts of India and there is a lot told about the places. For instance *The Golden Fortress* is about Rajasthan and the ancient forts and various picturesque scenes and camels, little trains running through desert country. So that there is a lot of information about things Indian and not necessarily things Bengali.

RAY'S COMMENTS

I had to concretize the dance of the ghosts to which the original story (written by Ray's grandfather) refers. . . I felt that a conventional treatment of the episode would not yield much. I reasoned that since they were ghosts of people once living, why not classify some of the people who were obviously there in Bengal. The kings were there from the Buddhist times, and of course the peasants. Then there were the British—within ten miles of where we were shooting there was a graveyard full of Englishmen, many of whom had died young. Then for sheer visual contrast, why not have a group of fat people—you know the traditional country businessman, the well-fed Brahmin. So the pattern became one of four classes—the kings, the peasants, the British and the fat well-fed ones. The division into four classes suggested a form of South Indian classical music which consists of twelve percussion instruments of four kinds—something quite unique in the world, I think. I had the idea of identifying the four classes with the four types of instruments—the drum for the kings, since it is a twin classical instrument, the small cymbal for the peasant because it is a folk instrument, the earthen pot with its hard, rigid sound for the British (whom I shot at slow speed so as to give them a wooden and mechanical style of movement. To the fat people I assigned the extraordinary percussion instrument that South Indians play holding between their teeth. Then comes the question of form. They start playing slow, then in medium tempo, gradually progressing through a total of five movements. Why should the tempo keep going up? So it was decided that the ghosts would come, dance, start fighting, then take the fight to its climax. That's how the story of the dance was built up. Finally, I felt it needed a sort of code in which they must all be in harmony with each other. Since ghosts would not have an internal conflict, their amity would come easily (unlike among humans) and it would come through a song. That's how the whole scheme emerged.

*Interview:
passage from
Kolkata magazine*

The dance of the ghosts



*Drawings for set decoration of
Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*

