



The many faces of exile in Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's *The Ghost of Gosain Bagan* and *Father*

Gabriel's Crypt

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Abstract

This paper mainly focuses on two of Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's stories and seeks to critique systems of formal pedagogy, and probe the close connections between the child's psychology and the pedagogic appraisal in the system of formal education; and how this in turn creates the child as a subject, and has a formative influence on him. This paper also analyses the space of the enchanted as one that allows the child to explore vistas beyond the classroom, a site that allows him to confront his "demons" through metaphoric or real ghosts. Set in contemporary society where formal education and its forms of appraisal becomes the yardstick for measuring self worth, failure is a concept that is no longer treated as a space for growth. For the child, the growing pressure and the need to "perform" is not just a metaphoric value judgement, as in both cases of Haribandhu and Burun- it accompanies forms of exile. Exile then is not just a form of punishment; it entails the psychological alienation of the child from the "home", struggling to reconcile the concepts of failure, filial loyalty and academic progress. Mukhopadhyay in *The Ghost of Gosain Bagan* and *Father Gabriel's Crypt* strongly critiques this sense of progress, and creates an alternate space for the child to rediscover his sense of self.

Keywords: Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, children's literature, pedagogy, punishment, exile

Introduction

The Colonial History of Pedagogy and Bengali Juvenile Fiction

'Sire, the education that is based on a sound principle is also most enriching'.

Mightily pleased, that Raja was about to remount his elephant, when a fault-finder, from behind the bush, cried out, 'Maharaja, have you seen the bird?'

'Indeed, I have not!' exclaimed the Raja, 'I completely forgot about the bird.'

Turning back he questioned the pundits about the method they followed in instructing the bird. It was demonstrated. The Raja was immensely impressed. The method was so stupendous that the bird looked absurdly unimportant in comparison^[1].

Tagore's story strongly indicts the senseless, blind process of education that insensitively trammels upon the spirit of the bird and continues on its glorified direction of progress. Education as utilitarian, as giving something 'in return' is an annihilation of the self—the bird that is mercilessly caged for the purpose of education regardless of what the process of education does to it. In a travesty of the educational process, it turns the spirit of the free bird into a stuffing of book leaves—dead. Tagore's critique is based in the historical process of colonial education, as elsewhere Tagore argues against this kind of educational system that stresses on rote-learning^[2]. He says,

¹ Rabindranath Tagore, "The Parrot's Training" in Andrew Robinson; Krishna Dutta (eds.). Rabindranath Tagore : An Anthology, Picador 1997. P. 329

² As Martha Nussbaum says, "The progressive education movements of the early twentieth century in Germany (Friedrich Froebel), England (A. S.

The missionaries themselves have contributed to this evil. In the name brotherhood and in the arrogance of their sectarian pride they create misunderstanding. This they make permanent in their text-books and poison the minds of children. The worst of fetters come when children lose their freedom of mind. I have tried to save the children from such vicious methods of alienating their minds and from other prejudices which are fostered through books, through histories, geographies and lessons full of national prejudices^[3].

The colonial government labelled its education system as 'modern'—supposedly to refer to the awakening of Reason that post-Enlightenment thought and science represented which was in turn signified by the presence of 'facts'. As the colonial system of education got entrenched in the codified

Neill's Summerhill and Leonard Elmhirst's Dartington Hall), the United States (John Dewey), and India (Tagore) all had similar goals. In all these countries, the status quo ante was a deadening education that imposed learning from outside, with little attention to the growing mind of the child. What reformers sought was, above all, freedom of mind, the child's freedom to think critically, to imagine, and to explore the world with his or her own faculties, rather than being stuffed with facts imported from without. For all the leading reformers, the arts were crucial to the process of educating children. For Tagore as for Dewey, the individual child was always the center of education. Children must be encouraged to aspire and to discipline themselves, but they would not do so if education treated them like automata. Most education, by contrast, is 'a mere method of discipline which refuses to take into account the individual. a manufactory specially designed for grinding out uniform results.' Tagore himself suffered greatly in all the schools he attended—and, in each case, left as soon as possible." The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious violence, and India's future, Harvard 2007, p.284

³ Rabindranath Tagore, The English Writings of Tagore (ed) Sisir Kumar Das. p. 611

procedures—its elaborate procedure of inspection, norms of evaluation for awards and scholarships—the mainstay of the modern system of education became dependant on ‘textbook learning’. To the English, administration and examination like the textbook were a means of maintaining status quo. Colonial policy used examinations to evolve a bureaucratic and centralised system of education. The rate of failure and the nature of examination generated a feeling of uncertainty. The notion of self-worth and passing these examinations came to be related because passing the colonial examinations in most ways stood for economic security and social status that the government job brought. Y.G Bonnell describes how he felt on failing the matriculation examination, “I went home after the examinations were over and my behaviour appeared very queer to all. I was weeping and wailing now and then...I sought solitude so as to mourn my failure and avoided the roads. I was not communicative, but very often shouted, “The Fellow Who Failed in Matric”^[4]. Premchand in his classic story ‘Bare Bhai Saab’ makes fun of this system of rote learning, when the elder brother lectures his younger brother saying that the Henrys are no less than eight and to write seventh instead of eighth is not even worth a zero^[5].

In a way, fear of failure in an examination became a part of the tradition of childhood and adolescent narratives—while this had its origins in the colonial system of education, this genre was systematically used by authors for children’s literature in colonial and independent India to develop a narrative of critique against this model of education. The *tol* or the *pathshala* (an informal, indigenous school that was not an institution, but rather was dependant on the crucial role of the *pandit* or the teacher) was in turn substituted by this new form of school that stressed on textbook curriculum—resulting in a regimented form of education that encouraged very little out the codified procedures. Alienation of the colonial subject from this kind of regimented codified form of education perhaps manifested itself in the narratives of critique against this kind of pedagogy that emerged during the early twentieth and late nineteenth century. Exile as a motif, and discipline as a theme increasingly became a part of Bengali juvenile fiction as a symptom of the growing alienation the new system of education brought about—it was a neurotic symptom in literature brought about by alienation and anxiety to this new kind of education.

The elasticity of the child allowed authors to experiment with the genre of juvenile literature as the ‘uncertainly political’^[6] child became a figure became a malleable tool for critique. The genre of juvenile literature allowed the author to explore issue not only geographical but political and social as well. While Tagore makes a scathing critique upon the colonial system of education through ‘Totakahini’, Sukumar Ray’ in Pagla Dashu creates a character who makes a travesty of the codified norms of school discipline. Dashu, the dotty one is a character who is beyond the disciplines of the colonial school, incomprehensible and always outside the codes of expected behaviour—he represents unreason, yet Ray indicates that he is

not without intelligence, but more like an unfathomable, whimsical genius who is beyond conventions. The story is not entirely about Dashu, but a variety of characters, representing a type of character in each episode—from the bully to the braggart, in each sub-story Ray creates a type only to subvert it and in turn generate humour. In “Nondolaler Mondo Kopaal” (“Nondolal’s Bad Luck”) Ray critiques the colonial system of appraisal that is arbitrary, and one that encourages rote learning, but turns it into a humorous episode that could easily not register the subtle tones of critique.

The critique of “unnatural pressure of the system of education” (as Tagore says) then has a history of pedagogy based in the colonial context. However, in Bengali juvenile literature various authors—from Rabindranath Tagore to the likes Upendrakishore Raychoudhury, Sukumar Ray, Leela Majumdar and Abanindranath Tagore to contemporary Bengali authors like Satyajit Ray, Sibaji Bandopadhyay and Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay—have critiqued this systematic notion of education and the anxiety of failure it generates.

The Geography of Exile

Among the various motifs that the genre of juvenile literature generates, this paper shall be looking at the form of exile (in Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay’s *Father Gabriel’s Crypt* and *The Ghost of Gosain Bagan*)^[7] and the specific geography of exile—the forest. As Satadru Sen says, beside the timeless Bengali countryside, the geographies of the urban home and the school become relevant sites in colonial fiction for children and Mukhopadhyay explores these two geographies of Bengali literary tradition to critique the notion of dominant pedagogic progress. The scopic frame of the forest not only allows the author to enter an alternative landscape of timelessness, but rather the timeless countryside-like terrain allows the author to explore the fantastic because it represents a landscape of tradition and non rational space^[8]. Exile in a way is an intended form of discipline, a method of punishment for the welfare of the child—a notion that has been carried on from the colonial past—a notion that Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay critiques in both *Father Gabriel’s Crypt* (1987) and *The Ghost of Gosain Bagan* (1979)^[9].

⁷ I have divided this paper according to thematic concerns. While I shall be looking at exile, my other concern in the paper is the trope of failure, as a means to reinvestigate notions of success, pedagogy and the effects these concepts generate on the child’s self worth. I shall look at both concerns in both the novels, but while *Father Gabriel’s Crypt* mainly talks of the reformatory school and a real geographical exile with a supernatural ghost that stands for other kinds of reform, *The Ghost Of Gosain Bagan* looks at psychological exile as a form of punishment, and the ‘bagan’ (literally means a garden but here stands for a small forest like uncultivated land) as a site of regeneration.

⁸ Satadru Sen, “A Juvenile Periphery: The Geographies Of Literary Childhood In Colonial Bengal” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5:1, 2004. Although Sen says that the countryside as a geographical space becomes an alternative to the urban colonial space in the colonial context, yet in Bengali folklore too—the forest, the “*Tepantorer math*” (a space that signifies presence of ghosts) or the countryside represents a peripheral landscape of the irrational and the subversive. The forest in the adapted form and in Upendrakishore Raychaudhury’s original *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* is a space of articulation, expressivity and fantasy.

⁹ As a contemporary Bengali writer for children, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay has written fiction both for adults and children. In 1975, his contribution to children’s literature was recognized by the West Bengal Government with the Vidyasagar Puraskar.

I have referred both to the English version and the Bengali version of both the texts. In both the translations, I think the translators have left out certain key words or phrases, or at least what seemed important to me. The language

⁴ Cited in Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education: Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*. New Delhi: Sage, p. 86

⁵ Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education: Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*. New Delhi: Sage, p. 86

⁶ Satadru Sen, “A Juvenile Periphery: The Geographies Of Literary Childhood In Colonial Bengal” in *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5:1, 2004.

For Haribandhu the whole affair was ominous. Having to leave his family and live in this god forsaken place was very painful for him...He was a little slow and perhaps that was the reason why his younger siblings loved him a lot...Hari might not know exactly how a tree feels at being uprooted, but the feeling of having to leave home was like someone uprooting him violently by his roots. This seemed to be his last journey. The way he was sent on exile from his home, will he ever be able to come back? ^[10]. (Translation mine)

The exile away from the home leads Hari into countryside or a *gunj*, a locale that keeps unfolding in fragments throughout the text—adding to the sense of mystery. It is also the beautiful environment (*poribesh*) of Motigunj that enchants him. Exile in Father Gabriel's Crypt is linked to the concept of the reformatory school, as Hari is adjudged as a good-for-nothing. Like most reformatories, Charubala Memorial School in Motigunj is a school that has a group of odd and menacing characters, amidst whom Hari not only has to survive through merit—but rather where self worth is far from being linked to notions of merit—it is rather a fight for survival amidst crooks and bullies. However, the focus of action shifts away from the school to the forest like neighbourhood of Kusum Kunj, which has an underlying subtext of colonial history. The exile turns into a playground of adventure where Hari must solve poetic puzzles, break codes, and befriend an unconventional thief in a bid to outmanoeuvre the crooks.

The forest-like geography of Motigunj is a place for ghost like missionaries who belongs to the past colonial era and stands for moral uprightness. The mysterious space of the undefined terrain not only allows for a reconstruction of spatial privilege in relation to heroism, but in terms of time as well, privileging a colonial past of perfect order. Unlike colonial texts that used the countryside to revisit notions of the timeless real selfhood ^[11] Mukhopadhyay used this geography to invert that politics. The real geography of the countryside that still has traces of a colonial history is landscape that privileges a past that is revered, preserved by mythification and glorification. The missionary priest stands for righteous conduct and Christian values, so that the notion of timelessness becomes dependant on the process of mythification itself, so strong is the myth of the righteous Father that it goes beyond the history of independent India to become a geography that creates its own timelessness by keeping the legend alive. “[A]ll the events and adventures that fill it, constitute time-sequences that are neither historical, quotidian, biographical, nor even biological and maturational. In this kind of time nothing changes...people do

in the translated texts have been modernized to suit an urban readership, and perhaps it has been done because the Bengali readership is more aware of a cultural memory of certain things that the rest of India is not—so that in *Father Gabriel's Crypt*, instead of Sir Ashutosh being mentioned, the translator uses her own creative freedom and changes it to Rip Van Winkle, and while everyone calls the ghost by the name of ‘Pagla Saheb’ in Bengali the connotations of the incomprehensible ghost is lost when he is just called ‘Father Gabriel in the English translation.

¹⁰ Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, *Paagla Shaheber Kobor*, Kolkata: Ananda, 2004. For eg., the above passage in the English translation totally removes the metaphor of the uprooted tree, a very important metaphor to convey Hari's sense of loss at being exiled.

¹¹ Satadru Sen, “A Juvenile Periphery: The Geographies Of Literary Childhood In Colonial Bengal” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5:1, 2004.

not even age. This, we repeat, is extratemporal hiatus that appears between two moments of a real time” ^[12]. In the mythified and the fabulous figure of Father Gabriel, the legend almost becomes like a fairy tale which awes the child into total belief. As Bettelheim says, like all preliterate people, the child trusts what the fairy story tells because its worldview accord with his own ^[13]. It is no coincidence then that while Hari must be ‘educated’ in Motigunj, he also becomes a teacher to the illiterate Patal Das, who is Hari's chief source of information about the mysteries around him. That the timeless, enchanted landscape of Motigunj is a real locale has no other signifier apart from the presence of a deferred school-education only comes about with the assertion of a ‘going back’ to real time. Like the trustful villagers of Motigunj and Patal Das, the timelessness of Motigunj of course can only be accommodated in the juvenile imagination of Hari ^[14].

Mukhopadhyay through the figure of the Father creates a super-hero like persona that is ultimately supernatural, ineffable and one that never dies/leaves/ages—who in turn generates an adventure time that is surreal as is the space of the Villa and its neighbouring region. Mukhopadhyay through the figure of the Father symbolises virtues that are timelessly valued and privileges it, to reject the after-effects of a system of education that was originally colonial. Hence while the school is a reformatory and does not stay in focus for most of the narrative, Hari's miraculous progress seems to be a result of his encounter with the supernatural ghost of Father Gabriel rather than an apparent progress in the story. Haribandhu's act of accidentally discovering the crypt becomes a signifier of his own innate goodness so that self worth in the text does not come from notions of pedagogy but rather from personal virtues of helpfulness and sensitivity—indicating self discovery in the process. By the end of the story, there is an indication that this endless hiatus must end to give way to real time, located outside the enchantment of the forest; and yet Hari is so enchanted by this timeless locale that despite the fact that he will have to leave Motigunj as a reformed student “to see the world”, he shall carry the memory in his ‘heart’. Although real time asserts itself at the end of the adventure, Mukhopadhyay by summoning the timeless forest of Motigunj prolongs the sense of fantasy because in a way the timelessness of the forest is also rooted in a cultural memory of colonialism. The crypt like the forest is located in interstitial spaces, spaces that preserve time through invisibility and mythification—it lies in spaces that are hidden, unknown and must be *discovered* through a code which only Hari breaks. The interstices in the space beneath the walls is where the crypt is, which perhaps also becomes a symbol for the underlying potential of Hari who must work beyond conventional ideas of self worth to revive himself from feelings of worthlessness.

Since his scoring thirteen in Mathematics, no one in the house had been speaking much to Burun—neither mother, nor younger brother Gurun nor sister Beli. There was an

¹² Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*. p. 91

¹³ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, New York: Vintage, 1989. p. 45

¹⁴ As Piaget has shown, the child's thinking remains animistic until the age of puberty. Michael Pressley and Christine McCormick, *Child and Adolescent Development for Educators*, New York: Guilford, 2007. pp 61-70.

awkward silence all around... Burun realised that his folk had made him an outcaste in his own house ^[15].

Like Hari, Burun in *The Ghost of Gosain Bagan* goes to the forest to recover from psychological alienation after having scored thirteen in mathematics. Unlike the forest-like landscape of Motigunj which seems ineffable, Gosain Bagan is clearly defined in terms of spatial demarcation—being a strictly separate space from the rest of the locality. Mukhopadhyay never mentions the locational specifics of places so that the geographical ordering of the place has to be sorted out in the mind of the reader. Perhaps it is through this lack of clear specificity that Mukhopadhyay creates an atmosphere of terror, impending danger and fear.

The *bagan* is a wilderness that like the forest has none of the associations of a cultivated garden, or any civilisational impulse and it is only natural then that Burun must choose the space of the wilderness as a refuge from his own family. The wilderness provides him a physical correlate of obstacles with the psychological trauma of alienation and yet the simple task of pervading the wilderness with skill thrills him with a sense of achievement. It is in the forest that Burun can think out of conventions—he practices ayurveda on himself taught by his grandfather and upon seeing the ghost nonchalantly wonders how science doesn't know many things—Burun is far from being entrenched within the discourse of curriculum, rather, he can re-think pedagogic instruction. Strangely however, the forest has its own rule of demotion and promotions within the hierarchy of ghosts, and Burun and Nidhiram must learn from each other.

The wilderness which becomes a haven of quiet retreat for Burun, is a space that must be reclaimed from Habu's exploits—who have turned the rather good natured ghosts into his slaves. With the awe-inspiring tiger as his pet, Habu's enchantment of Hari and Bhutum symbolises the ultimate hypnotic effects of an escape which Burun has to undo with the help of his own will power. Burun's heroism must lie in the fact that he can discover himself despite the hypnotic effects of pedagogy that hegemonises one into straitjacketed thinking. On the other realm of extremity, if the hypnotic effects of pedagogic strictures are resisted, so is an attempt towards complete escape from pedagogic reality, or the responsibility of improving himself, despite the author's critique of pedagogic restraints—fantastic escapes with the help of Nidhiram must end with Karali Babu's repeated reminders of Burun's score in mathematics. The author makes it quite clear that despite the brief escape from reality, however beautiful the world of enchantment might be to the child's imagination, a return to the real is the practical norm. Time and again, the exploits of the child protagonist must end in the real time of reintegration after a brief hiatus of marvellous fantasy. Habu's solipsistic world of fantasy perhaps is more dangerous for Burun because he is hypnotised without his free will, and this state of fantasy like pedagogical disciplining only becomes a form of control from which Burun must break free. Like the forest in *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* the *bagan* is a haunt of harmless ghosts, but unlike *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* the miraculous cure doesn't last for long as Burun must find his own sense of self through an ultimate struggle with himself, with the impulse of an eternal escape into the world of fantasy.

Unlike *Goopy* and *Bagha* who never return to the native village from exile, Burun must be reintegrated into society. Similar to the scheming king of Hirok in *Hirok Rajar Deshe*, Habu's hypnosis is a way of enchantment through a different medium of instruction where the ideology of escape becomes a desirable boon but must be resisted for the sake of reintegration. In a battle between the two forms of enchantment—pedagogic and solipsistic, the former is asserted over the latter. The geography of the wilderness is only a brief interlude in the struggle for Burun's self discovery rather than being a permanent escape. The geography of exile in the end only asserts the spatial regions that lie outside it, but also accommodates the different forms of expressivity, unlike the classroom which has a strict model of uniform hierarchy.

Before I proceed to the psychological effects of exile—I would like to discuss Tagore short story 'Chhuti' which in my opinion, very early in Bengali literature explores this theme through a psychological lens. Unlike Tagore's famous story of exile, *Chhuti* ^[16]. (*chhuti* in Bengali could mean freedom, a holiday connoting boundlessness) where exile ends in death, both literal and metaphorical, in Mukhopadhyay the exile becomes a tool for reclaiming the sense of selfhood and reintegration. In Tagore, the exile like all exiles becomes a form of alienation from love, warmth and a sense of self worth. Also the concept of 'Chhuti' seems to be exactly the opposite of the disciplining regime that is sought to impose on Fatik. While Tagore does not explore alternative ideas of revival, Mukhopadhyay uses the space of adventure as a space 'other' to the classroom. Although *chhuti* in itself as a concept implies freedom from regimentation, Tagore's only alternative to Fatik's restless energy and irrepressible yearning for freedom seems to be death.

Like Mukhopadhyay Tagore probes into the psychology of an adolescent boy, Fatik, who seeks the boundless adventures of youth, troubles his mother and as a result is taken away by his uncle to the city to be disciplined. In an alien household, Tagore acutely represents the psychology of a young adolescent who thinks he is a misfit outside the rightful claims of family. Exile in juvenile literature works through an implied assumption of the family and a rightful place of the child in the family—alienation, like Fatik's, then generates a phobia of loss that cannot find accommodation elsewhere. While Mukhopadhyay compares Hari to an uprooted tree, Tagore compares Fatik to a lost dog. However, both Mukhopadhyay and Tagore in their narratives of exile critique this sense of forced punishment that works through psychological estrangement. While the forest teaches through experience and the rules of the wilderness are exactly opposite to the regimented and categorized classroom, yet Mukhopadhyay instead of giving '*chhuti*' (freedom) to the adolescent boy, ultimately reintegrates him from the timelessness of the forest into real time.

¹⁵ Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, *The Ghost of Gosain Bagan*, New Delhi: Ponytale p.11

¹⁶ 'Chhuti' by Rabindranath Tagore acutely and sensitively portrays the psychological trauma generated by exile upon a young adolescent boy, an age when Tagore thinks he is the most misunderstood and needs affection instead of discipline. Tagore's sensitive portrayal of Fatik is a memorable story in Bengali literature, a story that is very psychological in its approach. Since my next section is on the psychological effects of alienation brought about failure, I thought 'Chhuti' in Bengali juvenile literature is a unique work that actually seeks to probe the psychological depth of its subject, and hence could thematically connect geographies of exile to the next section.

The Psychology of Exile: Interrogating Notions of Progress and Pedagogy

“Children are suggestible...the most contagious disease of childhood is anxiety”^[17].

Burun was feeling very low...If a snake bit him, he might die. He would not mind...the burning sensation of the nettle would not be any more than the insult that was burning his mind. Burun entered the jungle to forget the hurt in his mind... if he fell from the tree he might die, but it would not matter to him much. At least his folks at home would regret this torture they had inflicted on him^[18].

“It is better to remain illiterate than getting wrong education”^[19].

In both the stories, despite a restoration of the real time over the timeless space of exile, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay makes a strong case of critique against the dominant notions of progress through pedagogy. Like Tagore himself, who believed in natural education through a discovery of things^[20], and that the principle determining the process guiding and discovering should be freedom^[21], Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay too seems to contest the totalitarian notion of progress through pedagogy and rather seems to advocate an exploration of possibilities outside the classroom through the hiatus of the exile.

Mukhopadhyay poignantly represents the neurosis in the child, whose phobia of loss drives him from a forced exile to an alienation of the self from the family. Family, as earlier stated, becomes a crucial implied assumption—it carries the traditional connotations of solidarity and the psychology of exile works through an undoing of those connotations. Unlike Tagore who ends his story with an eternal escape of death, Mukhopadhyay is optimistic in his rendering of the innate goodness in his child protagonists who must overcome obstacles to find his own sense of self.

Mukhopadhyay, like Tagore chooses an age group for his protagonists which imply oncoming adolescence, an age where one struggles with emotional and existential dilemmas. As McCormick and Pressley say, “With increasing age, children also become more aware...of the implications of not succeeding...with these perceptions affecting expectancies about future success and having the potential to affect school performance”^[22]. Appraisal and approval become hegemonic ideas which become ways for the adolescent child to relate to his sense of self, which is mobile yet.

In Father Gabriel’s Crypt, the author through the figure of Dukhram babu, who suggests the reformatory, critiques an early dismissal of Hari by his father and says, “Parents are sometimes quite ignorant about the qualities of the child”^[23]. As opposed to this is the over indulgence of Dashu in The

Ghost of Gosain Bagan which contributes to the shaping of Habu’s character as being spoilt beyond redemption. The parental expectations in both texts create a hierarchy of knowledge, so that it is not enough that Hari likes poetry, or that Burun has passed in all subjects apart from his exceptional low score in Mathematics. In The Ghost of Gosain Bagan Karali babu^[24], although a brilliant mathematics teacher is a forgetful person who is not adept at handling cash. In both the protagonists, Mukhopadhyay shows redeeming qualities that are beyond the scope of just academic excellence (although the latter is asserted in the end). Hari is extremely sensitive to things around him and does not like hurting plants, while Burun follows the unconventional method of ayurveda, as opposed to the allopathic remedies of his father. The father figure, both doctors, ironically fails to diagnose the psychological vulnerability of the child or show any understanding of it, but rather sends him to exile. While the father figure in both the texts stands for the autocratic patriarch who dictates the exile, Burun finds refuge in his grandfather who wants to give him an education beyond the required conventions of literacy, and Hari finds a confidante and a friend in Patal Das who teaches him to look beyond surfaces.

Once Burun asked him, “Sir, we add one to one and make it two as per Arithmetical law, but is it completely correct? Nothing in this universe is exactly like any other thing. If we compare one lakh leaves of a tree, we will find not one leaf is exactly like another. Some difference will be there either in size, or structure or colour or weight or whatever. Even a grain of sand is minutely different from another grain. Hence one added to one does not make two, because the two ones are different.”

Karali babu was greatly surprised and asked, “Then what will be the result of one added to one?”

Burun replied, “Two ones, three ones and like that”^[25].

The author indicates that although Burun has low scores in mathematics yet his engagement with the subject is unconventional, as is the author’s approach to pedagogy. Karali babu does not value Burun only because of his brief promise of academic excellence, through the help of Nidhiram, but beyond that Karali babu also respects Burun’s sensitivity to the subject. Through the figure of Karali babu Mukhopadhyay also shows that mathematics although much feared among students can be a fun medium, if learnt through the practical means of everyday life rather than the removed context of a classroom.

The spatial organisation of the crypt and the wilderness are in direct contrast to the spatial ordering of the classroom. While the classroom follows a strict rule of grading, time in the classroom is calculated through age and its appointed measure of progress as opposed to the crypt and the wilderness which are timeless. Foucault traces the idea of the classroom to

¹⁷ R. S Illingworth *The Normal School Child* London: William Heinemann, 1964, p.15

¹⁸ Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, *The Ghost of Gosain Bagan*, New Delhi: Ponytale, p.15

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 25

²⁰ Rabindranath Tagore, *The English Writings of Tagore* (ed) Sisir Kumar Das. p. 611

²¹ S.C Sarkar, *Tagore’s Educational Philosophy and Experiment*, Shantiniketan: Visva Bharati, 1961, p. 40

²² Michael Pressley and Christine McCormick, *Child and Adolescent Development for Educators*, New York: Guilford, p. 269

²³ Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, *Father Gabriel’s Crypt*, Calcutta: Thema, 1997, p. 1

²⁴ Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay does not represent the mathematics teacher Karali babu as a typical insensitive mathematics teacher, who is unidimensionally dedicated to reason and lacks imagination, unlike Satyajit Ray’s story “Onko Sir, Golapi Babu aar Tipu” where the mathematics teacher has to be convinced through an brief adventure about the existence of a realm beyond the facts of mathematics and the existence of an imaginative hereafter.

²⁵ Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, *The Ghost of Gosain Bagan*, New Delhi: Ponytale, pp. 99-100

monastic origins in its impulse for discipline ^[26]. Appraisal becomes a mode of surveillance—a constant teleology of progress that has to be reported from time to time, impinging upon the child in direct contrast to the freedom of spirit espoused by Tagore. Time becomes a cloistered phenomenon ^[27], so that the timetable bound curriculum infringes on the notion of self autonomy. The structure of the classroom is like a cell that is assigned according to rank, which has been established by grading, assessment, or examination. This kind of spatial organisation homogenises its subjects into objects of knowing, mastering and using and creates a sharp break gradually in the perceptive individuality of the self. Examinations, classifications and promotions besides creating categories of types—excellent, average or poor—establish ‘normal’ pattern of expectations, attempting to create what Foucault calls *normalised individuals*.

Exile as a concept becomes relevant only in an attempt towards this homogenisation— in creating normalised individuals and any attempt at dissent and originality is then quickly struck down as being offensive to the structure of normativity. It is precisely this stifling nature of the classroom education that Mukhopadhyay aims to critique. Exile although begins with a painful realisation of loss, separation and a phobia of being a misfit, in the trope of juvenile literature, as in this case, it brings about a regeneration of the self, realised through an alternative way to the normative meaning of progress.

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