



## **Art and Its Validation in Fairy Tales: Viewing Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury's Goopy Gyne Baagha Byne as a Fairy Tale**

**Aayushi Tripathi**

Research scholar,  
USHSS. PhD English,  
GGS Indraprastha University, Delhi.  
aayushitripathi164@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0294-282X>

### **Abstract:**

The paper analyses Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury's Goopy Gyne Baagha Byne to demonstrate how the story functions as a fairy tale which investigates artistic validation. The Bengali fantasy work Goopy Gyne Baagha Baagha Byne which Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury created combines traditional Bengali folklore with his artistic vision and imaginative storytelling. The research study analyses the narrative as a fairy tale through two theoretical frameworks which include Vladimir Propp's structural framework and Bruno Bettelheim's psychological theories. The film shows how Goopy and Baagha travel to find their artistic recognition which they desperately need. The plot develops through their exile which leads to their encounter with ghosts and their subsequent magical reward which conforms to fairy-tale patterns while showcasing their artistic abilities and their friendship. The narrative presents art as a force which transforms people while creating their identity through its creative power which enables readers to explore their imagination while understanding the artistic process of self-discovery.

**Keywords:** Fairy Tales, Children's Literature, Folklore, Narrative Structure, Bengali Literary Tradition.

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Goopy Gyne Baagha Byne is a fantasy story written by Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury (1863-1915). It was first published along with several others in the monthly children's magazine Sandesh (সন্দেশ) started by Upendrakishore himself during 1913-1915. His greatest contribution was in the field of children's literature in Bengali. Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury was a man who never quite lost the mischievous child inside of him and maybe that's the reason his famous story which was written for children starred adults as the protagonists. He was a man who was good at many things, a prolific writer, a fine artist, a musician, a man of science, and at the same time a deeply religious man. He learnt to print book and then developed his own technology to improve the printing. But he is best remembered as a master of the short tale, the magical yarn that draws you in makes you laugh, makes you wonder, makes you scared and worried for the characters then makes you happy. Like the Grimm brothers, Lewis Carroll and more recently Roald Dahl, Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury wrote stories that have entered the very DNA of the language they were written in- his case Bangla. He wrote stories for the kids in an attempt to instill within them a love of life, a vivid imagination and great command of simple but beautiful language. He picked up many Bengali folktales, stories usually told orally which were passed down generations, polishing them into little gems of printed text, such as the Tuntuni Stories. At the same time, he also wrote many original stories, the most well known of which is Goopy Gyne Baagha Byne. The reason this story is known outside of Bengal is because Satyajit Ray made one of his most brilliant films, a full-length feature film, out of his Grandfather's great short story.

For centuries children from all over the world have loved reading and listening to tales. Storytelling has been around for as long as one can remember, the act of sitting in a circle at dusk and listening tales of magic and adventure, usually from an adult most commonly Grandparents,

has thrilled children for generations. But these fairy tales serve a much bigger purpose than entertainment and instilling a spirit of adventure in the children. Albert Einstein once said:

“If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.”

Fairy tales entail a huge chunk of children’s literature, mostly because of their appeal to the young audiences. They play a pivotal role in a child’s emotional, social, inherent skill and mental development. The child develops creativity and imaginative thinking while listening or reading these fairy/wonder tales. These tales inspire them to develop a larger than life personality. The best lessons learnt from these are when there is no moral attached to their end. Assigning morals to fairy/wonder tales kills its essence, the tales should be left open for interpretation as doing so would help build the critical thinking of the child. As a kid I would always prefer listening tales rather than reading them because somehow, I always had versions of them that ended with morals or witty one-liners and even as a kid I didn’t like being told what to think or understand.

In 1976, psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim published a book entitled *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, whose German translation, *Kinder brauchen Märchen*, encapsulates the author’s basic premise of children need fairy tales, examined through a psychoanalytical perspective. Bettelheim’s work represented a return to Freud’s theories on the importance of fairy tales in the mental life of children. Wikipedia summarizes his work as

“Bettelheim presents a case that fairy tales help children solve certain existential problems such as separation anxiety, oedipal conflict, and sibling rivalries. The extreme violence and ugly emotions of many fairy tales serve to deflect what may well be going on in the child's mind anyway.”

Children with imaginary dangerous situations need their parents to develop imaginary dangerous situations which require emergency alerts. Bettelheim introduced his book through explanation that he would write it as an educator who works with severely disturbed children and as a therapist.

Vladimir Propp described a fairy/wonder tale according to its component parts and the relationship these parts shared with each other. These component parts were the thirty-one narrative units or functions that every fairy tale entailed. The tale Goopy Gyne Baagha Byne can be very much read as a fairy/wonder tale, as it contains quite a lot of those functions, such as :  
 Departure- leaving one's home with a sense of adventure (Goopy and Baagha both are exiled from their respective villages and leave the comfort of their father's home thus beginning their quest) ,  
 Interdiction- the hero is violated from doing something ( Goopy is told not to sing, Baagha is told not to play his dholak), Violation of the Interdiction- despite the violation the hero does the thing ( Goopy continues singing and Baagha continues playing), First Function of the Donor- the hero encounters a magical agent and is presented with some sort of puzzle or test ( Goopy and Baagha encounter Ghosts in the forest and are asked to play for them), Hero's reaction- the responds to the test by acing it ( Goopy and Baagha give the performance of their life impressing the Ghosts),  
 Receipt of Magical Agent- the hero acquires magical objects from the donor (Goopy and Baagha receive gifts from the ghosts), Villainy -the villain harms one or more protagonists, inflicting nightly torments ( the King of Shundi imprisons Goopy and Baagha), Return- the hero travels back to their home ( Goopy and Baagha eventually travel back to their village), Solution- the hero accomplishes a difficult task (Goopy and Baagha manage to kidnap the King of Shundi to avert the war) , Recognition- the hero is given their due recognition ( the King of Halla recognises the inherent skills of Goopy and Baagha giving both of them half of his kingdom, each and his

daughters in marriage), Punishment- the villain is punished for their crimes ( the King of Shundi gets his kingdom confiscated by the King of Halla), Wedding- the hero marries and is rewarded or promoted by the family or community, typically ascending to the throne ( the story ends with Goopy and Baagha marrying the princesses of Halla with great celebration and festivities having received half of the kingdom and becoming the son-in-laws of the King of Halla).

*Goopy Gyne Baagha Byne* is undoubtedly written for children and the story has a massive appeal to the younger audience yet, it has adults as its protagonists, the innocent, carefree and naive nature of Goopy and Baagha make them appealing and relatable to the reader. It goes on to mark the fact childhood is a spirit, an emotion which has little to nothing to do with age, Goopy and Baagha due to their innocence, inherent skill, passion and spirit of adventure are childlike and not childish. The story like many other fairy tales uses the element of forest or entering into the woods as a medium of evolution, transcendence and development. The friendship of Goopy and Baagha promotes the feeling of brotherhood and comradeship within its reader. Their bond is what leads them to develop their latent talent and it is only when they are together, they can use their gifts, had they not met in the forest they would have never been able to accomplish the things they do. They go on a journey of adventure and self-discovery together and are lauded together. Although the story is about coming of age and self-evolution, it contains quite a lot of fascination with royal life as the protagonists constantly seek validation from Kings and the story ends with them ultimately becoming royalty by marrying the princess.

The elements / components / narrative units of a fairy tale are very much present in this tale and as ensued earlier what one learns or takes away from these is completely subjective and dependent on individual perspective. From what I have read and gathered; this is a story about an artist seeking validation. The recognition of the hero in a fairy tale is one of the thirty-one functions

of Vladimir Propp, according to him in this unit of narrative the hero is given their due recognition. The most important thing an artist seeks and yearns for is validation, the validation is not always judged by a fan-following it can come in various forms ranging from people asking for one's autograph to receiving a pat on the shoulder on one's first poetry recital. An artist doesn't find their true self until someone else lauds it for them, the popular notion that one can only love themselves when others love them, which stems from the deep rooted narcissistic in every individual's unconscious who wants not just the self but those surrounding the self to love and appreciate them.

In the case of Goopy and Baagha their art is both their curse and blessing, it is due to their art that they are thrown from the village but this art also becomes their rescue, when they are dripping wet from their fall in the river, all alone in the forest and ready to become some beast's meal, their singing and drumming attracts the attention of the Ghosts and they are saved from the perilous forest. And their art not only rescues them but also goes on to earn them gifts and appreciation from the Ghosts. This is the first validation or recognition of their talent and their journey as artists begins from here.

The story is a perfect blend of magic and realism. The protagonists of the story are ridiculed by the people from their society and are beaten away from the villages, their validation comes not from this world but from the metaphysical world of Ghosts. It is the Ghosts that recognise their talent and laud them with boons and gifts. Goopy and Baagha from the very beginning of the story constantly seek validation, playing and singing for the villagers, crossing a river and travelling to meet the King and earn his praise, even after receiving gifts from the Ghosts they continue their pursuit of acceptance and validation from the material world of humans. The Ghosts' gift of a magical bag which could produce food and apparel upon wish, furthers the story's appeal to its

intended reader assuring them that while pursuing their dreams, filling their stomach and clothing oneself would never be an issue, which we as adults know very differently. Although the notion is unrealistic it is romantic in nature, providing its reader with an optimistic outlook on life and encouraging them to pursue their dreams. Ghosts in this story are depicted in a very interesting way, one in which they are not the evil but the magical agent which provide validation to our protagonists, this representation of ghost attempts to subvert the evil as it is the society that punishes our heroes and the Ghosts that reward them. It encourages its young readership to not view things on their face value and perceive beyond presumed notions and stereotypes. The transformation of the standard ghost figure creates a vital area to examine the nature of "good" and "evil" as social constructs instead of fixed universal truths. The story uses ghosts as friendly judges of talent which creates uncertainty about the common belief that children must accept all things without doubt. The story aligns with fairy tales because their power to subvert expectations comes from their ability to show how unknown things and feared things become chances for people to change themselves and understand new things. The ghosts function as actual donors but they also represent another way for people to gain validation which shows that people can achieve recognition through untraditional paths that exist outside the established systems of social recognition.

When Goopy and Baagha are in the forest and their life is endangered the best thing, they can think of doing is performing their art. It is reminiscent of the scene in the movie *Titanic (1997)* directed by James Cameron when the ship is sinking and everybody is scurrying for their life, the musicians for lack of a more meaningful activity start playing their music, the best they could do in those circumstances, that is what any artist can do under any life-threatening crisis, it's such an important lesson in the long run of life and this story manages to sneak it in a playful manner for

its young readers. This story has layers and layers of meaningfulness and significance that as an adult reader one is bound to end up impressed and astounded. This becomes so much more meaningful when we regard it in today's context, in a bid to slow the spread of the 2019/2020 coronavirus Covid-19, an increasing number of countries have initiated 'lockdown' procedures and now strongly encourage or insist upon extreme forms of social isolation and confinement. We are all quarantined, seeking shelter at our home, unsure of the immediate future. Anxiety, restlessness and hopelessness have become our constant companion, in such testing times creatively inclined people are finding solace in their art. Artists are directing all their energy on their work. It provides the individual with a sense of purpose again. Performing one's art fills one with positivity and creativity. It serves as a release for all the pent-up restlessness and anxiety. Humans in sensory deprivation situations which bring about total isolation, restricted external stimulation and unpredictable circumstances most often direct their attention to their inner thoughts. The human mind uses inwardness to create new artistic works through processes which involve both imaginative thinking and introspective study. The creative process which people develop through fantasy and storytelling shows how people use their imagination to deal with anxiety, fear and existential uncertainty. The creative process in these moments turns into an essential element which functions as a stabilizing force that returns balance to our lives.

The Goopy and Baagha story presents an inward creative process which demonstrates literary finesse. The artists' need to create during dangerous times when they face abandonment emerges from their human nature to perform. The Propp fairy tale analysis framework identifies essential elements which support the hero's transformation process in a story that moves toward its resolution. The forest functions as a physical exile location which transforms into an artistic creation space for self-discovery and artistic transformation.

The framework enables us to explore how artists use their work to establish their personal value. The *Goopy and Baagha* story shows how characters seek validation through royal recognition and marriage which serves as a common theme in fairy tales. Their first validation which comes from the supernatural realm of ghosts shows how they challenge the traditional recognition system of human society. The displacement demonstrates that artistic value exists before social recognition and social acknowledgment. The concept relates to psychoanalytic theories which define creativity as a fundamental human need that requires fulfillment through inner creative work rather than validation from others. The disruption from global crises demonstrate that this narrative holds greater importance in contemporary society. The story has shown how artistic practice can serve both therapeutic and restorative functions during time periods when people are lost, stuck or otherwise dis-empowered. People express themselves through creative activities such as writing, music and performance which help them overcome despair while discovering their life purpose in times of uncertainty. Artists and thinkers have established that restrictive conditions lead to artists developing new artistic methods which demonstrate that creative constraints produce unexpected artistic outcomes. Even something as personal as the act of writing can serve as a personal refuge where one can express themselves completely through their writing. The artist engages with the artistic process when future events lack certainty and external validation does not materialize. The process serves as both an end and a means because every artistic activity provides immediate satisfaction while helping artists build their personal identity and maintain their optimistic outlook. *Goopy Gyne Baagha Byne* showcases that artists develop their creative work through internal mental processes during times of crisis when they lose their connection to the outside world. Art transcends mere artistic expression in

this situation because it serves as the fundamental element which enables individuals to survive while creating meaning and maintaining faith in their ability to transform themselves.

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