

# **“The Call of the Man”**

## **Detecting Gender, Culture and Masculinity in Feluda**

Thesis submitted to

Jawaharlal Nehru University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

## **Master of Philosophy**

by

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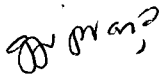
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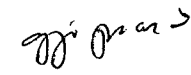
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**Declaration by the Candidate**

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*To Baba,*

*for all the hours of the storyteller*

*To Ma,*

*for the making of the bookworm in her rebuking fashion*

*And to Chhotu,*

*for believing that I can make it rain.*

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## HARK THE HERALD

### The making of the Universe...

*To her fair works did nature link*

*The human soul that through me ran;*

*And much it griev'd me my heart to think*

*What man has made of man.*

*(Lines written in Early Spring: William Wordsworth)<sup>1</sup>*

Bengali literature has been obsessed with 'man' and the 'man' authors have worried to no end about what they have 'made of' the Bengali man. Ashish Nandy's concern over the various tropes of masculinities in colonial India, which had gone many alterations in the hands of various authors and hence fashioning selves in India, derives from the assumption of how literature subjectivizes the reader and not merely caters to his enjoyment. He elucidates from the works of various writers of the early nineteenth century, he critiques the *ksatriyahood* prophesizing works of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and says how writers such as Michael Madhusudan Dutta were creating 'hard' warrior like protagonists to reconstruct the notion of manhood deriving from the Hindu notion of hyper-masculine Indians in *Meghnadbad Kavya* and builds on his argument on the importance to build the picture of *purusatva* in whose wake would emerge the post colonial *purusha*.

Nandy ultimately sides with Gandhi and his construction of man which derived from *naritva* which Nandy calls the sublime and aligned to *pakriti*, which is greater than *purusatva* that does not depend on the militancy prophesized by the Hindu slayers and saviour which caused the terrorism in colonial Bengal. In a Wordsworthian strain Nandy argues how *naritva*, the higher state of being should be allowed to penetrate *purusatva* in order to prevent 'man' from becoming a victim of *kapurusatva*. This reminded me of the lines Wordsworth wrote once in early spring and I co-opted them to suit my saga of what 'man' in their effort to be a man made of the figure of the Bengali man in their works.

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<sup>1</sup> As available on <http://quotations.about.com/od/poemlyrics/a/wordsworth17.htm> as accessed on 02.05.2009



A case of extreme penetration of the *purusha* by *naritva* can be perceived in the works of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, whose prototype protagonists Shekhar (*Parineeta*) and Devdas (*Devdas*) are men with fragile egos and the only other characteristic which dare challenges their narcissism is their lack of understanding of women. The wallowing self pity of their ill fated love stories made one wonder how would '*prakriti*' finally influence her souls and make men out of them. One, however, had to just turn to the body of crime fiction emerging in the wake of the colonial modern Bengal. The detective in Bengali literature has always been a figure which merges the natural instincts of a sharp mind to his ability to logically refigure his surroundings to establish order amidst chaos. Hence the detective I would argue is the man who maneuvers his *pakritic* qualities to effect the broader social structures that he operates in. The *naritva* in him is therefore evident. However sadly, there is where it ends.

The detective as a genre has been very explicit in its proclamation of being the garden of Eden where Eve has not made her appearance yet. The male struts about like a peacock and unfurls his wisdom at the lesser creatures. He is content in what he is and needs no female intuition to guide him in his path. Hence if at all a female enters this universe he accommodates her but is by then a fully formed persona in his own right (as is the case in Byomkesh Bakshi) or else there are no females in these narratives to claim significance or prominence (as is the case of Feluda). This paper works on this fact in Bengali literary genre and establishes how the female lives comfortably absent from the chaotic world which the detective corrects and finally elucidates how translation becomes that 'third space' between the all male universe and the target male reader which accommodates the voice of the female by engaging with the translation of *The Adventures of Feluda*, a popular detective series originally written by Satyajit Ray, by Gopa Majumdar.

### **How reading is no more an appropriation...**

*"If he is good at crime detection, why don't you let him do all the hard work? Why waste your own time making enquiries?"*

*Ah well, Tinkori Babu might know a lot about printing and typefaces, but that doesn't necessarily mean he'd know everything."*

(Danger in Darjeeling, *The Complete Adventures of Feluda*, Vol I, p. 11)

The extract I have quoted above explains through the casual conversation between Feluda and his cousin why we fans are so hooked to detective fiction. The puzzle is not merely the smart sleuth's to solve but it is the labyrinth of adventure which extends from the narrative and engulfs the reader into its depth with the lure of the plot. We plunge into the maze willingly, taking up the challenge of yet another mystery. The only case I can put forward at the moment is mine and hence my paper would plunge into an anecdote to validate the point how female readership falls short of paving way for the female to trespass into the territory which has clearly been demarcated for the male.

Due to my education in a missionary school, Famous Fives and Secret Sevens had crawled onto my bookshelf long before Feluda or any other Bengali sleuth made it. This might not be true for the others who suffered schools such as mine but it is interesting to know how Feluda happened to an average Bengali anglophile accidentally.

It was a sunny day in February when I, a rather plump girl of eleven then, strolled into the Kolkata Book Fair flanked by my parents impatient to lay my hands on the volumes by Enid Blyton. Much to my annoyance all my parents did was to wander into stalls which stocked books which looked appealing only to walruses. As I tugged impatiently at my father's sleeve he bent down and thrust a slim book into my hands and said, "here is something I would rather you read..." my first Feluda lay in my hands. And yes, I picked it up after I had finished reading all the Blytons purchased in that stock. Frankly I did not quite like him then. The missing girl in the narrative sat with the book on her lap and imagined herself as Georgina who preferred to be called George than identify with Topshe who sighs in relief- "Feluda's answer pleased me, I bet Tinkori babu isn't as clever as Feluda."

At the age of eleven one tends to value venturing out into the moors with torch lights more than climbing up a tree to stay clear of danger as the ever so great cousin takes care of a Royal Bengal tiger. Yet, just as I have stated above the lure of the detective is particularly hard to overcome. I fell into the trap of finding my own solutions to Feluda's puzzles and took up the challenge of solving them before the famous professional desi Sherlock Holmes managed to. And so one moved on to unsex herself and become the thirteen and a half years old sidekick who regards Feluda with adoring eyes. Thus the world of the Charminar smoking, pistol carrying detective became mine.

For a Bengali girl in her early years this is no surprising feat, because the usual Bengali adventures have been the non accommodating male universes where the hero achieved wonderful feats by solving riddles or deciphering the coded clues and so on. We have all done it too often to even register how exclusive these male detective worlds are. As for Feluda, he is a young man in his twenties, who lives with his uncle and calls himself "Private Investigator." His cases take him from Kolkata to Kathmandu and Lucknow to London. His thrilling adventures are narrated by his teenage cousin Tapeshe, who he fondly calls Topshe.

Topshe is Feluda's assistant. Later Lalmohan Ganguly, who is the author of bestselling adventure pot boilers, joins the team. He is a foil to Feluda's profound intelligence and is the source of most of the humour in the series. The core team has no female characters, even the important kids in the series are males, the world of the brotherhood functions uncaring for the absence of any woman. The loss of the woman from the order of things can only be perceived by a female reader when the Western counterparts of the adventure novels sketch characters like Anne or George, who is a tomboy in all senses but is ultimately as she is often reminded, a girl. The lament for the absent female settles in much later, in retrospective theorization or worse, never sets in at all. The androgynous side of every child, defiant of her girlhood and too young to welcome womanhood identifies with a male character and allows her to enjoy the series as much as a boy and like George she becomes a tomboy who reads detective fiction rather than sitting with her doll's house.

Satyajit Ray emphatically states that he has modelled Feluda on Sherlock Holmes, only having replaced the pipe with a filter-less Charminar cigarette. The English Holmesian genius has now been appropriated in the post colonial figure of the detective as Baker Street has been relocated in post colonial Bengal. The Bengali *Bhadralok* ethos which Ray

addresses, as Devangshu Dutta in a Business Standard article<sup>2</sup> says, is a post colonial construction of the rational and crisp Bengali man; far removed from the effeminate Devdas figure, who was the cult romantic Bengali hero in his own right, in his own times. Of course the Bengali men could use some adrenaline and brain stimulation.

However, within the Feluda narrative Ray is modelling the typical Bengali masculinities. First published in 1965 and later published as a series till 1991 the detective was born a year later Nehru's death. Feluda reached his high in career when India was in a crisis of masculinity again after the colonial times. Post independence India faced unprecedented unrest with the Indo- Pakistan war in 1971 to the emergency which was declared across the country till late in the decade.<sup>3</sup> This is when Feluda completed his years in making and emerged as a well formed character in the wake of the decade. The masculinity project hence is not unfounded more so when the sleuth himself is made into what every boy aspires to be.

The training project is apparent through the body of the narrative. Topshe, the adolescent, soon man to be, adored and admires Feluda's physical and intellectual prowess and from him learns the necessity to be a man of learning who does not remain constrained within his domestic circle and Topshe in no time develops the thrill for adventures and masters skills of deduction albeit not as good as his cousin but better than what he would have been without Feluda's influence. Since Feluda was written for the young adolescent boys as the target readers, the simultaneous identification between Topshe influences the reader to develop the idea of the post colonial Bengali as the wanderlusting Feluda and they all want to become like him. The larger than a Bengali life hero leads a million dreams of his numerous ardent fans to be the man that he is and forms the Bengali imagination of the man-to-be.

Here Satyajit Ray uses the 'dada' trope for hegemonizing the mind of his young readers. Here 'dada' is used in the literal sense for addressing the elder brother, and in Bengali parlance he naturally would be called 'dada' since Feluda is Topshe's cousin. However one does tend to become a bit wary since this word is not rid of a lineage of significance when contextualized in terms of its use in Bengali literature. More than a mere familial address, this word has been used to the effect of generating social significance. The word 'dada' derives

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<sup>2</sup> As cited in the article titled "The Bengali Sherlock Holmes" by Devangshu Datta on <<<http://www.business-standard.com/india/storypage.php?autono=49773>>> accessed on 10-2-2009

<sup>3</sup> Information accessed on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Republic_of_India)

from the familiar address made to the leader of a 'dal' and his 'chelas' followed him for achieving a common goal of the group, "[f]ollowers call the dada their preceptor and dasas often engage in teaching practical skills, ideology and political strategy to their followers."<sup>4</sup>

Since Satyajit Ray was very disillusioned with politics in India, as he states in his interview translated by Samik Bandopadhyay, the political conditioning is left out of the training project and instead Feluda sets about correcting social crimes like smuggling of Indian art and architecture (*A Killer in Kailash*), drug trafficking (*The Criminals of Kathmandu*) and of course includes treasure hunts (*Royal Bengal Mystery*), solving difficult riddles (*The Locked Chest*) and digging up of graves in graveyards (*The Secret of the Cemetery*). Rather than siding with any particular strain of politics Feluda is concerned with doing broader social good and by the middle of the second volume of the anthology of Feluda stories this .32 colt carrying sleuth has taught his faithful cousin how to engage in single combat with his enemies, think beyond what is obvious, move silently and swiftly. Though rather than highlighting the very helpful weapon that Feluda carries, Feluda teaches his readers how to use what he calls, 'magajashtra' (the weapon that is the 'magaja' or mind).

Most of Feluda's plots are unfurled by the crisp, Western rational faculty of mind, the agility of the body which is fast and an extreme bibliophilia. A minor yet indispensable and recurrent character in the body of Feluda works in Sidhu Uncle, who is someone who would have records of an incident which happened somewhere in America which involved the blowing up of a laboratory causing blindness of a researcher at the verge of completing his research (*The Mysterious Tenant*). He is modelled on the stereotype of the Bengali obsessed with archives, documents and books and collects newspapers and practically sits on a pile of information every time Feluda meets him. This stereotype of the bespectacled Bengali bibliophile who knows all but does little has been created by Ray and serves the purpose of a live archive and though Feluda visits the National library in Kolkata on numerous occasions, the interactions with this Uncle becomes very interesting and appeals far more to the age group Ray is writing for. The detective accesses Sidhu Uncle's resources and engages in action directly deriving from the information he has been supplied with unlike his uncle who laments "I could have done a lot had I wanted to but..." ('The Curse of the Goddess', *The Complete Adventures of Feluda* Vol. I. pg 761). Unlike him Feluda processes the resources and with information brings about social transformation.

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<sup>4</sup> From Leonard Gordon's essay *Portrait of a Bengal Revolutionary*.

Another significant male figure is Jatayu, who completes the trio, he is usually taken to be the foil to Feluda, he is extremely confused, funny and extremely ill informed but immensely successful, whose fame exceeds even Feluda's. Responsible for supplying dollops of humour in the stories Jatayu aka Lalmohan Ganguly, who teases and admires Feluda, causes him to laugh and frown in exasperation. One would have dismissed him had Sandip Ray, current director of Feluda Films in Bengali and son of Satyajit Ray would not have said that, "a character like Lalmohan Babu for instance would be difficult to translate without altering his very Bengali temperament."<sup>5</sup> Hence one wonders whether his presence in the detective stories is merely for the benign purpose of supplying humour. The fact that Sandip Ray makes him uphold the onus of portraying the Bengali temperament makes his extremely comic construction significant. I perceive a polarity that the Rays constructed in the figure of this 'very Bengali' man. This temperament would cause someone to look comical and evidently uncomfortable in western attire and would give him the capacity to be just a monolingual, easily influenced by voodoo and make irrational accusations without any faculty of deduction yet an extremely efficient storyteller and immensely successful due to the Bengali populus lapping up his under-researched stories where he confuses that the camel's hump with its stomach (The Golden Fortress). He is the character who won hearts and steered clear of every Western influence on post colonial Bengal.

This is a character who is at best a sprinter, as fast as a rabbit, but never a man, never the ideal Bengali man who cannot be a marvellous yet petty joke. I guess this is the reason why Feluda's worthy adversary is not a Bengali man at all; he is the hyper masculine, shrewd business man and smuggler, drug dealer Maganlal Meghraj. He is Nandy's rakshasha, who is left a villain and not subverted into a defeated hero, since the Feluda series is no tragedy and Meghraj never succeeds in defeating Feluda and never is mistaken as a Bengali. The Bengali postcolonial 'man' hence is not a mere warrior but a man of agility, wisdom and is trained in skills which have been borrowed from our colonial masters of course borrowing only best from the two worlds.

### **The Promise of the Research**

The area of my research is not only confined to gender studies but is also culturally locating Feluda in the political history of India. I would like to compare him to other detective from

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<sup>5</sup> As stated to Romila Bhattacharya in an interview for Screen. Article accessed in <[www.banglalive.com/patrika/sanglap/sanglap\\_detail\\_16-8-2004.asp](http://www.banglalive.com/patrika/sanglap/sanglap_detail_16-8-2004.asp)>

Kolkata and assess how at various political brackets in time the figure of the detective has asserted his masterful masculine mannerisms to fit the imagination of his times. In the due course of my research I would like to compare Felu Mittir with his successful predecessors like Kiriti Roy and Byomkesh Bakshi. Therefore my research would engage intricately with the detective fiction genre in Bengali to locate this Charminar smoking detective as a literary cultural icon.

My research would like to locate the feminine intuition and presence in the alpha male world of the bachelor detective, as formerly readers (especially the female readers) have complained about the absence of females in the scheme of the Feluda body of fiction. I would like to locate this lament in the project of masculinity and address the broader question of detective fiction at least in Bengali has primarily been a masculine scape of heroic deeds, which leaves social correction in the able hands of the male and often does away with the females. By the time Feluda emerges, the dream of a Miss Marple in Bengali literature has long since failed due to the miserable plight of the female investigators of the genre. Though Byomkesh's wife is a significant part of the trio her role is the most powerful in the case where she impresses our star sleuth into falling in love with her, in the rest of the series she appears to be extremely preoccupied with her domestic chores. Feluda glaringly flaunts a universe where the significance of a woman has trickled to almost a void. I would like to investigate whether this masculinity project has as a natural consequence done away with the female due to the nation's concern over the effeminate colonial subject, who has by now been made aware of adrenaline and the need to be a *purusha*.

Such is the premise with which I would like to traverse into the world of Feluda, where the series obsesses with men, creates a universe out of the hyper masculine actions and detections and emerges out of a cultural history born out of a crisis during colonisation. The characters created in the series represent social stereotypes and come from a literary history which has been one the most formulaic of genres in Bengali. The emergence of detective fiction as serious literature and not just literature born out of thrills and scandalous dealings has spurred on attempts at creating fiction which do not merely serve popular thirst for the sensational. Therefore this project aims at evaluating the masculinity of the series with its due cultural connotation and socio-historical significance.

For the evaluation of the genre one must address a few characteristic features defines detective fiction. W H Auden states that the 'classical' English detective story typically re-

enacts acts of affirmation of good over evil by hunting down the beginning of evil and exposing it.<sup>6</sup> The surrender of evil, as Wright asserts, must not be achieved by ‘unmotivated confessions’ or ‘accidents’ or ‘coincidence’ but through logical deductions.<sup>7</sup> Hence the genre by definition is a genre which captures the instinctive thirst for justice and moral correction in the reader and pits him right in the middle of its plot by titillating his faculty of reason and rationality. Information and clues are stated in the fiction and made access to the reader through testimonies, statements or just general information, so that the reader might be pitted against the detective in a clash of wits till the transgression is corrected and the transgressor overthrown. Hence in the end of the detective there is a summarisation of the plot reported either by the detective himself or some other character reinstating the championing of the moral order. This idea of fairness is integral in the narrative of a detective story. Detective fiction engages the reader by pitting him into its plot. As Peter Brookes states, this makes it a part of the ‘low brow’ branch of literature written for mass entertainment. He says that reading for the plot stimulates ‘an active quest of the reader for those shaping ends that, terminating the dynamic process of reading, promise to bestow meaning and significance on the beginning and the middle.’<sup>8</sup> The integral identification in the genre is the juncture of the points of inquiry into the genre. Here I would like to engage with the pitting of the reader in the middle of all things and my studies on the culture, gender and history therein.

This dissertation can best be described as sleuth studies. The research covers a time period from the inception of the first detective in Bengal till one traverses around a hundred years of detective literature and the evolution of the detective character, formations of stereotypes and conventions and the arrival to the set formulas used in the genre to make a series successful. The character of Feluda has been developed out of a lineage of extremely masculine detectives and hence before the research delves into the universe of Feluda it would engage with the masculinity of detectives before him. The obsession with the ‘male rationale’ as has been privileged in this genre has led to the negation of the female from the scheme of plots in the detective. My dissertation also focuses on the woman detectives and their universes and tries to account for their lack of popularity.

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Charles J Rzepka in his book *Detective Fiction*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> In Willard Huntington Wright’s book *Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Fiction*. In Haycraft. pg 193.

<sup>8</sup> From Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. New York: Knopf, 1984, p 19.



*"...cunning is always admired and wished for by minds conscious of inward weakness..."-*  
*Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

## CHAPTER ONE: IN SEARCH OF THE SLEUTH

### **The Coming to Be...**

*“The Bengalee alone who is unfitted by physical disqualification for a constable, makes in this country the perfect detective” (The Annual Police Report of Calcutta of 1855)<sup>9</sup>*

It has been an extremely prejudiced and stereo typifying opinion among people who have little reason to think of themselves as Bengalis that the Bengali is not the aggressive warlike sort. Brawn not being a thing to boast of, Bengalis have more often than not, be it in the hands of the colonizers or the postcolonial non Bengali brotherhood, been thought of as the brainy fellow. This stereotype has shaped the expectation of a Bengali man where in his universe overpowering with mettle has been far more alluring than the use of any metal. Building upon the tendency of our colonial masters to distinguish and demarcating between martial and non martial races in India, these are a few of the assumptions with which one must start on a project which claims to define Bengali masculinity. For a race that seems to have taken the might of a pen too much to his heart and has turned his face away from the sword, many a figure has emerged as cultural or literary hero to identify with, as well as aspire to be in their search for the male ideal. The fact that Bengal has seen fiercest of militant revolutions and riots does not surface in the literary representation of a true Bengali, even in books written during times of unrest the thoughtful protagonist has been shown as one catapulted in the middle of militant uprising due to his convictions for a cause. While a lot of literature does talk of the armed Bengali man, the point of identification has been of them being an average brooding Bengali whose life has created circumstances of militancy in the vortex of which he has been tricked into. The identification of the reader with the character is due to very accessible and identifiable characteristics of the literary figure.

However this is not the same for the detective. From the onset the detective is asserted as not just another man, his skills, mettle and personality sets him apart from the reader. The thrill and excitement that is integral to the genre creates the competitive sphere where the reader engages with the puzzle with the intention of solving it before the super intelligent

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted from Sumanto Banerjee's *The Wicked City*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2009, p. 467.

man. This distance is often bridged by awe and aspiration. For the detective, therefore, it is imperative that he becomes inspirational and upholds the incredible feats as credible at the same time. This is when I argue the characterization of a detective becomes of supreme importance. He must not only stand for the imagination of a Bengali who can be identified with, but also account for his awe inspiring characteristics and his impeccable road to success. For the Bengali, this was an area which captured the reader's imagination on the onset; thankfully we had the police reports created by our superior colonial masters attesting to the fact that we always already had it in us and in the historical reality of colonial capital Calcutta such a figure became social presence. Thus it was just a matter of a proficient pen to capture such a figure and by incredible bouts of eulogizing and narrativising, to create in Bengali literature a genre which has been both popular and successful at the same time. This chapter traces the penetration of a cultural and social real into pages of literature and studies the evolution of the detective from a mere man to a super man of reasonable capabilities.

### **Appearance of the sleuth on the roads of Calcutta**

Sumanto Banerjee<sup>10</sup> states that the detective arrived in Bengal as a result of the advent of capitalist economy during late eighteenth and nineteenth century Bengal. Due to migration to the colonial capital Calcutta during urbanization the cityscape enfolded within its terrain pockets of crime which had changed its character from crimes before. If crime be as he argues an act of breaking the law then the nature of crime committed in modern Calcutta would be considerably different from what has been considered criminal before. For example the freedom struggle was considered by the British penal structure as a punishable offence and public execution of the criminal was accepted as a legal punishment then. Similarly, the urban Calcutta was faced with many new kinds of crimes such as forgery, theft, burglary and transformation from the police required to subdue the rebels.

But before discussing the nature of the police it is integral that one fully comprehends the nature of crime in Calcutta in transition. While the superfluous Bengali babus indulged in acts of petty violations some went steps ahead in breaching the law in order to preserve the lifestyle and extravagance demanded of his stature. The aspiring upward mobility of this class often led them to blindly pursue the acquisition of money and they became an undeniable part

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. pg. 477.

of the crime structure of this time. Due to famines and epidemics in the eighteenth century Bengal a lot of the rural populations had formed bands who looted and murdered for wealth and food, they came to be known as dacoits and the nature of their robbing determined whether they were mere *Daakaats*, *Thuggees*, *Tangees* etc. This was the manner in which the upper and lower classes were implicated in the crime scenario.

In eighteenth and nineteenth century Bengal there were many 'social bandits,' as Eric J Hobsbaum<sup>11</sup> would have me call them, who looted rich *zaminders* and British indigo planters and became heroes since they distributed the loot amidst the poor. These bandits also looted temples and their stories became extremely popular as the readers in Calcutta were caught fascinated by tales of heroes in a society distraught during these trying times.

"In British-ruled Calcutta also, the Indian Penal Code of 1860, enacted primarily to defend the administration of the colonial authorities and protect the financial and business interests of the officials and traders, criminalised a variety of activities that were deemed as civil offences in the pre-colonial period. The introduction of money economy with the development of banking with its use of credit, and the violation of the trust placed in persons dealing with money, made it necessary to extend the criminal law to cover transactions and deals in the areas of business and commerce, which were earlier governed by civil laws."<sup>12</sup>

Therefore the middle class constituting of the mercantile class and also the ones employed in administrative service or commercial business formed the third type of criminals in modern colonial Calcutta. Commercial individualism encouraged self advancement and the migrant of the metropolis pined to make use of every available method to reap the highest social and economic rewards. This new competitive mentality differed from the ambitious ends the individuals aimed at achieving in the pre-industrial and agrarian society.

Such an ambition gave rise to the state of art techniques of murder, burglary, fraud and swindling. Thus emerged the belief of the criminal as the artist and the fascination towards their creativity and prowess at executing their art in modern Bengal, hence the invincible mighty deviant was already capturing the interest of the people. This led to the popularity of yellow journalism, followed by detective fiction in contemporary Bengali literature.

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<sup>11</sup> Eric J Hobsbawm in *Bandits*, London, Weinfeld and Nicholson, 1969.

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.* Banerjee, p. 7.

“Vivid accounts of their gory deeds in newspaper columns in those days, and fictionalised narratives of their murderous acts in the chapbooks printed by the cheap publishing houses in north Calcutta (known as *Battala* publications, corresponding to the *penny dreadful* of London of the same period) were the staple of the new generation of literate and semi-literate Bengali readership.”<sup>13</sup>

Detective literature remained in this ghettoised stature for it suffered from sensationalised narratives of passionate criminals committing sexual crimes till it was resurrected to the stature of mainstream literature by the police detectives who wrote biographical details of their real time adventures and accorded the genre the required levitation, rid it of the prevalent cheap thrills and replaced them with credible tales of mystery and chase. The recruitment of these detectives into the police force of colonial Calcutta was a direct outcome of the increased threats against property, ownership of resources and mercantile factors engaged in transactions of profit.

In order to arrest and stop the nouveau anti socials a correcting mechanism was required to gauge and outwit their cunning. The new criminal therefore needed to be defeated in his own game of scheming and operation hence mere physical prowess was found wanting of such calibre and the correcting apparatus of the state began employing men who were capable enough to defeat the criminals in their own game. Such a feat not only demanded wit but an intricate knowledge of the geography of the city and a familiarity with the criminal mind and person. Therefore the police started to be constituted of not just the choudidars but a new set of Bengalis were hired by the British as Darogahs. The darogahs were mainly educated middle class Bengalis who were recruited in the force so as achieve the desired end since they could comprehend the criminals. They were trained in the Holmesian model of crime detection, privileging rational deduction and with an obsession with forensic sciences and chemistry.

The earliest accounts are of Priyonath Mukhopadhyay, who is a darogah and writes of his encounters with hardened criminals with whom he had hunted down by outwitting their tactics. His stories reflect the composition of the police department in late nineteenth century where the Bengalis featured in the lowest. Since the short statured Bengali had little martial claim they were appointed in the force for their brain. While the men of north were employed in the physically demanding assignments Bengalis were made informants due to their

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Pg 23.

intimate knowledge of the city and the others were given tasks of tracking down groups of bandits or men involved in criminal activities.

Bengalis were first employed in the police department as informants about the gangs of thuggees. Under the jurisdiction of William Bentinck from the years 1828 to 1835 there came into existence a department within the police for the suppression of dacoity in the countryside headed by William H. Sleeman. This department utilised locals in order to trace the areas of operation, methods of plundering and spy of the gang to gather valuable information which would eventually lead to the capturing of the gang. These employees would usually be dacoits who now offered their services to the Governor who would never transgress the stature of an informant but in 1863 the secretary to the government of Bengal suggested that a few informants who have been the best behaved and have been thoroughly tried, since these men are ex-dacoits, be appointed as constables. Following this declaration a few middle class literate Bengalis were recruited as detectives. These detectives owing to their mettle overcame their foes and soon they rose to be the darogahs and earned their reputation as a goenda. Thus began the days of the detective in colonial Calcutta.

Born out of a colonial modernity and criminological transformation I would like to assert right at their conception that these men were trained in Holmesian method of detection and deduction. For the detective had already gained popularity in London for similar reasons and the Holmesian model was an import in colonial Calcutta police department and its newly recruited trainees. Therefore the model has survived and evolved in the genre, more so since the genre almost began with autobiographical accounts of men trained to be the modern Bengali Holmes. Therefore an aspiration to be the scrupulous and disciplined yet, just as sharp a sleuth is evident in the fiction written by these detectives. Slowly as the popularity of the genre gained prominence in the literary works produced authors started creating fictional accounts since then the rigid institutional structure would not fetter the protagonist sleuth's habits. Hence the police inspectors turned into self employed detectives who chose the mysteries worthy of their service instead of duty being thrust on them.

The Department for the Suppression of Dacoity in Bengal grew redundant as the banditry lost its foothold in the crime structure and evolved into a special detective force as a branch in the police. Priyonath Mukhopadhyay was a recruit in this department, his adventures are of a urban nature dealing with criminals in the cities involved in commercial crimes while another sleuth recruited during the days of the dacoits called Bankaulla whose

became famous in his days for his success in tracing bands of bandits. Bankaulla's memoirs authored by Kaliprasanna Chattopadhyay appeared later than Mukhopadhyay's biographical accounts even though they are clearly of a period when the colonial government was obsessed with the eradication of thugs and robbers.

Bankaulla is a middle class Bengali Muslim who is educated in a village madrasa and who is extremely capable in adorning numerous disguises and was responsible for the capture of many bandits. His memoirs hail the police structure which has given the colonial subject to prove his mettle and earn accolades in contemporary society. His first person accounts are of dismantling groups of armed robbers and tracing men involved in forgery, however, his success prompted many men to aspire for the post of the darogah since it then began to be viewed as a profession which not only allowed authority and power over others but also gave scope for earning quite a respectable amount in those times. Following his ardent administration for the job many Bengali darogahs rose to recognition in those times, some of them being Meajahn Daroga, Nobokisto (Nabakrishna) Ghose, Baidyanath Mookerjee who "knew how best to meet the needs of their European bosses, who were facing challenges from a new type of criminals: elusive house breakers, invisible urban guilds of forgers, and respectable white collar offenders. These darogahs came from the same middle class background and semi-urban environs which spawned these criminals." (Banerjee, 472) In return these detectives earned title and rewards, Priyonath Mukhopadyay, who became a *Rai Bahadur*, others like Kali Nath Bose earned a cash prize of two thousand rupees from the Maharaja of Travancore for the recovery of his crown jewels. Such was the success that these men achieved that one of the British police commissioners states, Banerjee quotes, "no men make better detectives than Bengalis [because they are] shrewd, calculating and patient to a degree... performances by Bengali officers quite equalling those of which we read in any part of the world."<sup>14</sup>

Charles J Rzepka<sup>15</sup> suggests in his generic engagement with the detective that detective fiction was born in times of cultural transformation and social restructuring, these were the days when Bengali minds began writing tales of mystery, adventure and invincible deftness of solving them. As western sciences infiltrated the education system in Bengal, the detectives employed by the police became increasingly obsessed with forensic sciences and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp, 472-473.

<sup>15</sup> As stated in Charles J Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2005, p. 5.

finger printing, post mortem in morgues became incorporated in the surveillance and correction mechanism in eighteenth century Bengal. Soon the imagination of the authors of detective fiction began to not only incorporate Holmesian techniques of detection, but also mannerisms and characteristics as the detective in Bengali literature grew steadily self willed and gained a very Holmes-like arrogance.

It is interesting to note that in the onset the detectives, who were not merely sleuths on fictional situations but real life crime fighters, were sceptical of the western methods of determining conclusions. Priyonath Mukhopadhyay after having failed to punish his prime suspect, who he knew to have had poisoned his mistress, due to the coroner's failure to find traces of any poisons in the victim's body, states ruefully how these Europeans had little knowledge of the native poisons which were not traceable by western chemicals. Bengalis were allowed charge of conducting post mortems much later, earlier only the Europeans took charge of such an exercise. Till then accounts reiterate the failure of the morgue methods of determining of deaths.

Thus taking on Rzepka's<sup>16</sup> argument of cultural trends shaping the genre it is evident how colonial modernity and social conditions of eighteenth century Bengal caused the coming of detective fiction in Bengali. "The rise of modern sciences devoted to the study of material history, such as geology, palaeontology and evolutionary biology, and of the human mind, especially psychoanalysis," have triggered the keen interest of authors to arouse the reader's reasoning skills. Hence the detective genre in Bengali began and evolved into one of the most successful bodies on literature written in Bengali.

### **His arrival on the pages of literature**

The detective story can be detected as early as in the Vedic age in the Rig Veda, where a female dog, called Sarama has been employed by the gods to find their lost cow which had been stolen by a band of foreign dacoits called *Pani*. Sarama traces the whereabouts of the dacoits and ultimately leads the gods to the lost cow. The first detective in India is extremely important a character if we are to trace an indigenous lineage of the non western detective.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 4.



The colonial hangover of the genre is evident as I have previously stated and the idea that the masculinity of the detective alpha male is a direct import from the European counterparts where the crisp western rationality of the detective is evident. In fact the first ever detective in India is a female. The most striking feature of this characterization is the fact that her feline instincts as well as her female intuition to solve the mystery of the lost cow.

Sarama is a literary figure in those times when the consciousness of the loss of masculine strength was not imprinted in the mind of who wrote of the Indian male. Hence when Ashish Nandy writes of the merging of the *purusha* and *pakriti* in the formation of the male ideal, the detective of Bengali fiction is best perceived as a character emerging out of a literary tradition which had never shied away from the feminine but had heralded it.

Another prototype character who had been the predecessor of our modern Bengali detective was the judge or the *Kazi*, *Bicharok* etc. Various short stories and folk tales constitute the story of the judge (kazi) or a witty noble like Birbal, Naseeruddin and Gopal Bhaar, who would unravel mysteries while all the time they would provoke humour in their readers. One of the earliest stories of a resolution of crime in Bengali fiction can be traced back to 8<sup>th</sup> century in a compilation by William Kerry called *Itihasmaala*<sup>17</sup>, where he states the story of a Brahmin who had gone to the pond to bathe leaving a wad of notes tied to his clothes but came back only to find his money missing. Helpless and penniless he runs to the local judge who then order his men to go to the site of the crime and to stab the ground with their spears, after the men carry out his orders, the thief who is a milkman, seeing this while passing, foolishly comments that whether such an act would get them back the lost money. On hearing which the men brings him to the judge who punishes the milkman and returns the money to the rightful owner. Wit and humour have long since been a part of the literary tradition from which the modern detective derives.

The detectives so far as I have mentioned have belonged to the privileged noble class constituting of high caste powerful individuals who possess powerful offices and are hence influential. The offices they are given charge of demand of these characters a certain amount of seriousness, a trustworthy judicious nature which would justify their capacity to mete out justice to all who are in need. However, I do not want to trace the presence of a detective like or a functionally similar character in Bengali literature in order to establish the roots of the

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<sup>17</sup> Cited in the Introduction by Sukumar Sen in Ranjit Chatterjee and Sidhharth Bose (ed.) *Goenda Aar Goenda*, Kolkata, Ananda Publishers, 2008.

detective fiction, since my argument is that the detective emerged in Bengal for a given social context and cultural condition, I consider the beginnings to be in the fag end of nineteenth century when detectives were born out of colonial modernity.

The modern detective in Bengali came almost half a century later than the emergence of the European counterparts. The first detective narratives can be traced back to the year 1892, when Priyonath Mukhopadhyay, an employee of the government's investigation bureau, began writing first hand narratives of crime stories. One of such stories, *Kritim Mudra (Counterfeit Coins)* tells the story of how the detective had caught a notorious criminal after he had initially been tricked out of evidences. In this story the play of wit is far more prominent than the suspense due to the anonymity of the criminal mastermind. The terrain which Mukhopadhyay traverses to trace the whereabouts of the criminal is also obvious here. He is outwitting a known foe who is escaping capture by sheer deception. In this story, as I have discussed earlier, the police hierarchical structure is evident. Mukhopadhyay seems painfully aware of the fact that he cannot appear to be a fool in front of his white superiors.

The universe of his memoirs is the same as that his office and the frequent inadequacy of western logic and rationality system of investigation becomes prominent. In a case, cited by Sumanto Banerjee<sup>18</sup>, where a client kills a prostitute who had a lot of jewellery in her possession by poisoning her. The coroner in charge of the post mortem fails to decipher any trace of poison in the victim's body; the plot precedes the times when the Indians were allowed to conduct a post mortem, Mukhopadhyay comments on the existence of certain Indian poisons which eluded the English tactic of detection. The social real is an imminent presence in these stories. Since Mukhopadhyay himself is a Bengali sleuth employed by the Europeans the stories of his adventures gained tremendous popularity in these times for they were not only addressing the social truth but also shaping in the Bengali reader a very real image of a successful professional conscious of the superiority of his capacity and ethnicity.

A series was published called *Daroga'r Doptor* or The Office of the Inspector comprising of 206 stories, the first of which appeared in April 1892, was called *Banomali Das'er Hatya* or The Murder of Banomali Das. The stories were biographical, stripped of all ornamentation narrating stories of everyday crime in the author's universe stated in a very matter of fact way. The plots of these adventures lacked the sensationalism and the suspense

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<sup>18</sup> Opcit., p. 498.

content of later fictive detective stories. The detective of Mukhopadhyay's stories is tied to the government's functioning and his responsibility to the institution is obvious in the stories. Not too later the detective would be self employed without constraints of a disciplined occupation. The Holmesian nonchalance and whimsical lifestyle is yet to arrive to the Indian detective's characteristics.

At this same time Kaliprasanna Chatterjee compiled and published written by the first Muslim detective in Bengal, Barkhatulla, he, as I have mentioned, is a policeman employed by the government to capture the *Thugees*, his cunning and wit earned him the name Bankaulla which later came, to be known as Bankaulla. His twelve stories have been compiled in the series called *Bankaulla's Doptor* or the Office of Bankaulla. He is a decent young fellow who has an enthusiasm towards the knowledge of Hinduism, and gives up no chance to know more of the religion (*Bahurupi, from Bankaulla's Doptor*). Another investigation required him to enter a Vaishnavite temple in disguise and live there for some time. His appreciation of the other religion is apparent in the plots of the memoirs. His story range from the suburbs of the colonial capital city Calcutta and usually takes him to the various places away from it. Even though a trip to the in a time when a journey from Calcutta to Benares on a boat would take one and a half months, but however this does not prevent his detective from operating in a wide geographical terrain. The wanderlust of the Bengali imagination has been tapped in by the genre right at its onset. This detective policeman moves around without uniform, anonymous except for the fact that many of his foes know him from his fame.

However, what one observes right from the onset is the fact that the genre suffers from a disdain towards the female characters. The feminine intuitive skills might be upheld at times however, the female intervention in the workings of the alpha male universe of sinister operations had already started getting rare. In Bankaulla's writings though female characters are not rare and they do have their significance in these narratives since their instincts are usually used in achieving resolution to the puzzles which come in Bankaulla's way, he treats them as a mere hindrance to the daring feats he could have achieved in their absence. However, he does admit to taking immense help from Bibijaan, a prostitute from Sonagachi in many cases but he asserts how he had rewarded her for her services which required special skills of seduction and conviction.

Till now the detective stories produced are biographical accounts of the employees of the police department. The first fiction was written by Panchkori Dey but his stories cannot

really be called original since they are stories originally composed in the West and given Indian colours. His detective is most certainly a derivation of Sherlock's brother Mycroft Holmes. He has been unsuccessful in his pursuit of academics and after whiling away four years he developed a habit of reading foreign books of detective stories. Yet when he expressed his desire to join the police department his brother, who was an established doctor in society, refused to allow him the joy of joining the department. Banerjee<sup>19</sup> states that the police detective department had gradually become infamous since very soon it became the nexus of corruption. Bribery, extortion and other malpractices infiltrated the department and the policemen lost the previously enjoyed grandeur of their profession. Becoming a detective at the department had lost its glitter and the middle class who were attracted to the profession were already moving away from it. By this time Mukhopadhyay or Bankaulla's days were slowly trickling to an end and the upper middle class of these times were moving away from seeking employment as a servant of the police force. However, Dey's detective Akshay Kumar, has to impress his brother with his investigative skills in the story *Chithichuri (The Theft of the Letter)* so as to convince him of a career as a detective in the police.

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 The social implications of being in the police were fast losing its elevated stature, more so as is obvious in the writings of Panchkori Dey, the western influence on the Indian detective was gaining prominence at an even faster pace. Soon the Indian social context would appropriate the mannerisms of the western detective and the Indian male would start resemble his western counterpart. The growing antipathy towards the police department would soon rid the detective of plots where he would be bound to governmental rules and regulations. The figure would then evolve into the self employed independent professional who seeks occasional help from the police. His universe will have little to do with women characters and his stories will focus on his character and its evolution while he solves mysteries worthy of his interest. This can be marked as the beginning of Holmesian influence on the popular detective figure.

The first female author of the detective Saralabala Dasi (Sirkar), treats women with disgust. Her detective, Shekhar, is the first where the European influences are so evident. The man is unnaturally sharp and intelligent. However, due to his own lack of enthusiasm in the general things he has never achieved a stature he deserved. He had formerly been employed by the government but the job had almost girdled his capabilities into the clockwork of a

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 438.



routine, which he detested, hence he was now a free consulting detective who followed only his rules and regulations for the investigation he undertook. These stories are also written in first person narration but only this time the perspective is not of the detective's but that of an admirer's. Historically it is possible to locate the of narrative technique which is going to be undertaken by more successful authors of detective fiction in Bengali and most popular structure of detective fiction in Bengali that would eventually come to be.

The conventional garb of the male universe of the detective gets challenged right on the onset since the most popular conventions used by renowned names now recognised as the creators of the success of this branch of fiction, stems from a female imagination. However, there is a marked disdain for women in Saralabala's writings. In one of her stories, *Gharichuri* or *The Theft of the Watch*, Shekhar most pompously points out, he can make out from the clumsiness of the writing which had left its impression on a piece of paper that it must have been written by a female hand and since he has been an expert in analysing handwriting while he was an employee of the police he is very well acquainted to the pathetic handwriting women have. With the import of Holmes like characteristic an all pervasive sense of the need for an all male universe of the detective can be perceived. The elaborate engagement with a letter written on a piece of paper torn from what appeared to the detective as a woman's note serves the purpose of establishing the detective's suave qualities also emphasizes how he casually dismisses a woman's skills with the pen and comments on the scents of her perfumed letter in a condescending tones. Ironically, all of this comes from the first female author of the detective. She seems to be very aware of the task she has at hand of constructing an awe inspiring, admirable male supreme and she assumes the slighting of the female as a natural consequence of this. Even harsher is the fact that she believes this to be task for her detective to earn success since he is authored by her female pen.

Within the years 1890 to 1930, numerous contributions were made to the genre by authors like Nagendranath Gupta, Harisadan Mukhopadhyay, Dinendra Kumar Ray. Police stories or the adventurous exploits of the *Daroga* was also written about, by Girish Chandra Basu called *Shey Kaaler Daroga Kahini* or *Stories of the Daroga from Yonder Years*. The sudden enthusiasm about and the interest in the genre was aroused since the editor of the *Bharati* magazine, Swarna Kumari Devi decided to become the patron of the genre. *Bharati* encouraged and published detective stories due to which reason a lot of detective fiction was written in this magazine from as early as 1887. Harisadan Mukhopadhyay, Nagendra Gupta were all published here.

Another significant contribution which produced a lot of detective fiction was the announcement of the *Kuntalin* prize by technician and perfumer Hemendra Mohan Basu who had made *Kuntalin* and *Dilkhosh* named perfumes. A lot of prize winning stories have shaped the genre and the figure of the detective, and in this period, had kept an active interest in the genre alive. The winners of this prize include Saralabala Dasi (Sirkar), the first female writer of this genre and whose work I have discussed at length already, Rajani Chandra Dutta and Dinendra Kumar Ray. Many magazines came into being during this time which published detective fiction only, writer Ambika Charan Gupta published a monthly magazine called *Goenda'r Golpo (Detective Story)*, where he published his own detective novel called *Swarnabayi*.

Though Priyonath Mukhopadhyay was considered as the first author of the original detective fiction written in Bengali there were authors who had written detective fiction only to be published after Mukhopadhyay's stories became popular. These authors included Bhuban Chandra Mukhopadhyay, who had published a story called *Haridas'er Guptakotha (Haridas' Secrets)*. In 1896, he published a novel in six volumes called *Markin Police Commissioner (American Police Commissioner)*. Other contributors to this genre include Khetramohan Ghosh and Surendramohan Bhattacharya. Inspired by Priyonath Mukhopadhyay's success Sarachchandra Sirkar published a series called *Goenda Kahini (Detective Stories)* where many others contributed.

Later Dinendra Kumar Ray translated many detective stories from English to Bengali. He has also written a few original detective fictions. One of his stories has a female detective, though she cannot really be called one since she is a mere housewife who took the responsibility of solving a murder mystery on her fragile shoulders in order to acquit her husband. In this particular story called *Hatya Rahasya (Murder Mystery)* all significant characters are females. From the murder victim, the detective and even the murderer is a female. The plot is set in the confines of a house in Benares; our investigator is forced to undertake a journey to Benares for her husband is the prime suspect of the murder. A mere girl bred on the benevolence of her benefactor, she says that the only reason for which she could undertake such a task was due to her deep love for her husband and the story ends with the declaration that love is the singular reason which can light the darkest hour, turn a curse to bliss etc. The crime committed in this story is also due to passion. The association of the female rationality has been associated with *crime passionel* or crimes of passion and love. Female universes can only include adult content. Their stories are not born out of

adventurous spirits but out of swirling red passion. Emotions being the driving force behind their ventures. Their participation in the mystery has been the outcome of their emotional interests.

Our heroine leaves no stone unturned to lift all charges from her virtuous husband and in the end she is rewarded by his admiring gaze since she confides to the reader she had indeed achieved feats impossible for a woman to accomplish. The crucial reality that surfaces in this narrative is the fact that how barring transgressors like the working women, who were still majorly composed of actresses, prostitutes and domestic help, women had little mobility in contemporary society. The *Bhadromohila* or the lady was confined in her household and left her comfortable and protected abode only to head for the temple or to seek rare, sanctioned entertainments. Since by this time the genre had already become a part of popular literature skirting the sordid sleaze of its origins, the involvement of the woman detective had to be for a noble cause considered worthy by the broader patriarchal society. Her character could not be of any less stature but a certain amount of travel would be inevitable in tales of mystery hence the crisis has been asserted as a task any woman of bearing would take up in order to fulfil her duty to her husband. It is interesting to note that the woman detective of this story is not really of noble lineage. She had been adopted by the landlord after her father, who had served a lifetime of faithful service had passed away. She was indeed married to a man of no income and of a lower stature from the landlord's family. The class structure present in this story is extremely interesting. While all the ladies are women are of endless virtues, the victim belongs to the class of maids and it is due to her love for the nephew of a rich and pious lady that he is deprived of his legitimate inheritance. The detective is nestled somewhere in between the two classes since she is not a lady by birth but due to the mercy of her benevolent benefactor. While in the universes of the male detectives, modern capitalist economy has already shaped crimes and adventures, the woman's tales still reveal feudal class division and social structures.

The author Dinendra Nath Roy is also responsible for authoring two hundred seventeen detective stories. These stories were heavily influenced by series published in England called *Sexton Blake* and *Union Jack*, they were translations in Bengali bearing minor transformations published under the series *Rahasya Lahari*. The stories have western origins but since they are being translated into Bengali by Roy therefore the stories have been made identifiable to the Bengali reader. Some of his novels have been based loosely on English novels, namely, *Aisha*, *She*, *Rupashi Morubashini (The Beautiful Desert Dweller)*, *Bhuter*

*Jaahaj (The Ship of Ghosts)*, *Chiner Dragon (Chinese Dragon)* etc. These are stories where sometimes he would change the plot and at other instances he would change names of the characters only. The first story of the series was called *Bidhi'r Bidhan (God's Decree)*. The crimes in these stories would concern the urban reality of Calcutta and their distinctive address of the failure of law and order due to modernization makes these inspired tales an important part of the Bengali detective genre.

These stories composed during the period 1890- 1930, were then taken over by writings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindra Nath Tagore. These three major literary figures in Bengal had successfully encapsulated a major portion of the Bengali readership making minor authors fade into insignificance and neglect. Hemendra Kumar Ray finally decided to tap into children's literature in order to resurrect the genre. Rzepka divides the detective story as belonging to mainly two categories, mystery and adventures. These stories prioritized adventure since they intended to capture interests of young adults. These stories involved the first trio of Bengali detectives, Bimal, Kumar and Sundarbabu, who is a policeman but would more often than not fail to solve the crime cases he was faced. Sundarbabu would also time and again the two professional detectives created by Ray Jayanto, Manik. Jayanto and Manik were professional detectives while Bimal and Kumar are adventurers, who would solve mysteries in case the professionals were not available. Ray was responsible for the genre evolving into a body of literature which was not only meant for adult readership, which had been the case so far. Taking his duos to distant countries and using the mysterious forests of Africa and the strange tribes of South America to weave immensely interesting and imaginative stories Ray gave the genre the required breath of air.

However, even beyond sheer literary success lay the important motifs and conventions that Ray created for detective literature which were meant for young minds. His writings bore the added trope of imparting fresh knowledge to his readers about faraway lands and their inhabitants. In his story *Ogaadh Joler Rui Katla (Fishes of Deep Waters)*, Ray writes of a weapon used by the villain is a blow-pipe collected by the villain from Borneo during his travels. It is only because Bimal had travelled to this place too and knew of this weapon and its usage that he could defeat this murderer red handed. Hence wanderlust which had previously in the first era of detective fiction been confined to suburbs or till Benares due to the limitations of transportation in late nineteenth century Calcutta, broke away from all constraints in the twentieth century and took off on the wings provided by the detective like



never before. The adventurer detective would be found travelling to Africa, Java, Ceylon and Burma etc. Bimal had the added advantage of having trained himself with the weapon so as to foil the impeccable plan of the murderer, a feat the policeman Sundarbabu could never have dreamt of given his limited exposure to the world outside his custody. The trope used in detectives of mid twentieth century of having a character in their plot who is an assistant and another one who serves as a foil to the detective survived and evolved since it successfully tapped into the reader's humorous bone and enriched the genre. Hence Bimal, Kumar, Jayanto, Manik teaming up with Sundarbabu became the predecessors of many such trios who would fascinate readers in the later years. Humour also became a significant component of the detective universe.

In 1928, Manoranjan Bhattacharya created a Japanese detective called Hukakashi. Bhattacharya had begun narrating the adventures of Hukakashi in a journal called *Ramdhanu (Rainbow)*. Hukakashi was a professional detective in Kolkata who was usually accompanied by his dedicated and admiring companion Ranajit. By nature this Japanese man is very different from the flamboyant and self congratulatory Bengali detectives; he operates silently, unnoticed by everybody, so much so as to the fact that he refrains from accepting a case until he requested personally, is efficient and swift. Proficient in mathematics, Hukakashi possesses an eye for all minute details. His characteristics vary vastly from the robust and dramatic Bengali detective, his strength lies in his mind. Bhattacharya, just like Ray, wrote adult fiction before authoring the cases of Hukakashi. Playing on the humorous nerve, Sibram Chakravarty, created Kalkekashi, who was a parody of the aforementioned detective. Chakravarty was one of the most successful authors of this time, he was known for his humour, satire and parodies. When he wrote of a parody the detective Hukakashi, the Bengali readers lovingly preserved his work amidst their favourites.

Kalkekashi was sadly far from revered by his assistant Prafulla, as a matter of fact, he considered working with the famous (known only in parts of Korea) detective as a task in itself. For this Korean man was greatly fascinated by Bengali food and hence gormandized at every given opportunity and his immense appetite could only be matched by his smartness, Prafulla, was more often than not quite irritated by this foreign man, only at times did he grudgingly grant him recognition for his genius. Prafulla says that Kalkekashi spoke fluent Bengali, Hindi and a few animal tongues, one of which could have been his mother tongue, was fat with rippling layers of flesh and had eyes of a fish. Blind to all except food Kalkekashi was hardly what popular expectation had shaped the imagination of a

conventional detective to be. The detective stories written on him were farcical and his cases, exaggerated deductions were mirth provoking which ridiculed the conclusions he jumped to since there was little social relevance or importance to what these mysteries were usually concerned with.

Bhattacharya was also the editor of an adventure series called *Rahasya Chakra (The Wheel of Mysteries)*. Numerous writers wrote for this series, Gajendra Kumar Mitra, who was known for novels and short stories also wrote a few mysteries for this series. His detective was called Tarun Gupta. Another series published during this time was the *Rahasya, Romancho, Adventure (Mystery, Thrillers, Adventure)* series. At around 1935 a lot of detective literature was being published, publishing houses like Deb Sahitya Kutir was publishing the *Kanchenjunga* series, a lot of renowned and established authors wrote for this series, Hemendra Kumar Ray, Naresh Chandra Sengupta, Prabhabati Devi Saraswati and Nripendra Krishna Chattopadhyay, who had compiled a series himself, called the *Katyayani Goenda Gronthomala (Katyayani Detective Books)*, being amongst them. In the 1950s Deb Sahitya Kutir published yet another series called *Bishwachakra (World's Wheel)*, written by Swapan Kumar, which became tremendously popular with the youth of this time. Another series called *Prohelika (Riddle)* authored by the famous Sourindro Mohan Mukhopadhyay, who wrote under the pseudonym Sabyasachi, was also published by the same in this time. This series, however was heavily inspired by the famous western detective fiction. General Printers and Publishers Ltd. published *Bichitra Rahasya (Unique Mysteries)* series in 1938. Later *Mohan Series* was published by Sisir Publishing House. This series was also very popular amidst the youth. Mohan was modelled on Robin Hood and was created by Sasadhar Dutta. More than two hundred books were published in this series, but the demise of the author in 1952 caused the series to end abruptly.

While the publishing houses were riotously producing series after series, the minor detectives were outshone by an extremely important detective who entered the shelves of thrill obsessed readers in Calcutta with unprecedented ease and appreciation. The urban crime slaying impetus that detective fiction had tapped into from its inception finds its most successful execution in the hands of Saradindu Bandhopadhyay, who creates one of Bengal's most favourite sleuths, Byomkesh Bakshi. As a matter of fact, Ranjit Chatterjee and Siddharth Ghosh believe<sup>20</sup> that it is due to Bandhopadhyay's writings that detective fiction

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<sup>20</sup> Opcit., p. 751.

gained its stature in the mainstream literature and became comparable to the writings of Tagore, Saratchandra Chattopadhyay and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. They quote the author,

“Mystery/ Adventure stories are definitely a part of literature, because they talk of human nature and human conditions, why must the thrill reduce its stature from serious literature? Some Nobel laureates in literature have also written in this genre. If language be the carrier of a narrative, then any serious dramatic narrative will suffer with the failure of it and if it be successful then even a detective story would be literature worthy of reckoning with” [translation mine].<sup>21</sup>

Bandhopadhyay's is feverishly Bengali, who prefers to call himself *Satyanweshi* (*The Truth Searcher*) instead of the English term *Detective*, wears dhoti instead of pantaloons and represents the middle class Bengali in all its defiance to any colonial hangovers. This detective, according to Chatterjee and Ghosh, is equal to Sherlock Holmes, Father Brown or Doctor Thorndike in terms of capabilities and intelligence. He is one of the most critically acclaimed creations of Bengali literature. His very middle class lifestyle, yet a certain arrogance which is an almost Holmes-like characteristic but a very prominent inclination towards a moral and ethical structure which distinctively distinguishes him from all Holmesian deviant ways. A bachelor with casually careless behaviour, Byomkesh shows a very deep sense of human bonding and grows very fond of Ajit, his friend and the narrator of his exploits right after they became roommates in a city mess, he possesses an extremely pleasurable, friendly disposition and has one of the shrewdest and smartest minds of Bengali literature. From smoking cigarettes, to being an ardent consumer of tea and eggs, Byomkesh does not bear any weapon, he is hardly found travelling long distances seeking solutions to mysteries. Rather in his stories, he has by chance been visiting a place on vacation or has been invited over to an estate and mysterious circumstances have followed in his wake. In order to solve a mystery which has taken place in Calcutta he has never had to travel anywhere except around the locale of the crime scene. I believe Bandhopadhyay does this for a very fascinating reason, Bengalis are known for their tendencies of taking vacations, calling on distant relations, visiting friends settled at faraway places. Bandhopadhyay uses this extremely stereotypical trait in Bengalis to address the wanderlust, which is an extremely important feature of the genre.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 752.

Since Byomkesh is a detective of colonial Calcutta, the crimes in his stories give an idea of the underworld of modern Calcutta like never before. From hired assassins (in *Pather Kanta*) to murders committed to claim life insurances (in *Agnibaan*) and robbing banks (in *Chitra Chor*), the crimes of the Byomkesh series have consistently baffled readers. The varied nature and the richness of the plots of Byomkesh's cases make the series such an interesting read. The cityscape of modern Calcutta has never been utilised as pockets cradling crime as well as in Bandhopadhyay's representation. In *Pather Kanta (Thorn in [your] Path)* a cyclist slays people he has been paid to get rid of by piercing their hearts with pins he shoots with his cycle-bell. This he accomplishes by using busy roads where the ring of the bell would be drowned by the din of traffic. In the first story of the series called *Satyanweshi*, Byomkesh foils the operations of an *anonymous* drug peddler in Central Calcutta, which is a part of the colonial capital known for the lodging of migrants and in consequence had a dingy, corrupt and congested ambience. The mess where our sleuth and the narrator were lodged had a Chinese colony on one side, a slum on the other and at the third lane of the triangular formation had a tremendous population of Marwari businessmen. His stories have characters that are extremely real to the social conditions of 1930s Bengal. The mess is full of bachelors or men who need to stay away from their families in order to earn their living in the city. Crimes are committed in the dark alleys of modern Calcutta. Drug peddling, murder, theft and blackmail, the capital was fast developing an underworld where the satyanweshi needed to intervene. Scientific inventions (like the poison used on a matchstick in *Agnibaan*), legendary gold which has been hidden in medieval times (in *Durga Rahasya*, incidentally the innovative murderer uses poison in a pen's ink in this case), exotic drugs from South America (in *Makarsha'r Ras*) and the very familiar plot of human greed and lust for money makes this series one of the most enriched body of literature produced in Bengali.

The series was also known for its very complete characterisations, the descriptive narration of the Byomkesh cases made the characters of this series credible and easily identifiable. These extremely developed real life characters and their passion, desperation and fear forms one of the most successful features of this series. For once the women are as much a part of the plot as the men are. Though the number of male characters is far more than the female characters, not once has the significance of these characters been compromised. Usually the female characters of this genre have suffered in the hands of adrenaline driven machismos who have claimed all significance. In the Byomkesh series many powerful females have generated awe in the readers' mind. Be it Banolakshmi in *Chiriakhana (Zoo)*,

Kumar Bahadur's daughter in *Chorabali (Quicksand)*, the obnoxious wife of the poor professor in *Chitra Chor (Thief of the Photograph)* or Byomkesh's own wife, Satyabati, whose strength impressed him to almost speechlessness in *Arthomanorthom (Money causes Devastation)*, the women have enjoyed a seriousness like never before. In *Chitra Chor*, he even buys her a perfume in order to exact permission for a smoke after his illness. The domestic space where the detective is answerable to his wife is an unprecedented feature in this genre. However, this adds to the humane attributes of the detective rather than taking away from his masculinity. It must also be kept in mind that this series was written for adults and the woman was often placed in the fulcrum of plots concerning bloodlust and murder. It is needless to say, that given all the best of Saradindu Bandhopadhyay's literary genius, this detective remains to be quite the favourite of many a Bengali, its popularity never has diminished ever since the first time *Satyanweshi* was published in a magazine called *Basumati* in the year 1932.

Right after the *Mohan Series* Nihar Ranjan Gupta started writing of the cases of Kiriti Roy and his assistant Subrata. Gupta's detective became immensely popular and detective novels and stories which so far had been considered as literature of leisure due to its set conventions and formulaic nature began to be considered as a serious genre. Gupta's novels and stories on Kiriti involved immense description of the landscape; crimes would be of a deep psychological nature and when they were not, they would be of an extremely serious nature sometimes threatening a large population or a town as in the story *Ratri Jokhon Gobhir Hoy (When the Night Deepens)*. Kiriti, himself was an extremely urban man who was created with obvious western influences. The stories involved adult plots where passion drove men to lose control over their actions and lust for money made them destroy numerous lives like in *Ora Tinjon (The Three of Them)*. Subrata admits that his stay with Kiriti has trained him to deal with criminals since Kiriti for the first time, delineates the importance of physical fitness. He has mastered the art of disguising and is an extremely clever man who knows how to challenge the roots of modern crime. The genre gained a much needed elevation due to the immense nature of crime which these stories are about. Kiriti is far more a western man than Byomkesh and the detective is hardly a man of emotive capacities. Gupta seemed to have drawn inspiration from the women driven sensational criminal plots hence envy, lust and passion would be a part of his plots but they would hardly accord the woman space enough for her character to be remembered or remain with the reader beyond the book.

However, Kiriti Ray was an important detective of this time and he gained a lot of acclaim for his scope and scale of operation.

Detective series were being produced in tandem during this period in Calcutta since they had become such an integral part of popular literature then. However, after Gupta and Bandhopadhyay had elevated the genre to suit the requisites of high literature in that time a lot of renowned authors of that time began to seriously invest their minds into the genre. Other than the more serious ones numerous publications of College Street and Dharmtalla died painful deaths as soon as they were started. The three significant magazines of detective fiction out of these was *Rahasya Romancho (Mystery Thrill)*, edited by Bimal Kar, an established writer and the creator of the detective, Kikira and poet Bimal Bhattacharya, *Rahasya Chakro (Wheel of Mysteries)* edited by Professor Sri Krishna Goswami and the third being called *Detective* which was edited by Dhruva Sirkar.

In 1932, a detective journal was founded called *Romancho (Thrill)* by a congregation of literary figures during a meet in the evening. Apart from the established playwright Mrityunjay Chattopadhyay, in whose garden the famous meeting was being held, Premendra Mitra, Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay, Pranab Ray, Panchugopal Mukhopadyay, Sunil Kumar Dhar, Phanindra Pal, Achintya Kumar Sengupta, Prabodh Kumar Sanyal attended the meet and came up with a detective of their own, whom they chose to call Pratul Lahiri. The adventures of this detective was authored by all these literary figures, compiled and then published in this weekly journal. Every week one of the aforementioned writers would write of a case concerning the detective Pratul Lahiri, whose assistant was called Bishwanath Chakravarty, also known as, Bishu. The first two adventures was written by Pranab Ray and then followed by Panchugopal Mukhopadhyay et al. But the following year, states Chatterjee and Ghose, the entire onus of running the weekly publication fell on Mrityunjay Chattopadhyay, who authored nearly a hundred stories under many names. This magazine was published for two decades until it 1952 it was converted into a monthly. It is needless to say that such an amount of work produced in the genre by so many authors marks the amount of readership the genre enjoyed. A lot of authors thought it fashionable to write detective fiction and such a set up managed to turn poet Premendra Mitra and lyricist Pranab Ray into writers. In 1956 Premendra Mitra created the poet detective Parashar Varma. The first story was called *Goenda Kobi Parashar (Detective Poet Parashar)*, Parashar was a detective by profession but a poet out of passion, yet his poems went little further from the waste paper bin. Mitra tries to relieve the formulaic formation of a typical detective story involving the

trio of an extremely suave detective and his admiring assistant accompanied by a foolish and clumsy third companion. Instead he writes of a detective who writes terrible poetry, binds them in thick volumes and hopes for an elusive fame for his ridiculous modern poetry. But behind this abject failure of a poet is a man of a keen mind and extremely alert ways. The stories of this detective are a welcome departure from conventions which have been circulated over the years of the detective. Parashar is extremely keen on making a career out of his poetry hence he does not desire to be an established youth, it is just that he is so good at detection that fame comes his way anyways while he remains blind to his real talents.

Many detectives were created and a lot of detective fiction was published during this time, Parashuram wrote the adventures of Rakhal Mustafi and Doctor Panchanan Ghoshal, just like Priyonath Mukhopadhyay, wrote of his own ventures since he too was a police officer. In the 1950s numerous authors contributed to the genre and experimented with its characters. Parimal Goswami created Brajabilash who could disguise himself as anyone, sometimes he could even manage to pass off as a dog. Mohit Mohan Chattopadhyay authored two foolish detectives Bhomboldas and Kevalram, apart from these authors Bodhayak Bhattacharya, Dhirendralal Dhar, Santosh Kumar Ghosh, Sudhanshu Kumar Gupta, Nirendra Nath Chakravarty, Samaresh Basu, Jogeshwar Ray, Manobendra Bandhopadhyay and Adrish Bardhan also made significant contributions to the genre.

In the 1960s the quantitative growth of the detective genre continued. Krishanu Bandhopadyay created Bashob and around fifty novels on Bashob's escapades. Poets Ananda Bagchi and Tarapada Roy also turned novelists by writing quite a lot of detective fiction. Shubhan Shome wrote many adventures of sleuth Shubha Chowdhury. Robin Dev created a detective called Robin Dev. Hiren Chattopadhyay wrote of two detectives called Shudhamoy and Mac Chowdhury. Gurnek Singh created a detective called Amaresh even though he himself was not a Bengali and knew little of the language. Himanish Goswami who had earned quite a name for himself as a cartoonist and an author of comedy created a funny series of sleuths Dey and Dawn. These detectives were numerous yet not one of them demanded a literary significance or earned the fame like the ones I have elaborately engaged with. The genre survived it seems on wheels of the quantity of fiction produced in it. The detectives were created and then soon forgotten after having enjoyed a momentous fame from the ardent fans of detective fiction.

In 1960s, the most critically acclaimed director of Bengal and the grandson of Upendra Kishore Roy Chowdhury, son of poet Sukumar Ray, Satyajit Ray wrote of a twenty six year old sleuth named Pradosh Chandra Mitter, adoringly called Feluda, by his assistant and admirer, Topesh. After Hemendra Kumar Ray, Satyajit Ray was the next significant author of the detective who made a major contribution to children's literature in terms of detective fiction. Borrowing tropes earlier used by Hemendra Ray to create a detective who would succeed in enthralling young minds, Satyajit Ray began writing of this illustrious young man in the journal, *Sandesh* which was founded by his grandfather. Ray states that he hardly had any intention of writing the first story on Feluda but the tremendous popularity the sleuth gained immediately after the publication made him write more adventures of the immensely popular Feluda. The figure of Feluda became an instant success with his target readers. Since the journal where he was published was already an established journal for young readers which had been shelved for some time after the passing of his grandfather, Ray had little difficulty in locating his target readership once he restarted the circulation of *Sandesh*. Ray states that demands poured in for the next Feluda adventure once the detective had entered the literary world.

The detective remains as one of the most successful Bengali detectives. Young readers obsess with the figure of Feluda and his popularity defies questioning. The extremely suave smart pistol carrying Charminar smoking detective has become one of the most powerful literary figures in Bengali literature. The series which is meant for young adults is written in a language which arrests one's interest right from the first word. Stripped of ornamentations the adventures of Feluda are considered to be most gripping of tales. The young cousin and assistant of Feluda, Topshe recounts the stories without any rhetorical complexities and with adrenaline drenched breathlessness. The pace of the series is one of the major reasons for its success. The immense geographical descriptions of the large terrain of Feluda's stories and the engaging historical accounts of every place of his visit elevate the detective from his contemporary sleuths and accord him a position which had long been lost by detectives since Byomkesh. Ray incorporated all the used and overused conventions of the clichéd structure of the detective including the trio of the detective, his assistant and an extremely clumsy author of popular and sensational best selling detective fiction, Lalmohan Ganguly, who writes under pseudonym Jatayu. However, even in this common trope he inserts a comment on the 'high brow' adventures of Feluda, who is laughing all the while at the ill informed Jatayu's 'low brow' sleuth Prokhor Rudra. The moral championing of good



over evil becomes imperative in detective fiction written for children, where there is almost no scope of grey, however, in the very first story, *Feluda'r Goendagiri* or *Danger in Darjeeling* (as translated by Gopa Majumdar), the wrongdoer is merely not evil. He is exacting revenge and his ways are laudable. He impresses Feluda to no end and manages to quit the place of crime before the star sleuth manages to decipher the truth about him. Ray introduces reasonable grey in his narratives; Feluda therefore becomes immensely popular right from the go.

It has been a long way since Priyonath Mukhopadyay first penned down his experiences and began a tradition in detective fiction. The genre had attracted a significant number of readers due to its inherent thrill. What was first only a body of adult fiction became a part of children's literature through the writings of Hemendra Kumar Ray, after that ample experimentation with the nature of the detective protagonist, the form of the fiction, the tone of the adventures had taken place. A lot of comic characters who were parodies of the conventional imagination of a detective were also created and these too were immensely popular in their times. Some of these experiments had earned immense appreciation and the others had just merely titillated a reader's interest before fading into insignificance. A few of them even became cultural icons like Byomkesh and Feluda. The characters of these detectives have been revered by young and adult readers alike. Both of them have stood for the imagination of a prototype Bengali, be it terms of their temperament, tastes or habits, the two detectives have become immortal figures in the literary history of Bengali literature. They have in their own ways defined the 'dream' of the Bengali man and showcased the ways of how to be him.

*'[He] is the type and genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd'*

*(Man of the Crowd, Edgar Allan Poe)*

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE MYSTERY OF MASCULINITY

#### A Study of the Starlet Sleuth

*“He is an aggressive, authoritative figure who exhibits intelligence, skill, daring, and often physical prowess. Usually, women are subordinate to and in love with him. The detective is the repository of dominant notions of both justice and masculinity.” (Cavendar, 1999, p. 161)*

Pradosh Chandra Mittir or Feluda, is one of the most popular detectives in Bengali and since his first appearance in the magazine, *Sandesh* in 1965, his popularity has steadily grown so much so as to make him the prototype Bengali sleuth on whom various authors have modelled their own detectives. The masculine hero of young adults who captured the imagination of all his readers across all ages has become the Bengali face for all the sleuths. The detective who had started his adventures in Darjeeling at the age of twenty seven continuous to charm the readers for a good many twenty five years before his stories came to end due to the death of the author in 1992. The consequent detectives who have come to be after Feluda have been modelled on him. His assistant Topshe has also been considered a model assistant.

Tapesh Ranjan, who is fondly called Topshe by Feluda is the narrator of his cousin's exploits. There is a constant aspiration and awe in his tone which when coupled with his descriptive effortless account of events becomes one of the primary reasons for the success of the detective. There is a very distinct agenda why this convention of the detective genre has been the most popular among the set clichéd form of the detective fiction. The admiring tones of the narrator becomes the site for the establishment of the detective as the man of fantastic deductive capabilities while also establishing him as a very intimate accomplice in the episodes of good championing over evil. Therefore while the detective must be established as the alpha male who's masculine and moral ideals can be awed, the narrator must serve the purpose of establishing this excess of rationality and maleness as credible. The narrator assistant is the site of identification between the reader and the sleuth, both of whom are engaged in a silent battle of wits in a narrative but till the end the latter must emerge as the winner but by evoking a respect and admiration in the mind of the reader which in turn is the

cause of the success of the detective. Just as the detective must be established as a man of rare talents, the assistant who is the narrator must be a figure so familiar that his words should be taken for granted without a question. Hence specific to Feluda's case every time the sleuth began his processes of rigorous brainstorming he would impress his logical methods on the assistant so as to subsequently impress the reader. Therefore conventionally when he has to preserve the answer to the mystery he usually retires to his room or a study in order to create the pinnacle of thrill till the last moment of the story. This chapter is going to deal with the processes in which an everyman and not-merely-an everyman gets created in the genre of detective fiction.

### **The Evolution of the Detective**

Detective fiction evolved from the stories of being the adventures of men who were fighters of crime in the cities to the stories of the man extraordinaire. In the West the detective derived its fictive form from the adventures of Eugene- Francois Vidocq (1775-1850), who was the head of the Parisian Sûreté, which have been compiled in his *Memoirs*. The thief-taker to the Parisian Prefecture of Police was a double agent and lived on the edge of danger for years. His *Memoirs* are about physical agility and strength, courage and quick thinking rather than privileging of rationality. However, he claims that he could infer from 'a single article of clothing' 'a thief from head to heel' his feats were known for his daring and the breathtaking life that he lived due to his constant fear of being discovered. The reason why these *Memoirs* became popular was due to the fact that they created the dream of the act of haunting down and capturing criminals as an achievable feat. Though Vidocq had a childhood where he was trained to be a bully and due to his notoriety he was imprisoned for sometime which helped him to gain access to the minds of the criminal, his first person accounts make his character seem like that of a common man who rose through life due to the honing of his individual skills.

But as fiction picked up strings from the memoirs the deductive faculty of the human mind began to gain privilege. The individual detective became a superman of credible capacities. The development of the mind now obsessed with rationality became now a reportage in third person as a lesser endowed man surveyed his daily mannerisms and took on the task of deciphering the true nature of the central protagonist of the detective. One of the pioneers who bore the traits of Vidocq is Monsieur Dupin created by Edgar Allan Poe. He is the first of the Bohemian detectives who would become one of the most popular characters in

the detective genre of the West. The most famous of these Bohemians is of course the eminent Sherlock Holmes who has been the framework we have imported and built our detectives on. The Holmesian sensibility and characteristics are admittedly the basis of the Bengali detective, Feluda being no exception. In my previous chapter I have mentioned that the recruits of the detective department in the police were trained in Holmes' ways of detection and since then the whimsical Bohemian has infiltrated the Bengali imagination of a detective. Satyajit Ray says in an interview that Feluda was created out of a childhood of obsessive fascination for Holmes. Only Feluda could not have been the Holmesian bohemian since his target readership was that of minors.

Feluda is no short of the superman detective that Holmes is, however he does not have Holmes' masterful knowledge of chemistry, nor is he of Holmes' notorious repute. The scientific detective, Sherlock Holmes, was conceived at a time when the use of science rose in the disciplinary institution in England, by the time Feluda becomes a part of the fictive crime scenario obsessions with chemistry and pathology had been replaced by the pace of the conventional chase in the hounding of the criminal. Therefore Feluda has such a vast terrain of operation, unlike Holmes who operated in the same country, Feluda's cases leads him to Honk Kong and London. Only the strong willed Holmesian rationality remains in the characteristics of the detective. However, the bohemianism of Holmes can be perceived in the detectives who were created when the sciences were being introduced in the police department in colonial Calcutta.

But as I have argued previously one wonders whether it is just due to the target readership of the genre that the detective is never made even close to the bohemian that Holmes is. As a matter of fact none of the literary detective characters born in Bengal possess the vices of Holmes. They are not as whimsical, nor are they arrogant and definitely not on drugs. They are men of respectable families, sociable, amicable only that they seem to be too self willed to belong to a professional organisation. Their operations demand a mobility that takes them far places. Marty Roth defines the Western, "detective as urban hero, that is, the hard-boiled PI and his descendants, is, almost by definition, 'male' and a 'loner'." The Bengali detective is not a loner, just usually single, and in case of Byomkesh Bakshi, he is not even a bachelor.

Probably therefore the key juncture where Holmesian traits are borrowed and replicated is from the 'male' part of the definition. The lonesome individual locked in

eccentricity is probably not the marker for the Indian masculine, the projection of maleness in a given culture is stringent on its social and philosophical histories. In Bengal the male prototype has always been the head of a *family*, who bears the responsibility of the household and ensures its wellbeing, and hence is called the '*Karta*' or the 'owner.' In India, in fact, addressing any man of honour is done on familial terms, for example the most common terms would include *Bhaisahab (Brother)*, or *Dada (Brother)*, *Chacha (Uncle)* unlike the Western tradition of calling an honourable man *Sir*, by the title bestowed by the queen. Therefore, for a detective in Bengal his family and lineage add to his respectability and hence in consequence his masculinity. Hence one arrives at the crucial juncture where one addresses the difference between what constitutes the masculine in the East and West at times of the emergence of the detective, which is in the first half of the nineteenth century in England and the second half of the same century in Bengal.

## **Stories from East and West**

### **Men of the West**

Rzepka (45) points out two major philosophical turns occurred in the west in this time. Two distinct attitudes emerged in England by the end of the eighteenth century, due to the philosophical ruptures caused by Enlightenment and Romanticism. Enlightenment promoted reason and empiricism in almost all human endeavours undertaken in the West during this time. All actions were weighed in terms of reason and rationality, while emotion and perceptions took a step closer to the irrational. The privileging of the common sense over all sensory experiences became the tendency of the post Enlightenment philosophical thoughts. There was a general distrust towards the faculties of imagination and intuition, superstitions and idiosyncrasies and a progressive obsession towards material gains. This hankering for the material profits alienated the individual from all sense of community. The moving away from faith and practices involving communal participation led to the consequent distancing and retreat within. Since perceptive experiences were suppressed or contained due to the incapacity of them being expressed in rational terms, the huge gains achieved through political reframing and liberating of markets and circulation of human rights however, it also removed and projected the individual into an existence where he began to value what he thought over how he felt.

Another major philosophical turn arose as a reaction to this depersonalizing and mechanising of the individual, romanticism. Romanticism heralded imagination and perception. In late eighteenth century there was a turn towards emotional extravagance in expression and spontaneity in perception. The Individual self was liberated and the claim to respect and freedom became the demand of the day, both the movements, though born out of opposite concerns, aggravated the obsession with the individual self. In both cases, the self was perceived as supreme in isolation be it when taken up with reasonable reminiscences or emotional outpour. The French Revolution in 1789, demanded liberty, equality and fraternity and rebelliousness and passion began to be valorised. Tales were told of highwaymen, rebels and the transgressors of the social order; therefore, the heroic began to get defined in terms of new moralities. The state sanctioned, official justice bearer began to move towards a more eccentric, amateur status, 'eventually splitting the difference between the official and the amateur detection by becoming a private professional.'<sup>22</sup>

Sherlock Holmes became the nouveau 'private professional' detective who was distinctively different from the recruits of the police department due to his inherent characteristics which can be called as romantic, bohemian. 'Bohemia' is the east European land of settlement of the gypsies, originally the homeland of the Romany people and the term Bohemian referred to the people of a certain temperament which is colourful and with a general disregard for social norms due to their unconventional habits and mannerisms with a very private notion of morality, they possessed unfathomable knowledge and genius with a love for music or arts. A bohemian detective belonged to the race that believed in the 'feudal order' of society (Rzepka, 47) and had illegal ways of aspiring for personal freedom, thus Bohemians were the outlaw heroes who were of the repute to be as lawless as the gypsies.

Holmesian bohemianism demanded such traits which had constituted the masculine popular notion of the detective in the west, where Holmes' mastery can only be admired even though one tends to overlook his deviant ways. In India, masculinity demanded separate markers due to our different history. However, as I have stated in my previous chapter, the recruits to the detective department of the police were trained in Holmesian methods of deduction and investigation. With the rise of science the importance of being the 'scientific investigator,' which Holmes is more often than not reputed to be, was asserted on them. As I have cited in the last chapter, Priyonath Mukhopadhyay did not completely trust these new

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<sup>22</sup> Charles J Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005. P.45.

methods of deduction and often stated their limitations. The colonial distinguishing of martial and non martial races and the stereotypes constructed by Bhaba (1994) shape different icons for what stands for masculine in India.

### **Into the East**

Under the subjugation of the colonial apparatus, the crisis of the male lay in the lack of freedom, not the lack of freedom due to a communitarian existence but a lack of liberty born out of the simple fact of being ruled. Mrinalini Sinha states that the male ideals in India<sup>23</sup>, were very different from that in the west. She critiques Nandy's imposition of the western evaluator's formulation of the post enlightenment notion of modern western masculinity on the Indian psyche. In India masculinity had its own culture specific connotations. Throughout late nineteenth century masculinity in India was defined by love for sports, which hints at a certain physical fitness, agility and prowess, a disdain for the intellectual individual and a high regard for individual competence. He should be engaged in constant pursuit of play and should have a chivalric attitude to, coupled with an appropriate distancing from, the women.

Sinha builds on the assumption that this colonial masculinity was shaped in the context of social formation in India, therefore the masculinity of the natives were in a constant process of definition and redefinition. The Bengalis were due to their slight frames labelled as a non martial race and because of the change of economic and political structures in nineteenth century Bengal, the upper class feudal lords were gradually becoming unproductive and hardly took part in economic processes. However, the pomp and grandeur of the aristocracy sunk the class into an economic stasis where they competed amidst themselves to replicate the habits and mannerisms of the colonial masters in order to exact titular favours from them. This tendency led to the naming of this social class as the 'effeminate *babus*' and the notion of effeminacy was applied to the sections who had degenerated and declined in this fashion. The lack of control over social and sexual activities and the propensity towards pretensions due to their belief that an English education was enough to procure an administrative or professional employment made them potentially decadent and disloyal subjects.

Bhaba suggests that this nouveau band of Bengalis went through a series of processes of identification and alienation with the colonial Other for the formation of colonial subjects,

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<sup>23</sup> In Mrinalini Sinha's *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.



this aroused in them an ‘ambivalence.’ Bhaba states that this ambivalence is the source of such effeminacy, however, this disturbing degeneration of the Bengali man led to the crisis of this cultural period in time and shook all notions of masculinity. Frantic critiques of those times even blamed it on the weather, the tropical heat which has rendered these men useless and unmanly. The nationalist intellectuals like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda appealed to the Bengali middle class to and exert their physical prowess and shake off the sloth. Sinha (22) says, “The appeal of the colonial politics of masculinity and effeminacy, therefore, was equally symptomatic of the efforts of the Indian middle class to establish their own hegemony in colonial society.” This double edged sword was wielded against the decrepit class in Bengal as well as the colonial masters in order to achieve the political control over a state which the middle class wanted to take over.

In no context be it philosophical or political is the Indian man ever depicted as a loner. Rather the Indian identity is formed on the basis of lineage and connection with the family. In fact, Sudhir Kakar (1997) says, “There is a greater need for ongoing mentorship, guidance and help from others in getting through life and a greater vulnerability to feelings of helplessness when these ties are strained.” Whether effeminate or the masculine the familial identity of the Indian male has been of supreme importance. Though after the rise of the middle class, as I have elucidated previously, Kakar (37) says, “a consequence of these related processes has been the uncritical acceptance by the middle class, itself the child of modernization, of Western intellectual models (of which Marxism is also one) with claims of universality.” Hence when the Bengali detective finally arrived with the rise of modernity and consequently the middle class in Bengal, he was already being framed on borrowed traits. Only the few indigenous consciousness of the Indian male remained. The effeminacy of the Indian male had been seen as result of sloth, an inability to think, the urge to ape but never because of his sense of social belonging. Therefore, the hegemonizing apparatus gained control over the masculine identity of the Bengali male by postulating the features of the detective male who was a cultural appropriation of the Holmes.

So the Indian detective emerged as the entwining processes of a cultural sensibility given the Indian social context and the Holmesian framework to work on. The detective who was initially a mere man employed by the government became the Private Investigator and throughout the genre the influence of Holmes is obvious. The acceptable vices like smoking and being self obsessed are traits that Holmes injected in their trained subjectivities. Stories were written of detectives who were modelled on Holmes, underachievers, fashionably

undisciplined sometimes obsessively careful, reasonably whimsical yet never too Holmesian for the Indian reader to not identify with. Various detectives have been created under the Holmesian influence Rzepka (139), agrees, “Holmes and his models of detection often with the sidekick attached, influenced popular literature beyond the boundaries of crime fiction.”

### **When the Two Ends Meet**

The Bengali detective fiction authors were taken up with the renowned Sherlock Holmes so much so that writer Parashuram, wrote of a detective on whose door Holmes himself came knocking seeking help. This story, *Nil Tara (Blue Star)* is a story where Holmes has been employed in Bengal to solve a case for the royal family. For the first time the readers are faced with the Indian perception of the two Englishmen. Rakhai Mustafi, the village schoolmaster who is known for his intelligence and a keen sense of observation finds two Englishmen knocking on his door at the dead of a night in nineteenth century Bengal. One of the two is a tall, thin clean shaven man with a broad forehead while the other is shorter, stouter sporting a moustache. He observes that while the taller man greets him by taking off his hat, the stouter of the two who must be familiar with the relationship the colonial masters have with the colonised natives does not do so. Sadly our Indian sleuth has no idea who these two men are and he has never heard of Sherlock Holmes and Watson even though he has read the works of Dickens, Milton and George Eliot. He deduces that Holmes must either smoke cigars or a pipe from the stains of tobacco on his fingers but due to his first visit to Bengal and his first encounter with Bengali food he has been licking his lips, all the while refraining from a smoke since his tongue is burnt from too spicy a meal. Watson on the other hand, due to his familiarity with the food habits of the Orient seems to be quite accustomed to the spice and mosquitoes which have kept them awake the whole night. Interestingly when he shares his observations with the two foreigners they are suitably impressed only their native attendant who had come to translate their English words to Bengali so that the simple school master might comprehend the British language bears him down with suspicion and condescension. Holmes is here to solve the case of the missing *Rani* or the queen of the village, who has disappeared with a brooch her husband had given her, which was in the shape of a blue star.

It seems that the man has quite easily deciphered the mystery and in the end Mustafi is recognised as the queen's past lover, who had been beaten senseless on the night of his marriage by the cruel king and his would-be wife was carried off and married to the *Raja* instead. Holmes' intention unlike what he had guessed in the beginning was not to interrogate

him in order to know her whereabouts but to inform him of the same and tell him to reconcile with her. This unusual plot has been spun around a man who, as Watson claims in *A Scandal in Bohemia*, would not let his 'softer passions' show. Watson claims that Holmes furiously neglected his emotional side so as to prevent any distraction from his tasks of cold rationality. This new, yet very familiar Sherlock Holmes reveals his emotional side which really complements his impeccable art of deduction rather than taking away from it. This is the effect Bengal has had on the sleuth.

If the narrative is viewed in a less literal fashion then it is probably a portrait of what the Holmesian detective would be if he were to solve cases in India. The Indian alpha male is never rid of emotions or compassions and in the end his 'softer passions' surface revealing a gullible heart moved by tales of love and separation. The story, though amusing, gives a deep insight to the relationship between Holmes and his Indian derivation, where even without knowing the detective they have been modelled on, they reach conclusions using his keen talents of observation. Secondly, it asserts how if a detective has to seek employment in India, it will not do to lock his emotional self behind 'gibe and sneer' by considering his humane side an 'intrusion.' In Bengal, the detective must use all faculties in order to reach the true end and mete out real justice to the wronged. The encounter between Holmes and Mustafi elucidates the evolution of the Bengali detective from the mere framework of a Holmes who is 'a perfect reasoning and observing machine' into a sleuth who has to operate within the Bengali social structure.

### **Pradosh Chandra Mitter and Holmes**

Feluda's character is modelled on Holmes as Ray admits and while the Indian influence of Saradindu's Byomkesh blends perfectly with that of the renowned Sherlock Holmes, Felu Mitter emerges as one of the most favourite investigators of Bengal. Topshe says 'Feluda, too, has an extraordinary memory. He is a bright, observant, receptive and curious man of sharp intellect and refinement who is extremely fond of adventures.'<sup>24</sup> This central character who Satyajit Ray created bears all the tropes of masculine ideals that I have been trying to establish so far, he is fast paced, sociable person who is a master of disguise and his adventures involve a wide terrain of operations. The sustained suspense and the thrilling narration of the cases that this detective undertakes not only achieves success for this sleuth but creates one of the richest series in sleuth fiction. The series is more in tune with the

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<sup>24</sup> From *Badshahi Angti or The Emperor's Ring*, Gopa Mjumdar's translation of Feluda story.

detective fiction written Hemendra Kumar Ray who was the first one to write for children. Hence Feluda is a strange amalgamation of the Bohemian scientific Holmes, the very Bengali and immensely successful Byomkesh Bakshi with a spirit of Joyonto Manik or Bimal Kumar.

This interesting fusion of the crisp and impeccable deductive skills of Holmes, the deep intelligence and amicable traits of Byomkesh Bakshi and the adventurous spirit of Ray's duo makes Feluda, the prototype detective who children trail as if he was their 'dada' and the adults are intrigued by. Feluda is a single man, suave, athletic and with fast reflexes, sporting a revolver he reminds the readers of another James Bond and adorned in his western attire he represents the sleuth who is at par with all his global counterparts, yet his mind is modelled on Byomkesh. Though I have engaged with the character of Byomkesh elaborately in my previous chapter it is perhaps only fair to mention a few traits which have earned him the repute of elevating the genre as high literature.

Byomkesh appears when he is younger than Feluda, he is a young man of twenty three who is clad in *dhoti* and carries no weapon beyond his brilliant mind. While he sports a pleasant disposition, he is capable of intimidating even the vilest of criminals. He was conceived in the mid 1930s which is post Gandhian *Swadeshi* and Non Violence Movement and therefore he is seen without any weapon and though his tales involve cold blooded and gruesome murders alike the sleuth never engages in any violence. He does make the criminals pay the highest penance, sometimes with their lives but their deaths occur either due to them committing suicide or because of them causing their own deaths. On one occasion in the story *Chorabaali (Quicksand)*, Byomkesh plans the killing of the culprit but he clears his own mind from any guilt by enquiring from the land lord of the property where he is investigating whether it is not fair that a murderer who kills in cold blood having calculated every move deserves a death exactly as cruel as he gives others?

It is perhaps this insight into his layered persona which makes Byomkesh so important in any attempt to critically engage with the genre. His character is one of the most psychologically developed characters in this genre. His deep conviction and passion in his work does not diminish when he falls in love with Satyabati, who he marries later in the series and in *Chitra Chor*, where he is ill, he whines and quarrels with her and then lures her into giving him permission for a smoke by buying her a perfume. This domestic and unconventional trait in a detective does not take away from his multi layered character but in fact adds to him. He is one of those rare literary figures who achieve the stature of identifying

with his readers both as one of their kind and as beyond their kind. Saradindu Bandhopdhyay achieves a feat unparalleled due to the characterisation of Byomkesh in this genre. His contemporary detectives who have been successful have not had such intrinsically engaging personas. Of sound morality and a deep sense of justice Byomkesh has beaten the overcoat sporting Kiriti Ray, Nihar Ranjan Gupta's sleuth and all other sleuths who have been derivations of the Holmesian ideal. It will be wrong to say that Byomkesh does not possess the Holmesian faculty of reason, however, as the series progresses he develops into a sleuth with a distinct persona of his own. So much so that one in Byomkesh's case tends to overlook the Holmesian influence as the character appears to be so sound even without that reference.

Felu Mittir, is just as sociable, but since his assistant is his cousin who is half his age, he must be intimidating at times. His rebukes and knocks on Topshe's head are what make him a familiar familial figure and the almost indifferent and depersonalised characters of other detectives are left behind in the competition for success. Unlike most other detectives of his times like Kikira, Parashar Shome etc Feluda has quite a humane character who remains reader beyond the plots. He possesses the footloose impulse and the wanderlust of Hemendra Ray's Bimal- Kumar and Holmes rationality, Byomkesh's distinctive personality and the adventurous spirit of the detective duo makes Feluda the male ideal in the times he appeared. Of course the identification and narrative structure of the series is what makes him the star sleuth of his readers. Surabhi Banerjee states,

Despite his adherence to the traditional techniques, Ray's Feluda stories can hardly be conventional. First of all, the character of Feluda, seemingly an indigenous version of Holmes, evinces qualities that are uniquely his own. It is interesting to note that Feluda, as a detective, excels in lone ventures; he solves the mysteries on his own and obviously Topshe is a feeble substitute for Watson with hardly any vital role in his investigations. He is at best a functional narrator and the other figure Lal Mohan Babu who is introduced for the sake of comic relief and as an archetype of catchy thriller-writers- and these two characters seldom overreach the boundaries, never transcend the authorial intention. Despite the reiterated use of the expression "Three Musketeers", there is hardly any evidence, in the actual stories of their joint venture. Thus it turns out to be an amalgam of the triangular and the single figure pattern." (169- 170)

Though Banerjee is extremely insightful in observing the unique traits of Feluda, who she later on goes on to call the author's 'projection into himself,' it is perhaps unfair to call the trio of Feluda, Topshe and Lal Mohan Ganguly as a redundant triangular formation. Rather it is also due to the 'unique' use of this most popular convention of the detective form that the series becomes so critically engrossing. The nexus of the three different stereotypes of masculinity, the sleuth, the sidekick and the foil, in this case all encapsulated in the body of the scintillating fast paced adventures of Feluda, enrich the narrative because of their frequent transgressions of the set roles and functions. It is perhaps a mistake to dismiss their 'joint ventures' since after the appearance of Lal Mohan Ganguly aka Jatayu, the climax of these stories have been sustained at a higher level of excitement and thrill. Banerjee asserts that even though Topshe is the narrator in the story it is Feluda, who is 'in command' of the story. The omnipresence of the detective often leads people to believe that the narrative is sustained in the 'single figure pattern' however this is probably where one must engage with the complex characterisation and the primary function of the assisting characters of the detective to avoid being so caught up in the detective's charm.

### **The Watsonian Topshe**

*"The standard detective sidekick such as Holmes' Watson or Hercule Poirot's Captain Hastings usually performs this modal functioning in a seemingly natural way calibrated to match his or her presumably ordinary intelligence."* (Rzepka, 20)

The narrator or the assistant to the detective plays the crucial role of bridging differences of acumen between the sleuth and the detective. Hence he must assume a role where he is a lesser individual than the protagonist, whose stories are worth recounting, and lesser to the reader even. For he serves as the crucial platform for identification and interphase between the reader and the detective, he must at times reduce to being a foil to the detective in order to accentuate the genius of the detective but he does have to maintain a certain stature in terms of insight and intelligence in order to be worthy of the sleuth's assistant:

Doyle made these aims known at the very beginning of the Holmes saga, starting with the title of the first chapter of *A Study in Scarlet*, 'Mr Sherlock Holmes'. Before encountering the human enigma, however, we are presented with another that is somewhat easier to penetrate, if no less difficult to appreciate fully in light of Doyle's disingenuous workmanship: 'John H Watson, M.D.' (Rzepka, 122)

The bridge over the essential championing of the sleuth over that of the reader must be achieved with the works explained through the presence of the intermediate intervention,, that of the seemingly humble and awestruck narrator. Certain information is withheld from the narrator in order to keep the curiosity of the reader and mystery of the plot intact. The deductive capacity of the sleuth must be proved and established over and over again every time hence not really in a way which gives fair scope to the reader to arrive at answers before the illustrious detective the plot plays itself out through the body of the narrator, which is in all ways the filter from what goes on within to what must be aroused without the narrative.

In Feluda, Topshe is that interstitial space which must be filled between the young readers and far older sleuth. He is the birthplace of awe and admiration. He is the author's tool to regulate the reader's response to his detective. Topshe is the screen of material evidence which keeps the pace and thrill of the narrative intact. The readers of this genre are meant to be roughly Topshe's age and the generation of awe for the 'dada' sleuth becomes a task that has to be carried out by Topshe. Hence he has to maintain that fine balance of scepticism and admiration which keeps the narrative moving. Hence Banerjee's assumption that he has hardly a role to play in the scheme of the detective falls short since the control of the action within the plot of the fictional narrative might be in the hands of the sleuth yet the generation of credibility for the detective's feats are achieved by Topshe's apparently unassuming ways. The frequent generation of awe and agitation due to an elusive conclusion pits the narrator in a battle of wits with the protagonist, this filter to the reader and creates possible junctures of identification and captivates the mind which is the moot aspiration of the popular detective genre.

Topshe 's training is hence not a benign practice to be the illustrious sleuth someday but an attempt to create the same grudging admiration and sometimes overwhelming awe he feels in the reader. He is a mere boy of thirteen and apart from his literary function he is also stands for the generation Feluda is addressing. The idolization and glorification of the detective is happening through Topshe's sparkling irises. The super human traits and the traits which he accesses in first hand in his cousin he learns from and the young readers are trained subsequently due to the complete identification with Topshe which happens instantly due to the fact that the series is his point of view.

### **The Foil, the Clown and the Critique**

The third of this convention ridden trio is the foil, namely, Lal Mohan Ganguly, who is the bestselling author of pot boilers but is in reality an ill informed comical man who is constantly being tolerated in exasperation or slighted with derision in the series. He is apparently the author's critique of himself and the manifestation of his fears but in fact Jatayu is a critique of the genre itself. The popularity of his sleuth Prakhar Rudra's adventures which often have wrong information and reach ridiculous conclusions. Yet such is the lure of the genre that Jatayu's books cannot help but succeed, even when he claims that hippopotamus's stay in Antarctica (*Tintoretto's Jesus*). The cathartic ritual at the end of a successful venture of scapegoating, as Rzepka says, is such that the reader reaches a point where he can barely distinguish between the realization of the utopic moral order and the quality of the plot where he is continuously getting lured into. By generating laughter of the readers by creating Lal Mohan Ganguly Ray's critique of the sensational and thrilling form of the genre can be perceived.

Lal Mohan Ganguly is barely the prototype Bengali, however, his acute, rich sense of humour and prowess with creative art and not to mention immense professional success, that equals if not defeats even Feluda's fame forms a character which becomes beyond a mere foil to the detective. Superstitious, cowardly, clumsy Jatayu not only creeps into the heart of the characters of the series but also critically stimulates the mind of the reader. The character prototype that one is addressing here is that of the cowardly Bengali, a long past cultural figure. However, here he is rid of all superficiality and hypocrisy which allows him to be so credible and dear to the readers. Jatayu, is how close one can come to effeminacy in the series, the creative faculty, the impulsive, irrational character embodies all the accusations Bengalis had flung at one another a century and a half ago, however, by serving as the foil to the alpha male detective, Jatayu exacts respect from the reader and earns favour by his immensely enjoyable sense of humour due to his credible characteristics. When the prototype effeminate Bengali man is portrayed in company of the prototype alpha male they not only create humour but also complement one another in order to penetrate the minds of the readers.

The trio of males in the series therefore are very interesting because even when they are a part of a formulaic structure, they become such interesting categories of gender construction. The all male universe of the series sustains the readers' imagination because of the different intrinsic ways in which the detective plays on itself and achieves all ends all the time captivating the reader's mind to construct the essential multiple portraits of the male



which is so central to the genre. The trio is not merely a feat achieved by building on the Indian imagination of Holmes but is also the Holmesian representation of the Indian psyche and cultural history which garbs itself in the sinews of masculinity.

*Glaisher laughed.*

*'Miss Vane's intuition, as they call it, is against it,' said he.*

*'It's not intuition,' retorted Harriet. 'There's no such thing. It's common sense. It's artistic sense, if you like. All those theories- they are all wrong. They're artificial. [...] You men [...] have let yourselves be carried away by all these figures and time-tables and you've lost sight of what you're really dealing with. But it's all machine-made. It creaks at every joint. It's like- like a bad plot, built up round an idea that won't work. [...] Whatever the explanation is, it must be simpler than that- bigger- not so ramped. Can't you see what I mean?'*

*(Have his Carcass-Dorothy Sayers)*

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ADVENTURE IN ANDROGYNY

*"The detective story genre is essentially even when written by women, even when the detectives are female a "masculine" genre, which reached stasis, if not perfection, by the sixties."-Marty Roth, in 'Foul and Fair Play: Reading Genre in Classic Detective Fiction (1995)*

#### **The formulaic author- sleuth- reader trio**

I shall use the term 'detective fiction' in what follows to refer to any story that contains a major character undertaking the investigation of a mysterious crime or similar transgression, and reserve the term 'detection', as in 'literary detection', 'stories of detection', and the like, for that category of detective writing in which the puzzle element directly engages the reader's attention and powers of inference.<sup>25</sup>

Deriving from Rzepka's formulations of the distinctive features of detection it is probably safe to infer that the detective story emerges out of a colonial capitalist economy which believes in the Foucaultian discourse of surveillance. Hence while the sleuth is engaged with a particular mystery he is found tracing the culprit's way all the time hounding his every move. A successful detective story is that which sets up points of identifications with the reader with the instinct of affirming to the moral universe where good defeats the evil and restores justice:

Literary detection seems to generate, in writers and readers alike, a distinct disciplinary impulse that paradoxically encourages 'rule subversion' by perpetuating the expectation of formulaic adherence, a self contradictory impulse largely foreign to other popular literary genres.<sup>26</sup>

This impulsive response and participation in the plot of the detective fiction triggers the success of the particular detective. Every author who has contributed to the genre aims at achieving this in order to capture the reader's active interest. Willard Huntington Wright

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted from Charles J Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2005. Pg 12

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 13

states that, 'the reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described.'<sup>27</sup> When the reader is so implicated in the narrative body of the detective then he becomes an extended machinery of the text, a tool taken out of the pages of the literary text which comes alive in his hands only with his active engagement with the plot. The experience of a detective story remains incomplete without the reader's intervention. Hence one arrives at the critical question on this task of the author to set his detective as a worthy adversary to the reader and the acceptance and cathartic ritual of admittance of defeat on the reader's part, in the hands of the detective at the end of a thrilling plot in order to pave way for his detective to make an impact on the reader's mind. The truth in totality must be perceived by the detective first and is then passed on to the reader along with other fictional characters. Rzepka asserts that this genre is a form of wish fulfilment:

The wishes to be fulfilled may be psychological and common to all readers, or socially determined, or both, but their fulfilment is nearly always conceived as vicarious, that is achieved through a process of identification with the activities of one or several characters.<sup>28</sup>

Here one assumes that the primary figure of identification remains to be that of the detective who stands for the defence of hegemonic norms and the cultural and moral value systems, however, if the reader is being subjectivised in the plot of the detective one cannot deny the probability of the reader also identifying with the narrator due to the intimate first person narration of the observant assistant which helps in generating awe and appreciation for the detective. The reader might also identify with other characters of the plot due to the deeply psychological intent of the characters. Hence the points of identification of the reader need not be limited to just the sleuth. However, one assumes that even though the third person reportage of the doings of the protagonist might insert a distance between the sleuth and the reader, the act of engaging in a fight for championing the puzzle creates points of identification where the space of the narrative gets infiltrated by the reader by his indulging in acts of reasoning and detection.

One arrives at a juncture where the dispensability of the reader promptly falls out of question. It is just to infer that the reader is just as integral to the universe of the detective as is the detective himself, borrowing Fredric Jameson's formulation that power relations of the

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<sup>27</sup> From Willard Huntington Wright ('S S van Dine'), *Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories* in Haycraft. pg 189.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

state gets perpetrated through popular culture, then the detective story, being one of the most popular of genres cannot deny the direct linkage it has with its readers. This is the crucial point where one addresses the absence of women in the Feluda series. Whenever I have discussed the characterization of Feluda, I have been asserting that the privileging of the male rationality over feminine intuition or passion has rid the narrative of any space for women.

Unfortunately, it is a fact that children's fiction in Bengali suffers from a lack of female characters. Even the genre is called 'kishore sahitya' (literature for young males), which quite benignly does away with the 'kishori' (young girls) from the scheme of things. Young female readership has been handled extremely callously by authors writing in this genre. It seems like one is forced into a world where one learns to think like a boy, perceive like a boy, read like a boy regardless of the reader's gender. This universe of the female reader begins with the act of unsexing, identifying with a character of the opposite gender, though one does not deny the fact that a lot of female readers might choose to do so. The point here is the availability of the choice and naturally internalising this situation of deprivation.

### **Feluda and the Missing Woman**

The stimulus to release a Felu Mittir within each young reader has rid the narrative world of the detective of one crucial figure, that of the woman. The *naritva* within failed to manifest without, so they did without her. Content in the all male universe of the detective they could find no corner for the woman. The anthropocentric turn of Bengali literature and the genre naturally turned to an androgynous turn and hence as I have argued in my Introduction, while *naritva* might have been appropriated the '*nari's* were perceived as unnecessary.

When one is assessing the character and characteristics of the illustrious Pradosh Chandra Mitter aka Feluda, the hero of the male readers young and old, one has to keep in mind that one is dealing with a world where "sex and crime passionel" had to be intentionally left out. For those unfamiliar with the stories- the fact that Feluda involves Topshe only in those cases that are suitable for "family audiences" so to speak is a part of the canon. This is principally because the target readers are teenage boys or even younger children. Byomkesh Bakshi, the very popular and successful sleuth created by Saradindu Bandhopadhyay, solved cases for adult readers and hence had teamed up with his wife Satyabati, who he met during one of his passionate tales of crime. However, such an involved female figure is not

considered proper for Feluda's universe that is full of adolescent readers and therefore the female figure is dispelled from the (dis)order of things.

Feluda stories were published in *Sandesh*, which is a magazine meant for youngsters. Satyajit Ray wanted to construct the post colonial modern Bengali Bhadraklok who was an iconic 'dada' to the next generation through admiring eyes and sighs of the narrator. Hence Topshe is found travelling with Feluda and Jatayu chronicling his adventures. Out of the rare insignificant female characters who the trio encounters are never paid any attention to by either Topshe or his cousin. In *The Curse of the Goddess*, the little granddaughter of the victim is far removed from the sticky plot since she is obsessed with her doll and other girly things that she plays with. Frankly, the adventures of Feluda then become narratives written by a male in the voice of an adolescent male about the exploits of an extremely suave male where the figure of the woman is considered extremely unnecessary and is therefore eventually done away with.

A very powerful woman character whom Feluda admires for her wit and confidence is Mrs Sen (*The Disappearance of Ambar Sen*). She is sensuous, smart and very convincing but her story is that of a joke a family plays on Feluda hence the woman's agency is contained within the family's domain. She does not affect social function and is not a serious part of the male universe which is acting in their myriad ways to engage with the noble cause moral correction. Hence a potential character like her has to remain within the patriarchal structure within the family and her significance in the broader social structure is curtailed.

Sadly this is all that the women in the series comprising of thirty two stories have to show. Throughout my dissertation I have established that women hardly ever featured in the genre when it was being written for children, for these stories could never have crimes of passion in the plot. This prompts us to delve deeper into the query as to why do the woman need to be contained in familial structures? Why must her story gain significance only when *crime passionel* gets incorporated in the narrative? Why must the woman naturally be associated with the assumption of being the receptor as well as the disseminator of emotional extravagance? The term 'rationality' is gendered right from its conception, since it has been considered the male forte and the faculty of intuition and instinct seemed to have been bestowed on the woman. This gendered perception of the capabilities attributed to both the sexes is best perceived in detective fiction. P D James calls her book on the detective *An Unsuitable Genre*, to critique the assumption that the woman makes an unconvincing sleuth.

However, while analysing the causes for the absence of women in Feluda, one has to engage with the literary tradition of detective literature in India. If the woman characters of Europe have evolved with historical and cultural transformation then it is imperative to locate points of cultural evolution which has caused the representation of women in this genre to be coloured in such shades.

### **On the Trail of the Woman**

It is unfair to state that women have little to do with this genre in Bengali, there have been ample women who have commissioned the production, authored and even played the role of the sleuth in detective fiction. However, the popularity or acclaim that these endeavours achieved is insignificant. The first appearance of the woman at the scene of crime was in the role of a spy, or an accomplice of the male sleuth. In the first accounts of detective operations by Priyonath Mukhopadhyay, there are mentions of women who helped him achieve his ends by extending their services. This as Sumanto Banerjee states had only been achieved because the detective department exploited “the gender specific reach of the female.”<sup>29</sup> The ‘female’ here implies prostitutes who would assist the workings of the department in return of material or social favours. There are mentions of a woman recruit of the detective department in Mukhopadhyay’s memoirs but even they were recruited in the department in order to gain access to the households of the suspects by disguising them as domestic hands. The primary function that these women served was that of baits. One of them assisted Mukhopadhyay in a case where a housewife went missing; disguised as a maid she spied on the family members to unravel the secret scandal in the family. The missing woman had an incestuous relation with her husband’s nephew and in fear of this secret being exposed the nephew had murdered his beloved.

There is a mention of a certain Basanta Bibi in Mukhopadhyay’s accounts; she is a prostitute in Sonagachi and not a regular recruit of the department. In the case mentioned earlier she had helped in the tracking of the murderer nephew who had finally hidden himself in the dark alleys of Sonagachi, Kolkata’s biggest red light area. In a strange case where the son of a particularly affluent family of Calcutta ran away from his home with a huge amount of money and jewellery, Mukhopadhyay was asked to cover the scandal and was entrusted with the secret task of finding out the whereabouts of the son. The trail led him to the brothel of Basanta Bibi and since the family had just asked for the return of their son, Mukhopadhyay

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<sup>29</sup> From Sumanto Banerjee’s *The Wicked City*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2009.

recruited Basanta Bibi as an informant of the department by giving her the jewellery and the thousand rupees which the young man had stolen from his family. Mukhopadhyay asserts the importance of having a spy in Sonagachi, for a lot of criminals visited their lovers in the area and the female spy was an important recruit to have in order to capture a lot of them.<sup>30</sup> The police had always targeted the brothels since they were considered the favourite retreats of these criminals the surveillance of these places became imperative to their operation.

Even in Bankaulla's stories, the role of the woman has been established as that of a spy. Though he has stated passionately that his spy was a "beautiful woman aged about 21 and 22, gifted with extraordinary intelligence," he adds with quite a complacent observation, "you won't find a cleverer woman than a depraved female."<sup>31</sup> In one of his cases this extremely beautiful spy called Bama had managed to capture the culprit by extracting a confession from him through seduction and manipulation. She too was a prostitute who had gone into the house of a suspect pretending that she is a damsel in distress who needed shelter for the night. She had an elaborate affair with the suspect, Umakanta, and on one such occasion when he was boasting to her of having committed this certain crime, she refused to believe him and in order to impress the truth on her, the foolish man showed her a few letters which were proof of his crime. She bagged those letters and left the house that night. This, according to Bankaulla, could have only been achieved by her skills of seduction. One can easily infer from such accounts the fact that the women who were earlier seen in the department belonged to a certain class and enjoyed a mobility which the upper class women of this time had still not begun to access.

Later when Panchkori Dey started writing detective fiction the woman's active participation in the narrative gets slowly done away with. Even in the writings of Saralabala Dasi (Sirkar), the first woman author of detective fiction women were slighted continuously. Her writing bears a general disdain for the woman and her ways. Her painstaking effort, to make her detective win the contest for which she is writing his story, results in the self-conscious expulsion of all that can be characterised as feminine in her writing. She was writing for winning the Kuntalin contest and her assumption that the rest of the detective stories being written by male competitors will be given the privilege of being labelled as 'rational' make her vehemently condemn the woman and her womanly ways. In order to comment on the clumsy, flamboyant, quite silly woman she unnecessarily makes her detective,

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<sup>30</sup> Both cases have been cited by Sumanto Banerjee in his book *The Wicked City*, p. 483-484.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 485.



Shekhar comment on their untidy writing and their obsessions with sending perfumed letters. She assumes her readers will be predominantly males who might expect a woman's narration of the adventure of a man who might unnecessary be sympathetic to a woman, a fact, she believes, that would take away from her chances at winning the prize.

After such a treatment from the female pen, the woman finds opportunity to show her skills with the art of detection in the writings of Dinendra Nath Ray, the author wrote of a woman, Kusum, in his story *Hatya Rahasya (Murder Mystery,)* who has lived under the patronage of a landlord but is really the daughter of his employee and who took up charge of acquitting her husband from the charges of murder that she was convinced her husband was incapable of committing. From the beginning she states boldly that the only reason why she could achieve such a daring feat is due to her husband's life being at stake. Her deep love and devotion for him gives her courage to even set out on such an escapade. Her upper class sisters, who are the biological daughters of the landlord, cannot at first comprehend how a protected housewife would achieve such a feat. Her favourite and closest friend, her sister Sarat, warns her about the dangers of wanting to do what she has never been trained for. She emphatically insists that when the police could not achieve any solution that would redeem her husband's reputation then what can a mere woman accomplish. But seeing the determination in Kusum she finally relents and agrees to send her over to Benares in the disguise of a maid. Her unparalleled daring has been a consequence of, as the author continuously asserts throughout the narrative, the wealth of feelings she has for her husband.

While for the male detective it is a venture into inductive detection and logical deduction triggered within him due to the perpetration of the hegemonic notions of morality in his times, for a woman any such escapade is a direct outcome of her emotional involvement with the victim or the suspect. Therefore even in writing of a woman's toils at deciphering the solution to a mystery, the author demarcates the nature and motive of undertaking such a feat very distinctively from the reasons a male would have for attempting such a task. This demarcation prevents the female detective from earning the same respectability which is naturally bestowed on the male sleuth. "Therefore individuals who act in a masculine manner expect to and likely will be treated with respect and a degree of deference to the "power" implicit in their behaviour."<sup>32</sup> While in the case of the female detective in accordance to her characterisation so far, "feminine behaviour, on the other hand,

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<sup>32</sup> From Connell, R. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1995.

implies caring, concern for others, and a certain vulnerability, signalling a need for protection and direction from others.”<sup>33</sup>

This is probably while in the consequent detective fiction the woman can be seen most frequently in the role of the victim since her ‘vulnerability’ leads to the subsequent victimisation of her character. It thus became quite a convention in adult detective fiction in Bengali to have female victims while the children fiction completely did away with her role. While in the West she was continuously growing feminist traits and ideology, in nineteenth century Bengal she could hardly discard her marital responsibility since ‘the Madonna and the vamp’<sup>34</sup> stereotype in Bengal was intricately linked to a woman living under the patronage of her husband or otherwise. The spies could only belong from a certain class in the society which allowed them to discard moral constraints while the detective in order to achieve the required seriousness and elevation to be a respectable sleuth. Hence due to the continuous harping on social security the female detective lost her position in the generic history of the detective and authors became intrigued with the task of constructing male protagonists. The woman as I have stated earlier became a convenient side character then mere victims. Emotional vulnerability and lack of scope for physical training makes them less suitable for the ‘masculine’ task of the detective.

“Joan Warthling Roberts's essay, "Amelia Butterworth: The Spinster Detective," is a survey of origins emphasizing the gendered limitations of the "spinster" as independent woman detective: Amelia Butterworth is a prototype from the American 1890s with the "supposed sexual innocence" of a Miss Marple, whom we see in Irons and Roberts's later essay as a female who may once have been, but isn't any longer, sexual, or has missed the (Love-) boat entirely. Bobbie Ann Mason's essay on Nancy Drew, girl detective, provides an analogous not-yet-sexual prototype for the female detective, in an entertaining reminder of pre-feminist days, marked by Drew's unselfconscious (but to us, proto-feminist) talent for independence.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Quote from Zimmerman "Gender Inequality: New Conceptual Terrain." In R. L. Blumberg (ed.), *Gender, Family and Economy*: 124- 151. Newbury Park: California. 1991.

<sup>34</sup> As suggested in ‘Crime in the Movies: Investigating the Efficacy of Measures of Both Sex and Gender for Predicting Victimization and Offending in Film’ by Author(s): Sarah Eschholz and Jana Bufkin Source: *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Dec., 2001), pp. 655-676 Published by: Springer Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/684828> Accessed: 30/07/2009 08:42

<sup>35</sup> Quote from Review: ‘An Unsuitable Genre for a Woman...’ Author(s): Patricia Merivale Reviewed work(s): *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction* by Glenwood Irons Source: *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 37, No. 4

While the West manages to create a loner female detective, the cultural conditioning of the women in pre- independence Bengal does not facilitate the formation of a literary woman icon for this genre. Hence the 'spinster' detective in Bengal never enters the literary world of the detective, mobility, when granted to a female in the late nineteenth and twentieth century Bengal, is given when patronage is assured, therefore the domestic and the woman's duties towards it prevents the sleuth from emerging out of her protected and protective quarters. This social constraint surfaces in the portrayal of women in the later detective fiction. The women then become the side characters, either as commentators who lends insights in the plot or at best she becomes a powerful character who is sustained in the series but not without her limitations of mobility.

In the works of Saradindu Bandhopadhyay the character of Satyabati is developed as a woman who furiously protects her brother who had been the prime suspect in a murder case (*Arthomanortham*), Byomkesh falls in love with her and marries her, sadly after this crucial contribution in the series she is perceived as the character in charge of the famous sleuth's household and health. Her persona gets engulfed in the plots concerning her husband's exploits while she accommodates herself in a role accorded to her in this universe featuring Byomkesh's feats. The failings of these women to emerge as the typical detective lie in their limited independence to undertake journeys without supervision. Their social identity overpowers their individual personas; the female detectives therefore operate in a very restricted domain and the narrative suffers from these stringent social bindings.

Till the 1960s the male detectives evolved and shaped the genre, the adult narratives still retained women characters, Saradindu Bandhopadhyay's *Chiriakhana*, has a very powerful woman called Banolakshmi, she is in fact a charismatic, intelligent, awe inspiring co conspirator in this novel. Bandhopadhyay has created many such intriguing women in his body of work, these women as is expected add to the complex narrative giving his writings the colours needed to make them a part of literature beyond scandalous thrills. However, the extent of their growth has either made them into repositories and conservers of deep, and often, dark secrets or into the cause for the actions of the male characters. Their depth or unity has never been compromised even when he is describing the obnoxious wife of the professor, Mr Shome, in *Chitra Chor*, who is no short of menace personified given her

extremely suspicious and not so pleasant disposition. The woman sleuth has by now disappeared completely from the genre as male sleuths are created through a continuous process of experimentation and a deepening obsession with the workings of their psyche and super minds. It is not till Satyajit Ray's *Feluda* had established himself quite firmly as a literary sleuth to reckon with and feminist authors becoming painfully aware of the absence of the female in this genre that a few female detectives enter the arena of mind games. These detectives too have been surprisingly created in Holmesian tones as I would thoroughly engage with, in the next section of my chapter.

### **The female eye for detection**

The detective genre due to its intrinsic privileging of rationality is considered as 'masculine' where certain rational and deductive capabilities become imperative in the character of the protagonist. Not merely the faculty of logical derivations, physical prowess also becomes a necessity. Hence the woman must put on the mannerisms and habits of the male. They would either become tomboyish or just exhibit an uncharacteristic strength of her mind perceived as best suited for the man. As Doyle would describe Adler, 'she has the face of most beautiful of women, and the mind of the most resolute of men.' (216). The primary reason why Roth believes that the genre demands androgyny is because of this kind of characterisation, I argue that the genre in Bengal had social constraints and the cultural connotations of being 'man' had very different significance from that of the West. Just like the fact that being a 'woman' in Bengal had very different social meaning. The genre developed in the late nineteenth century in Bengal, the social mobility and the position of women in terms of the social freedom was very different from the women of the West. The Bengali woman were not reputed to have the man's liberation or capacity of rational deduction, their fiery dedication and the intense emotional capacity, like Ray's detective *Kusum*, make them capable of 'intuition' and not 'deduction':

Irons's introduction charts the post-sixties development of the feminist detective story in the creative, yet problematic and stressful, tension between its feminism and the masculinist conventions of the "hard-boiled" or "private eye" story."<sup>36</sup>

The feminine intervention in the genre appears post the heydays of the alpha male detective. Suchitra Bhattacharya creates the characters Mitin Mashi and her assistant Tupur,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 693.

interestingly Mitin, or Pragya Paramita Mukhopadhyay is married and is an ardent addict of the internet, given any case she goes back to this storehouse of information for her research. Her cases are all set in Kolkata but involve people of different nationalities. For example she usually has clients who belong to the Armenian Diaspora in Kolkata (*Arakiel'er Hire or Arakiel's Diamond*), or the Anglo Indians who have stayed for generations here (*Jonathan'er Barir Bhoot or (The Ghost in Jonathan's House)*), and sometimes involve even the inmates of the Chinese colony situated in the middle of Kolkata who are in possession of a rare and valuable map. This aunt and niece duo series has been written in the turn of the millennium and the series has not had a stellar reception. Rather the lukewarm response has been quite a disappointment for the female detective.

However the failure of the detective to make a lasting impression on her reader is because her character suffers traits of both the female Holmes as well as the respectable Indian woman who balances a happy family and a very demanding profession. Her intimidating persona gets torn between playing the playful wife and mother and the sleuth trying to outwit hard criminals. This series is written with the conscious effort of penetrating the conventional norms of detectives, here the sleuth must exhibit perfect prowess in the familial domain before she operates outside it. The influence of Feluda on the series is quite evident, though the narration is done in third person; the basic point of view of the series is that of Tupur, who is assistant to the debonair aunt. She is modelled on Topshe but never gets past the restricted function she serves in her aunt's exploits. While Topshe gets trained to be as his renowned cousin through the admiration and appreciation he has for Feluda which becomes the foundation for this training, Tupur is merely the faithful sidekick who never grows as a character, she is suitably scared for a seventeen year old girl. Her awe struck expression is never replaced by the comprehension dawning on it, in short, if Mitin Mashi had any intention of training her to be a sleuth someday then she was doing quite a sorry job of it. Tupur does little beyond turning to her aunt every time she is faced with a puzzle. Her femininity had been heralded by the author too much for her to develop anywhere near to what Mitin claims to have achieved. She also fancies herself as Miss Watson but her admiring interventions have neither the wit nor the insightful commentary that either Topshe or Watson possess. In the accounts of the two distinguished assistants there is also very prominent critique of the sleuth's personality. Tupur seems to be too burdened under the task of valorising the protagonist. The singular purpose of her in the narrative is to think no end of her aunt's capacities.

The female protagonist too seems to be obsessed with her prowess, her conversations with her husband seems to be her battleground for establishing her supreme aptitude; the husband's character therefore suffers a constant defeating and he becomes the comic relief of the series. The super sleuth who even the commissioner of police seems to be in awe of is a house wife who handles her household with equal proficiency as her cases. The various Diasporas referred to in the plots of this detective compensate for the deficiency in terms of travel and mobility. The series engages with the historical backgrounds of these ethnic groups in order to achieve an elevation in the narrative. This effort of enriching the stories have had its desired effect, these particular portions are extremely engaging, however, the informative and interesting parts are incorporated in the plots as verbal banter between Mitin and her husband, even in these sequences the information is used to assert the acumen of the internet addict, well informed detective. This sadly makes it quite evident that the detective wants to be conceived as smart by outsmarting her husband during all conversations. This reversal of gender conventions in the genre is not a commendable feat, it is based on an assumption that one of the gender's must be slighted in order to assert the might of the other. Early detective fiction fell into the traps of such a deed but returning the favour is probably not the way to success.

The author Suchitra Bhattacharya seems to be obsessed with making her sleuth as invincible as possible but her over enthusiasm and unending faith in her detective do not make Mitin's methods of deduction intriguing. Rather almost always her culprit gives himself away when faced with her interrogation; she relies heavily on the consistency of the various characters and confidently lies through her teeth to force confessions out of them. One really cannot blame Tupur for not learning much from such a detective, what is immensely amusing in this scheme of things is the fact that whenever Tupur expresses her confusion over the mysterious situations all her enigmatic aunt tells her is to use her brains. The series is hence, not surprisingly, not very acclaimed among the fans of detective literature.

Another detective series created by Sukanto Gangopadhyay features a young girl as the assistant of a myopic detective who solves criminal cases. The detective here is a man who is also an uncle to the young college student Jhinuk. Jhinuk is not so impressed by her father's friend, Dipankar, and considers him quite a menace right at the beginning of the series. He could easily make out her lies and would rarely stop at that, he would make it a point to tell her parents if she had missed her classes to spend time with her friends. Though this anger at the detective is the beginning of the duo, this eventually turns to admiration

since along with this annoying habit, Dipankar, is a star sleuth and in her words no short of a genius. There is a constant rediscovery of his tremendous acumen which Jhinuk grudgingly accepts. The first few cases of this extremely careless and messy individual were given by her. It is through a constant process of reevaluation that the faith in his capabilities grows within her. As a narrator, she appears to be extremely rooted and smart; she assists the detective in cases but never lets his presence intimidate her. This character succeeds in becoming a successful narrator. Right from the onset Jhinuk has a mind of her own and is not convinced easily about anything hence the detective has to undertake the task of impressing both her and the reader in order to make a name for himself. In the series he is first seen living in humble ways after retirement and it is only when through Jhinuk's help he manages to find some cases which make him famous. But material affluence does not change him at all and he becomes an immensely credible sleuth. Unlike most of detective fiction, the active participation and comments of Jhinuk makes her quite a smart assistant who emerges as having a mind of her own. However, one has to keep in mind that it is the voice of Gangopadhyay which prompts into Jhinuk's ears every word that would further the exploits of his detective.

But sadly this is where the contribution of women to the genre stands as of now. The social restrictions that had prevented early detectives to flourish in Bengal had begun to loosen with the passage of time creating women characters who gradually and steadily gained mobility and with the rise of feminism, the woman detective had been long awaited yet the reversal of roles by the gender reduces the subjective awe one usually harbours for the detective.

### **The Woman in Feluda**

The cosy corner that Feluda and his readers had created for themselves gets a little disturbed when a female voice makes its way into it, demurely, with cautious steps. This is the voice of the translator. She has of course suitably unsexed herself and pronounced herself to be an avid reader of Feluda in her childhood. In fact her introduction to the volume of translated stories of Feluda, commences with the declaration of how losing a copy of *Sandesh* is sacrilegious according to her (these were obviously a part of her father's collection) and, of course she has always been one of Feluda's most passionate fans. Gopa Majumdar manages to nestle in between the author and the character as the admiring reader, a role many a girl like me is familiar with. However, the translation of a male point of view into female words

cannot escape accusations of being violation. Kishore Sahitya in Bengali literally means literature for young boys and has mostly been the domain, as I have so laboriously explained, of males. Thus the act of a woman legitimizing her space in the male order of things and lending her pen to it is indeed an act of transgression:

Literary texts were constituted not primarily of language but in fact of culture, language being in effect a vehicle of that culture.<sup>37</sup>

The translations of Feluda, therefore, is more than the mere retelling of stories in another language, the 'other' language becomes a tool for the appropriation of a very male universe by the 'other' gender. The female account is of course not mutated by a sudden female cousin recounting adventures, but the woman behind the veil of Topshe, is far from being dismissed from the scheme of the tales. Though her translation would suffer for she has dismissed many cultural specific details, mostly in cases of riddles and clues to give the detective her voice in the bilingual boundless 'third space' between the text and the reader.

Gopa Majumdar's Feluda translations are written in the same unadorned and fast paced tone as one would expect a teenager to think in. Her work has earned her vicious criticisms from male readers like Devangshu Datta who believes that Feluda, and consequently Ray, have "suffered in translation" and that she has single handedly ruined the novels. However, when I read the translated stories of Feluda as an adult female reader, they, as non academic readers would term it "worked for me." I found her translation not only interesting but also gripping. Somehow, as the adult female re-creator of Feluda tales, she has managed not only to successfully problematize the male order of the detective fiction but also to camouflage her invasion by modesty pretending to slip in the interstitial place between the author and the text. Feluda in translation has, according to me, survived the transition. Purabi Punwar, a reviewer for Outlook India<sup>38</sup>, finds Majumdar's work readable and at places more than enjoyable.

Translating Feluda and his adventures is not a project without traps. The fact is this that the popularity of Feluda has been attributed to the brilliant hybrid figure that he is. The modern Bengali westernized hero of the Bengali modern fiction. He has achieved the cult status since he is every Bengali man and also not just every Bengali man. He is a very

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<sup>37</sup> Quote from Harish Trivedi's *Translating Culture Vs Cultural Translation*

<sup>38</sup> Article available on

<http://www.outlookindia.com/scriptur11w2.asp?act=sign&url=/full.asp?fodname=19991025&fname=booksc&id=1> as accessed on 22.02.2009



familiar Bengali middle class figure 'dada', having discarded Byomkesh's dhoti and kurta and having picked up a colt .32 has crossed the threshold of an ordinary middle class dream.

The dream that is constructed through his stories does not stop at the old graveyard in Park Street but like a wave of wanderlust takes the imagination of the footloose Bengali to Hongkong and beyond. Feluda expands the average Bengali traveler's dream and shapes a figure who is so familiar yet extraordinary. Here the narration by Topshe becomes extremely important since it is through his worshipping voice that the bond between the reader and his beloved Feluda is forged. This bond is what, according to me, makes Feluda stories, what Walter Benjamin would call, "highly translatable." Translating an already westernized figure into English might have taken a lot away from the Bengali temperament but the English speaking detective never becomes too unfamiliar to the Bengali boy reading him in English because even while reading him in Bengali, Feluda's hybridity had always been taken for granted. The translation of a figure of the detective, who originally emerged out of thorough readings of Sherlock Holmes to an English speaking Bengali detective, apparently seems effortless yet the trappings of translating the Holmesian rationality of Feluda would lead a bad translator to constructing another second class citizen of Baker Street not just a mere Anglophonic, all too familiar Felu Mittir.

Though the extension of availability and readership of a text is a noble cause for translation, yet Sandip Ray is right when he highlights the supreme importance of preserving the 'temperament' of this Bengali Bengal hero who believes in stretching his feet and wit a bit farther than usual. The fact remains that Feluda has never been one who was larger than life but yet managed to be ahead of his predecessors- Kiriti Roy, Byomkesh Bakshi, Hukakashi, Joyonto- Manik, Bimol-Kumar and never faced competition from his peers Kakababu and Professor Sanku.

Doubtlessly the crisp words vested on him in English compliment his brilliant deductive capacity and undefeatable logic yet in Gopa Majumdar's translation not in Harish Trivedi's way like using untranslatable words and metaphors, Feluda's cultural specificity remains intact. Majumdar achieves this by remaining literally faithful to the descriptions of the locales of Feluda, which has appealed to the imagination of the middle class Bengali traveler for decades. To keep the temperament unhampered she vividly describes the habits and likings of the characters and their very Bengali ways, like their addiction to tea or their fondness of food available at Park Street all of the time avoiding Bengali words left

untranslatable in italics but asserting the culture of the Bengali which in my opinion should be Trivedi's tool in preventing translated literature from becoming a monolingual monolithic dilapidated colosseum within which cultures are slain ruthlessly by pen carrying gladiators of the global order. Hence I feel Gopa Majumdar's translation and her repute as a translator are worthy of applause.

However, one cannot deny how Ray himself makes way for such successful translation. He writes for a readership educated in English, and mentions favorite tourist spots like Darjeeling and not only this, he goes onto include the Nepal Curio Shop, which every tourist to Darjeeling is familiar with. Hence it might seem that the task of the translator is being achieved by being a bilingual. However, the translator's voice does not get stifled under the sonorous tones of the author. Just when one is tempted to put all the credit for a successful translation on the author's haloed shoulder, the translator intervenes. This is evident in the way she handles the riddles and codes that the novels are riddled with.

To elucidate, here is an example from *The Royal Bengal Mystery*:

"muro hoy buror gaachh haate gono bhaat paanch

Dik payo thik thik jababe

Falgun taal jor dui maajhe bhui fore

Sandhane dhon daye nawabe"

A literal translation of this would be:

"The head of the ancient tree, count till rice five, find your way through the correct answer. Falgun. Two palm trees between which you must dig, where you shall find the wealth of the nawabs."

Yes, thankfully I am not the translator. Majumdar translates this as:

"Old man hollow

Pace to follow

People's tree

Half ten, half again

century

rising sun

whence it's done can't you see?

Between hands, below them stands

Yours it be."

(‘The Royal Bengal Mystery’, *The Complete Adventures of Feluda*, Vol I, p 425)

The bilinguality of the translator prevents the translation from becoming a riddle out of Alfred Hitchcock's Three Investigators series. In the riddle though 'falgun' (a specific season in the Bengali calendar), has been done away with, 'people's tree' is introduced. This tree would definitely have been a willow if it was Hitchcock writing. Trading one word for another local word to suit the interests of her readers, what Majumdar has successfully accomplished is the appropriation of the Bengali genre of the detective and here she establishes her territory as the 'other' gender in the 'other' language.

She transgresses the role of a mere storyteller and addresses her readers directly. In the story she calls, *The Locked Chest*, she translates "trinayan o trinayan ektu jiro" (rest oh holy third eye) as "shut the door, oh big fat hen" (p. 501). She uses the old nursery rhyme familiar to every English speaker 'One, Two, Buckle my shoe' to interpret the riddle in the story. Her intervention into the all male universe of the series is achieved through her pen and her language becomes her domain of play.

Hence the female voice in the Feluda universe does not disappear as a whisper left unheard. If the colonizer's language is being appropriated by her post colonial pen then an equally exclusive male universe is being invaded by her female pen. Borrowing N Kamala's words<sup>39</sup>, Majumdar penetrates the womb of the all male order through translation and her translation becomes a subversion of the birth of Frankenstein, born out the seed of the mother's pen on the fertile soil of the androgynous narrative. Majumdar hence undertakes the acts of the detective that is analyzing signifiers to create her very own signified to create a diaspora within the patriarchal world of the alpha male Feluda always, in awe of the original fatherland of the narrative.

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<sup>39</sup> From her essay 'Translation and Gender'

As for me accused that I am for being an anglophile for preferring the adventures of the West, I am left feeling content with the Bengali world of the detective as it stands now. Since the young girl forced to identify with the Bengali Watson in *Topshe* has somehow found a way into the narrative of the boys by unsexing herself and consequently penetrating the heart of the male universe of Feluda.

### **Putting All Pieces Together**

The fate of the woman so far has been quite shocking in terms of the depiction of her skills of deduction, as I have meticulously pointed out her role in the genre has been experimented with amply but somewhere the confines of a social and cultural history has prevented the author, be it a man or a woman, to formulate a female detective who will draw parallels with the most famous sleuths in Bengali literature. The failure of the female to make an impact on the 'masculine' genre is evident; her historical burden of subjugated expressions surfaces in either the self conscious efforts of equalling and defeating the man sleuth or the blatant acceptance of this being no place for a woman. For a genre where 'intuition' is looked down upon due to consistent privileging of the male rationale the character of the female sleuth therefore becomes androgynous or like Gopa Majumdar, her pen should formulate the male tongue. However, herein lie the success of the translator, the female mightier sword cuts across the male universe colouring it in her shade, all the while accepting demurely her second hand authorship.

All the unsexing and the legitimizing of her act is voiced by her wary apology about choosing the two bound volumes of *Sandesh* for her play, which is the opening lines of her Introduction as the translator of Feluda:

One of my earliest recollections of childhood is of struggling to get two thick bound volumes from my father's bookshelf, with a view to using them as walls for my doll's house (*The Complete Adventures of Feluda*, Vol. I. p. ix).

And she has built the walls of her doll's house as have the rest of us who disguise ourselves in male attire to encroach upon the all male universe, with the boundaries demarcating these exclusive brackets in Bengali literature. For a doll's house can sit nestled between the androgynous adrenaline oriented universes and it is time for building our respective doll houses in these interstitial spaces previously considered too insignificant for serious play. The claim Gopa Majumdar makes for constructing her space between these worlds is probably an

enterprise more fruitful than lamenting its absence. The bold proclamations of authoring the female world of intuition resulted to almost an abject failure in the works of Suchitra Bhattacharya, the narration of Sukanto Gangopadhyay in the guise of Jhinuk makes one question the success of the female assistant speaking the language lent by a man's words and the struggling characters who have remained overshadowed by the machismo supreme Bengalis call their sleuth. While absence and failure stabs at the female reader's eyes with every passing word, unsexing and identifying become the natural archway to the world of the male detectives, yet in the hands of the benign translator the identification happens without being made conscious of the author or the character or the reader's gender.

Since the young girl forced to identify with the Bengali Watson in *Topshe* has somehow found a way into the narrative of the boys by unsexing herself and consequently penetrating the heart of the male universe of Feluda, the crucial juncture where second hand narratives of the male Feluda have overpowered the first hand ventures of Mitin Mashi, it is probably time for the genre to be less conscious of the gender and rather be content and comfortable with the sex of the trio in question. The effortless equalling with the masculine heritage of a hundred and fifty years is not a feat easily achieved hence it must not be asserted unnecessarily on narratives which suffer this agenda. For along with Majumdar, this time without the chemises or breeches but in petty frocks and ribbons, we have entered the world where previously we could only trespass into.

*So, free from danger, free from fear,*

*They crossed the court: right glad they were.*

(*Christabel*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge)<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted from poem available at <http://www.online-literature.com/coleridge/655/> as accessed on 3.05.2009

## THE RESOLUTION OF ALL INTRIGUES

The dissertation is at last done. It is at last the final turn in a journey undertaken in turbulent times. This piece of work will always remain within me for reasons past the mere stature of it. During the making of this I have done and undone, reframed and (en)framed tales to tell in the days to come. From technological holocaust to ends of emotional eras my dissertation stands witness to it all. However, my prolonged engagement with the various authors of the detective and various kinds of detective fiction has allowed me to spend many a pleasurable hour as I have allowed myself to nestle in between pages and engage in various processes in which I have derived 'low' thrills and been duped into the plots of this popular form. For many hours which have passed in the drugged excitement of expectation and resolution my final tribute before I attempt to let this work go. For after the hide and seek is over, the detective's world deflates and becomes another day in lethargic times. My dull drowsy days lie ahead; it is time to move on.

In this project I have tried to achieve in a generic study of detective fiction in terms of its cultural history of emergence, gender representation and literary icons that this genre addresses, a critique of the convention oriented and formulaic form of popular literature. In my critical engagement with this area I have analysed these popular literary figures as bearing lineages from the social reality, cultural processes rather than a mere import of a male ideal from the colonial masters. I have tried to achieve in indigenous lineage of literary detection in Bengal so as to construct frameworks which extend beyond the building up on a Holmesian imagination.

To achieve this end I have engaged with the social history of the genre and made connections between the social detective and literary detective. Since my engagement with the critical study of the detective in Bengali preceded my engagement with the English investigators I was surprised to find startling parallels between both the beginnings. From Vidocq's *Memoirs* to Priyonath Mukhopadhyay's *Daroga'r Daptor* it has been astonishing a finding that personal accounts of the dark tales of an ailing Parisian double agent for the Police and that of a man continents away fighting for recognition under the constraints of colonial apparatus would have the same outcome of birthing a genre in literary history which would claim to be one of the most popular of fiction and capture minds of literary geniuses.

The advent of the detective coincides with the rise of modernity in both capital London and colonial capital Calcutta, hence a study of the nature of both the modernities can be an area of interest in future. Another area of interest is the study of crime fiction which preceded the detective. The crime fiction of colonial Calcutta has been a genre I could barely address in the scope of this project. But I plan to take it into my area of research in future endeavours.

In my dissertation in my third chapter **The Adventure in Androgyny** I have argued for the woman in the narrative. This area in gender studies where genres of literature which require mobility and initiation is usually rid of the females can be engaged with in deeper levels than what I could address in the limitations of elaboration in order to maintain the brevity of this project. The privileging of men over women in literary genres is again not rare, however, every cultural history have different cultural validations for such an act. Therefore the erasure of women from these narrative universes can be engaged with in terms of culture studies as well as reader-response engagements.

The detective genre itself can be studied in its linguistic affluence when one elaborates on a project in translation studies. The intervention of the translator can also be a potential area of inquiry and critical engagement. This dissertation is just the beginning of that which can take gigantic form in the future.

This project had been an effort to speak of the masculine universes, their beginnings, their histories and their politics of exclusion, a witness to the slow turnings of the day, a scroll of the man's tidings.

“‘Didn’t I tell you so when we started?’ cried Sherlock Holmes with a laugh. ‘That’s the result of all our Study in Scarlet: to get them a testimonial!’

‘Never mind,’ I answered; ‘I have all the facts in my journal and the public shall know them.’”

*A Study in Scarlet*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (103).

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