Chapter 5
Conclusion

The association of literary criticism and detective fiction is not new since the genre has been the axiom of much academic debate in recent past. In most cases such debates aimed at reformulating the general perception which considers that the genre offers no intellectual expertise. The genre is usually considered to be inferior and less literary in comparison to other literary genres on account of its subject matter, stereotyped structural conventions and predetermined appeal. Voicing a strong protest against such opinion Heather Worthington states that:

... those elements that had elicited the strongest opprobrium...The very conventions, the strict structural patterns, the lack of emphasis on characters, the revelations about society inherent in this popular and immediate genre brought it to the attention of academics and literary critics as the twentieth century progressed. (Worthington 2011:153)

From the early quarter of twentieth century, the approach towards detective fiction underwent a radical change. The growing interest of people like T.S. Eliot, W.H Auden et.al reflect this wave of change and gradually scholars undertook detailed study to reconsider the genre from the perspective of literary scholarship. But even then, the genre failed to secure a place in the grand canon of English literature and one of the major reasons behind this is the conventional attitude towards popular literature. The visible absence of popular literature in the curriculum of literary studies indicates the prevalent resistance against the study of popular literature in academic institutions.
Popular literature has always been conveniently marginalised as inferior and critics have tried to establish its shortcomings to claim that it is unfit for critical scholarship. On one hand most genres of fiction writing that come under the umbrella term-popular literature are widely read outside the literary enclosures of academics. But on the other hand, popular literature is regarded to lack literariness and therefore distort the aesthetic taste of people. It is believed that early scholarship on popular literature had initiated from the necessity to inquire the reasons behind the negligence towards those texts which have incidentally captured the interest of huge sections of readers. Scholars of popular literature look forward to a phase when the established tradition of literary criticism and scholarship would openly accommodate popular literary culture within the canonised literary construct in academic institutions. In this direction a new wave of scholarship from the perspective of popular literature accentuated particularly with the advent of culture studies and intra-disciplinary studies. Infact, over the last century the prejudice against studying popular literature has become less pronounced. Once the study of literature is approached as a communicative practice associated with social and historical relevance, it would not be easy to ignore those fictional works which command the imagination of the widest section of reading public.

In most cases popular literature is ignored on grounds of a very casual mindset as it is assumed that the reading of a thriller or a romance can be nothing more than a straightforward exercise in reading and comprehension. In a typical taken for granted mindset such works are considered to have no scope for the assessment of literary merit and so most works of popular fiction remain under-valued. The elitist views of the scholars of ‘high’ literature consider popular literature as a manifestation of popular culture or mass culture. For a long period of time, the elites had exclusive rights over ‘true’ or standard culture and the advocates of the upper classes of the society dismissed mass culture as inferior. But by mid-twentieth century the discipline of culture studies emphasized more on popular culture and argued that
the objects and artefacts of the masses must be taken seriously. Infact, culture studies found its initial impetus in the study of popular culture. Pramod K. Nayar defines popular culture as “...the set of practices, artefacts and beliefs shared by masses, and is constituted by the everyday life of the masses: the food habits, fashion... the music, the reading habits...” (Nayar 2009:6). So, when popular fiction is degraded for being a distraction for readers of the non-elite, less-intellectual masses; it is the discrimination of patronizing literary elites who reject the non-elite literary indulgences as tasteless and useless.

The politics of popular culture has its roots in these elite considerations. But gradually scholars defended popular fiction and questioned the grounds on which popular literature is sidelined from academic canon. The proposed research work also made similar attempts to question the authority of ‘high’ literature which regards popular fiction, more particularly detective fiction as a disgraceful addiction that leads to anything but aesthetic pleasure. William W. Stowe gives a detailed explanation of his take on popular fiction, particularly detective fiction in his essay “Popular Fiction as Liberal Art”. According to him, “Popular fiction is by nature neither bad nor good, neither progressive nor repressive. It has a distinctive cultural function which it may fulfil well or badly or not at all.” (Stowe 1986:660).

In his essay, Stowe analysed the typical approach towards popular culture with special reference to the Frankfurt School of critics and gives voice to his justification against Edmund Wilson’s sceptical opinion about the genre of detective fiction. He asserts that:

Detective novels are artistically limited... but this does not mean they are “rubbish” or by any chance incapable of being good. Detective novels can be good or bad in and of their kind, and the artistry required to create them is parallel to if not identical with that of the mainstream novelists. (Stowe 1986: 654)
But in view of the research work conducted, it can be argued that detective novels are not ‘artistically limited’ and therefore this sympathetic as well as condescending attitude towards the genre is unjustified. In the introduction to the book, *Mayhem and Murder: Narrative Problems in the Detective Story* (1999), Heta Pyrhonen quotes Dennis Porter’s description of a detective story as a “...textual ‘machine for producing thrills’ that evokes in readers pleasurable bodily sensations which they experience as an agreeable state of excitement, associated with either fear or anxiety and its release.” (Pyrhonen 1999:3). Detective stories are definitely entertaining and hence popular but this popularity does not account for its lack of literariness as claimed by the advocates of ‘high’ literature. One of the most common derogatory assumptions of critics is that because of its basic conventions and stereotyped narrative structure the genre offers nothing but thrill and excitement and therefore demands least effort from the reader to conceptualize the narratives which always ends in a predictable manner. However, the conducted research tries to highlight various narrative strategies on account of which a detective fiction author skilfully blends the content, i.e, the story and the discourse to produce thrilling narratives for the reader. The researcher makes an in depth study of the genre and focuses on how a detective novel operates, what are the ramifications of the author’s narrative structuring and what impact does it impart on the readers.

Undertaking an in-depth study and a thorough analysis of all relevant aspects of the genre, the researcher tries to focus on the schematized framework of a detective fiction narrative which depicts the artistic skill of the author. On the basis of this study the research aims to validate the argument that detective fiction is not artistically inferior and therefore deserve canonical signification from the established tradition of English literature.

In other words, it can be stated that the conducted research also tries to look into the politics of the canon. The term canon is derived from the Greek word ‘kanon’ meaning a rule or a measuring stick. In its modern usage the English term stands to signify or measure the
aesthetic relevance or appeal of a literary work. David Carrier in his essay “ART AND ITS CANONS” writes; “Any tradition of art-making in which there are generally accepted distinctions between better and worse, and a body of much admired works, has a canon.” (Carrier 1993:525). In order to understand how a better work is different from a bad one; the focus needs to be shifted to the very process of evaluation, so that one can trace the parameters on the basis of which a literary work wins an entry into the canon. In his study of canon, David Carrier seems to adopt a rational approach to explain that:

The canon, I argue, changes radically, but at each time there is a limited consensus about what works are, or might be canonical. Because this consensus changes, today the canon of earlier generations seems puzzling, mistaken or confused. But such changes in the canon are compatible with a belief in objectivity of aesthetic value, for what defines that objectivity is a certain agreement about what constitutes the canon. (Carrier 1993:524)

The fact that detective fiction has continually faced the negligence of literary canon is based on this degree of consensus that some sceptical critics have managed to draw towards their subjective assessment of the genre. This scepticism has gradually attained an objective validity from the proponents of literary canon and as Carrier points out, this consensus “...exists because most people accept the canon without critically questioning its judgements.” (Carrier 1993:526). Considering the conventional treatment of the genre, the conducted research intends to question the grounds on which literary canon degrades detective fiction. In this regard, the researcher had even proposed to situate the genre in an ‘alternative’ canon right from the inception of the research plan. Infact, the researcher aims to reform or expand the idea of canon to accommodate detective fiction. Alternatively, the genre can lead its way to form a new canon on its credibility. This new canon in the making would accommodate all those literary segments of writing which are no less literary than those
which are canonised by the proponents of the elite school of scholars. Apparently the idea of an alternative canon is not absolute in its terms since the researcher acknowledges the fact that the inception of a new canon is not a simple enterprise. So the alternative canon can be conceived as that which accords relevance to literary works in terms of their artistic value. In formulating an alternative canon the researcher puts up a strong challenge against the conventional approach to argue that detective fiction with its many unexplored aspects is worth taking seriously.

In this regard the researcher tries to find out how the early stories of crime made their way to the world of literature. The inception of the genre took place in the sixteenth century tradition of crime tales. These stories appeared in the form of various pamphlets like Broadsides, Ordinaries Accounts and Newgate Calendars. The initial stories of crime illustrated the criminal’s life of crime including his conviction. Such stories were mainly aimed to warn the people against any act of hindrance against the law of the state. But gradually these stories made a significant contribution to the formation of a genre that dominated the world of fiction from nineteenth century onwards. From these early pamphlets arrived the tradition of Newgate novels and finally nineteenth century witnessed the arrival of the professional detective. After catching the imagination of the people of the west, the genre extended its claws to other parts of the globe. By twentieth century writers from other countries appropriated the notions of the genre to produce their own versions of crime narratives. But the genre was yet to receive its due credit from the canon of English literature. To delve into the root of this treatment, the conducted research traces the evolution of the genre right from its early stage and makes an in depth study of all aspects of the detective novel to understand its working principle that has so long sustained the addiction of the readers. In the course of the research, the researcher also discovers many unexplored facets of the genre and tries to emphasize the need to understand the genre in new ways.
Arthur Conan Doyle is credited for creating the quintessential detective in Sherlock Holmes but the figure of the detective was not a sudden discovery, infact, the figure of an investigator followed a gradual process to evolve in its modern version. The early stories of crime dealt with criminal heroes, some of whom were reflections of real life criminals. When the real world saw the advent of crime- regulatory bodies along with police detectives, runners or thief-takers, the idea of investigation gradually developed and in the nineteenth century the focus shifted to such investigative figures. Following this, the memoirs of such figures made way into the literary world as many real life investigators like Francois Vidocq came up with their version of recollections. Following the trend of police detectives some enthusiasts worked in private capacity by accepting personal assignments and this marked the entry of the private amateur detective. From 1850 onwards people from other professions most notably physicians, barristers et.al. also published their pseudo-factual tales which presented them as semi-detectives. These early models of investigators gradually paved the way for the private professional detective. When Doyle produced his first Holmes story in 1887 he was aware of these early versions. Heather Worthington points out that Doyle was aware of ‘professional anecdote genre’ (Worthington 2011:23) since he refers to the protagonists of such tales like ‘Confessions of an Attorney’ and ‘The Experiences of a Barrister’. It can be stated that as a genre, detective fiction has been responsive to the trends of its age right from its nascent stage. Like any other literary genre it has always been a reflection of its age and Conal Doyle’s stories featuring the quintessential private detective also gives a picture of the prevalent trends of the English society in that period.

The American tradition of crime narratives also follows a similar course of development. Although American writers were influenced by the pre-existing English versions, American writers appropriated the basic conventions of the genre in response to the trends of nineteenth century American society. In America the twentieth century tradition of
the ‘hard-boiled’ crime narratives evolved in response to the prevalent socio-economic trends of America. When the genre was adapted by Indian writers the same aspect was prominent. An active reading of the Feluda stories will highlight that while constructing the crime narratives Ray was aware of the tendencies of the age. In a post-modern world of duplicity and forgery Feluda works as an efficient realistic sleuth with whom the readers can easily associate. Thus like most other canonised literary genres, detective fiction is also set against the social and cultural traits of its age of creation. However, due to hierarchical discrepancies the genre is looked down upon and is often treated as pulp fiction; the so called popular but non-canonical literature that is usually excluded from serious research interests. But the research work provides a bounteous scope to theorize on detective stories from various theoretical perspectives. It must be noted that in order to reformulate the canon and to make space for detective fiction; dealing with the intrinsic structures of such narratives would not be enough. Rather, one must also focus on how such stories or novels are read.

The research hypothesis necessitates the formulation of a theoretical framework to read or comprehend detective fiction. To start with, the first concern is to understand- why do people love reading detective fiction? A detective fiction narrative gives a fictional projection of a world where the lead protagonists stand for antagonistic values like good and bad; right and wrong. The conflict between these opposing values has an objective reality and through the narrative the author tries to reinforce those values or ideology which is universally acknowledged to uphold the virtues of righteousness against all odds. Moreover, the setting in such narratives is unlike those fantastic worlds where everything is set to be right at the end in an unrealistic fashion. Detective stories depict a real world with real problems and therefore the finished product (novel or story) is more appealing to the readers. But contrary to popular beliefs the readers of detective fiction are not passive consumers. To intake the aesthetic pleasure of any literary work, like Shakespeare’s tragedies or Eliot’s poems, a
reader has to involve in an active interaction with the text. Reading will be reduced to a futile exercise if a reader does not get actively involved to interpret the reflection of the author’s mind. A detective story or novel is, in fact, an intellectual challenge to the reader. Critics argue that in such narratives things are pre-determined and the reader knows what to expect. William W. Stowe writes, “In a mainstream novel... very little is determined in advance” but a detective novel has a “basic structure and the source of its interest are given.” (Stowe 1986:654). But the interesting point is that even if the main scheme of the problem-solving structure of such narratives is known to the reader he or she never loses interest. This goes to the credit of the author, whose skill creates an artistic maze out of a basic structural pattern. In order to find a way out of this maze an active reader must be alert and on his toes to interpret any hint or clue suggested by the narrative. However, a passive reader will not be able to apprehend the suggestive meaning of the narrative scheme to understand the mystery. So it can be argued that it is not just the formulaic structural patterns that make the genre popular. The author’s artistic skill is crucial in building up an intense detective fiction narrative, besides the reader too must engage in an active interaction with the narrative to enjoy the aesthetic pleasure of reading.

The research work argues that the canon must be reformulated because detective fiction deserves serious approach on account of which it deserves a position of academic respectability. In terms of artistic skill detective stories are always thought to fall short of the so-called ‘serious’ literary works. However, a detailed analysis of a typical detective fiction narrative will reveal how the author generates the dynamics of the mystery by balancing the equation between story and discourse. The narrative strategies as incorporated by a detective fiction writer will challenge those popular claims which consider the genre less ‘literary’. The intricate structure of a detective fiction story can be studied as a multi-layered narrative. Detective stories operate on a problem-solving principle but the solution of the problem is not
just confined to the detective’s act of investigation. In fact, the multi-layered implications of the narrative can be studied from various theoretical angles. A detective story has a distinct structural design and can be read as a story of crime and detection, as a story of writing and reading and as a story of concealment and cognition. In case of each reading model, the detective and the criminal are in charge of the respective tales according to the motives that drives them. A criminal executes a crime and scripts his story of crime in order to conceal his act. While a detective investigates a crime to decipher the criminal’s concealed act to seek cognition of the criminal.

The schematized framework of a detective fiction narrative can be perceived as a three-tier game- between the detective and criminal, between the detective and reader and between the reader and author. Detective stories operate as a game of intellect in which the detective tries to out-wit the criminal. A detective is the skilled agent powered with extraordinary intelligence, shrewd mind, sharp observation and rational deduction. But his opponent in this game is no less intelligent, infact, a brilliant detective fiction narrative is a conflict between two equally brilliant individuals who are driven by their respective motives. While investigating, the detective tries to decode the culprit’s well-thought plan to solve the mystery and restore normalcy out of an apparently chaotic atmosphere. As the detective tries to detect the culprit, the reader also tries to do the same from outside the text. Reading a detective novel is always a challenge for an active reader who tries to follow the detective’s style of investigation in his bid to find the criminal. In doing this the reader also tries to out-smart the detective by solving the mystery before him. These complexities of the narrative are pre-set by the author as he ensures how the game will operate. While writing a detective fiction narrative, the author first slips into the shoes of the criminal to contrive the problem and its consequences. While doing this the author also devises a solution and thinks like a detective to reconstruct everything back to normalcy. So in this process, the author almost
splits his personality and thinks both like the criminal as well as the detective. However, the complexity of the narrative becomes intense when the role of the reader is considered. While the game of intellect operates within the text, the reader who is outside the text; tries to follow its dynamics to solve the mystery beforehand. But the reader does not enjoy an easy access to all aspects of the plot and the appeal of the narrative comes from this skilful treatment of the narrative discourse.

So, contrary to popular claims detective stories does provide much more than entertainment and therefore demand an active intellectual involvement from the reader’s end. In a multi-layered narrative scheme, the detective tries to investigate all available angles to deduce a rational perception of the criminal’s story of crime. Infact, the detective and the criminal try to outsmart one another and it is interesting to see how the detective follows his opponent’s thought process to decode the mystery. Moreover, the reader also tries to follow the detective’s thought process to solve the crime and become a detective himself. But the author ensures that all angles of the game are not open to the reader-detective which requires him to put some extra effort to decode the mystery as well as the author’s thought process. So, it can be suggested that a detective story is also a conflict or game between the reader-detective and the author. In this way the conducted research highlights the artistry behind detective stories. On one hand the detective tries to follow the criminal’s moves, on the other hand the reader tries to follow the detective’s moves and in this process the reader actually tries to grasp the author’s expertise in creating the intense narrative.

In order to carry out a more detailed study of the narrative structure of detective stories, the conducted research tries to analyze the narrative scheme from various theoretical perspectives. This helps to understand the machination that goes behind each narrative in order to generate the desired impact upon the reader. In any story or novel narrative technique plays a major role. This is not a mere tool used to enhance the stylistics of the plot but it is
also devised to complement the plot. In a detective story or novel, the story and the narrative discourse are made to complement each other and in addition to this the author also incorporates suitable narrative preferences. Narration in such stories is anything but a plain sequential telling of events. French literary theorist Gerard Genette has paved some new directions in the study of narratives. His theoretical postulations as explained in his book *Narrative Discourse: An essay in Method* (1980) helps to understand how narration is modulated to create suspense, the most crucial aspect in a detective novel. The conducted research has mainly focused on some of his concepts that suits best to the research plan. Suspense is an integral part of such narratives. In order to create the right pitch of suspense the author chooses to reveal some information and withhold some. He also chooses the suitable time to deliver specific information. In other words the author dexterously modulates narrative information according to the demand of the plot in order to create the anticipated suspense in the narrative. So, detective stories or novels do not follow a strict chronological narrative pattern. Infact, such works often incorporate ‘anachrony’; a term used by Gerard Gennet to refer to inconsistency in discourse order. Often the author prefers to disrupt the order between the occurrence of an event in the story and the disclosure of the same in the discourse of the narrative. While investigating the detective might have discovered a vital clue, but this development is kept in darkness and is disclosed later or towards the climax in the narrative discourse. In this way the author bears an impact on the order of narration to build the suspense in the narrative. Moreover, certain other aspects of Genette’s theories are highly relevant in understanding how the author creates the desired reading effect on the reader.

A look at Gerard’s theoretical apparatus helps to study and understand how the author handles narration and formulates the narrative scheme to generate the much needed suspense and impart the desired reading effect upon the reader. Genette’s elucidation on narrative
mood and narrative voice further aids to apprehend the artistic aptitude of a detective fiction author. In such narratives the author always decides which narrative information would be available to the reader and he also regulates how and in what manner it will be presented in the narrative discourse. Sometimes the reader does not have access to some vital clues which are available to the detective and with such narrative strategies the author intensifies the mystery. But as the narrative progresses the narrator provides some clues although in a less obvious way and in the final culmination the detective provides all relevant information to resolve the mystery. In order to create the right pitch of narrative mood the author controls the manner in which the narrator maintains a degree of distance or proximity with the narrative information that he provides or is rather made to provide. In this way the author also determines the perspective of the narrator. Thus the suspense and thrill experienced by the reader is not a general after-effect of an unprecedented event. The secret behind the appeal of detective stories depends on the authorial skills of composition. Infact, the reader’s response depends on how the author designs the narrative discourse to generate the desired narrative mood in the thriller. So it is unjustified to degrade the popularity of the genre; as if being popular automatically accounts for its lack of artistic appeal. Infact, the conducted research shows, how the complex workmanship of the author adds to the aestheticism of the narratives thereby making them popular.

It is usually regarded that detective fiction has limited scope to seek an inclusion into the canon due to its stereotyped conventions. The research tries to emphasize that without the various structural strategies the narrative would fail to generate the essential appeal that keep the readers addicted to the story or novel until the detective narrates and enlightens the readers as well as the other characters in the narrative. So it needs to be understood that the operative conventions of a detective story does not account for its lack of ‘literariness’. Infact, critics need to re-think whether the generalised perception about the genre has been
misleading in assessing the true merit of detective fiction. However, it might be argued that while reading, a reader has nothing to do with the structural engineering of the narrative, as he is more concerned about how the detective investigates and emerges as a hero at the end. So, after learning how the thriller operates or is made to operate, it is necessary to study how the author makes his charismatic detective function in such narratives.

The structural design of detective fiction narratives stresses the detective’s authorial mastery over the lives of the other protagonists in the story. Here, it must be noted that in a detective fiction narrative a detective enjoys double authority. As a detective he is empowered to carry out investigation and enjoys an access to all vital aspects like hints and clues related to the mystery. Besides he is also empowered as a narrator, who almost diminishes the role of the other narrator to take full control of narration once the denouement is reached. The authoritative stance of the detective is also discernible when he decides to withhold crucial information from his assistant. Even if he makes his partner a co-sharer he decides to what degree the information can be shared and often leaves things half-revealed. These aspects of the detective’s personality are consciously infused into his character in order to accentuate the narrative mood and sustain the narrative suspense. Due to this authoritative power bestowed upon the detective, he entrusts himself with the task of invading or examining the lives of all those protagonists who fall into the radius of his suspicion.

The conducted research tries to clarify that the dramatic appeal of detective fiction is often put to question without giving a serious consideration to the technicalities that are involved in its genesis and conceptualisation. The drama evolves not just because of an unprecedented event (crime) and its resultant impact. In fact, it takes a skilled artist to make a drama out of a crime by resorting to subtle intricacies that often goes unnoticed and therefore under-valued. When a detective tries to find the criminal, he tries to study the motives that might have propelled the crime. In most cases the narrative depicts multiple suspects, so in
order to identify the culprit a detective must accurately assess the motive that must have led to the crime. Thus the assessment of the most logical motive is no less important than the identification of the culprit. While investigating, the detective becomes a multi-tasking agent; he hunts for clues, examines the behavioural patterns or mannerisms of the suspects and at times he even acts like a criminal prototype. In his book *Grammar of Motives* (1969) Kenneth Burke makes an extensive study to explain that human actions can be best understood by analysing the motives behind them. His theorization of the ‘pentadic’ scheme and ‘motivational discourse’ (Knapp 1999: 588) helps to study human motives and when applied to the study of detective fiction it provides new insight into the technicalities of the detective’s investigation. In the course of fact-finding the detective is driven by five major ‘wh’-questions- what is the crime, where and when did it occur, who did it and how and finally why did he do it. However, there is no relevant order in the series of the questions but each is intricately related to the other. This series is almost similar to Burke’s ‘pentadic’ scheme which according to him helps to find the reason behind human action.

Like any other literary work, the drama in a detective story or novel commences from human action. The hero and the villain act according to their respective motives and as a result of this they come into a direct conflict with one another. The motive behind the detective’s investigation is to comprehend the criminal’s motivational discourse in order to solve the case and devise a closure of the narrative. The detective tries to understand the criminal’s act of crime by positing it against the five major queries which can also be understood in terms of Burke’s ‘pentadic’ scheme. But the answers to the questions are not easy to find. In most cases the narrative points at multiple suspects with multiple angles and as a result, the detective is often left confused. This even runs the risk of engaging in a one way track of investigation. But with an incredible power of rational deduction the detective tries to establish the link between the five major aspects of act, scene, agency, agent and
purpose of crime. He studies each aspect and analyses the working equation between them to understand the criminal’s story of crime. In this process the detective often tries to analyse the criminal’s motive by thinking like a culprit himself. In some stories the narrative does not provide any clear idea about the intention of the criminal; then the detective tries to draw a rational conclusion by making an assessment of the culprit’s thought process. This helps to shed off ambiguity because by thinking like a criminal the detective manages to narrow down to the most logical intention that might have had motived the criminal’s act of crime.

Moreover, the detective’s skill to imaginatively associate and identify with the criminal’s thought process illuminates the psychological implications of the genre. Detective fiction primarily celebrates the intellectual mastery of the sleuth, but while conceptualising a mystery, the author ensures that the criminal is no less shrewd. Infact, the mystery intensifies when there is a tight-grip conflict between a brilliant detective and an equally brilliant opponent. As already discussed, during the process of investigation, the detective often takes a psychological insight into the thought process of the culprit in order to understand his opponent’s scheme. To be able to think like his opponent, the detective psychologically negates his own identity and switches over to the criminal’s space to synchronise his thought process with that of the criminal. This helps him to understand the manoeuvrings of the criminal’s mind and even predict his future course of action. So, it can be asserted that the detective is the alter-ego of criminal. Infact, when the detective negates his personality the criminal undergoes a kind of duplication and as Heta Pyrhonen explains; this image is projected as a mirror image upon the detective. This mirror image is a reflected simulation of the criminal which appears to be identical but is reverse in nature. However, when a reader reads a detective novel or story he is actually unaware of such theoretical implications. For a reader, the dramatic action of the narrative heightens when the detective almost appears like a criminal prototype.
While investigating a detective discovers various hints and clues but they remain as fragmented pieces of information until their relevance is established according to the scheme of the criminal’s act of crime. However, the task is not easy and at times all clues appear to be confusingly inter-related or ambiguous. At such junctures, the detective has to interchange his position with that of the criminal and negotiate with the criminal’s mental makeup to make an assessment of how things might have taken shape to lead to the act of crime. In other words, when the detective has some idea about the crime but fails to find other relevant aspects he tries to think how he might have acted under those circumstances in order to execute the crime, or what would have been his intention or scheme in executing the crime. However, the detective’s skill is not just confined here and it is interesting to learn that in the process of thinking like a criminal he often ends up behaving like one. In his pursuit of justice, the detective often deploys various means to find the criminal and bring him to books. A shrewd criminal tries to leave no trace of his crime, but the detective is empowered to invade into his territory to find clues either directly or indirectly. Considering the repute of the investigator one does not expect him to break into someone’s house to lay his hands on some vital clues. But when situation demands the detective can undertake any measures; he can disguise himself to mislead people or eavesdrop to overhear conversations and can even plan a theft to get hold of clues. In this regard, Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis provides better explanation of the detective’s behaviour. In the light of Freud’s theory as explained in his 1920 essay “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” it can be stated that when a detective executes a theft he actually tries to gratify his conflicting urges according to the pleasure principle of the id. The researcher has focused on these aspects of the detective’s process of investigation to showcase the intricacies of the mystery as conceptualised by the author. Thus, a detective fiction narrative is conceptualized like a complicated web, and in order to disentangle its intricate patterns, a detective must think like a sleuth as well as a culprit. As
far as the reader is concerned it is naturally quite an enthralling experience to find the
detective skilfully executing a theft after undertaking a disguise.

Thus, the conducted research not only gives scope to explore the theoretical
ramifications of detective fiction, but it also helps to understand the science or reason behind
the popularity of the genre. Critics of the genre are of the view that the genre receives wide-
scale popularity since it addresses the tastes of the mass culture. Infact, in a typical ‘taken-
for-granted’ attitude critics assume that the aesthetic taste of the non-elites- the plebeians who
largely represent popular culture is inferior and limited than the elites. And therefore popular
literature is not expected to deliver aesthetic pleasure to the readers whose capabilities are
also considered to be limited. However, what we often tend to overlook is that this perception
itself shows the limitations of the elitist views. Thus it is imperative that the grounds on
which the scholars of ‘high’ literature evaluate the genre and its popularity must undergo a
serious reconsideration. From its inception the discipline of culture studies have questioned
the elitist ideology which exclusively considers their expressions of art as cultured. Infact,
both culture and literature must not be considered as enclosed concepts since both are
receptive to the changing tendencies of time. Therefore it is high time that the parameters on
which academicians tend to evaluate detective fiction must be modified. The credibility of a
literary work rests on the equation between author- text- reader and the text is a space where
the author and the reader can engage in a dynamic interaction. So, the research argues that the
popularity and less-literariness of detective fiction does not owe to its formulaic conventions
nor because it manifests the expressions of mass culture. Infact, the conventions of the genre
are flexible enough to inculcate the spirit of any age or section of society and in order to
savor the pleasure of reading these brainteasers; a reader needs to engage in active reading
and understand the author’s narrative scheme.
Critical judgements concerning detective novels claim that such novels do not lend aesthetic pleasure of reading. Aestheticism of a text does not depend on its internal structure alone and as most reader-response theorists explain the pleasure of reading depends on how readers perceive a text. Louis Rosenblatt was the first theorist who shifted the focus from the text to the reader’s act of reading. According to Rosenblatt, reading initiates a transaction between the text and the reader and this transaction becomes fulfilled with an active participation from the reader. The meaning of a literary work is like a message or code which can be perceived or decoded only when the reader engages in a dynamic transaction with the text. Reading becomes unfruitful when the reader passively goes through the text without being able to experience the true essence of the work. Detective fiction also calls for a participative process of reading. Louis Rosenblatt’s transactional concept of reading when applied to the study of detective fiction shows how reading becomes a participative process that engages the reader in a live circuit with the text. Rosenblatt has broadly classified between two different approaches of the reader’s act of reading; ‘efferent’ reading and ‘aesthetic’ reading (Beardsley 1979:641). In the former the reader is only concerned to draw information from the text while in the latter the reader tries to evoke an experience during the process of reading. Reading is all about the experience shaped by the reader and therefore an efferent reading will not do justice to any work of literature. Any text as formulated by the author holds no value if a reader fails to comprehend the meaning inherent in it. Therefore a passive reading will only result in a plain reading of the formal aspects of the text, out of which a reader cannot draw any kind of pleasure.

Umberto Eco classified detective novels into the category of ‘closed texts’ (Bennett, Royle 2008:197) since they predetermine the reader’s response. So critics argue that the genre demands least contribution from the reader’s end to generate meaning out of the text. But, detective novels are designed as a thrilling challenge not only to the detective within the
text but also to the reader outside the text. Such novels pose an open challenge to the intellectual faculties of a reader who continually tries to find out the criminal as he goes through the text. Therefore for a conscious reader, reading detective fiction makes him a detective out of a reader. As a reader-turned-detective he tries to follow the narrative scheme and unravel the mystery with his own capabilities and limitations. Rosenblatt has emphasised that a reader’s ‘past experiences’ and ‘present personality’ (Davis 1992:72) always shape his capability of drawing meaning out of a text. Thus, reading detective fiction becomes interesting only when the reader-detective with his store house of past and present experiences utilizes his faculties of thought, intellect and observation to disentangle the hints and analyse the clues to demystify the puzzle. The conducted research opposes the notion that detective fiction narratives are easy to comprehend and argues that the genre pave the way for aesthetic reading as and when a conscious reader actively interacts with the text to shape his own experience as a reader-detective. This experience according to Rosenblatt leads to a ‘lived through experience of reading’ (Davis 1992:74) that engages the reader in a live circuit with the text.

While reading a detective fiction narrative an active reader is consciously occupied with relevant questions concerning the act, agent, agency, scene and purpose of crime. In order to solve the mystery, the reader tries to analyse all relevant angles and study the available hints and clues almost like a detective. Infact, the structuring of detective stories or novels benefit the text-reader interaction. Wolfgang Iser’s phenomenological study of the reading process explains that a reader’s aesthetic response is shaped by the text itself. His analysis of the reading process highlights how a reader approaches a text. Besides, Iser also adds that a text incorporates different narrative patterns that help to shape a reader’s response. In his essay “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach”, Iser gives a detailed explanation of the reader’s course of reading. Iser suggests that while a reader reads, meaning
is not fixed since a reader constantly anticipates and modifies his perception to finally derive meaning out of a text. His concept can be best conceptualised when it is applied to detective fiction. When a reader reads a detective fiction narrative he constantly anticipates about what is going to happen next. As he continues reading new developments in the plot force him to modify his early perceptions and this process continues until the mystery is resolved towards the end of the narrative. Finally as the detective solves the mystery the reader too draws his final perception of the text. According to Iser this text-reader interaction is virtual and it ‘brings a literary work into existence’ (Iser 1972:279).

However, Iser acknowledged the fact that a smooth flow of narration cannot result in an active transaction with the text and this leads him to his famous proposition of textual gaps. Iser claims that all stories incorporate some kind of blockage or gap and to fill this gap a reader must utilize his intellectual faculties. Such gaps are created when the author intentionally interrupts the smooth flow of narrative discourse by leaving things unexplained or untold. Once again detective novels provide a bounteous scope to understand how textual gaps are incorporated to turn the text into a response-generating structure. Infact, the working principle of a detective fiction narrative is based on the concept of ‘logos of absence’ where the logos, i.e, the centre of the novel is about the absence of some important information about the criminal. In other words it can be said that any information about the presence or the role of criminal is intentionally withheld to create a gap or an absence and without this absence (of information) or gap a detective fiction narrative cannot be conceptualized. However, besides this central gap, there are many other blockages that a detective needs to negotiate with in order to reveal the identity of the criminal. In order to build the necessary suspense the author devises some crucial twists and creates some blockage where the detective is made to leave things half-explained or half-said. In such cases the other characters notably his assistant as well as the reader is left confused. To be
precise, a detective fiction narrative consists of both written as well as unwritten part of text, and it is the unwritten part which comprises the gaps. The narrative scheme of the genre requires these gaps to be filled in by the detective within the text and the reader outside the text. In this regard the detective enjoys an authority owing to which he enjoys access to all relevant hints and clues and is thus empowered to solve the mystery. But the reader has limited access in this respect and this is a conscious strategy incorporated by the author. When a reader is unable to unravel the gaps he would find difficulty in making any progress during the course of his reading. As a result of this the reader would be unable to understand the dynamics of the mystery.

Thus, it is clear that in order to revaluate the genre one must look beyond the so-called limitations of detective fiction in terms of the author’s artistic expertise, the formulaic generic conventions and the pre-determined response of the reader. Infact, the conducted research shows that without a skilled author the conventions of the genre are not enough to create such thrillers because it is the author who decides how the story of crime would be constructed or what details of criminal’s act would be made available to the detective, or to what extent will the detective withheld an information to arouse the curiosity of the reader. The author also bestows the detective with a degree of authority owing to which all hints and clues are available to him while some of them are intentionally distanced from the reach of the reader. In this way detective fiction narrative gains dynamism through the intelligently constructed textual gaps. In his essay Iser has stressed that a text becomes lively only ‘when it is realized’ (Iser 1972:279). Thus the success of the genre depends on how the author competently constructs the narrative scheme to present it in terms of written and unwritten part of the text. Moreover, such narrative intricacies are not easy to comprehend and it demands the active participation of the reader to comprehend the gaps and formulate the ‘unformulated part of the text’ (Iser 1972: 292). For this a reader must utilize his resources of
thought and intellect as this will help the reader-detective to understand the dynamics of the narrative as an ongoing mystery and take pleasure in reading.

The pleasure of reading the brainteasers becomes more profounding when the reader-detective himself tries to think like a detective or a criminal. In terms of Iser’s theorisation, it can be said that when the reader tries to decode the thought process of the detective or the criminal to understand or anticipate their moves he almost negates his personality and acts like an ‘alien’ reader. Moreover, Iser also explained that the text-reader interaction has a virtual dimension and the reader also operates as the ‘real-virtual’ reader. As it has been already discussed while reading a reader approaches a text with his bag of capabilities and limitations. Therefore in view of Iser’s postulations it can be stated that when a reader almost acts as the reader-detective he engages in a virtual interaction with the text and while he analyses the various hints and clues he utilises his faculties and limitations. Thus, even when a reader thinks like a detective he does not completely negate his personality and therefore the real reader always virtually interacts with the text as a ‘real-virtual’ reader. So while reading a detective fiction narrative, the reader operates as an ‘alien’ reader as well as a ‘real-virtual’ reader according to the demands of the plot.

The entire dynamics about detective novels are therefore not easy to comprehend although, one might argue that while reading a reader is least concerned about whether he reads as an ‘alien’ reader or as ‘real-virtual’ one. In giving a detailed account of the text-reader relationship, the researcher tried to emphasize that the easy readability of a detective fiction narrative is not a feature that accounts for its literary inferiority. The fact that the genre delivers entertainment and is therefore popular goes to the credit of the generic conventions which gives a scope to the conscious reader to utilise his intellectual and reasoning faculties and grasp the narrative scheme as conceived by the author. If a reader fails to understand the mechanics of the narrative, then reading detective fiction will be
boring, because a plain reading of the semantic content of the narrative would never produce the thrill and entertainment that the genre is known to deliver. Heta Pyrhonen has explained about “...two broad conceptualizations of reading the genre: a ‘lowbrow’ explanation accounting for its appeal to a mass readership, and a ‘highbrow’ explanation accounting for its appeal to a distinctly academic audience.” (Pyrhonen 1999:7). She further explains that:

> With its focus on the emotional side of reading, the lowbrow conceptualization emphasizes suspense, excitement, anxiety, and fear... the highbrow explanation offers a ‘cerebral’ version of reading, which stresses mental agility requiring attention, intelligence, inferential thought, and inventiveness. (Pyrhonen 1999:7- 8)

However, the researcher does not adhere to these broad classifications. Critics disregard the genre for they consider that the easy comprehension of the genre accounts for its mass readership and therefore it has nothing to offer to serious academic readers. But in view of the arguments put forward the researcher suggests that reading a detective fiction narrative emphasizes both ‘lowbrow’ and ‘highbrow’ considerations. The thrill, excitement and suspense as experienced by the reader results out of an attentive reading even if the reader is unaware of the theoretical aspects of his reading. In addition to this the genre also offers serious ‘cerebral’ involvement for an academician so that one can comprehend the intricate narrative conventions and experience the thrill of decoding the puzzle.

In recent years the established tradition of canon as it exists did shift its focus to the genre of popular fiction. But in most cases the main emphasis has been to study how the genre evolved as a response to the cultural and social values of a particular age and time. This however, does not question why detective stories are not generally taught as a part of the curriculum in academic institutions. In this respect, the research claims that to give the genre
its due relevance the idea of the canon needs to be expanded to make space for detective fiction. Infact, in post-modern times the term canon and its connotations are being challenged and one question which is often raised is that why is the canon necessary. The idea of canon which the researcher has referred to mainly focuses on the mainstream literary canon as reflected in the curriculum of academic studies. In this context, popular literature has struggled to make space for itself and therefore the conducted research tries to challenge the grounds on which popular literature more particularly detective fiction has been sidelined or excluded. By analysing the various aspects that goes into the structuring of detective stories the researcher tries to imply that the genre has been mainly devalued due to judgemental bias. The research argues that in terms of artistic skill and aesthetic appeal the genre is no less than any other literary genre and from this point the research proposes the concept of an alternative canon which could be a part of the greater canon of literary studies. In validating the arguments the researcher not only focuses on the narrative strategies of such stories but also highlights the psychoanalytic implications of the genre and the reader’s virtual interaction with such texts.

In defence of the proposed claims the conducted research also tries to formulate a new theoretical apparatus that does justice to the genre. However, the researcher does not extensively deal with the European counterpart of the genre. Infact, the main focus of the research is on the Indian counterpart of detective fiction. Though for a major period, the genre was thought to be a western phenomenon but owing to wide scale popularity among reading public, the genre was gradually adapted and appropriated in other parts of the globe. In India the genre made its way in the early quarter of twentieth century but it took quite some time to cast off the western influence and appropriate the genre to the cultural and social values of India. However, the root of the origin of the Indian detective novel can be traced in Bengal, although in Bengal the genre proliferated mainly as a branch of the pulp-
tradition. The flourishing industry of printing saw a concomitant development of fiction writing. This popular pulp tradition gradually paved the way for conventional crime tales that were published in the form of short stories or even full length novels. Amongst a long list of Bengali detective fiction writers, the research lends major emphasis to the works of noted Bengali film director-author Satyajit Ray. Ray’s Feluda stories give an abounding scope to defend the researcher’s attempts in reassessing the genre of detective fiction and reformulate the traditional approach of the grand literary canon. With special focus to the Feluda series, the researcher tries to showcase how in India the genre has faced a similar treatment of negligence from serious academic studies.

The research primarily deals with the English translations of the Ray’s stories that have been collected in two volumes by translator Gopa Majumdar. The researcher has conducted a detailed examination of the thirty-five stories focussing on the different premises that have so far been the centre of discussion about the genre in general. Besides the research work also explores other aspects like the culture-specific nuances that are inherent in Feluda stories. These stories provide an interesting insight into the cultural and social milieu of the age in which they were created. Apart from this, the research also traces the history of the genre in India and while doing this, the researcher discovers that many popular tales of early Vedic times show the presence of such elements which are now integral aspects of modern day stories of detection. The researcher has coined the term ‘detective-fiction elements’ to refer to these aspects and they are also found to be present in the oral literature of the native state of the researcher. Moreover, the researcher focuses on the intricacies involved in the process of translation itself. In this respect, the researcher not only deals with inter-lingual translation but also focuses on the dynamics of inter-semiotic translation. In short, the conducted research helps to study and assess the significance of Satyajit Ray’s work specifically his fictional detective-Feluda in the larger context of the Indian detective novel.
Ray’s love for detective stories particularly those featuring Sherlock Holmes is usually thought to be the inspiration behind his creation of Prodosh Chandra Mitter alias Feluda. The stories enjoy unprecedented popularity in Bengal but are often thought to be less complicated than other popular Bengali detective stories. Ray initiated the series mainly for the young readers of his children’s magazine *Sandesh* but soon the brainteasers found popularity among the readers from different age groups. At one point the stories even drew criticism over dealing with light-hearted matters but Ray tactfully clarified his stand on composing the stories through his mouthpiece Feluda. In the story, “Mystery of Nayan” Feluda is seen distressed over the letters received from the readers who expressed that the thrillers are losing their appeal. Voicing Ray’s thoughts Feluda strongly stressed that since the stories are primarily meant for children the stories have consciously avoided ‘spicy’ (Majumdar 2005:639) ingredients that might have been more entertaining for adult readers. However, a detailed analysis of the stories will reveal Ray’s craft with which he has incorporated various complexities into the narratives and some of them even focus on the thin line between crime and sin; revenge and justice. The researcher attempts to theoretically conceptualise Ray’s narratives to show that his stories are products of shrewd conceptual structuring and design. The stories follow the basic framework of the western detective story, however, Ray has given special care to appropriate the western conventions of the genre to Indian tastes. Infact, Ray has incorporated new elements in the basic structural framework to improvise certain conventions and lend the stories with his personal touch as well as a typical Bengali essence.

Initially, Satyajit Ray chose not to introduce his young readers with a professional private detective. So he introduced a young-eccentric man who loved reading detective thrillers and challenged himself to solve any perplexing development that happened to distort the harmony of his surrounding atmosphere. But it is interesting to see how with each story
Ray’s amateur investigator gradually develops to become a professional private detective. Ray has also improvised the cult motif of detective-assistant duo and as a variation to the western model he introduced Lalmohan Ganguli, to make it a group of three. Moreover, each story is a product of Ray’s craftsmanship with interesting plots to keep the readers engrossed. In terms of theoretical conceptualisation, Ray’s stories are no adventurous tales; rather each story provides ample scope to explore the intricacies of the plot as integrated by the author and also brings into focus many unexplored facets. A close reading of the stories would clarify that Ray has presented Feluda as a twentieth century Bengali sleuth. His razor-sharp observation, shrewd rational deduction, his authority as an all knowing detective-narrator, his craft in pulling off disguises or carrying out thefts and his supreme ability to follow the antagonist’s thought process makes him a competent agent to deal with the problems of the age. But in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of his characterisation, the researcher traced back to the roots of the genre’s adoption in Bengal.

The pulp-outputs of the Bat-tala publications developed the tradition of Guptakathas or crime thrillers in Bengal. But from the early half of the twentieth century Bengal produced a number of Bengali detectives. Many of them who appeared between 1940s and 1960s reflect the nationalistic consciousness of an educated Bengali youth. At a time when the struggle for independence gained prominence, the educated Bengali youth realised that in order to fight against the colonisers, one must build up a solid combination of strong body and sharp intellect. As a result, in those times the concept of akharas and Anushilan Samitis were gaining ground in Bengal. Moreover, the influence of western education also had a sound impact on the Bengali nationalists. This happy combination of brain and brawn was also reflected in the emerging tradition of the Bengali detective fiction of those times. When Satyajit Ray introduced his fictional detective he carried forth this legacy of the established tradition of Bengali detectives. Although, Feluda is not clad in a dhoti (a traditional men’s
garment worn by Bengalis) like Byomkesh Bakshi, yet he reflected a similar Bengali consciousness and the importance of intellect and physicality. However, Satyajit Ray brought in some necessary modification in his detective and it is interesting to study how Ray characterised Feluda as a twentieth century sleuth who embodies the finest qualities of east and west.

Surely Ray was influenced by the colonial model of Sherlock Holmes, but he has cast Feluda as a quintessential Bengali bhadralok with refined taste and intellectual abilities. Infact Ray’s stories give an opportunity to understand how the connotation of a typical Bengali bhadralok has undergone a suitable metamorphosis in Feluda. Lalmohan Ganguli’s induction into the series is merely considered to provide a comic relief to the thrillers. But his character as conceived by the author is in sharp contrast to that of Feluda and this helps in a better comprehension of the latter’s character. Lalmohan Ganguli is a typical Bengali gentleman whose crime-thrillers are often erroneous in facts but are famous for the adventurous feats of its phantasmagorical hero- Prakhar Rudra. In his self confessed admiration for an attractive-muscular physic Mr. Ganguli lives his dream of being a macho man in his fictional creation. In real life Mr. Ganguli is a meek and faint-hearted man and in his character Ray seems to have reflected the usual concept of Bengalis who are often looked at as a physically weak race. Goutam Basu writes that “...the physical effeminacy of the Bengali as a ‘race’ found its most blatant expression in Thomas Macaulay’s critique.” (Basu 2013:64). However, Satyajit Ray has presented Feluda as a Bengali gentleman who is heroic in his deeds, courageous at heart and physically fit and agile. In this way Ray juxtaposes two versions of Bengali gentlemen or bhadralok. This can be an intentional move by the author to give a realistic portrayal of an efficient modern age detective. Feluda is neither meek like Mr. Ganguli nor is he unrealistically heroic like Prakhar Rudra. Infact, in delineating Feluda, Satyajit Ray has done a balancing act to bring the best qualities of the colonial model of a detective and the
Bengali notion of a bhadralok with some necessary variations. Feluda’s charismatic personality empowered by his extraordinary intellect, his skills of observation and rational deduction make him akin to the western detective; although as a typical Bengali gentleman he convincingly differs from this model. But he is also different from the usual notion of a Bengali bhadralok, as represented by Lalmohan Ganguli. Infact, Feluda is an intellectual who emphasizes the need of nurturing the physical strength of the body. So he is neither a colonial prototype, nor a typical Bengali, rather he evolves as an alternative-realistic- post-colonial sleuth who works by balancing the strengths of his sharp brain, steady nerves and muscle power.

Interestingly Ray’s portrayal of Feluda accentuates the cultural aspects of the stories. Feluda stories are deeply rooted in an Indian socio-cultural space that specifically reflects the spirit of Bengal. The characters, their idiosyncratic behaviour, the food they eat, the places they visit naturally reverberate the sounds and colors of Bengal. But what is more interesting is that when Feluda travels outside the territory of Bengal to outsmart a non-Bengali crook in his home ground or sometimes outside the country, Ray skillfully glorifies the entire race of Bengal through the representative figure of Feluda. But besides the cultural aspects, some stories also reflect the moral-ethical build up of the chief protagonists. At the end of puzzle in the story “The Mysterious Tenant” none of the persons who broke the law and committed crime were convicted for their acts. While the thief was asked to return the money and the important papers, the murderer who committed the crime to take revenge of the injustice done to him was let free. Mr. Nihar Datta was the victim of malice and jealousy and after a fatal accident he lost his eyesight and his research was left incomplete. After this tragic misfortune the only jest that kept him alive was the desire of revenge. Feluda’s knowledge of the truth convinced him that in this regard he does not own the authority to unmask the convict so that he can be convicted by law. In this case Feluda’s decision to let him free
reflects his moral-ethical backup as he considers that Mr. Nihar Datta is “...close to death... and no one can touch him not even law.” (Majumdar 2005:94). Keeping this view in mind a conscious reader can assess the detective’s as well the author’s moral stand that brings in the paradigm of God and sin in a detective thriller which predominantly operates on the human-mortal paradigm of crime and justice.

However, these socio-cultural aspects might pose a problem for a reader who is from a different socio-cultural background. For a non-Bengali reader reading the Feluda stories will call for an extra effort to understand the subtle socio-cultural nuances that have been incorporated into the narratives. In this regard, reading surely provides an opportunity to know and understand the source culture but it also raises a problem since the reader’s socio-cultural build-up might not facilitate an easy comprehension of the source culture. However, a Bengali reader enjoys a slight privilege while reading the English translations of Feluda stories. In this regard the reader-researcher enjoys an advantage since she is aware of the subtle nuances of the source culture. Moreover, the ethical build-up of the reader might also influence one’s reading since one may or might not be able to relate with the moral stand of the detective as depicted in the stories. These are some of the complications that the research attempt to explore while dealing with the translated versions of the original Bengali stories. Translation is problematic and considering the intricacies inherent in it, the researcher try to focus on how the translator has adapted the narratives from the source language to the target language without compromising with the aesthetic essence of the original narratives. Secondly, the researcher also tries to understand how the dynamics of translation might affect the reader’s act of drawing meaning out of the text.

Every language has its own semantic tradition that reflects its specific culture. When an original work is translated from one linguistic medium to another it is always accompanied with some inevitable changes. Gopa Majumdar’s translation of Feluda stories is a brilliant
endeavour and the translator has done complete justice to the original works. But like most translators she could not avoid some changes. Every language has an in-built mechanism that poses a strong resistance against translation. Although, Majumdar is acquainted with the language of the original compositions as well as the source culture of the works, yet she had to make certain compromise while translating the stories into English. As a Bengali, the researcher has had read some original Bengali stories in the past, and therefore she could easily locate the differences incorporated by the translator into the English versions. For instance, on many occasions Ray’s comprehensive detailing has been condensed in the translated versions. Majumdar also had to retain some original Bengali terms since the semantic conventions of the concerned language does not allow an all-inclusive translation of those terms that are culturally sound and specific. But as a Bengali, the translator also had an advantage to express the semantic content of many original Bengali terms in English; although the aesthetic content of the original term got compromised in this process. However, things got more complicated when the researcher shifted attention to the reader’s role in comprehending the English translations. For the reader-researcher reading the English translations was interesting as she is aware of the linguistic and cultural conventions of the original compositions. But for a reader from a different cultural background reading initiates a problem. Many original words have been translated into English but since in this case the reader is unaware of the cultural connotations of many culture-specific terms; reading the English terms does not convey the associated aesthetic information of the original Bengali terms. Moreover those words which are retained in their original Bengali form remain beyond comprehension since the translator has not provided any accompanying list of explanatory notes. By highlighting these inherent subtleties that accompany the translated versions, the researcher tries to draw more attention to Feluda stories which are often downplayed for their not-so-serious content. In this direction the researcher also tries to emphasize how translation
initiates a transaction between cultures. Besides the researcher’s prior knowledge of the original works and the source culture also helps to assess the significance of Gopa Majumdar’s English translation in promoting the legacy of Satyajit Ray’s thrillers.

Critics have always stressed that detective fiction narratives give vent to the cultural and moral values of the culture of its origin. The conducted research also highlights a similar trend. On reading Feluda stories the reader gets acquainted with cultural notions, societal norms, the ethical frame work and the spirit of Bengal. Infact, it can be suggested that Ray has almost simulated Bengal in his narratives. While tracing the history of the genre the researcher lays hand at some popular tales that dates back to Vedic times. Even a casual reading of the stories will suggest how socio-cultural tendencies of that particular age get reflected in such popular tales. In those times too, society witnessed incidents of theft and forgery and therefore there was the concept of finding the thief or exposing the fraud. This idea of ‘finding out’ the truth is an inherent aspect of modern day detective stories. In this direction, the researcher has coined the term ‘detective fiction elements’ to showcase the presence of the same in popular tales of early Vedic times. Besides, the researcher also shows the presence of such elements in the ethnic literature of Tripura, specifically in the folk-tales of the Darlong community of the state. Infact, a look at the folk-tales of the Darlong community will help to comprehend that the very connotations of crime and criminality might vary across time and cultures. In this regard the conducted research adds an extra dimension to understand how the very concepts of crime-law-justice are integral aspects of the working principle of a detective fiction narrative.

One of the most important findings of the research is the coinage of the term ‘detective fiction elements’ which in the survey of the existing literature on this genre has not been located before. This claim is however, not all inclusive and is made within the limitations of time and space of the research conducted and the readings undertaken thereof.
The term refers to the basic ideas of finding clues, keen observation, tracing footprints, analytical reasoning and deduction. Many popular tales in Sanskrit and Pali, the Jataka tales in Prakrit show the presence of such elements. These tales also mirror the socio-cultural conventions of the age which stressed the need of finding the miscreant. Even epics like *The Ramayana* show the presence of such elements. However, a look into the folk tales of the Darlong community helps to understand why the genre is absent in the ethnic literature of the region despite the presence of detective fiction elements in their literature both oral and written. A closer look at the socio-cultural construct of such societies explains how the very concepts of crime and criminality vary across cultures. Such societies have their customary laws and rituals and it often makes the format of ‘detecting-proving-defending’ criminality dysfunctional. While conducting the research, the researcher has mainly dealt with the oral tales of Darlong community and has not come across any evidence of the presence of the conventional genre of detective fiction in the written or oral literature of the community. The research throws new insights into the literature of such ethnic tribes to explain how the connotations of crime-criminality, detection-conviction are intricate concepts rooted in the socio-cultural construct of a particular society. The genre of detective fiction has been conceptualized in a society where the complex paradigm of ‘detecting-proving-convicting’ criminality is essential according to the judicial system of the society in which it operates. The Darlongs have their own social customs and social practices and in many cases such customs are not acceptable in a conventional modern society. Moreover, such societies have their own governing system which nullifies the basic concepts required for a detective story to operate. Thus detective fiction proper does not operate in such societies.

So the term ‘detective fiction element’ and its varied implications are very significant in understanding the grounds on which a detective story operates. Moreover, the term also explains the fact that many so-called non-detective fictions might also have detective fiction
elements. The cultural connotations of Feluda stories indicate how authors in a post-colonial age have tried to formulate a quintessential tradition of Indian detective fiction by defying the early twentieth century tradition of crime stories that were primarily translations or adaptations of original English works. Thus, the research work also helps to re-assess the worth of Feluda stories in the Indian tradition of detective fiction. A close study of the thirty-five stories reveals the journey of a young man who went on to become a heroic figure in every Bengali household. He is competent, energetic and courageous, ready for any intellectual or physical hurdle. Re-formulating the initial plan, Satyajit Ray later introduced other important characters and without them the adventures of Feluda and Topshe would be almost incomplete. Feluda stories cannot be thought without Lalmohan Ganguli. First introduced in “The Golden Fortress”, the famed writer is a perfect partner of Feluda and Topshe even with his silly imperfections. Ray’s skill in Mr. Ganguli’s depiction sets him as a perfect contrast to Feluda, the quintessential Bengali bhadralok, but at the same time Ray often makes him contribute to the investigation in his idiosyncratic style. Besides Lalmohan Babu, two other important creations of Ray are Maganlal Meghraj- Feluda’s most cunning opponent and Uncle Sidhu-a representative figure of a typical Bengali intellectual whose massive collection of books speaks for his encyclopaedic knowledge. With each mystery Feluda’s skill of investigation got better and he developed as a professional investigator. At one point he even crossed the national boundaries to showcase his skill on foreign soil. His adventures in Hong Kong or in London exhibit his mental adroitness and once he returned home after resolving the mystery his fame grew further. As the popularity of the stories gradually accelerated, many of them were adapted to the big screen; some were made into television series and even cartoons. In an attempt to attain a better comprehension of Ray’s authorial skills as a detective fiction writer, the researcher also attempted to study how the famed writer-director fares as a maker of detective thrillers. Apart from interpreting the
theoretical implications of the genre and of Feluda stories in particular, the conducted
research also attempts to study how such stories are made into movies with special reference
to Satyajit Ray’s cinematic adaptations of two of his famous stories “The Golden Fortress”
and “The Mystery of the Elephant God”. Analysing the stories in two different mediums
helps to study the intricacies of inter-semiotic translation. In this direction the researcher has
tried to focus at the multiple levels at which literary works get adapted from text to screen.

Films are autonomous works of art. Like literary works, films too have a basic set of
conventions and it works only in correspondence with them. But when a literary work is
made into a movie it is expected to be at par with the original work. Critics often evaluate the
aesthetic worth of the movie in comparison to the original text. However, it must be
considered that the journey of a literary text from the typographical mode to the audio-visual
mode is a complex affair and there are multiple levels at which the original story gets adapted
into a movie. Detective stories offer an interesting area of research in both typographical and
cinematic paradigms. As the research has showcased, translation (from one language to
another) itself is a complex task and when it involves two totally different domains it would
be more interesting to study how the director adapts the story with audio-visual aspects.
Infact, the research undertaken in this regard proved to be more engaging since both the film
as well as the original fiction is the creation of the same artist. When a filmmaker makes a
movie out of a literary work, he almost rewrites the text of the original fiction into an audio-
visual text. And in the process he might incorporate some necessary changes according to the
demands of the medium. Therefore the credibility of the movie will depend on how the
filmmaker interprets the story. When Satyajit Ray decided to make Sonar Kella and Joy Baba
Felunath, he must have taken special care to decide how the suspense will be created in a
stipulated time frame since it is practically not possible to film the entire length of the
original story. So, the adaptation and execution of the screenplay and its final reception by the audience holds the key for a movie’s success.

In order to carry out a detailed study of Ray’s movies, the research has mainly focussed on the response of the reader-turned-viewer in order to analyse the changes that has been embodied into the movies. Reading imparts a different experience. The act of reading can be viewed as an act of re-writing since it offers complete freedom (to the reader) in employing the faculties of intellect, thought and imagination. Therefore while reading, a reader becomes a virtual writer and re-writes the text to decode meaning with his own capabilities and limitations. In view of Loius Rosenblatt’s postulation it can be stated that reading a detective thriller initiates an active transaction between the text and the reader and in order to decode the mystery the reader must interact with the text as a virtual-detective. But in comparison to this, watching a movie constricts a viewer’s imagination as the viewer is confined to what is being shown on the screen. So when a reader becomes a viewer his reaction on watching the movie after having read the original story will surely influence his response. In this regard the researcher has showcased, how her personal reaction as a reader and then as a viewer has influenced her perception of a detective thriller that has been communicated through two different mediums. In view of the responses of the reader-turned-viewer, the researcher has found that both works are brilliant in their respective domains, although the filmmaker has incorporated some major differences in the screenplay of the thriller without compromising the essence of the original mystery. In case of Joy Baba Felunath, Ray has deviated from the original text to add some additional twists. Infact, after reading the original story and then watching the movie, it would not be inappropriate to say that Ray has almost rewritten the original text into an audio-visual text.

Moreover, the conducted research has also highlighted some other aspects of the process of translation in both linguistic and cinematic domain. Translation in any mode is
always accompanied with some unavoidable losses and gains. The original Bengali versions of the stories are products of Ray’s craftsmanship with well-knit plots aided by illustrative graphics. It is true that illustrations always give some impression but they also impose a kind of visual limit. But while reading the Bengali versions of the stories, the reader will surely enjoy the narrative along with the sketches. Infact, a reader might even benefit from these illustrations in building perception. But while reading the English translations one will not get to take delight of Ray’s illustrative lines. For a reader who is reading the English versions first, this loss will not make any difference since it gives more opportunity to utilize the faculties of perception, but for the researcher, who is acquainted with some of the original stories, this loss curtails the appeal of reading the translated versions. The study of the original Bengali classics and their translated versions is further extended by shifting focus to book-covers and film-posters. Once again the researcher’s prior knowledge of the original Bengali stories helps to assess how book covers of the original stories and film posters of the movies trigger our perspective. In short, the researcher has tried to highlight all those details which are inherent aspects of the process of translation and when translation takes place from one medium of signs to another semiotic medium, the dynamics is more intricate. Moreover, by making a comprehensive study of the English translations of Feluda stories and of Ray’s cinematic adaptation of the original Bengali stories, the research has tried to highlight Satyajit Ray’s skill as a story-writer as well as a filmmaker in the domain of detective fiction.

After conducting a research on detective fiction it can be asserted that a detective story or novel is not just a thrilling narrative of mystery and suspense devised solely to draw the interest of maximum number of readers. The conducted research not only opposes the categorizations of high and low art, but it also defends the initial hypothesis of the researcher. In most cases advocates of the canon are skeptical about the aesthetics of the genre since they consider that once the suspense is resolved and the detective unmasks the criminal the
narrative comes to a closure. But in view of the research conducted, it can be argued that in an over-simplistic assessment of the genre, critics often fail to acknowledge that the genre is not just about the resolution of suspense. Infact, what substantiates the genre is the very manner in which the suspense is concretized and resolved. If reading a detective fiction narrative was all about the unveiling of the culprit, then the reader can always take the lease of turning to the last few pages of the narrative to know who the real criminal is. But the ultimate selling point of detective fiction lies in their schematized narrative framework that binds the author, text and the reader in a vitalizing association. From the initial stages of the research, the researcher had claimed that the genre deserves serious reading and interpretation. And to validate this argument, the researcher has undertaken a thorough analysis of those popular assumptions that differentiate the genre from the so-called mainstream serious literature.

In dealing with the various stigmas that pose a hindrance on the way of the genre, the research has extensively dealt with different theoretical angles that aid in interpreting the generic conventions of detective fiction. Infact, it appears that the notion of popularity has almost become a stigma for the genre. It is believe that such stories are popular as they make the reader confront with the existing problems of the society. Often described as ‘literature of crisis’, most critics are of the view that “Detective fiction, like all popular art, is also, and primarily, entertainment. Readers come to it for relaxation, for escape… not for self-improvement, and certainly not for social criticism.” (Stowe 1986: 661). A close look at the narratives will speak for the generic conventions which are stereotyped. Tzvetan Todorov has classified that ‘the story of the crime’ and ‘the story of the investigation’ (Todorov 1977:44) constitute a detective novel. This basic structure is constant and the former always evolves at the end of the latter. Critics claim that detective fiction is formulaic since the conventions are stereotyped, but it has to be noted that one cannot possibly compose the mystery without
these basic tenets. In *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* (1976) John Cawelti has focussed on some branches of popular literature to analyse the concept of formulaic literature. In a detailed study he deals with detective fiction and tries to underline the formula of a classic detective story. In this connection he even points out three devices that are widely used by writers of formulaic literature and states that:

Three of the literary devices most often used by formulaic writers of all kinds can serve as an illustration of this sort of artistic skill: suspense, identification, and the creating of a slightly removed, imaginary world. (Cawelti 1976:16-17)

A detective fiction author creates an imaginary world that reflects the socio-cultural trends of the real world on which it is modelled. The genre works on the problem-solving principle, however, the way of arriving at any solution might vary according to the nature of the problem. Detective fiction does not always deal with conventional crime in the literal sense of the term, and in most narratives the central problem evolves from a perfect blend of crime, detection, mystery and puzzle. The reader of a detective fiction narrative knows that with the unveiling of the criminal the problem will be sorted, but to generate the desired suspense the readers are kept in darkness and with various narrative strategies the author delays the resolution of the suspense. As the author delays, the suspense is heightened and automatically the reader tries to follow the detective’s course of investigation in his attempts to resolve the mystery. In this process the reader tries to partly negate his personality so that he or she can virtually identify with the criminal and the detective to decode the author’s fabrication of the mystery. This active interaction with the text helps to seek complete understanding of the mystery in order to enjoy reading. Thus the genre demands these conventions in order to function and generate the much hyped quotient of ‘entertainment’ that keeps the reader hooked till the end. To contend against the claims of the genre’s formulaic nature and its resultant artistic inferiority; the conducted research gives a detailed explanation
Detective fiction is often noted for its role in propagating cultural and social values. Infact, some critics consider that it is the only considerable aspect of the genre which also in a way contributes to its popularity. Such novels are essentially culture specific and they are constructed against the socio-cultural aspects of a particular age. Infact, all literary works are primarily a reflection of their age. Therefore to categorize one particular genre as a ‘literature of crisis’ (Stowe 1986:661) for giving vent to the real-life problems of an age makes no relevant sense. Literary escapism is true for almost all literary genres. When readers read a piece of Romantic poetry they temporarily tend to forget their own existence and undertake a poetic voyage to the poet’s world of imagination as described in the poem. Similarly, the intense suspense of a detective fiction narrative occupies the reader to such an extent that he almost negates his personality to identify with the detective and follow his cerebral course of action. This helps the reader to comprehend the mystery and engross oneself with the pleasure of reading.

Therefore the claim that detective fiction is formulaic, popular and entertaining does not curtail its aesthetic connotation in comparison to the so-called serious literature. So it is unjustified to condemn the artistic features or characteristics of the genre on these grounds. Infact, the genre is characterised by its own aspects, it is artistic on its own grounds and therefore appealing in its own terms. In recent years, there have been attempts to change the approach towards the genre. But in order to initiate a serious approach towards the study of detective fiction, tracing the history of the genre would not be enough. Infact, now the focus must be shifted to the narrative strategies to learn how the genre has continued to enjoy the popularity of a wide section of readers from across the globe for over a century. However, the
genre is yet to receive its due accord from the domain of serious academics. In order to re-evaluate such popular notions that degrade the genre, the researcher has undertaken a detailed study to formulate a theoretical apparatus that will aid in defying the continual negligence of the literary canon. This theoretical framework will challenge the existing notions of the canon and pave the way for studying or teaching detective fiction as a part of serious academic studies. In this regard the research aims to reformulate or expand the idea of canon or formulate an alternative canon in order to accommodate detective fiction and all other branches of popular fiction or literature.

Apart from reinstating the genre to a respectable position within the academic canon, the research also attempts to find a respectable place for Satyajit Ray’s Feluda stories in the context of detective fiction. In India the earliest forms of fiction writing in this tradition failed to create an indigenous tradition of Indian detective fiction. Infact, the contribution of Bengal in this regard often goes unnoticed, since Bengal’s tradition of detective fiction found its initial impetus in the flourishing pulp industry of the region from early nineteenth century. However, in the following century many writers have composed conventional detective stories and some of their fictional creations like detective Byomkesh Bakshi and Feluda went on to become very popular. But Bengali detective fiction is still struggling to make a mark in the domain of detective fiction. In this regard, this research has conducted a detailed study to draw attention to Ray’s detective series to showcase that his narratives are not mere entertaining stories and have serious implications to challenge the politics of the canon itself. Although the stories are often downplayed for their light-hearted matters, but a serious reading would help to assess the author’s skill that has created intense narratives without any trace of sex and violence. Infact, Ray has taken the archetypal western detective story and infused it with his personal touch to create entertaining and thought-provoking thrillers that impart a fulfilling reading experience to readers of all age group. Ray’s stories provide a
prolific scope to be analysed from different theoretical premises that has been suggested by the conducted research to study detective fiction in general. As detective stories, Ray’s works contribute to the huge corpus of literature that is generally labelled as popular literature. In this connection the researcher aims to prove that Feluda stories are no less literary and offers a gamut of perspectives that needs serious recognition. Moreover, Ray’s stories are essentially culture specific and they provide interesting insights into the socio-cultural milieu of Bengal. Besides, Ray also makes the reader think over the complex issues of crime and sin; justice and revenge. However, a huge share of the popularity of the stories goes to Ray’s portrayal of the detective-hero. In his stories Ray presents a realistic- alternative agent as an efficient twentieth century sleuth who embodies a fine blend of brain and brawn. In portraying Feluda, Ray deviates from the typical colonial model and invests in him the finest qualities of west and east to present him as a Bengali detective. Another interesting aspect of the research is the implications of the term ‘detective fiction elements’; which help to trace the history of detective fiction in India by extending it beyond the known points of origin. Moreover, as the researcher is dealing with the translated version of the original works, it also gives an opportunity to study the translated versions of the original stores both in textual as well as in cinematic medium.

Hence, detective fiction offers a wide domain of studies for conducting serious academic research. The research work has defended its claim that detective fiction offers enough intellectual expertise. Therefore, the research validates the proposed hypothesis that through serious reading and interpretation the true implications of the genre can be assessed. In this respect, the research has undertaken a detailed textual analysis of primary and secondary reading material that includes the English translations of the original Feluda stories. Moreover the researcher has also undertaken a thorough study of various theoretical postulations to understand how a typical detective story works. In addition to this the
researcher also focuses on other available critical material and also on Ray in general. At last, the conducted research affirms that detective novels are artistically viable and aesthetically profound. So the research suggests a proper theoretical framework to study the inherent intricacies of the genre. In this way the research puts up a strong argument against the popular notions that belittles the genre and proposes to situate it in an alternative canon by negating the politics of exclusion initiated by the grand canon of literature.
WORKS CITED


