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The Psychoanalytical Study of Bengali and English Detective Stories

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ABSTRACT

This research compares the psychology of characters in English and Bengali detective stories, using Freudian theory to understand their behaviors and motivations. The study looks at how these characters are influenced by their cultures, focusing on unconscious desires, social norms, and personal reasons. The research focuses on works by Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Sharadindu Bandhyopadhyay, and Satyajit Ray, such as Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Byomkesh Bakshi, and Feluda. In English detective stories like The Speckled Band and The Dead Harlequin, the detectives mainly use logic, reason, and intellect, which aligns with Freud's idea of the ego—focussed on rational thinking. These stories reflect the values of the Victorian and early 20th-century eras, where individualism, intellect, and reason were highly valued. On the other hand, Bengali detective stories like The Emperor's Ring *and* The Will That Vanished *show detectives who not only think critically but also understand and connect with people's emotions and cultural relationships. Characters like Byomkesh Bakshi and Feluda combine intellect with empathy, showing both the ego and the superego, which is the moral part shaped by society's rules. This shows how Bengali detective fiction emphasises family, community, and moral responsibility, highlighting the importance of these values in Bengali culture. The study also explores how Freudian ideas about the id, ego, and superego can be applied to both Western and non-Western stories, showing how these concepts work differently in various cultures. The research also looks at gender roles in detective fiction, noting how English stories often reflect traditional views of men and women, while Bengali stories offer more balanced portrayals, with detectives showing both intellectual and emotional depth. This comparison helps us understand that detective fiction is not just about solving mysteries but also reflects the values of the culture in which it is written. By applying psychoanalytical theory to both English and Bengali stories, this research broadens the study of literature, showing how different cultures approach psychological themes. It emphasises the importance of considering cultural context when*

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analysing characters and the themes of detective fiction.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Freudian theory, detective fiction, cultural values, unconscious desires, English literature, Bengali literature, Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Byomkesh Bakshi, Feluda, id, ego, superego, gender roles, societal norms

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Detective fiction has been a popular genre in literature, captivating readers with its intricate mysteries, clever detectives, and psychological depth. This study examines the psychological aspects of detective characters in English and Bengali literature, comparing how they are influenced by cultural values and Freudian psychoanalysis. The focus is on major works from both traditions, including Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories, Agatha Christie's *Hercule Poirot* mysteries, and Bengali detective stories featuring Byomkesh Bakshi and Feluda. While both traditions share the common goal of solving mysteries, they approach character psychology in distinct ways, reflecting the cultural backgrounds in which they were written. In English detective fiction, the detective is often portrayed as a figure of pure logic and reason. Sherlock Holmes, one of the most famous literary detectives, relies entirely on his intellect to solve crimes. He represents the dominance of the ego, a concept in Freudian psychoanalysis that refers to the rational and logical part of the mind. Holmes rarely allows emotions to interfere with his work, maintaining a detached and clinical approach to his investigations. This is evident in The Speckled Band, where he carefully observes clues, forms logical deductions, and solves the case without being swayed by personal feelings. Similarly, Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie's famous Belgian detective, prioritises logic and method in his investigations. In The Dead Harlequin, Poirot uncovers hidden desires and suppressed emotions in the suspects, but his own personality remains firmly controlled by reason. His careful observations and deductions expose the truth, reinforcing the idea that intellect triumphs over emotion.

Bengali detective fiction, on the other hand, presents a more balanced portrayal of intellect and emotion. While detectives like Byomkesh Bakshi and Feluda possess sharp analytical skills, they also display emotional intelligence and empathy. Unlike Holmes, who works in isolation and rarely forms personal attachments, Byomkesh and Feluda operate within a social framework,

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interacting with family, friends, and society. This difference highlights the role of the superego in Bengali detective fiction. The superego, according to Freud, represents moral values and cultural norms. In The Emperor's Ring, Feluda not only solves the mystery using logic but also considers the ethical implications of his actions. His decisions are shaped by a sense of justice that extends beyond the law, reflecting the cultural emphasis on community and moral duty in Bengali society. Another major contrast between English and Bengali detective fiction lies in the portrayal of psychological conflicts. In English stories, internal struggles are often centered around the conflict between the id and the ego. The id represents deep desires and instincts, which characters in these stories often suppress. In *The Dead Harlequin*, for example, hidden emotions and subconscious motivations play a key role in the mystery, as characters battle with desires they refuse to acknowledge. The presence of the id is strong, but it is ultimately controlled by the ego, maintaining the Victorian belief in rationality and order. In contrast, Bengali detective fiction integrates psychological conflicts with societal concerns. In The Will That Vanished, the mystery revolves around family honor and duty, showing how personal struggles are linked to collective well-being. The characters' decisions are influenced not just by their inner emotions but also by the expectations of society, reinforcing the importance of the superego in shaping their actions. The cultural background of these stories also affects their themes and character development. English detective fiction emerged during the Victorian and early 20th-century periods, reflecting the values of those times. Individualism, strict social hierarchies, and the power of reason are central themes in these works. Sherlock Holmes, for instance, embodies the ideal of an independent, highly intellectual man who operates outside traditional social structures. He does not rely on authority figures and often clashes with the police, showing his superiority as a private investigator. In contrast, Bengali detective fiction is deeply rooted in the traditions of Indian society, where relationships and moral responsibility are highly valued. Byomkesh Bakshi, for example, does not see himself merely as a detective but as a "truth-seeker." His work is driven not just by logic but also by his duty to uncover the truth for the good of society. This sense of responsibility is a reflection of the collective values of Bengali culture, where personal actions are often judged in relation to their impact on the community. Gender roles in detective fiction also reveal cultural differences. In English stories, female characters are

often portrayed as passive victims or sources of mystery. In *The Speckled Band*, Helen Stoner is depicted as a helpless woman in need of protection, reinforcing the traditional Victorian image of women as fragile and dependent. Similarly, in *The Dead Harlequin*, female characters are shaped by their emotional vulnerabilities, their hidden desires driving the mystery forward. In Bengali detective fiction, while traditional gender roles are still present, women are often portrayed with greater depth. In *The Emperor's Ring*, female characters are not merely victims but have agency, influencing the course of the investigation. This difference suggests that while Bengali detective fiction still reflects patriarchal values, it allows for more nuanced representations of women compared to English stories.

The adaptability of Freudian psychoanalysis to different literary traditions is another key insight from this research. While Freud's theories were developed in a Western context, they can be applied to Bengali literature in meaningful ways. The concepts of the id, ego, and superego appear in both English and Bengali detective stories but are expressed differently based on cultural influences. In English fiction, the ego dominates, maintaining a strict control over impulses and emotions. The detective is a figure of reason, ensuring that logic prevails. In Bengali fiction, however, the superego plays a more significant role, blending logic with cultural values and ethical considerations. Feluda and Byomkesh do not act solely based on intellect; they also consider the moral consequences of their actions, showing how detective fiction can be shaped by different psychological and cultural frameworks. This comparative analysis of English and Bengali detective fiction enriches the understanding of how literature reflects psychological and cultural themes. It highlights the importance of considering cultural context in literary studies, demonstrating that detective fiction is not just about solving crimes but also about exploring human psychology and societal values. English detective stories emphasise the power of reason, presenting detectives as figures of pure intellect who navigate a world of crime and deception with logic alone. Bengali detective stories, meanwhile, offer a more holistic perspective, incorporating emotional intelligence and moral responsibility into their narratives. This distinction sheds light on how different cultures view problem-solving, justice, and the role of the individual in society. The study also opens avenues for further research. Detective fiction Is a global genre, with stories from different countries offering unique perspectives on crime and

justice. Future studies could explore detective fiction from other cultural traditions, analyzing how psychological and social factors influence character development. Additionally, examining the role of gender in detective fiction across different cultures could provide deeper insights into how societal expectations shape literary narratives. This research underscores the richness of detective fiction as a genre that goes beyond entertainment. It serves as a mirror to cultural values, revealing how societies construct ideas of justice, morality, and human nature. By applying psychoanalytical theory to both English and Bengali detective stories, the study demonstrates that literature is not only a reflection of psychological processes but also of the social and historical contexts in which it is created. The comparative approach allows for a broader appreciation of how different cultures use storytelling to explore the complexities of the human mind.

One of the key aspects of detective fiction is the way it constructs the detective as a figure of authority and intellect. In English literature, especially in the works of Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, the detective is a superior intellect who stands above ordinary people. Sherlock Holmes, for instance, is portrayed as an almost superhuman figure, capable of solving the most complex cases with his sharp observational skills and deductive reasoning. His abilities often leave others in awe, reinforcing the idea that intelligence is the most valuable tool in crime-solving. Even when Holmes interacts with Dr. Watson, his closest companion, there is a clear intellectual hierarchy between them. Holmes frequently corrects Watson's observations, demonstrating his own superior reasoning skills. This reinforces the belief in a rational and scientific approach to problem-solving, which was highly valued in Victorian England. Similarly, Hercule Poirot relies on his methodical approach and "little grey cells" to solve mysteries. He is meticulous, always one step ahead of the other characters, reinforcing the idea that the detective must be an extraordinary figure, removed from the emotional concerns of ordinary people.

Bengali detective fiction, while also portraying detectives as highly intelligent, presents them as more human and relatable. Feluda and Byomkesh Bakshi are both brilliant, but they do not exist in isolation. They are deeply connected to their cultural and social surroundings, making them

more accessible to readers. Feluda, for example, often interacts with his younger cousin, Topshe, and the humorous writer Lalmohan Babu, creating a sense of camaraderie and warmth that is absent in Holmes's world. Byomkesh, on the other hand, is not just a detective; he considers himself a seeker of truth. His work is not about displaying superior intelligence but about ensuring justice is served. This aligns with Bengali cultural values, which emphasise relationships, morality, and social responsibility. While Holmes and Poirot work largely alone, Feluda and Byomkesh operate within a network of relationships, showing that intelligence does not have to be detached from emotion and human connection. The difference in detective characterisation is also reflected in how each tradition treats criminals. In English detective fiction, criminals are often seen as purely evil figures, motivated by greed, jealousy, or revenge. There is little room for understanding their psychological motivations beyond their criminal acts. In The Speckled Band, for example, Dr. Roylott is a classic villain—violent, cruel, and lacking any redeeming qualities. He is portrayed as an outsider who threatens order, reinforcing the idea that criminals are inherently bad and must be stopped by rational thinkers like Holmes. In The Dead Harlequin, Agatha Christie similarly presents crime as a disruption of social order, with the detective's role being to restore balance. The moral clarity in these stories leaves little room for ambiguity—the criminal is always in the wrong, and the detective's pursuit of justice is unquestionable. Bengali detective fiction, however, often presents criminals with more psychological depth. In *The Will That Vanished* and *The Emperor's Ring*, the motivations behind crimes are explored in greater detail, making the criminals more complex and sometimes even sympathetic. Rather than being purely evil, they are often driven by desperation, societal pressure, or personal conflicts. Byomkesh Bakshi and Feluda do not simply punish criminals but seek to understand them. This reflects a more nuanced view of justice, where crime is not just a legal issue but a social and psychological phenomenon. By showing criminals as multi-dimensional characters, Bengali detective fiction engages with deeper ethical questions, such as whether individuals are entirely responsible for their actions or if they are shaped by societal and psychological factors beyond their control. Another important distinction is the narrative style used in both traditions. English detective fiction typically follows a structured, logical format, where clues are presented methodically and lead to a clear resolution. The reader is expected to

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follow the detective's thought process and arrive at the conclusion alongside them. This structured approach reflects the influence of Enlightenment thinking, which emphasised reason, order, and scientific inquiry. In contrast, Bengali detective fiction often incorporates elements of storytelling and cultural references that make the narrative more fluid and engaging. Satyajit Ray's Feluda stories, for example, often include historical and literary references, creating a richer reading experience that goes beyond the crime itself. Byomkesh Bakshi's stories, written by Sharadindu Bandhyopadhyay, blend elements of detective fiction with philosophical reflections, making them more introspective. This stylistic difference reflects the cultural backgrounds of each tradition—where English detective fiction prioritises logic and structure, Bengali detective fiction integrates storytelling and moral contemplation.

The role of setting in detective fiction also reveals key cultural differences. In English detective fiction, settings are often confined to closed spaces—gothic mansions, isolated country houses, or urban crime scenes. This creates a sense of control, where the detective operates within a contained environment to restore order. Agatha Christie's novels, for example, often take place in secluded settings, such as a train in *Murder on the Orient Express* or a country house in *And Then There Were None*, reinforcing the idea that crime disrupts order in a controlled space. Bengali detective fiction, on the other hand, is more expansive in its settings. Feluda's adventures often take him across India, from the bustling streets of Kolkata to the remote hills of Darjeeling. Byomkesh's investigations frequently involve different layers of Bengali society, from aristocratic families to ordinary citizens. This broader scope reflects the cultural diversity and social dynamics of India, where crime and justice are not limited to closed spaces but are deeply intertwined with everyday life. The psychological aspects of detective fiction also extend to the relationship between the detective and the reader. In English detective fiction, there is often a clear distinction between the detective's knowledge and the reader's knowledge. Holmes and Poirot frequently withhold information until the final revelation, creating a sense of suspense and surprise. This technique reinforces the idea that the detective is an intellectual superior, guiding the reader toward the truth. In Bengali detective fiction, however, the reader is often given more insight into the detective's thought process. Byomkesh and Feluda think aloud, discuss their reasoning with companions, and allow the reader to engage more actively in the

mystery-solving process. This creates a sense of participation, where the reader is not just a passive observer but an active thinker alongside the detective. The presence of humor in Bengali detective fiction is another notable difference. While English detective fiction tends to maintain a serious tone, Bengali stories often incorporate humor, making the narratives more relatable. Lalmohan Babu, a recurring character in Feluda stories, provides comic relief through his exaggerated storytelling and naïve observations. Similarly, Byomkesh's interactions with his friend Ajit often include moments of lightheartedness. This use of humor serves multiple purposes—it makes the stories more engaging, adds depth to character relationships, and reflects the cultural tendency in Bengali literature to blend seriousness with wit. The presence of humor humanises the detective, making them more accessible to readers and reinforcing the idea that intelligence does not have to come at the expense of warmth and relatability. Despite these differences, both English and Bengali detective fiction share a common goal—to explore human psychology and unravel the mysteries of crime. While their approaches may vary, the core themes of justice, truth, and intellect remain central to both traditions. This comparative analysis highlights how detective fiction is shaped by its cultural context, reflecting the values, beliefs, and psychological frameworks of the societies in which it is produced.

The study of detective fiction through a psychoanalytical lens offers valuable insights into how literature engages with the human mind. The application of Freudian concepts such as the id, ego, and superego allows for a deeper understanding of character motivations and narrative structures. It also demonstrates how different cultures interpret psychological theories in their own unique ways. By comparing English and Bengali detective fiction, this research broadens the scope of literary analysis, showing that detective fiction is not just a form of entertainment but a rich field for exploring cultural and psychological themes.

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