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Bodies Out of Proportion: Fatness, Grotesque Embodiment, and the Politics of Nonsense in Sukumar Ray's *Abol Tabol* and Rabindranath Tagore's *Khāpchhārā*

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Abstract: This paper looks at bodily disproportion in Sukumar Ray's *Abol Tabol* (1923) and Rabindranath Tagore's *Khāpchhārā* (1936) from an interdisciplinary perspective that encompasses Fat Studies, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body, Disability Studies, Sianne Ngai's account of the zany, Sara Ahmed's phenomenology of orientation, and major theories of literary nonsense. It suggests that the "oversized, voracious, mixed sexed, malformed, or otherwise out-of-place bodies of Bengali nonsense" are not just "embellishing eccentricities. They reveal the cultural work necessary to create "normal" embodiment as coherent, bounded, proportionate, disciplined, and easily classifiable. Here, Fat Studies is neither a diagnosis of the characters as fat nor a disability diagnosis of fatness, but rather analysis of the moralization of appetite, size, excess and body-visibility. The grotesque body, which is open, unfinished, relational and in process, is the theoretical heart of the paper, illuminating Ray's impossible creatures and Tagore's mismatched figures. Disability Studies helps to clarify how visual difference can turn into spectacle; Ahmed can help to clarify how bodies that don't fit the lines can be disorienting; and Ngai's zany can help to clarify the exhausting comic energy of bodies and actions that go beyond the stable lines. The other theory, nonsense theory (Elizabeth Sewell and Wim Tigges, Jean-Jacques Lecercle and Michael Heyman), demonstrates that there is no lack of order in the absurd; it is another organization of sense. The paper thus locates 'laughter' as politically 'un-stable' – that is, capable of producing stigma by making bodies ridiculous; as also 'reflecting' stigma back on the 'rules' of classification by which bodies are decided 'right'. The politics of nonsense is in the instability of both Ray and Tagore. The out-of-proportion body is a way to develop the out-of-proportion proportions.

Keywords: *Fat Studies, Fat Embodiment, Body Normativity, Corporeal Excess, Grotesque Body, Nonsense Literature, Non-Normative Embodiment*

Introduction: When Proportion Becomes a Problem

Comic body is seldom innocent. It's already measured by a tacit standard to call a body too large, too hungry, too hybrid, too mobile, too crooked, too loud, or just too strange. This measurement doesn't have to be in the form of a medical chart. It can come in the form of laughter, staring, naming, illustration, proverb, etiquette, and the seemingly innocuous juxtaposition of the ordinary and the ridiculous. In *Abol Tabol* and *Khāpchhārā* of Sukumar Ray and Rabindranath Tagore respectively, bodies act in ways which are not the ways of bodies. They grow, fuse, lean, grow deformed, overeat, overperform, misalign or become hard to classify (visual and verbal). It is the poems that make these bodies funny, not politically. It may make a joke out of difference; it may also expose difference's (and difference's judge, the norm) absurdity (Davis 23–49; Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 8–10; Farrell 3–11).

This paper makes the argument that bodily disproportion in Ray and Tagore plays the role of an epistemological disturbance. Their nonsensicalness not only produces unlikely bodies, but it exposes the demand for 'body coherences' in culture in a new way. A proper body is one where parts are related, appetites are still capable of being controlled, scales are not too large or too small, social behaviors are intelligible, and appearance doesn't interfere with normal perception. The "nonsense body," by contrast, is too much; it goes beyond rules of recognition. In Ray, the disturbance is frequently breathtaking: impossible anatomies and gigantic appetites, hybrid creatures, violent songs, muscular braggarts, rulers whose decrees render every day of bodily activity ridiculous. In Tagore, the disturbance is often lighter, more disjointed, goes through mismatch, asymmetry, abrupt change, unlikely collocation, even the "out-of-joint" logic of the title *Khāpchhārā*, which is deliberately "out-of-joint" and intelligent. It's crucial to note that the difference is important. The body of Ray is often overrun by the grotesque and Tagore's is often pulled to the side. But both call into question the fantasy that there is a normal body before the language and culture (Ray; Tagore; Davis 23–49).

Fat Studies is not used here to classify every large, hungry, or grotesque figure in the two collections as literally fat. Doing so would merely replace one classificatory regime with another. Instead, Fat Studies supplies a vocabulary for examining the moralization of size, appetite, visibility, self-control, and corporeal excess. Body size is not self-evident; it acquires meaning through histories of fat identity, stigma, framing, activism, and acceptance (LeBesco 1–13; Farrell 3–11; Saguy 3–18; Cooper 1–16; Wann 9–17).

The grotesque body is the theoretical centre of the paper with Bakhtin. In *Rabelais and His World*, the classical body is closed, polished, bounded, complete and separated from the world, while the grotesque body is unfinished, protruding, ingesting, excreting, reproducing and becoming (Bakhtin

317–18). The disfigured body is not just ugly, but rather a grotesque body. It is an incorporeal being, whose limits are impervious. It feeds the world and is fed by it; it outgrows its optimum shape, and it turns into a collective and temporal entity instead of a static one. This openness and the emphasis on the process are particularly fruitful for *Abol Tabol*, in which the body becomes a temporary and provisional form. However, Bakhtin will not do the job. The fat body and the disabled body have opposing histories of regulation and stigma; and sometimes, excess is romanticized, but the social or political costs are taken into consideration for the actual bodies being called excessive. Therefore, the paper does not place Bakhtin in the conversation with Fat Studies and Disability Studies, but rather, the grotesque does not absorb them.

The term “normate” as defined by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and the genealogy of normalcy posited by Lennard J. Davis were used to help determine the social status from which bodily difference becomes difference (Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 8–10; Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy* 23–49). As for staring in the future, it could also be seen as a social relation through which unexpected bodies become spectacles, and moments for knowledge, as Garland-Thomson demonstrates in his work on staring (*Staring* 3–7). This is especially true for Ray, who used his drawings to accentuate his words. The visual joke isn't only added to the poem; it enters into the process of creating bodily oddity. However, image-text relationships in Ray are not as straightforward as a picture supporting the words; as Poushali Bhadury and Hirak Bhattacharya have suggested in varied ways, Ray's image-text relations are far more complex than that of what can be considered a straightforward hierarchy. *Abol Tabol*'s body is typically created between the impossibility of words and the plausibility of sight.

Queer Phenomenology is an exploration by Sara Ahmed of what a body is, rather than how a body is. As bodies approach the proper objects, traverse the proper spaces, and move in the proper direction (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 1–20), they become intelligible. A definite break in the line can lead to a feeling of being oblique, awkward, or out of place. Useful approach to *Khāp̄chhārā*, where mismatch does not necessarily equate to a show-stopping deformity but may be a failure of alignment. The zany is added to the mix by Sianne Ngai's class. The zany's humour is comic, energetic, unstable, its humour thrown with excess; it is never without overactivity nor without a danger that it might become exhausting or dangerous (Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* 174–82). Ray's bodies are overly active, and Tagore's figures often morph into new shapes at the last minute, and it is just this kind of uneasy comic punch that often results.

Lastly, where is the sense in nonsense—where is it and is there any—to be considered a structured literary genre? For Elizabeth Sewell, the field of nonsense is rule-governed; for Wim Tigges it is a field of balance between sense and non-sense; and for Jean-Jacques Lecercle it is a field that reveals

tensions within the language, for Michael Heyman, Indian nonsense is a mode that must be understood through its multi-lingual, multi-cultural specificity (Sewell 5; Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* 47; Lecercle 29; Heyman et al. xxvi–xxix). This theoretical tradition allows for the central thesis of this paper to come into existence: If the impossible bodies of nonsense can create alternative systems of sense, then the same might go for impossible bodies of embodiment. They don't just fall short of the ordinary. They show that there is more than one grammar, that “the normal” grammar is one of them.

This paper has four movements. In Section I, the conceptual problem of the normal body is built up using theories of Fat Studies, Bakhtin, Disability Studies, affect, and the theory of nonsense. In this section, grotesque embodiment in *Abol Tabol* is explored from selected poems like *Kumro Potash*, *Hnukumukho Hyangla*, *Sat Patro*, *Ganer Gunto*, *Palowan* and *Bombagorer Raja*. In Section III, *Khāpchhārā* and its aesthetics of mismatch, asymmetry, and unstable transformation are explored. Section IV raises the question of who has the right to laugh and if it is not nonsense, does it repeat or redistribute bodily stigma? The goal of the conclusion is to make an argument that Ray and Tagore make a disproportion a critical method: the body that does not fit makes the frame visible.

I. Constructing the Normal Body

I guess the term “normal body” was used and sounds descriptive only because its history has been forgotten. In *Enforcing Normalcy*, Davis shows how statistical, medical, administrative, and aesthetic regimes – each institutionalizing the normal – bring a sense of normalcy to the modern world. Similarly, Georges Canguilhem, who, in his paper “The normal” (Canguilhem 126–27), states that “the normal” is not simply uncovered in the bodies; it is created through judgements concerning function, value and error. The repeated comparisons, surveillance, corrections and examinations of bodies that make them governable, as studied by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, are also present. These traditions make it difficult to have any simple narrative of literary bodies in terms of proportion as a neutral fact. Proportion is a relation between beauty and politics.

Fat Studies amplifies this argument by showing that body size is organized through moral narratives. Farrell connects modern fat stigma to presumed failures of self-control, beauty, and civic responsibility; Saguy demonstrates that fatness can be framed as disease, risk, identity, beauty, or civil-rights concern, with different institutional consequences. LeBesco reclaims fat identity as politically contestable, while Cooper traces activist histories and critiques knowledge produced without fat people as authoritative subjects (Farrell 3–11; Saguy 3–18; LeBesco 1–13; Cooper, *Fat Activism* 1–16). Methodologically, a body becomes ‘too much’ not simply because it has more mass, but because a culture has already linked appearance and appetite to morality, gender, productivity, and citizenship.

This history cannot be transferred unchanged to colonial Bengal: fat stigma is culturally and regionally specific. Stearns, Forth, Gilman, Vigarello, Lupton, Kulick and Meneley, and Farrell show that the meanings attached to corpulence vary across time and place (Stearns 1–15; Forth 9–24; Gilman 1–12; Vigarello 3–19; Lupton 1–17; Kulick and Meneley 1–17; Farrell 3–11). The comparative value of Fat Studies lies in tracking how bodily distinction becomes a narrative of character. Nonsense can repeat those associations, but it can also redistribute them by making thin and thick, strong and weak, human and animal bodies equally vulnerable to absurd classification.

Bakhtin is important because he came up with a grotesque realism that turned the order of ideal form and of material excess upside down. Classical aesthetics looks to a completed body. The grotesque body is open to the world through mouth, stomach, genitals, wounds, protrusions, eating and vomiting; it is a body in becoming and not a completed monument (Bakhtin 317–18). At first, it seems as though an immediate link could be made with Fat Studies because of focus on eating and expansion, but this needs to be negotiated critically. In fact, Bakhtinian excess is frequently hailed as carnivalesque freedom, and fat people in modern cultures are subjected to material discrimination because their bodies are interpreted in terms of excess. A fat-positive theory of literature that does not pay attention to the anti-fat stigma has the potential to eat the fat body. This paper is a resisting move because it maintains the productive tension between the terms “fat embodiment” and “grotesque embodiment”. The grotesque is an aesthetic structure, and fatness is an aesthetic category that is also lived and politicised. But there's only partial overlap, and it's significant.

The second limit necessary is created in Disability Studies. Garland-Thomson calls the privileged name position that he envisions “normate” (*Extraordinary Bodies* 8–10). In a culture that is dedicated to the normal, Davis also suggests that disability is only made legible. (*Enforcing Normalcy* 23–49) Bodily difference is often used to answer representational problems, as Mitchell and Snyder’s use of the term ‘narrative prosthesis’ demonstrates: disability can be a stand-in for character, plot, metaphor, or moral meaning. Just as disability can be instrumentalized in a similar way without it being “fatness,” so can fatness be instrumentalized in a similar way without it being “disability.” This complicating of the comparison is precisely why Cooper’s question “Can a Fat Woman Call Herself Disabled?” is useful: histories and identities can differ, as can disabling environments, access barriers, stigma, and medicalization, and these may intersect. The nonsensical body exacerbates this issue. But the difference is sometimes so extreme that it turns into show, and the showiness can drive the spectator to laugh out loud, making his compulsion to classify look ridiculous.

The politics of looking is another theme that is addressed in Garland-Thomson’s work on staring. The stare starts in the space in-between the usual recognising: when the body is unexpected and breaks a

visual routine and is called into question (*Staring* 3–7). This moment is used to great effect time and time again in Ray's illustrations. A hybrid creature, an unfeasible facial feature, an awkward appendage, or an excessive position of the body demands the reader to observe the body in greater detail, as it cannot be absorbed immediately. However, the visual field isn't steady. The picture could either give substance to the verbal impossibility or make the hyperreality of visual certainty apparent. Bhadury's investigation of Ray's bestiary illustrates the symbiotic relationship between image and creature-making, while Bhattacharya's multi-modal reading signals the fact that illustration is not only not an add-on, but it is integral to the process of the work itself (Bhadury 75–96; Bhattacharya 64–69). The body is thus “out of proportion” both in the fictional universe and in the reader's experience of seeing.

The idea of orientation in Ahmed is on spatial and affective fit rather than on visual classification. Some bodies may walk without realising a world is organised by the lines that they can follow. Others find furniture, architecture, expectations, language, kinship or public space to be barriers (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 1–20). While Ahmed's project is not a theory of fatness, Fat Studies has demonstrated again the worlds designed around limited bodily expectations (Rothblum and Solovay 1–7; Pausé et al. 1–12). Thus the saying ‘bodies that do not fit’ is both literal and figurative. When it comes to nonsense, the concept of fit is a particularly fruitful one because words, bodies, categories are all misfitted. Aesthetic principles are made non-fit in the name of *Khāpchhārā*, which literally means mismatch, irregularity, or being out of joint.

Ngai's whimsical further adds to the comic body, as he binds the comic with humor. Zany figures are neither just odd-looking, but are made to be active, improvised, and to find labor that is not stable (*Our Aesthetic Categories* 174–82). They include this uncertainty that everything might fall apart as they are making jokes. The idea of distinguishing mass and action, grotesque mass from grotesque action. A body can be too much: it can be too bad too much, too loud too loud, too fast too fast, too much follow too much, or too strong too strong. Ray's “*Ganer Gunto*” is a masterpiece: Bhismalochan Sharma's singing is a material force which shakes the surroundings, injures the world; till it gets interrupted by an animal. The body isn't the thing that's too big; it's the quantity of embodied output that's too much. Zany labor makes voice an impact.

A nonsensical theory fills this out, leaving the strange body unallegorized. In Sewell's “field” of nonsense, there is a structure; Tigges's “field” of nonsense has a tension of intelligibility that is produced and frustrated; Lecercle's “field” of nonsense is a way of discovering the excessive capacities of language itself (Sewell 5; Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* 47; Lecercle 29). Not a handbook of nonsense, Gilles Deleuze's *Logic of Sense* is nonetheless based on a central role for

paradox in the production of sense (Deleuze 1–11). As with sense, which comes from unstable relations - not fixed correspondences - so can bodily meaning. Mixing the two stable social types is not a requirement for a hybrid creature. It might alternatively reveal the reader's need to confine bodies to semantic boxes.

The theoretical framework of this study brings together several complementary approaches to explain how bodily difference and literary nonsense interact. Fat Studies, particularly the work of LeBesco, Cooper, and Farrell, provides the concepts of body normativity and fat stigma and enables fatness to be understood as culturally constructed rather than naturally self-explanatory. Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body contributes the ideas of excess, openness, and carnival, which illuminate the disproportionate and excessive bodies that recur throughout the selected texts. Disability Studies, especially the work of Garland-Thomson and Davis, adds the concepts of the normate, staring, and normality, thereby clarifying how bodily difference is socially regulated and made visible. Sara Ahmed's account of affect and orientation extends this framework by emphasizing bodily fit and discomfort, showing how certain bodies become marked when they fail to align with established social norms. Finally, the nonsense theories of Tigges, Sewell, and Lecercle foreground internal logic and instability, demonstrating how nonsense destabilizes apparently fixed categories of body, identity, and meaning. Taken together, these perspectives provide an interdisciplinary basis for reading corporeal excess not as a simple deviation from normality but as a literary device through which the cultural production of normality itself becomes open to critique.

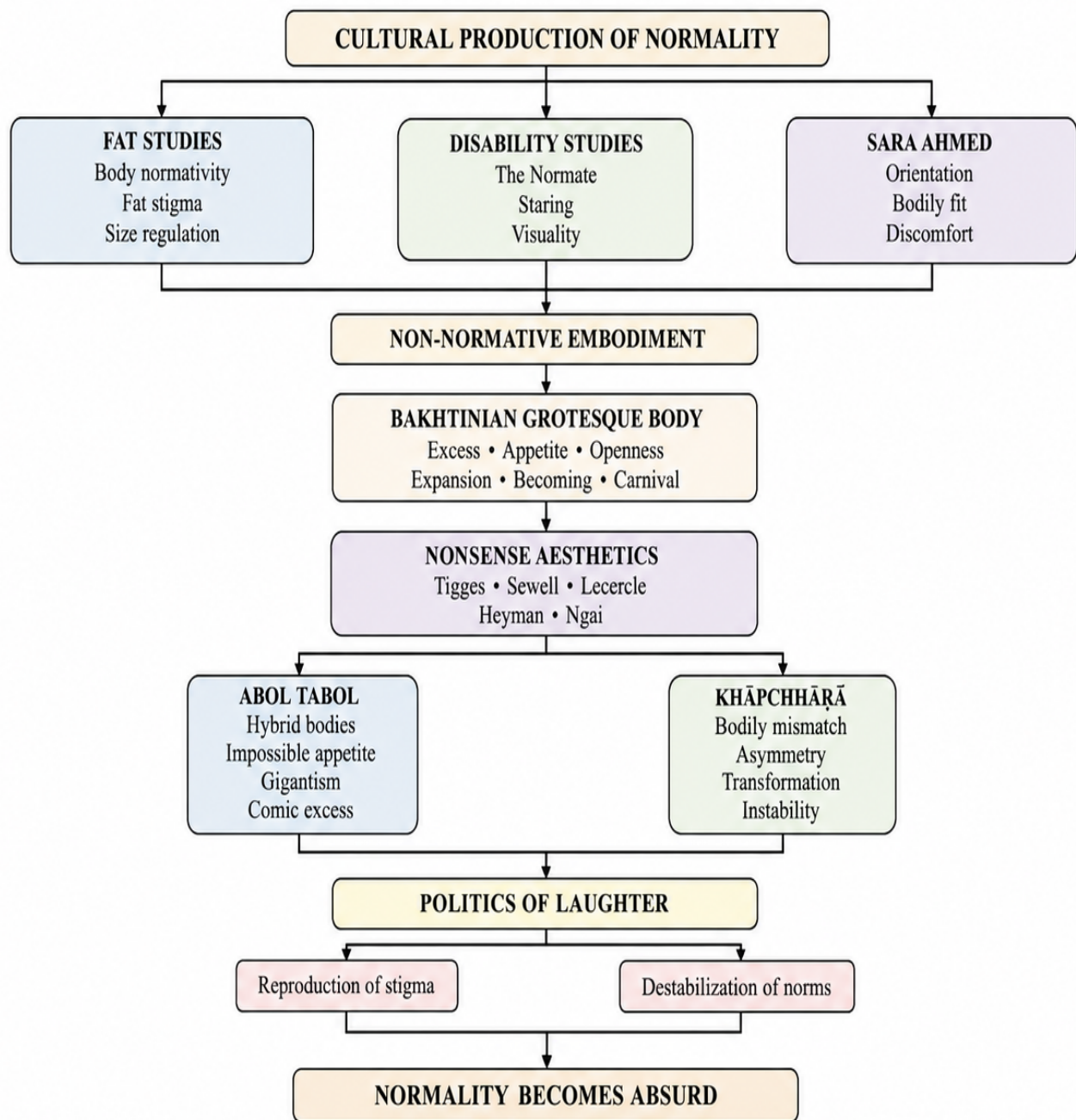


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: From Body Normativity to the Politics of Nonsense

II. Grotesque Bodies in *Abol Tabol*

Abol Tabol is a place that is hugely welcoming of bodies which cannot be classified in a single way. The animals that Ray creates often appear as if they are cut together from various taxonomies: animal/thing, man/best, face/instrument, appetite/anatomy. It is no fantasy, but a result. Fantasy can maintain the integrity of the body by putting together coherent bodies in impossible worlds. Often, though, Ray

does the opposite, and the world is sufficiently knowable, but the body itself is the site of logic's breakage and reform. The gathering of the three bodies – Bakhtin's unfinished, Lecercle's excessive, and Garland-Thomson's political – is why they work so well together in this collection (Ray; Bakhtin 317–18; Lecercle 29; Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 8–10).

Kumro Potash is a useful starting point because the creature's power lies in uncertainty about what it is. Ray's conditional refrain produces a whole disciplinary script: if it dances, observers must 'hang with all four feet raised from the hottmula tree' (my translation) (Ray, *Kumro Potash*). The grotesque body therefore does not merely appear strange; it reorganizes the postures, gestures, and movements of everyone around it. The poem parodies precautionary logic: bodily difference becomes the pretext for a regime of self-surveillance, while the creature itself remains beyond stable classification.

From a Fat Studies perspective, the point is not that *Kumro Potash* is explicitly described as fat, but that its excess is managed through anticipatory conduct. Fat bodies are often treated as warnings—signs of risk, failed self-control, or future illness—and that interpretation regulates the conduct of others (Farrell 3–11; Saguy 3–18; Lupton 1–17). Ray's nonsense exposes this mechanism by making everyone around the creature bend, fast, climb, and contort themselves. The exceptional body becomes the occasion for the joke, but the social apparatus built to contain exception becomes its deeper object (Ray, *Kumro Potash*).

Hnukumukho Hyangla sharpens the relation between naming, appetite, and faciality. Ray remembers the figure's earlier body as one that danced 'with thumping feet' and had a face 'brimming with delight' before asking why the smile has vanished (my translation) (Ray, *Hnukumukho Hyangla*). The questions do not resolve the body; they intensify the reader's demand for explanation. Garland-Thomson's account of staring is useful here: bodily difference summons an explanatory gaze, yet Ray frustrates the belief that appearance will disclose a stable truth (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 3–7).

This disparity lies at the centre of Fat Studies: fatness is regularly treated as a body that 'speaks for itself.' A fat body is made to signify appetite, health, discipline, class, or personality even when appearance cannot sustain those conclusions (Saguy 3–18; Farrell 3–11). Ray's impossible physiognomies parody that confidence. When a face can be a hookah-face and anatomy can mix semantic materials that do not belong together, the belief that a surface reveals a person's truth begins to look like another form of nonsense (Ray, *Hnukumukho Hyangla*).

Sat Patro shifts the politics of fit into the marriage market. Gangaram is appraised through a grotesque inventory: 'his colour is exceedingly dark,' and his face is 'rather like an owl's' (my translation) (Ray, *Sat Patro*). Education, illness, poverty, family reputation, caste lineage, complexion, and facial form

accumulate as if a person were a profile of measurable defects. The poem anticipates Garland-Thomson's normate, a composite of socially preferred capacities and appearances; the suitor is comic because the criteria do not add up, but the deeper joke is that the fantasy of a perfectly fitting body-and-biography does not add up either (Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 8–10).

Some insights into what is at stake in such lists may be offered by the 'body normativity' concept in Fat Studies. Size stigma is usually propagated by seemingly trivial standards of value: the "right" body is seen as proof of control of one's self and future worth. As Susan Bordo's description of the disciplined body and Susie Orbach's feminist critique of fatness as a gendered social problem illustrate, intimate judgements are intimately interconnected with broader systems of power. But Ray's poem doesn't directly satirize fat marriageability; it is a catalogic form that reveals the violence of the "marriageability profile" of embodied persons. If there is no sense, then there is no judgment; but if there is sense, there is speeded-up judgment until the criteria are made ridiculous (Bordo 185–212; Orbach 15–33; Ray, *Sat Patro*).

Ganer Gunto moves excess from bodily form to bodily force. Bhismalochan Sharma's voice 'attacks from Delhi to Burma,' while injured listeners beg, 'Our lives are going—stop the song at once' (my translation) (Ray, *Ganer Gunto*). Sound becomes impact: animals collapse, trees fall, and voice crosses the boundary between singer and world. Bakhtin's open body explains this leakage, while Ngai's zany clarifies why the performance is both spectacular and exhausting: the singer does too much, and his surplus energy becomes unmanageable (Bakhtin 317–18; Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* 174–82).

There is also a common moral logic of excess that is complicated in this poem. The focus in anti-fat discourse is often on the amount of food consumed (too much food goes in). "*Ganer Gunto*" features over-production. Excessive voice comes out of the body. This flip is significant because it separates out the excess from a morphology. When physical action is greater than mental proper action, anybody can turn into a grotesque. This corporeal excess is not anatomical, but is relational. A small body can be too much; an ordinary body can be too much; a thin body can be too much; a sound, a gesture, an appetite, a speed, an authority can make an ordinary body monstrous. Here, at this point, Fat Studies is most critically useful, in that it uncovers the error of ideology that has been imposed on the "excess" of one body type (Ray, *Ganer Gunto*; Farrell 3–11; Saguy 3–18).

Palowan makes masculine strength textual by giving Shashthi Charan a body that 'weighs nineteen maunds' and is 'built as strong as iron' (my translation) (Ray, *Palowan*). The strongman exists through comparison: muscularity becomes meaningful only when it is demonstrated, narrated, challenged, and repeatedly confirmed. The humour therefore unsettles the body as an obvious store of power. Bordo's disciplined body, Butler's account of performativity, and Ngai's zany all clarify why masculine

mastery must be enacted and why repeated enactment always risks comic failure (Bordo 185–212; Butler 179–80; Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* 174–82).

It is an important contrast that is added by Fat Studies. There are perceptions about the morality of the size of a man's body, as well as the size of his fat, that are different in modern culture. One size is "big," which is a sign of discipline, strength, and mastery--the other size is to signify indiscipline. The difference shows that "too large" is not an easy measurement. It's a cultural appraisal of the significance attributed to the largeness. "*Palowan*" unsettles the greatness of the disciplined size with a comic and also a narratively unstable strength. The so-called superior body is another body that is open for comment (Ray, *Palowan*; Bordo 185–212; Farrell 3–11).

Bombagorer Raja turns from individual grotesquerie to institutional absurdity. Its questions—‘Why is a pillow tied to the queen’s head all day?’ and ‘Why do people somersault whenever they catch cold?’—make arbitrary rules act directly upon ordinary bodies (my translation) (Ray, *Bombagorer Raja*). Bureaucratic power converts posture, illness, dress, and movement into regulated performances. Foucault’s disciplinary body is made comic: discipline appears not as a seamless normalizing system but as a sequence of ridiculous commands whose arbitrariness is exposed through repetition (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 135–69).

The social dimension is clearest in this aspect of Ray’s bodily politics. A normal body is not only an aesthetic ideal; it is also an administrative object. Bodies must walk, dress, move, and respond in authorized ways. Ray’s kingdom literalizes Davis’s argument that normalcy is institutional as well as visual (Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy* 23–49). Fat Studies likewise shows how weight becomes governable through public-health discourse, the workplace, insurance, and medical surveillance (Saguy 3–18; Rothblum and Solovay 1–7; Boero 1–24). The issue is structural: ordinary variation is converted into a rule by which bodies can be managed (Ray, *Bombagorer Raja*).

Throughout these poems, Ray continually makes the body a space where categories fail. It's not entirely human or animal; a voice doesn't control the singer; the strongman can't define his strength; the suitor can't be boiled down to a list; you can't go anywhere without having it governed. Gigantism and disproportion change the relation of observer and object (Stewart 70–103), and Susan Stewart's account of scale is beneficial in this regard. The gigantic stands beyond the man's capacity to be able to see the whole of it in one go. Whether or not they're literally gigantic, Ray's bodies can often produce a similar effect. They are too ‘semantically’ big to be in one category.

The pictures accentuate this process. Very often, Ray makes the impossible look possible – in a comic way. While the image does not simply “show” the body (Bhadury 75–96; Bhattacharya 64–69),

Bhadury's discussion of the bestiary and Bhattacharya's multimodal analysis help to explain this fact. It presents some visual evidence of an impossible category. The creature is clearly visible, and its nature is not known. It is similar to what Garland-Thomson described as the stare, but with a twist - the more of the visual information the reader receives, the less steady the classification. Stare is not closed.

III. Irregular Bodies in *Khāpchhārā*

While grotesque bodies are often products of *Abol Tabol*'s vivid creature-making, irregularity is the compositional principle of *Khāpchhārā*. The title itself suggests disjunction: something mismatched, out of joint, or resistant to smooth arrangement. Tagore's collection gives Bengali nonsense a distinctive anecdotal, urban, domestic, linguistic, and metapoetic tonality. Monsters are not always required; ordinary people enter situations in which body, appetite, work, expertise, and social role no longer correspond (Tagore).

The reception of *Khāpchhārā* matters because Tagore's nonsense has often been overshadowed by the solemnity attached to his canonical identity. Treating these poems as minor amusements reproduces a hierarchy in which philosophical value belongs to serious forms and nonsense is relegated to childhood. Scholarship on Indian nonsense resists that division: the collection's lightness is a mode of thought rather than an absence of thought (Heyman et al. xxvi–xxix; Tagore).

Sewell and Tigges help clarify this formal procedure. Literary nonsense does not simply reject order; it establishes a local rule and then applies pressure to it (Sewell 5; Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* 47). Tagore begins with a recognizable name, body, appetite, profession, or domestic scene, then disturbs the expected relation among them. Ahmed's account of orientation is useful because a body appears to fit only when the world's lines remain familiar; *Khāpchhārā* makes the body comic by redirecting those lines (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 1–20; Tagore).

Poem 9 begins with appetite: 'Tempted by rasgullas, Panchakari Mittir finished the whole packet' (my translation) (Tagore 12). The bodily consequence is rendered as broken machinery beneath the liver, and the final joke turns his stomach into a memorial meeting for his own deed. The poem does not merely moralize eating; it stages appetite, diagnosis, blame, and familial ridicule as rival explanations of the body. Fat Studies clarifies the ideological step by which an excessive act is made to reveal a supposedly stable character (Farrell 3–11; Saguy 3–18).

Poem 10 makes body normativity explicit when Tinkari decides, 'By eating less and less, I make this body thin' (my translation) (Tagore 13). He does so because his house is crowded with servants and broken furniture, turning a shrinking body into a strategy of spatial management. Thinness is not presented as an inherent virtue; it is an improvised response to an environment that does not fit.

Ahmed's relational model of orientation and Garland-Thomson's normate are thus literalized: the apparent defect belongs neither to body nor room alone, but to the relation between them (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 1–20; Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 8–10).

That distinction is visible again in poem 11: 'Four wrestlers from Mechhuabazar clean rubbish in other people's rooms' (my translation) (Tagore 15). The strongman's expected role is mismatched with domestic cleaning; the body is not anatomically grotesque, but social designation and labour no longer align. This is less an instance of Bakhtin's lower bodily stratum than a compact zany rearrangement of capacity, work, and status. The mismatch exposes the cultural script that decides which labour properly belongs to which body (Bakhtin 317–18; Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* 174–82).

Poem 18 takes the cultural construction of bodily expertise further. Anukul Babu reasons that 'grass has vitamins' and that cattle, sheep, and horses 'live by eating grass'; he then imposes the analogy upon a human stomach until he dies (my translation) (Tagore 23). The closing claim that science would have been proved had he survived parodies an abstract norm imposed against bodily difference. The body fails not because it is inherently irregular but because a theory ignores species, appetite, and situated capacity. Nonsense makes the violence of that false equivalence visible (Lecerle 29; Tagore 23).

There's a lot to be learned from this insight in Fat Studies. The moral, medical, emotional, and economic judgments that are attached to the term "fat" are often disregarded in anti-fat discourse, which often uses the word "fat" as if it were a superficial sign of the body. While names have been the subject of struggle, the struggle over naming is not about the quantity of body mass (Cooper, *Fat Activism* 1–16; LeBesco 1–13). As a language, *Khāpchhārā* is unstable, making the naming of its body in literature never quite certain. This is not the liberation of fat, but it does challenge the epistemological certainty that underpins the stigmatizing label.

The use of absurd transformation is another important aspect of Tagore. Transformation is the making of the body as a temporal identity, not an essential one. If the body can be otherwise, then it can't be reduced to the statement that its current state shows that it is the truth of the matter. Becoming is the theme here, and it is expressed on a more subdued level, as Bakhtin has led the way. The unfinished body is not just a body whose orifices are protruding, but a body that has not been closed (Bakhtin 317–18) in terms of its meaning. Also, in Ahmed's orientations, there is a sense of a temporality, of repetition of line in order to achieve familiarity, but also of a leaving, crossing, or redrawing of lines (*Queer Phenomenology* 1–20). The reader is taken a few times by Tagore's nonsensical writing to a glimpse of that instability.

Although the politics of scale in *Khāpchhārā* is not as similar to Ray's bestiary, it is still important. Stewart's definition of miniature and gigantic is not merely quantitative; it's relational, pertaining to relations of mastery, distance, interiority and exteriority (Stewart 70–103). Through his scale, Nonsense is both 'scaled' and 'conceptually scaled'. An uncomplicated physical aspect can capture a social scene, a gigantic statement can buckle to a small reason, a common object can be the standard for a human being. Reversals change the body's hierarchy—where some facts about the body are treated as central, and others are treated as incidental.

This is particularly important with regard to stigma. Goffman demonstrates how one single marked feature of a person can ultimately become socially “master” information which reshapes the perception of the total person (Goffman 3–5). Body size does this when it overpowers everything else that defines the individual, and disability does this when it is the only thing in which the person is known (Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 8–10; Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy* 23–49). This could be considered a formal parody of the process that is described by *Khāpchhārā*'s scale-shifting humor. If a bunch of idiotic noise can make anything sound terrific, then the social custom to judge a person by their body starts to seem rather constructively random.

A critical reading must recognize that the irregular body may still be the target of the joke. Nonsense does not automatically become emancipatory merely because it disrupts categories. Fat, disabled, old, gender-nonconforming, racialized, and otherwise marked bodies have long histories as comic spectacles. Grotesque visibility can expose dominant norms while also reaffirming the body as an object of display (Russo 53–73). Garland-Thomson likewise treats staring as ethically ambivalent; the lightness of *Khāpchhārā* therefore requires attentive interpretation rather than an assumption that every mismatch is liberating (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 3–7).

Tagore's best attempts at being funny are to simply re-target the ridicule, so many incongruous layers of it that no stable spectator can be left out. The "normal" observer is drawn into a world where the use of categories no longer holds true. The sense of social superiority/difference between the one who laughs and the one being laughed at is reduced. This is one way in which nonsense can be valuable work which cannot be done by a simple satire. Satire is often based on a norm upon which there is an assumption that it is stable without deviation. The norm may be made to shiver by the 'nonsense' (Tagore; Heyman et al. xxvi–xxix; Tigges 47)

A comparative theoretical reading of *Abol Tabol* and *Khāpchhārā* reveals two related but distinct modes of non-normative embodiment. In *Abol Tabol*, bodily form is typically hybrid and exaggerated, while corporeal excess appears through appetite, gigantism, and mutation. Its comedy frequently depends on grotesque spectacle, and its challenge to normativity operates by disturbing accepted ideas

of bodily proportion; consequently, classification itself becomes unstable. In *Khāpchhārā*, by contrast, bodies are more often asymmetrical, mismatched, or placed in situations of transformation and instability. The comic effect is therefore produced less through spectacular grotesquerie than through absurd incongruity, and the text challenges bodily coherence by making the assumptions behind normality appear arbitrary. The comparison suggests that Ray destabilizes the boundaries through which bodies are classified, whereas Tagore unsettles the apparent naturalness of the standards by which bodily and social coherence are judged. Despite their different comic strategies, both collections use corporeal irregularity to expose normality as a constructed and contestable category rather than a neutral condition.

IV. The Politics of Laughter: Stigma, Reversal, and Nonsense

Laughter is the argument's least stable element. It would be politically naive to assume that playful nonsense necessarily undermines bodily norms. Comedy has repeatedly made fat, disabled, aging, racialized, gender-nonconforming, and sexually coded bodies bear the burden of difference. A history of the grotesque is therefore inseparable from a history of stigma. The central question is not simply whether a body is funny, but how that humour positions the reader in relation to it (Farrell 3–11; Russo 53–73; Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 3–7).

This positioning can be better understood with Garland-Thomson's use of the term "looking" and "staring." *Staring* can objectify, but can also be a meeting that shakes up one's usual notions about the everyday (*Staring* 3–7). Nonsense laughter can be interpreted as having the same ambivalence. The reader might laugh at the body's failure because it is different from the norm, or the impossible shape of the body might expose the norm to be a laughable demand. That's a difference of direction. Is there a downward flow of laughter toward the marked body, or does it flow sideways and upward toward the systems producing marking?

Here, fat studies is a must, as anti-fat humor can be covered up as a kind of nonthreatening humor. In all of their writing, Wann, LeBesco, and a discussion of "revolting" fat identity, Cooper, *Fat Activism*, and a history of stigma, Farrell, all exhibit how jesting about fatness fits within larger regimes of shame (Wann 9–17; LeBesco 1–13; Cooper, *Fat Activism* 1–16; Farrell 3–11). Fat people are also the subject of apparently accidental acts of harm, as in Aubrey Gordon's contemporary work (Gordon 13–24). A literary critic, therefore, is unable to save all of the big-bodied comics from being rescued from carnival. The question of the ethics of this still has to be answered: what is the use of bodily difference other than to be looked at and laughed at?

In Ray's best poems, this complexity is introduced as ridicule doesn't necessarily remain where it's found. The animal is silly, but the people who classify it, the people who regulate it, the strong people who practice superiority, the authorities who lay down the law, the ones who watch it, even the ones who need to be explained to, enter the comic field. For example, "*Bombagorer Raja*" is about the grotesque nature of authority because it craves regulation. "*Sat Patro*" takes the evaluative social reason to the absurd because of its fixation on criteria. The flow of "*Ganer Gunto*" is unending and makes the performance grotesque. Normality is not a safe observing post even if an odd body starts off the joke (Ray, *Bombagorer Raja*; Ray, *Sat Patro*; Ray, *Ganer Gunto*).

Tagore's approach is more dispersed. In *Khāpchhārā*, mismatch becomes so recurrent that the distinction between normal observer and abnormal object grows uncertain. Appetite becomes machinery, thinness becomes spatial strategy, wrestlers become cleaners, and dietary science destroys the body it claims to improve (Tagore 12–15, 23). This resembles Bakhtin's loosening of hierarchy, but Tagore's nonsense should not be collapsed into a Rabelaisian model. Its politics is often linguistic and relational: labels, professions, names, and expectations go awry, weakening the language that sorts bodies (Bakhtin 317–18; Lecercle 29).

Lecercle's theory of nonsense can be helpful here as the genre demonstrates that language itself cannot be completely dominant with its own components (Lecercle 29). Words have echoes, sounds, two levels of meaning, arbitrary conventions, and unconsciously associated meanings. In the absence of stable meaning, it is impossible to have stable identity through body classification (which is conducted through language). The comic body is made into a place where the fragility of the sign is displayed.

Disability Studies adds an essential ethical caveat: bodily difference is not automatically liberating. Mitchell and Snyder's 'narrative prosthesis' names the use of disability as a device for character, crisis, metaphor, or resolution, while Shildrick shows how 'monstrous' bodies can be held as boundary figures even as actual embodied subjects remain marginalized (Mitchell and Snyder 47–64; Shildrick 1–13). The critical question for Ray and Tagore is therefore whether the nonsense body opens imaginative possibility or is merely made available for the reader's imaginative freedom.

Ray's creatures often do not lend themselves to complete instrumentalization due to their instability in signifying. This resistance matters. This creature that can be read as "greed" or "colonial bureaucracy" – and nothing else – is no longer nonsense in Tigges' meaning, and the tension between sense and nonsense is removed by interpretation. *Abol Tabol*'s important message can sometimes be found in the bits that can't be decoded. There can be political satire, but it is the body that surpasses it. After the allegory, the creature's linguistic, visual, and anatomical abnormality remains (Ray; Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* 47).

It is at this point where Fat Studies and nonsense theory come together in the most fruitful manner. Fat Studies calls into question the expectation that fat bodies will serve a purpose related to health, morality, productivity, or a “fat self” that is acceptable. Nonsense counters the call for signs to clarify to a certain end. At its extreme, both cannot be explained. So there's no reason why fatness is a joke or why it's a freedom from fat. It essentially implies that epistemological structures are similar: a norm requires legibility; the marked body is required to explain itself; refusal is irrational. Ray and Tagore continually envision figures that don't do everything for themselves (LeBesco 1–13; Cooper, *Fat Activism* 1–16; Lecercle 29).

This is complemented by Ahmed's discussion of affect and orientation. Discomfort can be produced by bodies that break up existing lines, in that they "show" that the line was never natural (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 1–20; *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 10–13). A neutral chair that works for some bodies feels terrible for others when they come into contact with it as an obstacle. A social joke, one that takes as its starting point that there's one scale of proper embodiment, is neutral until the terms of that non-normative body are revealed. Nonsense is a literary technology which can be used to make this encounter deliberate. Does not allow the reader to flow easily.

Ngai's zany changes how laughter is understood: zany comedy is anxious, busy, and tied to overperformance rather than relaxation (Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* 174–82). These bodies labour excessively to remain intelligible, strong, musical, rule-following, or spectacular, and the joke arrives as performance approaches breakdown. In *Ganer Gunto*, the singer's surplus threatens the world; in *Palowan*, masculine strength must be continuously demonstrated; and in *Bombagorer Raja*, bodies must constantly adjust to arbitrary commands. Normality becomes exhausting work (Ray, *Ganer Gunto*; Ray, *Palowan*; Ray, *Bombagorer Raja*).

This produces an important political shift. What appears to be effortless bodily fit is often an effect of environments organized around some bodies rather than others. Fat, disabled, queer, and otherwise marked bodies are named as problems when the difficulty may lie in the surrounding space, institution, or norm (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 1–20; Titchkosky 3–21; Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 8–10). Ray's nonsense makes the labour of normalcy comic: rules multiply, bodies bend, classifications fail, and explanations proliferate. The supposedly simple world of ‘normality’ is revealed as continuous maintenance.

The politics of laughter therefore depends on whether the text leaves the reader comfortably superior. At its most nonsensical, it does not. The reader may laugh at *Kumro Potash*, Gangaram, Bhismalochan, Tinkari, or Anukul Babu, yet the habits of classification, marriageability, discipline, dieting, and expertise are equally exposed as absurd (Ray, *Kumro Potash*; Ray, *Sat Patro*; Ray, *Ganer Gunto*;

Tagore 13, 23). Disproportion makes its measuring frame visible: one laughs at appetite and then encounters institutions with a still greater appetite for control.

This ambivalence does not erase stigma. Contemporary readers may hear violence in jokes that earlier audiences received as harmless humour, and that historical shift should not be dismissed. Ray and Tagore inherit comic traditions that expose marked bodies to the gaze, yet they also invent nonsensical structures that unsettle the authority of the normal gaze. A critical reading must hold both possibilities together rather than declare the texts innocent or wholly emancipatory (Russo 53–73; Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 3–7).

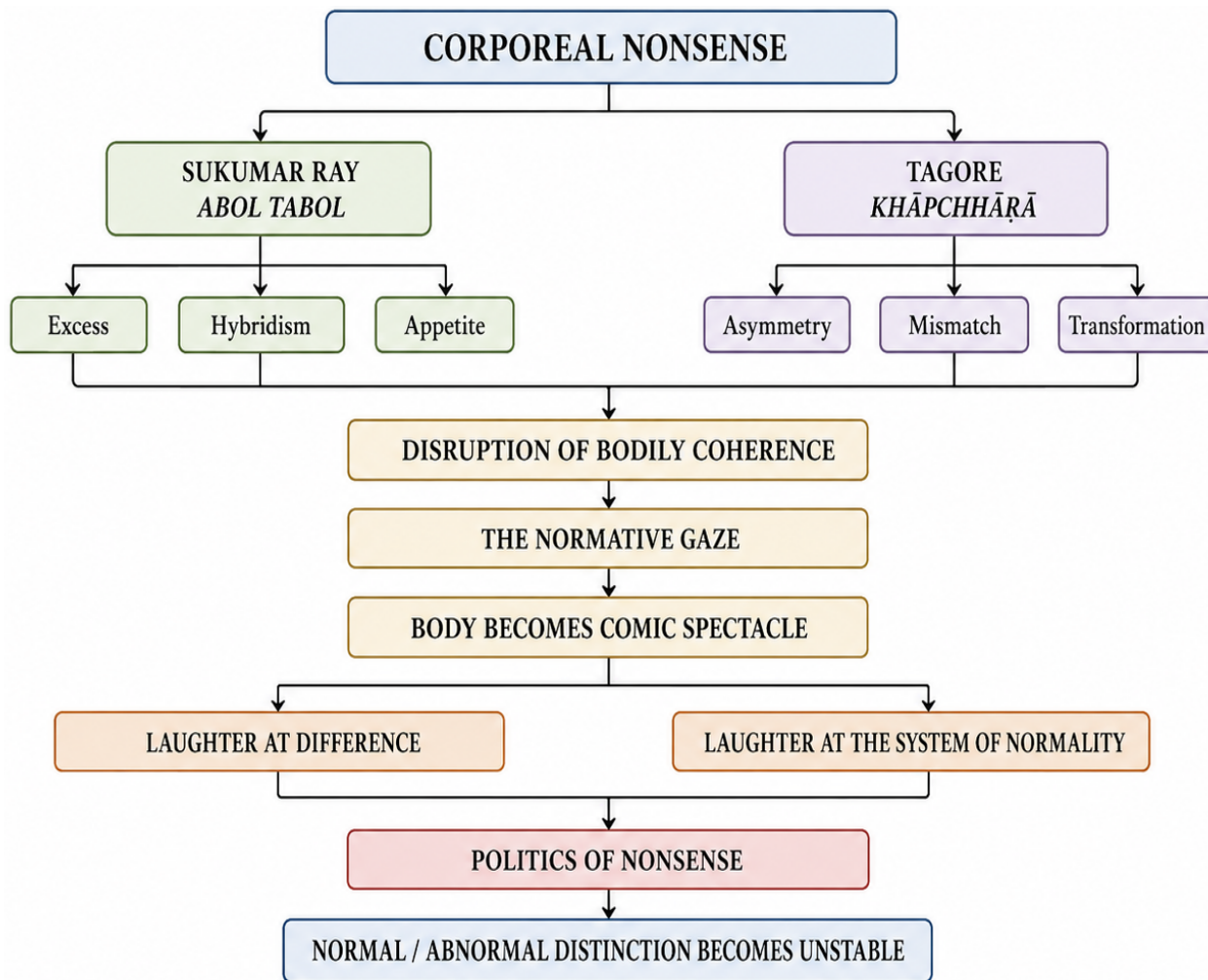


Figure 2. Comparative Model of Corporeal Nonsense in Ray and Tagore

Conclusion: The Body That Makes the Frame Visible

Bodies Out of Proportion has contended that the body's otherness in *Abol Tabol* and *Khāpchhārā* is not a decorative part of the idea of nonsense, but a part of the way of thinking that it is. In successive scenes, Ray and Tagore challenge the cultural illusion of the unified body, its boundedness, its proportionate form, its readability, self-control, and the way it fits into and is fit for the world. Their enlarged, large-mouth, hybrid, asymmetrical, hyperactive, and morphing figures eat you and turn embodiment into an issue of classification (Ray; Tagore).

Fat Studies is a problem that is made legible because it denies a medical normalisation of what size means. Fatness is culturally constructed via moral, risk, attractiveness, discipline and citizenship discourses (LeBesco 1–13; Cooper, *Fat Activism* 1–16; Farrell 3–11; Saguy 3–18; Wann 9–17; Rothblum and Solovay 1–7). When used correctly, this framework can be used to read Bengali nonsense without making each and every grotesque body a fat body. It uncovers, rather, the attachment of “excess” to bodies and a literary play to make excess unattach a single morphology.

The grotesque body is open, unfinished, and in process (Bakhtin 317–18), the theoretical centre. This aesthetics is particularly evident in Ray's creatures, where body and world merge, voice turns into a physical force, species merge, and then two, and identity isn't definable by anatomy. But Disability Studies counters any “celebration of grotesque difference” by “putting the history of staring, spectacle, normalcy, and representational use” in the foreground (Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy* 23–49; Mitchell and Snyder 47–64; Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 8–10). The destabilizer can be stabilized and yet still have to pay for the destabilization.

Ahmed and Ngai join to explain two other aspects. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed demonstrates that fit is not a quality that could be situated solely within the body, but one that is a relation between the body and world. The mismatches in *Khāpchhārā* are a recurring way of dramatizing this relationality. In Ngai's zany, comic excess is created as a result of the unstable performance and labor (*Our Aesthetic Categories* 174–82). Ray's singers, strongmen, rulers, and rule-bound citizens prove that normalcy itself can be a strenuous affair (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 1–20; Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* 174–82).

The theory of nonsense, which finally alters the meaning of political. Sewell, Tigges, Lecercle, Deleuze, Heyman et al. lead us not to consider ‘nonsense’ as a failure of ‘sense’ (Sewell 5). Nonsense builds local orders that contradict each other to thus render the ordinary orders new to the perception. In these texts, the peculiar body is not just politically significant because it provides an allegorical message but because it does not come into the process of closing too quickly.

The big question, 'Who Laughs?', thus has no definitive answer. In some instances, the body in question is the target of the laughter itself. Sometimes it's authority, expertise, manliness, bureaucracy, etiquette or linguistic certainty that is the punchline. Most importantly, the direction of laughter can shift as much as in the same poem. The trouble is a weakness in the argument; it is the politics of nonsense itself.

Ray and Tagore were not advocates of contemporary fat acceptance, disability justice, or body positivity; describing them in those terms would be anachronistic. Their formal intervention is different: they imagine worlds in which bodily proportion cannot guarantee truth. The normal body loses the privilege of invisibility because standards of fit become visible through nonsense. Once proportion appears as a cultural rule rather than a natural fact, it becomes available for critique (Ray; Tagore).

The body out of proportion then does a double movement. It catches the eye and reflects the eye of the viewer. It seems a bit extreme but reveals the extreme nature of categorisation. It does not fit into the container, but in the trying, it shows the shape of the container. With *Abol Tabol* and *Khāp̄chhārā*, nothing is quite so ridiculous as to just celebrate strange bodies. It renders 'strangeness' a way of thinking about all bodies (Ray; Tagore).

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