Chapter 2

Theorizing Detective Fiction: An Autopsy

Reading is an enthralling experience and while reading fiction a reader gets an opportunity to plunge into the depths of the imaginary world depicted in it. A work of fiction in any configuration or set up is actually a story composed by an author who tends to liberate his thoughts, feelings, beliefs, attitudes or desires through it. The author’s conceptualization and subsequently the creation of any fictional work is shaped by his real life experiences, which he or she gathers while interacting with a society in which both the author and reader live. So in order to study and generate an idea about a particular work one must look beyond the story line and focus on other vital factors like the author, society and the reader as these factors stand in a complex yet dynamic relationship with the text. When a reader reads an author’s work of fiction he or she gets an idea about the author’s impressions or views as shaped by his surrounding environment. Such impressions offer an extensive area of study and in order to understand them, a reader must involve himself in a process of active reading. Moreover the author’s and the reader’s position within the society and their approach towards the text is another significant aspect which requires a better understanding. Thus, meaning inherent in a text depends on the intricate triangulation between the author-text-reader. Most scholars have an inclination to explore the link between them and this aspiration to understand a literary work and its various aspects motivates scholars to analyze literature theoretically.

During the process of reading, the reader-critic might have an active and critical approach or a passive and inactive approach. While some readers do not utilize their intellectual expertise and carry out reading just for the sake of it, others attempt to understand a particular work from their own perspective. Theoretical investigation is always fascinating
since it facilitates literary scholarship. However, it does involve an accompanying challenge; as in many cases the reader might end up scrutinizing the author’s perspective in the work. This can turn out to be risky as reading might get narrowed down to a subjective-argumentative exercise. In an interesting project, Lisa Zunshine endeavours to understand literature by applying ‘Theory of Mind’. In her work she explains it as a process of ‘mind-reading’ and tries to study the cerebral course of action or the mental procedure involved in the understanding of literature. Theory of Mind is about the innate capability of comprehending human behavior through their behavioral patterns including their spoken words and bodily gestures. This ability when applied to a literary work aids in a better comprehension of the work. In her book Why We Read Fiction: Theory Of Mind and the Novel (2006), Zunshine makes an in-depth study and explains how this innate ability helps to carry out better interpretation of literary works. The following excerpt quoted from Amy Watkin’s review of Zunshine’s book gives an idea about Zunshine’s approach towards the very process of reading. According to Zunshine:

> The very process of making sense of what we read appears to be grounded in our ability to invest the flimsy verbal constructions that we generously call ‘characters’ with a potential for a variety of thoughts, feelings and desires and then to look for the ‘cues’ that would allow us to guess at their feelings and thus predict their actions. (Watkin 2007:143)

By developing this approach readers will be equipped to perceive a particular work in a different manner defying the one intended by the author. In this respect, it has to be remembered that the driving force behind this endeavour is to enjoy literature rather than encourage arguments. But since the power of perception lies in the head of the perceiver, one’s view about a particular character or an incident might not be in sync with that of the author who crafted that character or incident. But, the Theory of Mind is unlike those
conventional theories or any academic concept or proposition within a particular field of research or study that is used as a general principle of explanation. It is something that we are born with; some utilize it while others remain unaware of it. However, there has been a prevailing inclination of critics to apply academic theories to elucidate their studies. Theories can be considered as means generated to carry out detailed study and accomplish a better acuity of their subject of research in any discipline. But before dealing with theories one has to understand the field of study or research in question.

Detective fiction, like any other branch of popular fiction has faced the wrath of the advocates of ‘high literature’. The genre has been in the middle of many debates which aimed to reformulate the general perception that the genre does not offer any intellectual expertise. Detective fiction is often considered inferior to those genres that are hailed to be intellectually challenging. But before highlighting the merit of the genre, one has to remember that detective fiction is in no way different from other literary genres. Like any other work of fiction, a detective fiction story is a fictional representation of an author’s imagination in a typographic format that succeeds in catering to the reader’s imagination, majority of whom are outside the intellectual circles of academic institutions. It is these readers on whom the popularity of the genre rests upon. A detective fiction narrative always provides a structure with which the readers can easily relate. This is because such narratives often reflect the various aspects of the age and the society against the backdrop of which the narrative has been constructed. In order to understand and evaluate such narratives, scholars have always made attempts to analyze them from various theoretical perspectives. This in turn will help to reevaluate the popular notions that degrade the genre and reassess its worth in order to situate it in a far more respectable position in the academic canon.

Acquisition of knowledge is an unending pursuit for man. From the dawn of civilization, man has tried to unravel the mysteries of the world and in the world of
academics the researcher does the same. Research is an intellectual endeavour through which the concerned person tries to fill gaps in order to know the unknown and find answers to the queries that have raised doubts in his or her mind. So when a researcher undertakes a research project he actually aims to locate and understand; address and rewrite ‘absences’ or fissures. With this inclination a researcher carries out a systematic study of various aspects to formulate a hypothesis, which is followed by a progressive study to frame a thesis and finally synthesize the thoughts to propose the inferences. Thus, undertaking a research work actually makes an investigator out of a researcher, who almost like a detective identifies the problem and then engage in analyzing the identified problem. So, in a bid to reinstate detective fiction to a position of academic respectability, this research work must take a deeper look into the various nuances of the genre in general. Moreover, the researcher will also have to carry out a thorough textual analysis of the primary reading texts comprising Gopa Majumdar’s English translations of Satyajit Ray’s famous Feluda stories. Besides this, while undertaking the research, the reader-researcher also gets a scope to place herself in the shoes of the detective.

It has to be understood that investigating the crime and unmasking the criminal does not actually summarize the dynamics of a detective fiction story or a crime fiction story. Although in most cases a crime takes center stage in such narratives, yet the terms ‘detective fiction’ and ‘crime fiction’ which are most commonly used to refer to the genre are not actually synonymous. Both detective fiction and crime fiction work on the problem-solving principle. However, the process of arriving at any possible solution might vary according to the nature of the problem. Contrary to popular and general beliefs all detective fiction narratives do not deal with any conventional crime in the true sense of the term. Some detective fiction narratives are constructed as a mystery with a central problem but the problem is not necessarily a crime. A typical detective fiction narrative has a compact narrative pattern which is structured as a puzzle. Moreover, the most essential aspect of
detective fiction narrative is the presence of a skilled agent – one who carries out a thorough investigation to unravel the puzzle. This presence of the non-police investigator or the detective constructs a detective fiction narrative and this model was popularized by Arthur Conan Doyle with his stories featuring the iconic detective Sherlock Holmes. Satyajit Ray’s Feluda stories also follow the same model but it is interesting to study how Ray has defied the model of a colonial detective by making his hero a typical Bengali bhadralok who brings in a sentiment of Bengali consciousness every time a reader reads the stories. But for those who are reading the stories in translation such elements will often remain unnoticed because of the cultural-lingual difference since the stories were originally composed in Bengali. In order to understand these cultural nuances along with other unexplored aspects that the stories offer, one has to entail a critical approach to carry out a detailed textual analysis of the text and then construct a necessary theoretical framework.

In post-modern times, the concept of the term ‘text’ is perceived to be multilayered since it offers multiple renderings to the theorists. A text is not an isolated entity and to attain a thorough understanding of it, the role of the author and that of the reader who stand in close association with it holds primal importance. Infact, a ‘text’ is a cohesive structure as envisioned by the author to give expression to his thoughts and is independent of its physical format. But in order to study and understand a text, it is important to notice what the author wants to present and in what way. To be precise, one must focus on the content of the text i.e, the story and consider the discourse of the text or focus on how the content has been presented. Theorists posit that the story involves the events or actions which the narrator would like us to believe to have occurred, i.e the content; while the discourse involves the way in which these events are recounted or how they get told. Discourse is mainly about the organization of telling, i.e the means by which the content is presented together in a text. These two elements are interdependent and any breach of collaboration between them will
cause the entire narrative to fall flat. The story or the content of the narrative can be thought to be a message or a code which is disseminated by the author to the reader through the narrative. The study of this code has always drawn attention of narrative theorists although the significance of the encoder and that of the decoder is also manifold.

However, a story is not merely a plot-line comprising characters, action, scene et. al. A particular story can be studied in respect of its components which are basically nothing but the projections of the author’s mind. But these components follow a sequential chain emanating from the mind of the author to the body of the text, to be finally presented to the reader. While reading a work of fiction, the reader at regular intervals tends to associate his experience within the fictive world with his real life experience of the outside world. The reason behind this can be considered to be the fact that, any story irrespective of some unavoidable differences is primarily an author’s reflection upon the real world of which the reader is also a part. So, in a given story the author presents a kind of a hybrid world which is fictive in its own terms but bears allusions to the real world. It is to be noted here that the author does not present the reader with a copy of the real world. Infact, the author represents a fictive world within the text with a reference to the world outside the text; to give expression to those thoughts or ideas or attitudes which were inspired or drawn from his real life experiences. In other words the author’s perception or interpretation of the real world finds expression through the story. In this regard the following lines quoted from Roger Seamon’s “Acts of Narration” are noteworthy as he explains that:

Characters express attitudes toward other events, characters, actions, etc. in the fictive world (expression_{1}), while authors express attitudes toward the events, actions, etc. in the fictive world (expression_{2}), and finally authors exhibit their attitudes toward the actual world (expression_{3}). (Seamon 1987:373)
No matter what is the nature of expression, the author by giving expression to his perception either by virtue of the character or the narrative itself intends to say something, thereby rendering the work with some specific meaning or message. These aspects of narration are almost always intrinsic to fictional works. In detective fiction too the narrative more or less follows the same scheme of events. The fictive world of a detective fiction narrative is actually a microcosmic picture of the macrocosmic world of the author where crime is rampant and is often left unpunished. With reference to the outside world the author represents a world where the criminal is brought to book by an alternative agent who is far more competent than the police personnel. While dealing with such issues of crime the author actually puts forward his perceptions drawn from the existing scenario of law and order in the real world. So, a narrative is not just a structure where various components are placed in a schematic order; the author’s role is also vital in putting up the narrative scheme of the work.

A narrative can be studied from other aspects as well. Each narrative has a two tier structure – one is the basic story while the other is the narrative structure. But a narrative is not just about one single story but is a collection of multiple stories which are interrelated and interdependent. In “Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories”, Barbara Herrnstein Smith says:

For any given narrative, there are always multiple basic stories that can be constructed in response to it because basic-ness is always arrived at by the exercise of some set of operations, in accord with some set of principles, that reflect some set of interests, all of which are, by nature, variable and thus multiple. (Smith 1980:221)

A detective fiction narrative is also a collection of multiple stories which are constructed in response to one another and are arrived at by virtue of the various activities carried out by the main protagonists in accordance with their respective principles and interest. As already
mentioned, a detective fiction narrative primarily works on the problem-solving principle. An act of crime or any mysterious activity which destabilizes the harmony of a particular environment is the epicenter of the problem in such narratives. Thus, the narrative begins as an effect of the problem while the cause of it remains hidden. This leads to the construction of a puzzle and in this puzzle the foundation of the narrative is laid. The narrative is also provided with some hidden clues and hints. These hints or clues must be unveiled as they are intricately associated to the central puzzle and are thus important to understand and solve the mystery. This puzzle is almost always about a crime and a criminal and it is the criminal’s hidden tale of crime that creates the mystery. According to the conventions of the genre, the detective solves this puzzle and unmasks the criminal by drawing valid inference from various clues and hints which are present within the narrative but are not easily accessible. Moreover, discerning those clues formulates a story in its own terms. So, it can be said that the narrative scheme of a detective fiction story is laid down as a collection of multiple stories. Each story is basic to the plot of the narrative and is arrived at by the concerned protagonists by carrying out their respective tasks according to their principle motives.

A narrative can also be understood in terms of its versions. Barbara Herrnstein Smith offers two possible interpretations of narrative version, one as ‘retellings of other narratives’ and the other as ‘accounts told from a particular or partial perspective’ (Smith 1980:215). A particular story can be retold in different ways without compromising the basic plot-line of the narrative. These ‘retellings’ can be in the form of translated versions of the original work or as adaptations in any possible form or medium. In both cases the main story is presented with slight variations. Besides, a particular narrative can be also read from a particular perspective. For instance, the Feluda stories that this research work deals with are the English translations of the original Bengali stories composed by Satyajit Ray. Many of these stories have also been adapted to silver screen, cartoon strips et.al. Such retellings are more
concerned with the narrative discourse of the narrative and offer a wide domain of study. However, a detective fiction narrative offers a panorama of multiple reading models as one can read such narratives against different contexts.

The narrative of a detective fiction story is intricately structured. In his essay, “The Typology of Detective Fiction” eminent theorist Tzvetan Todorov suggests that a classic detective fiction narrative “contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation.” (Todorov 1977:44), and of these two the former emerges only at the end of the story of investigation. The guiding principle which holds the narrative together is that of concealment and cognizance. While the story of crime is always concealed, the dynamics of the latter helps in the cognition of the former. This concealment of facts often creates confusion where the innocent seems guilty and the guilty appears to be innocent. Thus each narrative is more like a hide and seek game where the criminal hides or tries to hide his activities and thus ends up writing his story of crime. While on the other hand the detective dispels all confusion and tries to read or comprehend the criminal’s story of crime by following an elaborate process of investigation. This investigation being carried out by the detective is no less than a narrative in its own right thus making the detective the author of the tale of detection. Heta Pyrhonen explains that “the enmity between criminals and detectives largely consists of a series of writing and reading ‘contests’ triggered by a crime.” (Pyrhonen 1999:5). So a classic detective fiction narrative can be read from different angles. It can be read as a tale of crime and a tale of detection, as a story of concealment and of cognition and also as a story of writing as done by the criminal and as a story of reading as carried out by the detective. In case of each model the detective and the criminal hold an authority over their respective tales. But the detective’s role is more significant in each case as the detective not only resolves the central puzzle within the narrative, but also delivers solution to the reader who tries to comprehend the same puzzle from outside the narrative.
A story in any context or from any perspective needs to be narrated and thus the other important aspect of a narrative is the narrative discourse and the act of narration. A detective fiction story in any of its above mentioned contexts is meant to be narrated to create the desired impact upon the readers. However, narration in such narratives is different from those stories which incorporate a sequential telling of events. When we speak about discourse in a detective fiction narrative, it is interesting to note how the author carries out narration to create the right atmosphere of suspense in the narrative. The dynamics of a detective fiction narrative primarily rests on the reader’s expectation of resolution of the suspense which will eventually pave the way to solve the puzzle. While reading such stories the reader is aware that the detective will unmask the criminal, but they don’t know how and when it is going to happen. Every time the detective makes any progress in this direction, the reader’s expectation is heightened and the more the expectation, the greater is the suspense. To sustain this, the author tries to delay the revelation which the reader expects to happen. So, in such narratives the author creates the right pitch of narrative suspense by balancing the act of narration to create a fusion of expectation, delay and resolution. What the criminal hides creates the suspense and it is the detective who is entrusted to resolve it by logical deduction. Such narratives in Umberto Eco’s terminology are ‘closed texts’ (Bennett, Royle 2008:197) where the reader’s suspense is resolved at the end. Here, it has to be kept in mind that unlike the reader, the detective enjoys an advantage. This is a power of authority which is bestowed upon the detective by the author himself and it gives him an easy access to all those concealed facts, hints and clues on the basis of which the detective resolves the puzzle. So in a detective fiction story, narration and narrative discourse is tactfully structured to generate suspense for the reader because such narratives work only when it functions like an intricate puzzle. And in order to achieve this, a detective fiction writer chooses various narrative strategies to communicate the story and generate suspense that will help to create the desired
reading effect upon the reader in order to keep them hooked till the culmination of the mystery.

French literary theorist Gerard Genette has postulated some new concepts in the study of narratives. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980) is a translation of ‘Discours du recit’ which is a major part of his work *Figures* III. In his work Genette has made an in-depth analysis of the various aspects of narratives with special reference to Proust’s novel *In Search of Lost Time*. Here he mainly focuses on story and discourse and their interweaving relationship in a narrative. In this direction he almost formulates a framework to explain the manner in which narratives are communicated. In a complex study he classified tense, mood and voice as the three categories which influence narrative communication or determine the nature of narrative discourse. Most narratives operate with a double-time order since there is a difference between the time an event is said to take in the story, denoted as ‘story time’ and the time required to tell that event in the discourse, denoted as ‘discourse time’ (Chatman 1980:222). For instance a person is said to be missing for twelve years in the story, but when presented in the discourse it only requires few seconds to read it or narrate it. This double time-order of narratives is an important aspect and according to Genette, addressing this difference the author at times makes some methodological choices to determine the order of the narrative, the duration of the narrative and the frequency of the events in the narrative. Genette’s theoretical apparatus especially the concepts of ‘discourse time’ and ‘story time’ help to understand how the author handles narration in order to generate and sustain suspense- the much needed impetus of a detective fiction narrative.

Often the author chooses a non-chronological order of narration in the narrative to produce the desired reading effect. The author prefers to present the events in the discourse long after they have occurred in the story. For instance, in a detective fiction story a missing person might later turn out to be dead long before. So the order in which the events have
occurred does not always follow a chronological pattern in the narrative discourse. Genette uses the term ‘anachronies’ (Genette 1980:35) to refer to this discrepancy in the discourse order. He also speaks about the duration or speed of a narrative. In a narrative the author can speed up or slow down the narration with respect to the events being narrated. He provides four possible postulations in which the author can vary the equation between discourse time (the time an event needs to be told in the discourse) and story time (the time an event is said to take in the story) to arouse desired effects upon the reader. In a detective fiction narrative the author can make certain choices while describing the story of crime or the story of investigation. He might choose to summarize some part of it, or take a pause in between or even omit parts of it and reveal it later. The next important factor influencing narrative time is the frequency of the narrative which denotes the relation between the number of times an event occurs in the story to the number of times it is mentioned or referred to in the discourse.

The author may choose to make one reference to an event which occurred once and use ‘singulative’ (Genette 1980:114) narration or the author may also narrate ‘*n times what happened once*’ (Genette 1980:115) and make multiple references to an event which occurred only once to use repetitive narration. In detective fiction narratives the author primarily employs the latter since; the detective recounts the act of crime more than once while revealing the circumstances that lead to the execution of the crime.

In his work Genette also speaks about narrative mood and narrative voice. In order to influence the reader with a desired point of view the author can regulate the inflow of narrative data and make the narrator speak with a certain perspective. While speaking about narrative mood, Genette explains how the distance between the narrator and the story and the perspective of the narrator are vital in regulating ‘narrative information’ provided by the narrator (author) to the reader. He says:
Narrative “representation,” or, more exactly narrative information, has its degrees: the narrative can furnish the reader with more or fewer details, and in a more or less direct way, and can thus seem (to adopt a common and convenient spatial metaphor, which is not to be taken literally) to keep at a greater or lesser distance from what it tells. (Genette 1980:162)

In the initial stages of a detective fiction narrative the reader is provided with less information or details about the crime or the criminal in a ‘less direct way’; whereas in the later stages of the narrative or towards the end, the narrator provides all information with full precision and details to explain the dynamics of the crime and expose the criminal. So in order to create a definite mood the author keeps the narrator at a desired degree of detachment or involvement from what he narrates. The degree of restraint or liberation with which the ‘narrative information’ is delivered shapes the right mood for the reader. According to Genette this aspect is also associated with the perspective of the narrator and says:

The narrative can choose to regulate the information it delivers, not with a sort of even screening, but according to the capacities of knowledge of one or another participant in the story (a character or a group of characters), with the narrative adopting or seeming to adopt what we ordinarily call the participant’s “vision” or “point of view”; the narrative seems in that case (continuing the spatial metaphor) to take on, with regard to the story, one or another perspective. (Genette 1980:162)

Genette coined the term ‘focalization’ (Genette 1980:189) to refer to the perspective of the narrator. Genette explains that the term has been derived from Cleanth Brooks’ and Robert Penn Warren’s much hyped notion, ‘focus of narration’ (Genette 1980:189). Explaining further he shows that the narrator can have three types of focalization. However, in a
detective fiction narrative things are a bit trickier since most narratives conventionally follow a format of dual-narrators. In such narratives both narrators are character-narrators. One of them who initiate the narration is the detective’s assistant or ally, and the other is the detective himself. In such narratives the detective-narrator has ‘zero focalization’ (Genette 1980:189) when the final denouement is reached. By zero-focalization Genette means the narrator who is the omniscient narrator- the all knowing figure. In detective fiction the detective-narrator is the all knowing figure who throws light upon the cause, agent and context of the crime with all necessary details. In such stories, vital information is withheld from other characters within the story as well as from the reader who is outside the story. The detective-narrator by virtue of his intelligence gathers this information (hints and clues) to solve the mystery and then undertakes the task of disseminating all facts both within and outside the text.

However, it is interesting to note that the detective- narrator enjoys a double-authority in such narratives. As a detective he is empowered to carry out investigation and as a narrator he is also empowered to deliver the final act of narration when the role of the other narrator (Watson, Topshe et.al) almost diminishes. The detective always enjoys an advantage as he has access to many hidden aspects of the narrative. Moreover, it is the prerogative of the detective-narrator to decide if the other narrator or any other character can be a co-sharer of this information and if it is shared the detective also decides how much should be shared. So, even if the other narrator and the reader try to comprehend the story of crime along with the detective or if possible before the detective they are unable to do it. In these narratives the detective-narrator is the omniscient narrator who not only provides logical explanation to his findings but is also able to explain the thoughts and gestures of the criminal. In this way the author not only creates the right pitch of narrative mood but also maintains it until the final moment of disclosure arrives. While speaking about narrative mood, Genette also speaks
about narrative voice which has a close link with the former. In this regard Genette explains about the nature of the narrator (who narrates), the time of narration and the nature of narration (from where the narration takes place). With reference to Genette’s terminology, narration in detective fiction operates within the ‘intra-diegetic’- ‘homo-diegetic’ (Chatman 1980:223) paradigm. In detective fiction both narrators are characters in the narrative which is described as ‘homo-diegetic’ by Genette. And in such case the narration also takes place from within the text and not from outside the text; which he terms as ‘intra-diegetic’ narration.

Genette’s work primarily focuses on the syntactic aspects of a narrative and is thus useful to analyze the narrative framework and the course of narrative discourse in detective fiction. But in detective fiction narration is not linear. The way the story and the discourse are made to complement each other, creates all the action in the narrative and it imparts the desired effect upon the readers. It can be said that the impact of a detective fiction narrative depends on the equation between act, scene, agent, agency and purpose. These five aspects are more famously known as the ‘pentadic’ scheme of noted theorist Kenneth Burke. The introduction to his book Grammar of Motives (1969) posits a question, “What is involved when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?” (Burke 1969: xv). Burke believed that motives behind human action make them more understandable and he designed the ‘pentadic’ structure to apprehend the discourse of human action through the implications of drama and five of its principle aspects. In his elucidation of the five key terms Burke adds:

…any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose). (Burke 1969:xv)
In this regard each element has its particular relevance and is also intricately related to others. He uses the term ‘ratios’ (Knapp 1999: 589) to explain how the equation between these elements is significant to grasp the ambiguities involved in making a one-way track of possibilities while apprehending human action. A detective fiction narrative can be understood in terms of the protagonist’s action or motives. However, in detective fiction these five aspects operate under two considerations, that of the detective and the criminal. Thus by applying Burke’s concept of ‘motivational discourse’ (Knapp 1999:588) detective stories can be read in terms of the detective’s and the criminal’s motivational discourse. The term ‘motivational discourse’ refers to the discursive attempts taken to comprehend human action. Considering Burke’s concept, a detective fiction narrative can be read as a complex interplay of individual motives. These respective motives or desires of the two central protagonists come into a direct conflict and eventually the detective’s motivation of arriving at a comprehension of the criminal’s motivation outlasts the criminal and brings about a closure of the narrative.

However, the entire concept of such a discourse will be very target oriented, monolithic and will depend on how the five variables work both singularly and in ratios as it would determine the motivational discourses of the respective characters. At times there can be multiple suspects and therefore multiple motives. In such cases the detective has to rationally narrow down from multiple motives to logical motives and finally to the most logical one. Using Burke’s pentadic scheme the detective can solve the mystery by taking into account the five principle aspects of the criminal’s tale of crime. When there are multiple suspects or motives, the detective has to apply this structure more than once in order to understand the most logical purpose or motive that could have driven the miscreant to execute the act of crime. Each time, the detective has to rationally analyze the five aspects of act, scene, agency, agent and purpose and their concerned operating ratios to zero down on
the real culprit. This entire theoretical approach would, infact, reduce the varied possibilities of interpretation or hermeneutics into a single possibility or the best determinative set of possibilities. But in some exceptional cases when the narrative is not provided with any specific details about the intention of the criminal, the detective analyzes the other four aspects and resolves the mystery according to his own logic of convenience. The detective is the alter-ego of the criminal and hence he can assess his opponent’s thought process. So in the absence of any clear motive the detective tries to think and analyze the motive that could have led him to commit the crime by placing him at the criminal’s position. Here the concept of the criminal is based on a possibility which appears to be more valid to the detective’s logic silencing the other probable logics.

Thus, a detective fiction narrative is far from being simple and there are many other elements which call for a detailed theoretical study. It is now understood that the detective enjoys a degree of authority in almost everything he does. The detective is moral, admirable and the saviour of the virtues which fight against the forces of evil. The detective is the author’s brain child, characterized with the best of capabilities, with great personality, style, skill of investigation et.al. The brilliance of a detective lies in his intelligence, razor-sharp brain, analytical mind and crystal clear observation seeking logical explanation for almost everything which raises a doubt or a query in his mind. The detective’s power of observation has been seen as a basic requirement. An act of observation is not just about seeing or looking at something, infact, observation is an act of attentive viewing at a particular thing which draws the attention of the onlooker. In most cases a detective’s observation is intended to discern beyond the physical or outer appearance of a thing or person that he is looking at. Sight is one of the five main faculties of human senses. To look or to see is a physical activity but when done in collaboration with the mind and brain, it is both a physical and a mental act. In a detective fiction narrative the detective does the same because when he looks, it is not a
simple act of physical nature. Rather it bears a mental connotation which helps the detective to observe and notice and hence develop a perspective about a particular object or subject that he looks at. Technically speaking a detective does more than just seeing, infact, he intently gazes into things with great curiosity and interest. The purpose of the detective’s gaze is to investigate a crime and every other thing or character which is related to that crime. When a detective investigates, the physical world is almost in a state of flux and is scattered with various hints and clues. The detective negotiates a way through these hints with the power of his gaze. This gaze has a determining power which has been bestowed upon the detective by the author. With this power the detective analyzes all possible angles of the clues available to squeeze facts out of them. Thus the detective enjoys a dual vision- that of the ‘eye’ and of the ‘mind’ which is empowered by memory. While gazing into an object the detective records the minute details with precision and later this data undergoes proper reasoning which helps in making proper logical deductions. However, apart from the physical world a detective also gazes into the mental world of the protagonists examining their personalities through their external gestures and action.

So the authority of being a detective empowers the detective’s act of vision. The detective’s eyes almost operate like camera lenses; zooming in and out for clues or hints. A camera uses different angles and different lenses to capture the varied and minute details. In a similar fashion the detective also observes the minute details of the various protagonists and the various possible things which appear before him. Later, the detective examines the collected data from different angles and analyses them under different circumstances. However unlike a camera lens a detective can judge the evidence with sense and reason, which the camera is impaired of doing. Moreover, the detective’s gaze has an inherent determining power. It has to be noted that the professional detective arrived in an age of increasing crime and rapidly changing social order. In that age everything was susceptible to
administrative power where the concerned authorities wanted to keep things under their surveillance. The twentieth century detective is a product of his age and thus has an empowered gaze. This gaze has a ‘panoptic’ (Barry 2010:169) quality. The concept of the ‘panopticon’ is an architectural structure developed by Jeremy Bentham which empowers a single person to keep a watchful surveillance over the inmates of any institution or organization. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), Faucault described this building as an apparatus of power to maintain order and discipline. In modern society everything is subject to surveillance, and the concept of a panopticon helps to disseminate power more effectively. But the panoptic quality of the detective’s gaze is different because the functional mechanism of the detective is to keep things under check and not disseminate power. The detective’s gaze is not subject to any authoritative power bestowed upon by various organizations which want to keep things under surveillance to maintain power. Infact, the detective’s power of surveillance is more psychological in nature.

Interestingly the discussion about the detective’s gaze in a detective fiction narrative can be extended to another level, when the concept of gaze is applied to understand the role of the reader subject who experiences or lives the detective’s role through reading. Foucault’s conceptualization of gaze focuses on power relations and speaks about gaze as a means of control. Another significant name in the realm of gaze theory is Laura Mulvey. Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975) undertakes a psychoanalytic study to understand how patriarchal society imparts its influence in producing visual images that expose the politics of gender relations in cinema. According to Mulvey, cinema offers pleasures of looking and stresses that “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.” (Mulvey 1975:9) and adds that the man is the bearer of the look and the woman is the object of the look. Mulvey not only speaks about how cinema produces gendered visual images but she also focuses on how
cinema structures or shapes the gaze of the spectator in this regard. It has to be noted that
gaze as depicted in a work also influences the onlooker as he gazes at that work. Apart from
films, Mulvey’s interpretation of gaze or looking can be applied to literature to study or
examine how literary works shape the concept of gaze within a work and how this gaze is
related to the reader’s gaze at the work, conducted through reading. For instance, when a
reader reads a detective fiction story he primarily co-opts the detective’s gaze. But if the
detective is male and the reader is female or vice-versa, then it would be interesting to see
how the reader associates with the detective’s gaze. Under this consideration, the reader
would be in an ambiguous position if there is a male-detective and a female-criminal in the
story. In this regard it would be interesting to see how Ray’s narratives shape the female
reader cum researcher’s gaze.

In a detective fiction narrative, the detective is projected as an agent who is competent
and is entrusted with the responsibility of restoring order and normalcy. After an act of crime
disturbs the harmony of the society the detective undertakes the task of restoring order upon
his shoulders and this is something which is naturalized in his sub-conscious. In The Hound
of the Baskervilles published in 1902, Sherlock Holmes remarked that “The world is full of
obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes.” (Doyle 2003:25). A detective is
unlike any person who observes just for the sake of it. Infact, the detective’s act of
observation follows a number of steps. At first, the physical appearance of a thing or person
when observed by the detective gives birth to some significant idea apart from the obvious
ones that one views. Then, the collected data is scrutinized and scanned by the detective’s
mind or brain and is thoroughly analyzed, the findings are then evaluated with proper
reasoning and thus the detective develops a final vision or idea which is then reapplied on the
object or subject of inspection. In this way the first reflection which the detective has,
undergoes a change or makeover and eventually the detective makes his final deduction.
Thus the detective is not just a celebrated superfluous protagonist. He is a highly equipped professional whose creation and conceptualization including his action and behavior provides space for theoretical analysis. From twentieth century onwards theorists have undertaken a more serious approach towards the genre. Once degraded as ‘non-serious’, a classic detective fiction narrative has now evolved to be more than just a conflict of good and evil. Over the past century there have been attempts to study the process of criminal detection in the light of psychoanalysis. Theories of psychoanalysis help in understanding human personalities and various possible interpretations of their action and behavior. In a detective fiction narrative, the detective tries to outwit the criminal by taking a psychological insight into the opponent’s mind. However, it was Edgar Allan Poe who paved the way for psychoanalytical interpretation of detective stories. In Poe’s second story, *The Purloined Letter* (1844), Dupin solves the crime by taking a psychological insight into the protagonist. The following passage from the story (quoted from Heta Pyrhenen’s book) shows how Poe gave vent to psychological interpretation of detective stories:

> When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is anyone, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression. (Pyrhonen 1999:31)

In the light of the above statement it can be understood that in order to crack down the criminal, the detective tries to trace his thought process by virtually placing him in the opponent’s seat. Infact, he tries to identify with the criminal in order to think like him with maximum possible accuracy. In this process the detective undergoes a willing suspension of identity or a conscious negation of one’s own self while trying to synchronize his thought process with that of the criminal. This effort on the part of the detective is of great help since
he will be able to anticipate the criminal’s future course of action. In the book *Mayhem and Murder: Narrative and Moral Problems in the Detective Story* (1999), Heta Pyrhonen sees the entire process in the light of the laws of reflection. She says that the detective stands,

...face to face with a self-generated picture of the criminal. Imaginative identification is thus based on the detective’s doubling of the criminal: the projected picture looks at him as the mirror image looks at us when we look into a mirror. (Pyrhonen 1999:31)

In the light of the quoted statement it can be said that when the detective negates his own self, it is the criminal who is projected upon the detective and thus undergoes a ‘doubling’. A mirror reflects one’s own image and thus when we stand in front of a mirror we see a duplication of our own self. This duplicated image appears to be identical but is actually reverse in nature. So it can be said that when the criminal undergoes duplication, the detective also becomes a mirror image. But owing to the inherent property of a mirror this image is an ‘antithetical double’ of the opponent. By general convention, the detective and the criminal stand to represent the opposing forces of good and evil respectively; so it can be suggested that the criminal is the alter ego of the detective who in the process of criminal detection psychologically substitutes his own self with the criminal in order to decode the mechanics of the opponent’s mind.

Mirror’s property of reflection also aids in understanding other aspects of detective fiction narratives. Although the detective and the criminal stand to represent antagonistic forces and are the reversed images of one another, still there remains a common link between them. A brilliant detective always finds a corresponding image in an equally brilliant criminal as both share one common aspect - equal intellect. According to medieval philosophy, everything in land finds a corresponding representation in water. Apart from mirror, water
also reflects images and is a natural reflector. Poets like Andrew Marvell and Sylvia Plath have referred to this property of water in their poetry. Plath’s poem “Mirror” presents a mirror as well as a lake as a mirror, while Andrew Marvell in his poem “The Garden” presents the human mind in terms of water and conveys that the mind is the ultimate reality and everything in the external world finds a corresponding image in the mind. So if the detective’s mind acts like a reflector, it can be said that he finds an embodiment of himself in an equally brilliant criminal.

Further, Pyrhonen explains that this substitution of oneself with that of the other, also involves the author and the reader of a detective fiction narrative. When an author constructs such narratives he has to think both like a criminal as well as a detective. So the author’s mind works at two levels. At first he creates an intricate story of crime, and then shifting over he also devises a solution to make the detective solve the crime. But for readers of detective fiction things are a bit trickier. In order to unravel the mystery within the narrative, the reader has to think like the detective as well as the criminal; changing over from the detective’s mould to that of the criminal or vice-versa. Moreover, if the story itself is thought to be a problem placed before a reader by the author, the reader also needs to understand the author’s thought process in order to solve it. So once again the reader has to substitute his own self with that of the author.

The psychological interpretations of detective stories can also be understood in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis. In his 1920 essay, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” Freud exposes the innate tendency of the id towards a gratification of sensual pleasures under the influence of what he calls the ‘pleasure principle’. He says that the “unpleasurable tension… follow a path such that their ultimate outcome represents a diminution of this tension, and hence a propensity to avoid unpleasure or to generate pleasure.” (Freud 2003:45). But these impulses are barred by the censoring agency ego. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the pleasure
principle of the id is pitted against the reality principle of the ego, i.e, the ego tries to gratify these impulses in suitable time and condition. According to Freud, ego does it through ‘sublimation’ (Gay 1992:36) which is the process of substituting unacceptable urges with acceptable behavior. In order to nab the criminal the detective applies all possible measures and can even adopt some adverse ones. While investigating, detectives often apply such measures which might not suit his profession on moral grounds. Taking disguise, misleading people, eavesdropping and even stealing evidences are various means at the disposal of the detective which he can apply to get his desired result. When a detective secretly enters into a suspect’s house to steal evidence, his act is actually improper and he is no less guilty. In other words, it can also be said that while executing the act of theft the detective psychologically substitutes the criminal by his own self. Although, a Freudian interpretation would suggest that while stealing the detective unconsciously tries to gratify his aggressive urges responding to the pleasure principle of the id. However the release of these unacceptable urges gets neutralized when seen under the light of ego. Freudian psychology explains that the ego expresses such conflicting impulses under suitable time and condition thereby making them more acceptable. Freud terms this process as ‘sublimation’ in which the unacceptable urges gets substituted by acceptable behavior. Thus, when a dutiful detective executes a theft, his act of stealing becomes unobjectionable and legitimized since he executes the act under suitable time and condition. However, a psychological analysis of such incidents gives vent to the wild streak of a detective’s psyche.

In an attempt to establish the literariness of detective fiction, scholars must attempt such comprehensive studies in every possible direction. Right from narrative technique to protagonists, every component of the genre must be analyzed in terms of theoretical studies. In recent times the role of the reader has been one of the most engaging fields of exploration. Like every literary genre, detective fiction also provides a suitable ground to study the role of
the reader, but ironically the fact that the genre has enjoyed massive readership has led theorists to claim that the genre is more popular than being literary, as if being ‘popular’ is almost synonymous to being ‘non-literary’. So, it would be interesting to study the role of the reader who rendered the genre with unprecedented popularity over the last two centuries. However, most readers of the genre often remain unaware of the theoretical ramifications of the narratives that they read. They are unaware of the fact that while they read, the act of reading itself becomes a captivating exercise which has a wide scope for theoretical evaluation.

During mid twentieth century the literary world witnessed the advent of reader-response theories; which for the first time overturned the dominance of the American New Critics, who were only interested with the ‘text in itself’ (Selden, Widdowson, Brooker 2005:19) and regarded it as an autonomous entity regardless of any external factors. But with theorists like Louis Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, Stanley Fish the focus shifted from the text to the reader to understand how he perceives or interprets the text. The emphasis was now on the act of reading and the reader’s active role in extracting meaning out of a text. If a text is considered to be a message or a code formulated by the author, then this message or code has to be understood or decoded by the reader. The message remains meaningless unless it is read or decoded. In a similar fashion, a text holds no worth unless it is read and comprehended. Taking this postulation as the guiding principle, many theorists developed their own theories which showcase the reader as an active agent in interpreting the meaning of the text.

But before the domain of reader-response theories was flooded by Iser and Fish’s concepts of the ‘implied’ reader and the ‘intended’ reader; it was Louis Rosenblatt who took the initial steps of drawing the attention from the text to the act of reading. Her major contribution to the literary world is the ‘transactional theory of reading’ put forward in her
two seminal works, *Literature as Exploration* (1938) and *The Reader, The Text and The Poem* (1978). According to Rosenblatt, the reader’s act of reading is actually a transaction between the reader and the text and the meaning generated out of a text is like a ‘poem’ (Beardsley 1979: 641) or a performance experienced by the reader while reading. She explains that this poem is ‘the experience shaped by the reader under the guidance of the text.’ (Beardsley 1979:641). Thus to derive this experience it requires the reader and the text to involve in an engaging transaction. Rosenblatt’s main focus was to lend significance to the reader’s act of reading. She explained that a reader always approaches a text with his or her bag of past experiences which in turn influences the reader’s capabilities of generating meaning out of a text. Rosenblatt further classifies two different approaches of reading: ‘efferent’ and ‘aesthetic’ (Beardsley 1979:641). In case of ‘efferent reading’ the reader is concerned to gather information from the text. In Rosenblatt’s view the reader is focused “...on what will remain as a residue after the reading.” (Beardsley 1979:642). And in case of ‘aesthetic reading’ the reader focuses on the experience that he evokes while reading. The meaning or ‘poem’ of a particular text is a result of the aesthetic stance undertaken by the reader during the actual act of reading which in Rosenblatt’s terms paves the way for “lived through experience of reading” (Davis 1992 :74). She also points out that while reading the reader is always under the influence of his pre-conceived ideas which are a result of his past experiences. These ideas guide the reader in his attempts to relate and draw inference to finally organize or bring out a composite meaning out of the ‘symbols of the text’ (Davis 1992 :72). In this regard the following lines quoted by Judith Rae Davis in the essay “Reconsidering Readers: Louise Rosenblatt and Reader-Response Pedagogy” are noteworthy to understand Rosenblatt’s views. She says:

The poem, then, must be thought of as an event in time...It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to
the text his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of
the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out
from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience,
which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life
experience… (Davis 1992:72)

In this way, reading becomes a ‘lived through experience’; a process in continuum
and it calls for an active participation from the reader to engage in a dynamic transaction with
the text to extract meaning out of it. However, these categories of efferent and aesthetic type
of reading is not mere distinction between types of reading, rather it helps the reader to
understand the manner in which one should fashion his act of reading. Any particular text is
loaded with information for a reader to gather. But in order to derive a meaningful essence
out of reading, a reader must engage in an aesthetic transaction with the text. Rosenblatt’s
theories can also be understood if applied to the study of detective fiction. Most readers enjoy
reading detective fiction for the thrill and excitement it provides. A passive reading of such
texts will only result in a plain reading out of the author’s words. Infact, a passive reader can
even jump to the conclusion by turning to the last page of the story. But such texts in the
guise of thrillers also provide a thrilling challenge to the readers to understand the process
that goes into the making of a thriller out of a text and experience the journey from the first
page of the story to the last. An aesthetic stance of the genre helps to look beyond the formal
aspects of the stories, as such stories challenge the reader to solve the mystery. Detective
fiction narratives are scattered with various hints and clues which have to be recognized and
analyzed in order to disentangle the puzzle. Thus a reader who is an amalgamation of his
previous experiences and current personality must utilize his resources of intellect,
observation and thought to relate and draw inferences from the hints and clues and solve the
mystery. So reading a detective fiction narrative initiates an active process which engages the reader in a live circuit with the text.

Years later Wolfgang Iser’s theory of reader-response emerged as a phenomenal work that paved the way to understand how the text and the reader are interdependent in generating appropriate textual meaning. In his work, Iser takes a phenomenological approach since the real essence of his theory is based on the fact that he tries to evaluate everything in respect of the reader’s literary experience while reading the text. The term ‘phenomenology’ can be understood as “A modern philosophical tendency which stresses the perceiver’s central role in determining meaning…” (Selden, Widdowson, Brooker 2005:49). In the domain of reader-response theories, Iser’s major contributions are his books *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978) and *The Implied Reader* (1974). But these books were preceded by his influential essay “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach” published in 1972 in the New Literary History. In this essay, Iser makes a detailed and systematic study of the reader’s process of reading which aids the reader in comprehending the meaning of the text and in this regard Iser does a phenomenological study of the reading process. Right at the beginning of his essay, Iser emphasized that in order to understand a literary work one must consider ‘the actions involved in responding’ (Iser 1972:279) to that work. Drawing inputs from Roman Ingarden he posited that a literary work comes to life only through the reader’s act of ‘konkretisation’ (Ingarden’s term for realization as referred by Iser in his essay). By the reader’s act of realization, Iser means having a profound experience and developing an aesthetic response while reading. Thus reading should not be a passive run through the text; rather it should be an active exercise on part of the reader to be able to experience the real aesthetic appeal of the text. Iser explains that a literary work is not ‘completely identical’ with the author’s artistic creation nor with the reader’s aesthetic realization, rather it lies ‘halfway between the two’ (Iser 1972:279). He says:
The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader – though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual… (Iser 1972:279)

In his theory, Iser mainly focuses on the text-reader interaction, on how this interaction helps the reader in generating aesthetic responses towards the text and also claims that the reader’s aesthetic response is in a way shaped by ‘the different patterns of the text’. Thus a text is a response inviting structure which works in virtual collaboration with the reader, who undertakes a dynamic reading approach unfolding the various possible implications of the text. Thus, the whole act of reading becomes an active and participative process as the reader employs his imagination to respond to the framework laid down by the text and achieve complete realization of the text. According to Iser, a text becomes a composite whole only through the reader’s creative exercise in generating meaning out of it.

According to Umberto Eco detective fiction, comics, gothic stories fall into the category of ‘closed’ texts since they predetermine the reader’s response and does not require the reader to participate in the act of generating meaning. But in reality detective fiction narratives offer a considerable space for the reader’s active collaboration in developing proper meaning out of the schematized framework of the text. It is true that while reading a detective fiction narrative, the reader’s horizon of expectation contemplates the revelation of the criminal and his act of crime. But this does not predetermine the reader’s response, in fact, a classic detective fiction narrative engages the reader in an active and participative process of reading which helps the reader to decode or comprehend the dynamics of the narrative and even challenges the reader to solve the mystery.
In his essay “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach” Iser provides a detailed explanation of the reader’s course of reading. He characterized the act of reading as a “...kaleidoscope of perspectives, preintentions, recollections.” (Iser 1972:284). Once again he draws from Ingarden and explains that in a literary work sentences are arranged in a complex network of ‘correlatives’ which gains meaning through an interaction between these ‘correlatives’. He further states that this interplay is propelled by “…the reader’s imagination, which gives shape to the interaction of correlatives foreshadowed in structure by the sequence of the sentences.” (Iser 1972:282). Iser also suggests that in a literary work, meaning is not fixed and is subject to constant alteration. While reading the reader interacts with the interlinking network of sentences and attempts to arrive at a possible meaning. In this process, the reader develops a growing anticipation of what is to come next, undergoes a continual modification of what has been already read and finally retrospects and negotiates through all possible perceptions offered by the ‘different patterns of the text’ in order to integrate or grasp its meaning. Thus reading is a dynamic creative process during which the reader who is outside the text almost becomes a part of it.

Contrary to popular beliefs a detective fiction narrative is not just a tale of crime, detection, thrill and excitement. It is a compact structure in which the essential components of the plot along with the elements of action, suspense, thrill et.al are made to fuse together to impart the desired effect upon the reader. And to achieve this, the author endows the narrative with some intense sequences, twists and turns, hints and clues. In order to understand these intricacies the reader has to indulge in an active involvement with the narrative and make the best possible use of one’s own faculties of intellect and imagination to decipher the mystery. In this process the reader almost becomes a virtual detective who tries to solve the case along with the detective. The layout of a typical detective fiction novel is like a game of wits; where there is a competition between the detective and the criminal regarding who can out do the
other. In addition to this, there is another unrecognized rivalry between the reader and the detective regarding who can solve the mystery before. Thus an active reader tries to grasp each and every detail in an effort to perceive the mystery as an ongoing puzzle. As the reader gradually progresses through the narrative, he encounters with the characters, their action and various twists and is curious about the next move of the author. New details evolve with further reading and as such the reader’s former perceptions undergo an alteration. This process continues and is, in fact, heightened due to the various twists and clues scattered in the narrative. Thus the reader gets so involved that he becomes a part of the narrative and almost ‘recreates the world it presents’ (Iser 1972:284). But then ‘perspectives, preintentions, recollections’ may vary from one reader to another and according to Iser:

The fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the “reality” of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written. (Iser 1972:283)

So while reading a detective fiction narrative, the reader gets an opportunity to indulge in a creative interaction with the text to decode the puzzle and comprehend the mystery. Thus a detective fiction story or novel comes alive or is brought to ‘existence’ by the text-reader interaction or by an interaction between the text and the reader’s faculties of intelligence, which according to Iser accords a ‘virtual dimension’ to the text and also lends it with its ‘reality’.

However, Iser’s most significant postulation states that a story gains its ‘dynamism’ through textual ‘blockage’ or ‘omissions’ or ‘gaps’. According to Iser, the guiding aspects of reading are those of ‘anticipation’ and ‘retrospection’ and these cannot be generated through a ‘smooth flow’ of sentences. He states that “Even in the simplest story there is bound to be some kind of blockage…” (Iser 1972:284). This blockage is meant to interrupt the flow of
events or the flow of sentences in the narrative. This blockage creates a ‘gap’ which in turn breaks off the chain of apprehension which is followed by a sense of recollection or reflection. Thus, being unable to lead further through the narrative the reader is left frustrated. An active reader then tries to utilize his own intellectual faculties to unlock those blockades and establish the missing-links to comprehend the narrative. Iser explains:

... whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections - for filling in the gaps left by the text itself. (Iser 1972:285)

It is to be noted that a detective fiction narrative is based on the ‘logos of absence’. It operates almost like a game whose programming is based on a gap, right at the centre of each narrative. This gap is created due to the withholding of vital information. This information is known only to the author and the criminal, but is withheld from the detective and the reader. In a detective fiction story the detective and the reader knows that a criminal is present but the identity of the criminal remains invisible, i.e, it is almost like an ‘invisible presence’ or a ‘visible absence’. The excitement or curiosity which is felt by the reader is due to this absence of the criminal’s visibility. So the logos or the centre of a detective story is about an ‘absence’ and in order to fill this absence the detective and the reader must make the criminal visible. In this endeavour the detective undertakes a thorough investigation, decodes the hints and clues (of which only some are revealed to the reader) and unveils the criminal thereby eradicating the absence. On the other hand, the reader also tries to become a virtual detective and employ his reasoning faculties to understand the intricacies of the narrative and identify the criminal. However, apart from the central ‘gap’ or absence, a detective fiction narrative is amply scattered with numerous other blockades which hinders the reader’s act of investigation. As the reader moves from one event to the next, the author often leaves some
‘gaps’ where the actions of the protagonist is left unexplained, or some hint or clue creates a mental blockage. In an intentional move by the author such ‘unwritten part of the text’ (Iser 1972:287) is posed as an enigma and unless it is deciphered, the ‘written part of the text’ (Iser 1972:288) remain unexplained. So, until the reader resolves this blockage he is impaired to make any anticipation or retrospection and is thus digressed in multiple directions. In this case the narrative will not progress and will remain static; if not the reader’s frustration makes him go to the last page and carry out a passive reading of the text. However, for a curious reader these ‘gaps’ provide an opportunity to exercise his faculties to compose the ‘unwritten part of the text’ according to his capabilities and limitations to apprehend the mystery.

Iser also points out that a second reading of a literary work exerts a far more alluring experience. A second reading will put more light on certain aspects which the reader might have missed on the first reading or may even cause the reader to view certain aspects from a different perspective thus leading him to a different retrospection altogether. So while reading, the reader’s perceptions are constantly modified and thus reading the text becomes an experience for him. This experience is comparable to a life like experience where our perceptions are also subject to continual modification. So reading becomes ‘true-to-life’ where the reader imparts the text with ‘lifelikeness’ (Iser 1972:293). Iser also assigns a connotation of defamiliarization to the process of reading but interestingly he shows how this concept operates at two different levels. Defamiliarization charts a way through which the author presents a familiar world in an unfamiliar way to give the reader a fulfilling conception of the literary work. According to Iser, the reader’s act of reading is nothing but a process of recreating the author’s formulation (text). He further explains that the reader associates with the unfamiliar world along with its unfamiliar experiences (as presented in the
text) by defamiliarizing the familiar, i.e., by negating his own familiar conceptions which Iser terms as his ‘preconceptions’.

In a detective fiction narrative the reader tries to unravel the mystery by being a virtual detective. In this respect the reader develops different responses towards the various familiar things which are presented in an unfamiliar way in the text. A detective fiction narrative presents a picture of the familiar world that is ravaged by crime and disorder in an unfamiliar way to make it an alluring and captivating experience for the reader. When the reader encounters this unfamiliar world as presented in the text he tries to associate with this world by being a part of it and the reader does this by negating his personality or his ‘preconceptions’. By negating his identity the reader tries to identify with the detective or the criminal according to the requirement of the plot. By placing himself in the detective or criminal’s space the reader tries to think accordingly to disentangle the mystery. Iser elucidates:

Once the reader is entangled, his own preconceptions are continually overtaken, so that the text becomes his “present” whilst his own ideas fade into the “past”… (Iser 1972:295)

In this way the reader defamiliarizes the familiar side of his own personality to identify with the unfamiliar world that he encounters while reading. In other words it can be said that while reading the reader’s personality goes through ‘an artificial division’ (Iser 1972:298) at two different levels. One is the ‘alien’ reader who negates his personality and tries to identify with the thought process of some other protagonist in the narrative, someone who is alien to the actual reader. While the ‘real, virtual’ reader is the one who ‘…are never really cut off from each other.’ (Iser 1972:298) and who virtually interacts with the text. The actual reader is the one who tries to think like some other protagonist, but does not completely annihilate his personality. The real or virtual reader draws various perspectives and tries to integrate them
to draw conclusion according to his capabilities and limitations. So the ‘alien me’ of Iser is
the anticipatory reader of the author, one who is implied as a part of the structure of the text,
but never actualized in reality. While the ‘real, virtual me’ is the actual reader who not only
realizes the text but might even defy the author and raise questions about the text. Thus, Iser
claims that while reading the reader ‘operates on different levels’ (Iser 1972:298).

His postulations can be best explained if applied to the reading of detective fiction. In
detective fiction narratives there are situations when the reader becomes the alien reader and
identifies with the detective or the criminal by negating his identity. By identifying with the
detective the ‘alien’ reader tries to decode the thought process of the detective in order to
anticipate the detective’s next move and stay a step ahead of the detective. In a game of wits,
the reader also operates as the ‘real-virtual’ reader who interacts with the text to apprehend
the mystery and seek complete understanding of the puzzle in order to resolve it. The ‘real-
virtual’ reader interacts with various intricate sequences, twists and turns and applies his own
reasoning faculties to analyze or even question the various perspectives offered by the text in
order to deduce his final observation.

Most reader-response theorists emphasize upon the reader’s own set of preconceived
ideas or conceptions and its influence on the reader’s faculty of reception. Every reader is at
first an individual, who has grown up with his own share of experiences and recollections.
From the very first interaction with the text, the reader tries to anticipate its content. Right
from the title to the graphics on the cover page everything draws the reader’s attention and is
then analyzed under the light of the reader’s preconceptions to draw an anticipatory idea
about the text. A reader’s set of preconceptions is neither a fixed entity nor an innate faculty
and can thus vary from one reader to another. These set of ideas are slowly developed from
the various spheres of life. But when there are so many things to be known and understood
no individual can claim to attain a comprehensive knowledge. The moment one steps out of
the comfort zone his sense of ideas are met with various challenges. It is indeed difficult to grasp complete knowledge or perception of every possible thing around. The most one can do is apply his inert faculties and conceptions to draw sensible perceptions and make the unfathomable expanse of the world precise and tractable. A reader tries to do the same while reading another individual’s (author) creation. A reader too owns a set of pre-conceived ideas which is a resultant effect of the various experiences he has had during the course of life. These notions guide the reader’s act of interpretation and even fashions his perception. Any text offers a number of varied aspects which reflect the author’s set of ideas. The nature of these aspects may vary from social, political, ideological to cultural and historical issues. So, when a reader from one cultural background with a particular set of ideas interacts with the author’s work that reflects specificities from another cultural background, he might not be able to immediately associate with the author’s work.

Detective fiction stories do not specifically highlight cultural aspects but do bear some culture-specific nuances. Most detective stories are constructed against the backdrop of a society in a given age. The early stories of crime like the Broadsides or Ordinaries and the Newgate Calendars give a picture of law and order in the eighteenth century society. And those which appeared in the nineteenth century also reflected the trends of the age. Sherlock Holmes is a typical English hero who represents the spirit of his age. His style, appearance and eccentricity bear a typical English style. Since then, most detective fiction writers have been inspired by the English model. As the genre gradually charted its way to other parts of the globe, the figure of the English detective popularized by Holmes underwent alterations reflecting the trends of the age and the society of its creation. When the colonial model appeared in India it underwent a similar metamorphosis.

In pre-independence era fiction writing mainly flourished in the 1890s. Although conventional novels appeared much later in the first half of the following century, nineteenth
century witnessed the growth of short stories. A major impetus which favoured the growth of fiction was the development of the printing industry. Many publishing houses came out with their own papers and monthlies which formed the breeding ground of early short stories in various Indian languages. The proliferating printing industry resulted in the establishment of various small scale publications which also included stories that can be categorized as Jasusi Upanyas or detective novels. However, these early stories did not help to formulate a quintessential tradition of Indian detective fiction as most of them were primarily translations or adaptations of English works. Although in India the genre mainly developed in the twentieth century, but it is interesting to note that ‘detective fiction elements’ are present in many tales that dates back to as early as the Vedic times. Many early popular tales that were composed in languages like Sanskrit or Pali, the Jataka Tales in Prakrit and even epics like *The Ramayana*, show the presence of ‘detective fiction elements’. Detective fiction works on the pivotal idea of ‘detection- deduction- conviction’ of criminality. Elements like keen observation, finding clues, analytical reasoning, logical deduction, tracing footprints et.al. are commonly found in such stories and are vital to the basic structure of the mystery. From its early years of inception detective fiction has been responsive to the trends of its time. Although conventional crime stories was not a common phenomenon in early civilizations but the popular tales of those times reveal that crimes like theft was rampant in society. Various popular tales in Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit reflect the social tendencies of those times. However, the concept of a detective or detection in the modern sense did not evolve at that age, but due to acts of crime the need to investigate or to ‘find out’ the truth behind an incident was operative. Sukumar Sen in his Bengali book *Crime Kahinir Kalkranti* (2012) writes about many such tales in which one can trace the concept of investigation. The Jataka tales are a collection of stories taken from the previous birth of Lord Budhha. In these stories Buddha is referred to as Bodhiswatta- a name often used by Buddhists to address Lord
Budhaa. These stories were originally composed in Pali\textsuperscript{2}, but later some were translated into Sanskrit and Bengali. In one such tale, Bodhiswatta is the chief minister of the king of Kashi and displays shrewd intelligence to recover the necklace of the queen. In another story one can find the modern day concept of foot-print deduction. In this story Bodhiswatta caught the thief and recovered the king’s treasure by tracing the foot-print of the culprit. In some tales in Prakrit\textsuperscript{3} the use of disguise is also notable. In one tale, the king disguised himself to get hold of the stolen items and catch the thief. These tales are not conventional detective stories and they mostly appear in various collections. But with various detective fiction elements such tales help to get a picture of the socio-cultural traits of those times. One can also locate detective fiction elements in classic Indian epics. For instance in \textit{The Ramayana}, Rama traced Sita’s abduction by gathering hints and clues. Rama arrives at the conclusion of her abduction by Ravana by deduction of clues left by Sita in a manner similar to what a detective does in a detective fiction narrative.

Detective fiction elements are also present in the ethnic literature of Tripura. Some folk tales of the Darlong\textsuperscript{4} community of Tripura also show the presence of detective fiction elements. For instance the tale of ‘Tlumtea’ is about an eponymous hero. To save himself from a witch he takes the disguise of an old man. But Tlumtea’s wife becomes suspicious and gets curious about his old looks. Driven by her curiosity, she undertakes an investigation and almost like a detective she reveals the real identity of Tlumtea. In another tale ‘Chawngmawii and Hrangesuana’ one can find the important aspect of evidence collection. Evidences are central to the functioning of the genre and in this tale; villagers devise a unique way to catch Hrangesuana by collecting and identifying his foot-prints as he used to secretly enter the village to meet his beloved at night.

Moreover, a look into such tales helps to apprehend the absence of the genre in the ethnic literature of the state despite the presence of detective fiction elements in their
literature both oral and written. Detective fiction stories operate in a society where the law governing bodies fail to deliver their tasks. Thus, the detective enjoys an elevated status as an efficient-alternative agent who eradicates criminality and upholds law and order thereby revealing the inadequacy of the police. Ethnic societies have an inherent law governing system with a body of customary laws that has made its way from one generation to the next. These laws have their origin in the rich customs, conventions and rituals of that particular society. In these communities people do not abide by a complex judicial system which usually functions in a non-ethnic society. For instance, the process of convicting a criminal and delivering justice is not based on deduction of evidence and proof. In this respect, the tribal chief with his council of members enjoy highest authority regarding issues of law and order and their maintenance. Thus such societies do not correspond to the complexities of ‘detecting-proving-defending’ criminality. Therefore such communities do not generally require the presence of an additional agent (detective) to collect evidence and convict the culprit. Thus the socio-cultural construction of these communities does not provide a suitable ground for the flowering of detective fiction since the paradigm of ‘criminality-detection-justice’ is dysfunctional in such societies.

Moreover, the connotations of crime may vary from one culture to other. Crime in a particular society in a given frame of time might not have a similar suggestive meaning in another society. In ethnic societies people share common social, cultural and ancestral practices and also share a common history of origin, language, rituals, socio-cultural practices et.al. In this context a look at the practice of ‘head hunting’ in many ethnic groups is interesting. Such a practice when viewed from the perspective of non-ethnic society is a crime. But it is actually an integral part of the socio-cultural paradigm of the particular society in which it is practised. Various tribes like the Garos, Nagas, Khasis, Mizos, Hmars and Darlongs indulged in the common practice of head hunting. It is popularly believed that
the men folk of these clans participated in this ‘man’s game’ (Darlong 1995:164) to elevate their social status. For men it was matter of great pride to show case their manhood by slaying the head of their enemies. Such brave men were said to be ‘Ratha’, meaning ‘Great warriors or hunters’ (Darlong 1995:166). With its origin in the socio-cultural system of the society, head hunting was not viewed as a gruesome act in such communities. Thus, there are many such unavoidable differences between the socio-culture aspects of ethnic and non-ethnic societies and this in turn reveals a degree of ambiguity over the basic assumptions that one tends to associate with the concepts of crime and criminality. So, detective fiction as it is generally conceptualised does not find ground in such societies as it functions within its own paradigms of crime and its detection, resulting in an apparent absence of the conventional genre in both the oral and written literatures of such ethnic societies, atleast in Tripura.

However, Bengal made a considerable contribution to the development of detective fiction in the literary domain of India. Although, the colonial hangover behind the early versions of detective stories which mainly appeared between late nineteenth and early twentieth century is often talked about; but the colonial influence somehow also helped to shape Indian consciousness. Bengal was a hub of activities in pre-independent India. Politically and intellectually Bengal charged a strong revolt against the colonial masters. Even in the realm of literary output Bengal was ahead of other provinces and a major reason behind this was the spread of English education and western ideas; though interestingly English education is an impetus of colonization itself. Apart from this, Bengal also cultivated its own tradition of various pulp magazines which helped to escalate the tradition of pulp fiction in the region. Amongst a variety of pulp outputs, emerged the tradition of Guptakathas or crime thrillers which eventually paved the way to create a unique tradition of Indian detective fiction.
From early twentieth century Bengal produced a host of Bengali detectives who were not copy-prints of the colonial model. Saradindu Bandopadhay’s Byomkesh Bakshi, Nihar Ranjan Gupta’s Kiriti Roy were such fictional detectives who appeared in the Bengali literary scene within a period spread across, before, during and after independence. In those times around the 40s to 60s the educated Bengali youth was becoming nationalistic and the concept of physical culture as propagated by akharas and Anushilan Samiti was gradually gaining ground among them. This rise of nationalistic consciousness could be attributed to several factors one of which is definitely western education and exposure to world history and politics. As a result, the nationalist Bengali youth stressed on the concept of physical culture and felt that a strong body would be suitable for undertaking the ordeal of freedom struggle. At the same time cultural revivalism coupled with western education took care of the development of the intellect. This was a happy blend of nationalism with the best that is available in western education. When Bengali detective fiction emerged during this period with the booming vernacular press, the Bengali sleuth reflected this happy combination of brain and brawn. At the same time the cultural superiority of Bengal resulted in a conscious or subconscious projection of Bengal as India and a merger of Bengal and the national identity. Thus the Bengali sleuths not only reflected a certain colonial influence in their shaping (either by a response to or by a reaction to it), they were also typically Bengalis and nationalists, imbibing within them the trend of physical culture who nurtured their physical prowess and valour through an attachment to the akhara, wrestling, the weights and the firearms. At one hand the very concept of Anushilan Samiti, which was almost a must for an educated Bengali youth of the bhadralok category, found immortalization in the feats of the robbing of Chittagong armoury; of Bagha Jatin, Binoy-Badal-Dinesh and Khudiram and at the other it also probably indirectly influenced the fictional sleuths like Byomkesh Bakshi or Kiriti Roy as a part of the tradition.
When Satyajit Ray first introduced his fictional detective, he was contributing to the already established tradition of Bengali detective fiction. Feluda can also be said to be an extension of the Bengali consciousness which was a result of the nationalistic idea, but in his characterization Ray showed some modification. He is a twentieth century creation and thus bear some necessary and obvious variations. In his stories Ray presents two different versions of Bengalis. One is represented by Feluda, who enjoys superior intellectual faculties and can withstand any physical or mental challenge. The other is represented by Lalmohan Ganguli, a noted fiction writer who later became a good friend and accomplice of Feluda. Lalmohan Ganguli represents the usual concept of Bengalis who are often looked at as a feeble and effeminate race. Goutam Basu in his essay “SELF ASSERTION THROUGH PHYSICAL CULTURE MOVEMENT IN BENGAL DURING THE LATER PART OF NINETEENTH CENTURY AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY” writes that for the ruling colonizers “Bengalis had been the object of ridicule… for their physical weakness.” (Basu 2013:64) He further adds that the ‘stereotypes of effeminacy’ was particularly used against the ‘babu’ section of the class. The term ‘babu’ was used to refer to an anglicized Bengali during the British rule, although now the term is more commonly used to refer to a Bengali gentleman. However, the Bengalis reacted against such stereotypes by putting up a strong revolt against the colonizers during the Nationalist movement. As already discussed the nationalist Bengali youth believed in building up a strong physique to fight against the colonial masters. Moreover, this development could also be a conscious strategy, as Basu writes, to respond “against the charge of effeminacy labeled against the Bengalis.” (Basu 2013:64)

Both Feluda and Lalmohan Ganguli represent a typical Bengali gentleman or bhadralok but are way apart in nature. A simple English illustration of the term ‘bhadralok’ would mean a gentleman, but the term is loaded with cultural bearings as it stands to define a quintessential Bengali man. Bengalis are considered to represent a culturally refined race and
are thought to be intellectually sound. From the days of colonial rule Bengalis are not seen as a part of the macho class who are physically strong and agile. But in his fictional creation Ray reverses this consideration and presents Feluda as a typical Bengali bhadralok who is intellectually as well as physically strong and his character stands in sharp contrast to Lalmohan Ganguli, another Bengali bhadralok in the fictional series. Lalmohan Ganguli is a short, middle aged man whose heart pops out even at the slightest smell of danger. This dichotomy turns out to be more interesting when the focus is shifted to Mr. Ganguli’s fictional creation Prakhar Rudra. He is a non-realistic, melodramatic hero who gives shape to Mr. Ganguli’s much cherished fantasies through fiction. He is a typical macho hero, a tough guy with muscular physique and relies mostly on his physical abilities to accomplish feats which often sound unrealistic. Ganguli’s portrayal of such a hero seems to be intentional since he himself lacks such an attractive physical appearance. In his first interaction with Feluda and Tapesh he speaks about how hard he tried to develop strong muscles and increase his height. So by presenting two different versions of Bengali bhadralok and two types of fictional heroes; Ray provides a sharp contrast between two different paradigms of fiction or crime thrillers. On one hand detective Feluda is a typical Bengali hero who is intellectual, strong and exhibits all the traits of a typical Bengali bhadralok. On the other hand we find Prakhar Rudra who emphasizes more on the power of brawn. So in a way Ray seems to highlight the conflict between brain vs brawn. But apart from this, Feluda stories also highlight some unexplored facts. Carrying forth the tradition of the Bengali consciousness, the tales provide an opportunity to understand the connotations of a typical Bengali bhadralok, infact, a look at the stories will showcase how Feluda refashions the connotation of the term. Moreover, all these aspects also lend the stories a typical Bengali identity.

Ray’s delineation of his hero shows a slight deviation from the conventional idea of a Bengali bhadralok. He is a Bengali of the ‘bhadralok’ category with refined taste and
intellectual abilities, but he is not meek like Mr. Ganguli, nor is he like Prakhar Rudra since his abilities are not dependent only on his physical strength. Rather he is a blend between the best of east and west. It is to be noted here that Satyajit Ray was an ardent lover of Sherlock Holmes stories and his creation was somewhat influenced by the English gentleman sleuth. But Ray’s characterization of Feluda is not only different from the colonial model but it also differs from the Bengali notion of a bhadralok. Thus Ray offers an alternative realistic hero, who can be seen as a post-colonial twentieth century detective. Infact, Feluda is a nice blend of variations. He differs from the colonial detective but does bear some striking similarities, given his extraordinary intellectual prowess and charismatic personality. Feluda also extends the nationalist idea as he too reflects the tradition promoted by Anushilan Samiti. Not to forget, Feluda too was physically fit and agile given his regular yoga practice. Thus in Feluda, Ray makes a nice amalgam of the finest qualities of the bhadralok category and a colonial model with necessary deviations to present him as a more efficient twentieth century sleuth.

Interestingly Ray’s portrayal of Feluda reflects the author’s sense of self-esteem of being a Bengali gentleman which he may have inherited from his intellectual background. The stories are culture specific and the concept of the Bengali identity accentuates it further. The stories not only reflect the typical cultural nuances of the race but also promote the concept of Bengal as a nation. Infact, Feluda has been presented as the cultural ambassador of Bengal. He glorifies the entire race and his fame has surpassed the territory of Bengal to reach the distant shores of other parts of the nation and even abroad. He is competent of outwitting opponents of any possible type both within and outside Bengal. Here, it is important to mention that his principle opponent in the fictional series is a non-Bengali North Indian goon Maganlal Meghraj. Meghraj is a powerful and influential goon who pleasures in carrying out crimes of any order. He is someone whom the locals fear to meddle with and at
the same time he has been conveniently eluding the local police. When Feluda arrives in his territory he poses a threat to Maganlal’s throne of power and authority. By arriving at Varanasi Feluda is actually intruding into an alien cultural space over which he easily claims control. Maganlal Meghraj being unable to threaten Feluda; takes pleasure in harassing and terrifying Lalmohan Ganguli. He tries all means but fails to curb Feluda’s advances in defeating him in each encounter. This again can be seen to be a conscious move by the author to celebrate the Bengali identity. Though Maganlal Meghraj is an equally dangerous criminal, Feluda is never defeated in his encounters and each time he emerges victorious against his opponent.

So, apart from being interesting crime narratives Feluda stories also offer a complex cultural web. The stories are scattered with numerous other subtleties that lend a typical Bengali flavour to the detective series. Right from their nomenclature, to the names of the protagonists everything reflects an idea of Bengal. It is true that the stories are about a Bengali sleuth, but what really draws our attention is that wherever the trio of Feluda-Topshe-Mr.Ganguli travel, they create a microscopic Bengali space out of a non- Bengali atmosphere. Whether they are in Varanasi or in Rajasthan they simulated Bengal. Whether it is the food of their preference, or the people they meet, or the manner in which they address each other; the author has been very meticulous to reflect Bengal in some way or the other. Infact, in his stories Ray has successfully simulated a virtual Bengal- a geographic and psychic space which reverberate the Hindu-Bengali cultural nuances. But in order to understand these subtleties a reader must be conscious of the cultural renderings of Bengal. When the author first started writing the stories he probably had only the Bengali readers in mind. And in this regard he must be credited for the manner in which he approached his target-reader who has went on to make the stories one of the most loved and popular fictional works among the Bengali readers even in modern times.
But his stories were not meant only for the Bengali readers. When the stories were first translated into English in 1988, the intention was to spread the genius of his work to a wider reach of readers. But translation is a tricky affair and runs a handful of risks. The translator should translate the stories written in a source language (laden with some cultural nuances) into a target language without losing out the essence of the original work. Besides, another significant factor is about the role of the reader. For a Bengali reader the translated stories with their various cultural aspects are easy to apprehend. But a reader from a different cultural background might not be able to relate to the cultural traits of the source culture. A non-Bengali reader is not aware of the Bengali consciousness or about the cultural nuances of Bengal. When such a reader reads the English translations, he would not be able to understand the cultural significance of the suffix ‘da’ which is added with the name of Felu or any Bengali who is considered like an elder brother. The suffix ‘da’ or the title ‘babu’ are characteristically Bengali attributes. The term ‘babu’ is usually used to greet a Bengali gentleman with respect. Being unaware of such aspects, the reader from a different cultural background must put an extra effort while reading, so that he can comprehend the social and cultural codifications disseminated through the original source work. This makes reading an interactive process as the stories provide an opportunity to know and experience the typical Bengali nuances of the original stories. The reader’s perception may however, vary from person to person since every reader interacts with a text with his store of pre-conceived ideas.

Moreover, in interpreting the stories a reader might face another problem since each reader has an operational value system embedded in him. Detective fiction primarily highlights the conflict between good and evil and like any other literary genre, detective fiction also reflects the society which is at the backdrop of its creation. So when a reader from a different cultural background encounters with the stories he or she might not correspond with the moral values propagated through the narratives. For instance, in a detective fiction
narrative the detective tries all means available to draw a logical conclusion and solve the mystery. In order to achieve this, the detective even adopts some means like deception and can even cheat on others to solve the mystery. In such cases the detective tries to justify his moves by the end result. When a reader from a different cultural background reads, he might not associate with the detective’s position in justifying his move by the end result. Infact, such a reader might also raise question and face dilemma over the criminal’s conviction at the end, if the stimulus behind the criminal’s act is injustice or revenge.

While conducting the research, the researcher noticed another interesting aspect of Ray’s narratives. In view of Laura Mulvey’s theory of gaze, it can be stated that Ray’s stories do not offer any female gaze for the reader. A serious study would reveal that there is an acute absence of woman characters in Feluda stories and hence there is an absence of female gaze. Therefore the readers usually co-opt the gaze of the male detective in the stories. However, in many films like *Pather Panchali*, *Devi*, *Charulata* et.al. Ray has portrayed powerful woman characters that have facilitated the viewer for co-opting the female gaze. Although one might argue that most of these films are based on the stories composed by other writers, yet Ray must be credited for portraying powerful women characters in his films. But in Feluda stories, Ray has refrained from creating strong female characters and in most cases women are depicted as fringe characters in the narratives. So, if the reader is a woman she gets minimal scope to develop the female gaze while reading Feluda stories. Infact, the female reader generally associates with the detective and as a result of this she can be said to undergo a kind of degendering. Out of the thirty-five stories only “Dr. Munshi’s Diary” presents a female character in an important role. Although the role of Mrs. Munshi has not been considerably developed but she has been presented as the main manipulator cum criminal in the story. However, one might argue that this practice (to use minimal female characters) has been a conscious part of the author’s strategy to minimalize the use of violence and sex in his narratives. But it may be argued that the role of violence has been
quite strong in his narratives; be it a murder or any other kind of damage, violence is always prominent in the stories. Here, it must be noted that by the term ‘violence’ the researcher does not intend to imply any damage done only through extreme physical force. Violence in its literal as well as metaphorical sense may result from any distortion or damage done to the normal order of things in both physical and mental realms. Moreover, this study has led the researcher to question whether Ray had attempted a certain sanctification of the genre to arguably make it more adaptable to Indian (in other words Bengali) sensibility, culture and social norms and also for a particular targeted age group.

Interestingly, Ray’s portrayal of Feluda and Lalmohan Babu as bachelors and Tapesh as an adolescent reveals his strategy to avoid any kind of female association with the lead characters in the stories. Thus, as a female reader the researcher feels curious to enquire or know the probable reason behind Ray’s minimal use of woman characters in Feluda stories. In her discussion the researcher has already spoken about how Ray’s delineation of Feluda extends the tradition of physicality as promoted by Anushilan Samitis. So, does the absence of female characters and Feluda’s bachelor status accounts for the concept of male efficiency as propagated by akharas? Not to forget, the Indian construct of brahmacharya, i.e, male celibacy is closely interlinked with the concept of male efficiency as promoted by akharas in India. The akhara culture believes that disassociation of women is necessary and beneficial for men to become more efficient. And because of this popular belief men in akharas or gymnasiums worship lord Hanuman- the epitome of male celibacy and insurmountable strength. In this connection, Ray’s convenience in handling bachelors and his minimal use of female characters in the Feluda series raises one vital question in the female reader cum researcher’s mind- whether Ray also believed that the idea of male celibacy is accountable for male efficiency.

Thus, detective fiction is not an easy genre to interpret. The genre can be analyzed from different theoretical angles as the stories offer an intricate web of theoretical renderings
which deserves serious attention. This would help to remove the tag of ‘pulp’ that one easily tends to associate with the genre. This chapter attempts to make a theoretical study of the genre, although from various theories only selective postulations have been referred, considering the suitability and compatibility with the research plan. This helps to understand the complexities of the genre and it also helps to validate the research plan which aims to explain that the genre is much beyond being ‘non-serious’. The genre has been explored theoretically considering the multi-layered implications of the term ‘text’. In this regard the theories of narration have been of great help to understand how the narrative text of a detective fiction story is structured to generate suspense. The chapter also refers to psychoanalytic theories to understand the game of conflict between the detective and the criminal and how the reader corresponds to it. The research work also suggests that the genre requires an active participation from the reader’s end, to be able to discern the various intricate perspectives that the text offers. The role of the reader is always crucial in interpreting the genre and in this regard the chapter refers to the theoretical postulations of Loius Rosenblatt and Wolfgang Iser to establish the link between the reader and a detective fiction narrative. In the process of discussing the various theoretical angles, the chapter has referred to Satyajit Ray’s Feluda stories as and when required to analyze the stories from the perspective of the various theories discussed. Apart from the established tradition of literary theories the chapter has also focused on some other aspects which are worth noticing in the study of the genre and of the Feluda stories in particular. Ray’s Feluda stories have contributed to the establishment of an indigenous tradition of Indian detective fiction. In this respect it is interesting to note how Ray has constructed the intense narratives featuring a twentieth century sleuth who has been portrayed as a quintessential Bengali detective in the realm of Indian detective fiction.
Notes.

1. A term used to refer to a quintessential Bengali gentleman. The term consists of two morphemes; ‘bhadra’ meaning gentle or well-mannered and ‘lok’ meaning a person.

2. It is a language which was used in the Indian subcontinent in the Vedic times. It is a Prakrit language and many ancient Buddhist scriptures were composed in Pali.

3. It is a term used to refer to a group of language used in ancient India. It was the language of the common people. Many religious scriptures of Jainism as well as popular tales were composed in it.

4. Darlongs are one of the nineteen ethnic tribes of Tripura of the Kuki-Chin origin. They are believed to have migrated from China and currently they reside mainly in the northern part of the state of Tripura. The tribe is a close-knit group bound with an integrated web of ethno-cultural traits.

5. Here it refers to a training place where Indian wrestlers or martial artists practice.

6. It is a term used to refer to the Bengali Indian organization that propagated the concept of using violence in the revolutionary missions against the British rule in the early quarter of twentieth century. The members of the organization were usually young Bengali men who cultivated the culture of physicality by associating with clubs or akharas.


