CHAPTER 5.

POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVES: BYOMKESH BAKSHI.

A. "THE INQUISITOR": -

As far as the conversations between Byomkesh Bakshi and his associate and litterateur Ajit Bandyopadhyay are concerned, "The Inquisitor" (1933), originally published as "Satyanweshi" in Bengali, appears to be the first narrative of the Byomkesh Bakshi canon, through chronologically "Pather Kanta", which Sreejata Guha translates as "The Gramophone Pin Mystery" in Picture Imperfect and Other Byomkesh Bakshi Mysteries, was the first story to be written and published in 1932. "Pather Kanta" was followed by "Shimonto Heera" (1932) before "Satyanweshi" was published.

It is in "The Inquisitor" that Byomkesh Bakshi and Ajit Bandyopadhyay meet for the first time at a Calcutta boarding house in the locality of Chinabazar (Sen 7). This can be compared to the first introduction of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson to one another in A Study in Scarlet. The period of publication of the first Bakshi story is significant because the 1930s was the decade of intense armed nationalist movement in Bengal and Punjab (Chandra, et al., 188). In "The Inquisitor" Saradindu Bandyopadhyay has identifiably incorporated elements of anti-colonial resistance by depicting the detective and the narrator of his adventures as typical Bengali characters who reveal their distinctively Indian identity in their hybridity and in their actions as distinct from the European fictional detectives like Holmes and Hercule Poirot

who are pronouncedly Eurocentric and exhibit imperial ideology in their characterisation. 1925 – the time earmarked as the year in which Ajit Bandyopadhyay first meets Bakshi – denotes a crucial phase in the struggle for independence in southern Bengal in wake of violent inter-racial killings which reached their nadir in Calcutta riots in 1926 (Chandra, et al., 1960).

From "The Inquisitor" until "Henyalir Chhando" written in January 1964 Ajit Bandyopadhyay takes the responsibility of narrating the adventures of Byomkesh Bakshi. In the very first story he introduces himself as a maturing litterateur with a substantial inheritance who is trying to sustain himself by living as a bachelor at a Calcutta boarding house (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 1). He remains a static character all throughout the canon and as even in the last incomplete narrative "Bishupal Badh" he has identifiably failed to establish himself or own a separate house. In contrast, Watson is an adventurous imperial figure who has served actively in the Indian subcontinent to dominate the natives, takes part in Holmes's outdoor investigations, and owns a house and thriving private practice. That Watson never introduces himself as a writer gains significance in the context that no strenuous physical action or adventure can be expected from a usually demure litterateur.

The Byomkesh Bakshi narratives and the Sherlock Holmes stories exhibit several similarities. Like the Holmes narratives in which actions are centred in the imperial metropolis of London, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay sets his detective stories in Calcutta which, in being the metropolis of the colonised Orientals speaking the Eastern language of Bengali symbolically becomes the mirror image of the

imperial capital. Both Holmes and Bakshi possess extraordinary first names – "Sherlock" and "Byomkesh" – while their associates exhibit ordinariness in their names, surnames and actions. Both the detectives start as bachelors at rented houses and become acquainted in that position with their respective friend and narrator who are bachelors and unemployed. It requires mention that Watson starts his private practice from "A Scandal in Bohemia" onwards. In another aspect of similarity both the detectives' family backgrounds are initially given little focus.

In "The Inquisitor", Ajit Bandyopadhyay introduces himself as been "fresh out of the university" and is, judging from normal circumstances, between twenty-two and twenty-three years of age. Deducing from Bakshi's calculation of his own age against Bandyopadhyay's in Where There is a Will (117), the detective might be identified as being in the early twenties too. In their position as educated Bengali youths, Bakshi and Bandyopadhyay poise a serious threat to the British colonisers in light of the fact that the contemporary nationalist movement was being led by similar educated Indian youths. Significantly, neither Bakshi nor Bandyopadhyay overtly supports or follows the violent path of nationalism. Being a practising lawyer in British courts, Saradindu Bandopadhyay has deftly eschewed advocacy of direct confrontation with the colonisers and follows the path of *literary collusion* to protest against the imperial hegemony.

As revealed in the concluding section of the narrative all the occupants of the detective's Harrison Road-residence are traditional Bengalis: the

detective himself, Ajit Bandyopadhyay and the domestic help, Puntiram. The detective's first name, "Byomkesh", signifies the Hindu god Shiva during his meditation, and therefore assumes an Indian connotation. Sukumar Sen, therefore, writes,

> "Unlike Sherlock Holmes, Byomkesh Bakshi is not withdrawn and self-centred. He is not a scientist, violinist or an addict. He is a typical Bengali gentleman of the 1930s – educated, intelligent, shrewd, reserved and sympathetic. Apart from his intellect and sedate serenity, he has got no other quality to distinguish himself from the average Bengali youths. That is why Bakshi as an amateur Bengali detective is most successfully conceived" (7).

The physician Anukul's boarding house, where Bakshi and Bandyopadhyay are first introduced, is inhabited by practising Bengalis. Ashwini, Ghanashyam and two unnamed "middle aged" single gentlemen exhibit a very Bengali addiction to betel leaves and desire to be "employed in regular jobs" (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 2-3). The boarding house, called 'mess' in India, is managed by a Bengali gentleman who is a homeopath, a profession common to the educated pre-independence and early post-independence Indian Bengalis (2).

Anukul's hybridity is exhibited in his penchant for European, particularly German drugs that he imports in cases bearing American stamps (17). Ajit Bandyopadhyay stresses that "the doctor never use[s]...Indian-made drugs."

(17). Used to gadgets imported to the colonies from England, he fixes the British-made Yale latch locks to different doors of his boarding house (10). In exact opposition to Doyle's identification of everything Oriental with malignancy and destruction in stories like The Sign of Four and "The Adventure of the Speckled Band", Saradindu Bandyopadhyay from his very first Byomkesh Bakshi story follows the paradigm of associating the West and individuals exhibiting affinity for the West to evilness and chaos. Understandably, Anukul has been portrayed as a murderer and a peddler in cocaine – a narcotic popularised by the Westerners – symbolically preserved in the bottles of European *Eric and Havell* sugar-of-milk bottles (17, 24). The easy breaking of the British Yale lock "to pieces" when Bakshi pushes the closed door of Ashwini Kumar Chowdhury's room, other that symbolising breakage of Western bondage by the colonised populace, also underscores the unreliability of the European security systems (10). Anukul himself observes,

> "That is the problem with locks from abroad – when they are fine, there is noting to worry about, but once they start wounding up, no one but an engineer can fix them. Our indigenous bolt is better than this..." (21).

Ajit Bandyopadhyay's description of Byomkesh Bakshi as he enters the boarding house under the pseudonym of Atul Chandra Mitra matches the Watson's description of Holmes in A Study in Scarlet. Even though the inquisitor's dress is "in dishabille', he is "fair, well-built and handsome, and his face radiate[s] intelligence" (5). With his uncombed hair, in a dress that looks "frayed" and shoes "[that]

have had taken on a rough hue for lack of polishing" (50), the Indian opposes the general European codes for etiquette and dresses involving combed and shaved face, well-pressed clothes and polished shoes. On the other hand, reminiscent of Holmes who has already achieved reputation for investigative excellences by the time he is first introduced to Watson, Bakshi has gained recognition before the readers are formally acquainted with him. When he questions "Anukulbabu, do you know someone called Byomkesh Bakshi?", he implies his having established a reputation formidable enough to be heard by the common people (22). His recognition is vindicated when the White commissioner of police personally turns up to secure his release after he is mistakenly detained (27). The prompt arrival of the White commissioner signifies the perceptible indispensability of the intelligent colonised native to the colonisers in apprehending dangerous subaltern criminals.

By referring to Bakshi's power of "build[ing]...up a camaraderie" in "the little time that he...spen[ds]" in the boarding house, the author stresses the detective's prowess at maintaining liaisons with the fellow Indian and reflects the general Indian fellow felling that the imperialists attempted to destroy by partitioning Bengal (7). Significantly, in none of the sixty Sherlock Holmes stories the detective is shown communicating with his neighbours and no neighbour has been mentioned. Exhibiting an affinity for the West, Anukul "do[es] not poke...[his]...nose into anybody's business" (8). Bakshi's excellent public relations therefore assume importance as anti-colonial responses.

Like London's representation as a cosmopolitan city in the Sherlock Holmes narratives, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay depicts the cosmopolitan character of the Oriental metropolis of Calcutta when he refers to the presence of a formidable number of "badly-off non-Bengalis" and "pale-skinned Chinese" (1) and Oriyas (7) in the city. While describing the London streets and alleys in "The Red Headed League" and English weather in "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box", Doyle expects his readers are acquainted with the details of the English atmosphere and London's geography. Similarly, Bandyopadhyay imparts a topicality to his Byomkesh Bakshi narratives by depicting a seedy portion of the imperial metropolis that is not known "even [to] those who are *deeply* familiar with Calcutta" (1) (italics mine). Through his description of the nefarious activities that run every night at the "delta" in central Calcutta, the author indicts the contemporary British administrative officials for their failure to maintain law and order in the eastern regional headquarters of the British imperialists.

It is important that while Doyle precisely indicates 221B Baker Street as being the address of Sherlock Holmes, Bandyopadhyay never straightforwardly singles out the precise location of Anukul's mess or the number of Bakshi's residence on Harrison Road (24). Even Sheikh Abdul Gaffoor's address has been mentioned as "thirty six, ____ Street" (4). The author avoids direct references to locations in British-dominated Calcutta which were being altered at will by the imperialists. Rather he presents Bakshi as a resident of Calcutta only to assert his Indian/Bengali identity.

Saradindu Bandyopadhyay exhibits his provincialism when on being asked by Bakshi how he manages to live in a corrupt and seedy locality, Anukul is depicted as saying, "Then you would rather have gone to the Oriya neighbourhood..." (7). By linking the inhabitants of a separate province of India to different crimes including drug peddling, Bandyopadhyay once again asserts the Bengali identity of his detective narratives. This is further exhibited in Ashwini's searching for "some beedis", "beedis" being the Indian equivalent of cigarettes, and Bakshi's taking position on the floor at night – a common practice among the residents of Calcutta during the summer (8). On the other hand, being a post graduate trained in British-initiated system of education, Ajit Bandyopadhyay exhibits his hybridity in his smoking the European cheroot after having a meal "as always" (8).

Through his characterisation of Ashwini Chowdhury, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay meticulously describes the general characteristic and behavioural features of ordinary Bengalis: Chowdhury, a resident of the village of Harirampur in Burdwan, is an employee of a mercantile firm, and is "an amicable person...[has] had no friends other than those at the office and the mess (11). He has been visiting his Harirampur-residence every Saturday "for the last ten or twelve years [,]...suffer[s] from diabetes...[,]...[and]...dr[aws]...a salary of approximately one hundred and twenty rupees" per month (12). Chowdhury's portrayal is in sharp contrast to the European characters readers normally encounter in the Sherlock Holmes stories where a common British citizen is portrayed as conforming and unexceptional. The

picture of the a typical Indian middle-class society is realistically exhibited when Ajit Bandyopadhyay writes, "Ashwinibabu's family had been informed of the tragedy by telegram" (15), thereby implying that telegram is used by common Indians only to send emergency news over long distances, in opposition to Holmes's frequent usage of intra-London telegrams to send directions to Watson.

In light of the police investigation into Chowdhury's death, the author depicts the intelligence of the Bengali detective and symbolically makes him dominate the imperial forces when he precisely and confidently points out that the window of Chowdhury's room is "the cause for...[Chowdhury's]...murder" (13). By waging a conversation with the police inspector during which he vindicates his own observations and logic as being infallible, Bakshi asserts his superiority to the colonial forces while the inspector is compelled to state, "I see you are an intelligent man..." (13-4). It is significant that the inquisitor avoids answering to or reacting at the inspector's invitation to join the imperial police forces, thus expressing his subaltern resentment at the imperial domination of India (14). Contrarily, Ramdhani Singh, who handcuffs Bakshi, embodies the author's satiric portrayal of the Indians that collaborated with the imperial forces (18).

"The Inquisitor" presents the Indian executive and judiciary which had changed themselves in accordance with the conventions of the British colonisers. Ajit Bandyopadhyay's reference to "C.I.D" or *Criminal Investigation Department* indicates a branch of Calcutta Police that was founded in 1868 primarily to

suppress the Indian armed nationalists rather than apprehending general criminals (17). The police inspector's procedure of interrogating the residents of Anukul's boarding house (11-4) and his manner of asking them to identify Bakshi as "Atul Chandra Mitra" before arresting him on the charge of murdering Chowdhury (18), indicate the conventions for interrogation and arrest promulgated by the British colonisers in India. The author satirises the colonial executive and judiciary in India by demonstrating fallibility of such conventions when the police inspector erroneously arrests Bakshi (27). On the other hand, Ajit Bandyopadhyay's observation that locating a lawyer in Calcutta is not difficult might be interpreted as his reference to the arbitrariness of the British administration and judiciary that forced Indians in British India to frequently consult advocates to avoid detention and harassment (19).

When, after returning from the police station, Byomkesh Bakshi says, "The English have a saying about a 'bad penny' – my situation is something similar; even the police tossed me right back" (20), he is not only being ironical about the erratic functioning of colonial police forces but also exhibits his acquaintance with the imperial customs and conventions, thus demonstrating his Occidental knowledge and, in extension, his hybridity. His hybridity is further depicted when he checks the "phosphorescent dial of his [identifiably European-make] watch" after narrating details of his original identity to Ajit Bandyopadhyay (22), and smokes a cheroot after apprehending Anukul (24). The homeopath's post-detention statement, "There is a legal system in the country and I have plenty of money too" (23) is also a part

of Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's depiction of the corruption and partiality of the British judicial system in India (23).

In "The Inquisitor" Bakshi is shown as possessing a revolver when he apprehends Anukul in action (23). In opposition to Holmes and Watson's customary carrying of their own revolvers during adventures, Bakshi owns a gun which does not belong to him but to the police inspector, Sukhomoy Samanta. In "Amriter Mrityu" the inquisitor expresses his discomfiture with handguns (Bandyopadhyay, *Byomkesh* 633). This signifies the polarity between the laws of the British colonisers and those applied to the Indian colonised individuals. On the other hand, that Bakshi possesses a firearm in 1925, a time when possessing firearms by average Indians had been banned following intermittent attacks on the British administrative officials by the Bengali and Punjabi nationalists, suggests his acquaintance with and influence on the senior British administrative officials. It requires mention that Bakshi follows the path of cultural *collusion* and hybridity while asserting his anti colonial resistance and his rapport with the British administrators is not an instance of debilitating anti-Indian liaison but a process of initial collaboration with the imperialists to dominate them thereafter.

A major difference between the Sherlock Holmes stories and the Byomkesh Bakshi narratives involves the position that Arthur Conan Doyle and Saradindu Bandyopadhyay assign to the respective associates of Holmes and Bakshi. While Watson shares the 221B Baker Street-flat with Holmes and identifiably

pays the rent, Ajit Bandyopadhyay is granted refuge by Bakshi at his Harrison Road residence which he immediately accepts and moves in not as a paying guest but as a friend all throughout the canon (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 27-8). Bakshi and Bandyopadhyay shift to the Keyatala residence in "Beni Sanghar". It might also be pointed out that while Watson does not remain consciously subservient to Holmes and or care for the latter's monetary patronage, Ajit Bandyopadhyay remains overtly dependent on the Bengali detective and thus defaces his own character and distinct identity.

It is in the first story of the Byomkesh Bakshi series that Saradindu Bandyopadhyay distinguishes the Bengali inquisitor from the professional *detectives* of Eurocentric literature. When Ajit Bandyopadhyay asks him to explain the significance of "Byomkesh Bakshi: Inquisitor" inscribed on the brass nameplate before to his residence, Bakshi says,

> "That is my identity. I don't like the sound of the word 'detective'; 'investigator' is even worse. So I call myself an Inquisitor, a Seeker of Truth..." (24)

This assumes significance as an anti-colonial reference on part of the Indian author in the context of the fact that Doyle's imperially-compatible Sherlock Holmes takes pride in his being the "a consulting detective, the only one in the world" in A Study in Scarlet (*The Complete* 18).

CHAPTER 5.B.

"THE GRAMOPHONE PHONE MYSTERY": -

"The Gramophone Pin Mystery", originally titled "Pather Kanta" in Bengali, was chronologically the first Byomkesh Bakshi story to be published in 1932. In his maiden Bakshi narrative Saradindu Bandyopadhyay has registered an anti-colonial reaction that is unmatched by any other story of the canon.

The main action in "The Gramophone Phone Mystery" occurs in the locality adjoining to Byomkesh Bakshi's residence on Harrison Road in Calcutta, the imperial metropolis of British India. The name of the street itself indicates the contemporary colonial atmosphere because a number of important British administrative offices were situated on Harrison Road, later renamed Mahatma Gandhi Road in post-independence Calcutta. The narrative was written in June 1932 – a period when activities of the armed Bengali nationalists like Surya Sen, Bina Das, Preetilata Wededar and Kalpana Dutta had reached their climax particularly in Calcutta, Midnapore and Chittagong (Chandra, et al., 188). Significantly, the author supplements the contemporary atmosphere of political turbulence with the description of "a fogless February morning...sparrows...flying about, filling the air with their uncalled-for chirps..." (*Picture* 29). The narrative having had been written and published in colonised India, Bandyopadhyay refrained form providing vivid description of the Indian freedom struggle although he displays his anti-colonial reaction by strenuously avoiding descriptions of the colonisers and depicting the Bengali protagonists as attempting to

create an exclusively Oriental world of their own. These characters' hybridity acts as a deterrent against the perceived literary and cultural hegemony of the imperialists.

In the introductory section of the narrative Saradindu Bandyopadhyay depicts Byomkesh Bakshi as an exceptional personality thus granting the detective a mystery and Otherness which the Orientalists generally associate with the Orientals (Said, *Orientalism* 72). Ajit Bandyopadhyay writes,

> "Byomkesh was a strange man...On the surface, form his looks or even his conversation, one wouldn't judge him to be extraordinary in any way. But if he was confronted or taunted into a state of agitation, his real self emerged from within its shell. In general he was a reserved person. But once he was jeered or ridiculed and lost his cool, his inherent razor-sharp intelligence ripped apart all modicum of uncertainty or restraint and then his conversation was something worth listening to" (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 30).

In context of the fact that Bakshi, an identifiably Bengali character, is Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's mouthpiece for registering his postcolonial resistance, the author's detailed description of the different behavioural traits of the inquisitor might be interpreted as his attempt to present the Indians as being opposite to the erroneous imperial perception of them as unintelligent and hideous subaltern individuals. While Watson never refers to Sherlock Holmes as being "strange", Ajit Bandyopadhyay stresses

Bakshi's strangeness as being a cover for his intellectual excellence. Also, in opposition to Holmes's perception of himself being the only practising detective of the world who rightly deserves attention, the Bengali detective's uniqueness is in his extraordinarily ordinary demeanour and his power to avoid attention even as he continues his investigation.

While Holmes minutely follows newspapers reports and make *scrap books* with different newspaper cuttings, Bakshi gives primary importance to the newspaper advertisements for 'genuine, relevant news' while simultaneously expressing his encyclopaedic knowledge. He projects himself to be in direct opposition to Holmes when he satirises the very act of reading news items and the quality of the news in British-controlled Indian newspapers:

> "Byomkesh turned away from the window and said, 'Have you noticed that a strange advertisement has been appearing in the newspaper for the last few days?'
>
> I said, 'No. I do not read advertisements'.
>
> Raising an incredulous eyebrow, Byomkesh said, 'You don't read advertisements? Then what *do* you read?'
>
> 'Just what everybody reads in a newspaper – news.'
>
> 'In other words, stories about someone in Manchuria who has a bleeding finger, or somebody who has had triplets in Brazil – that's what you read!

What's the point of reading that? If you are looking for genuine, relevant news, look to the advertisements'" (29).

In expressing his liking for the 'real *meaty* news... in the *personals*' (30) (italics mine), Bakshi might seem to assert the perceived Oriental sensuousness (Said, *Orientalism* 72), thus opposing the British imperial detective who never expresses any such affinity. He also underscores the excellence of the Indian news revealed through the advertisements and refers to them as being superior to the British 'Reuter's telegrams' (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 30). On the other hand, he displays his methodical approach to investigation when he mentions that he has been watching the *Thorn-in-the-Flesh* advertisement appear "every Friday without fail for the last three months" (31). His psychoanalytic approach, unlike the Holmesian empirical deduction from physical evidences, is displayed when he tires to analyse the psychology of the advertiser in his position as an Indian without having visited the scheduled place – "the south-western corner of Whiteway Laidlaw" – beforehand (30-1).

While in stories like The Sign of Four and "The Red-Headed League", Doyle describes different regions of London and reflects on the busy life of the imperial locus, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay meticulously depicts "the kind of crowd that gathers [at Whiteway Laidlaw] on a Saturday evening...There is Whiteway Laidlaw on one side and New Market on the other and several cinema halls all around the place", thus painting the weekend life of Bengalis influenced by the British customs and infusing his narratives with a subaltern topicality (31-2). The gas-lamp posts referred to

by Bakshi during his conversation also serve to portray the atmosphere of colonial Calcutta.

In "The Gramophone Pin Mystery" Saradindu Bandyopadhyay contrasts the Bengali detective's psychoanalytic approach to investigation with Holmes's theory of elimination based on forensic examination of physical evidences and physical outdoor adventures. Bakshi proves that "a correct assumption is the best proof" and excludes the necessity of Sherlockian empirical evidences from his "sequence of assumptions" based on the movements of a sparrow (32). According to his ideology, empirical evidences are erroneous and concern of the novices whereas psychoanalysis is infallible:

> "...Byomkesh stopped pacing and, pointing to the bird, asked, 'Can you tell me what that bird is trying to do?'
>
> Startled, I replied, 'What is it trying to do – oh, I suppose it's looking for a place to build its nest.'
>
> 'Do you know that for sure? Beyond a doubt?'
>
> 'Yes, I think so – beyond a doubt.'
>
> Byomkesh crossed his arms behind himself and said, smiling gently, 'How did you figure that out? What is the proof?'
>
> 'Proof...well, the straw in its mouth-'
>
> 'Does a straw in its mouth necessarily indicate that it is trying to build a nest?'

I realised that I had fallen into the trap of Byomkesh's logic. I said, 'No-but-'

'Assumption. Now you are talking. Why were you vacillating for so long then?'

'Not vacillating, really. You mean to say that the assumption that works for a sparrow would work for a human being, too?'

'Why not?'

"If you were to perch on someone's ledge with a straw in your mouth, would it prove that you wish to build a nest?'

'No. It would prove that I am a raving lunatic.'

'Does that need any proving?'

Byomkesh began to laugh. He said, 'You shall not exasperate me. Come on, you'll have to accept this – empirical proof may be fallible, but a logical assumption is failproof. It can't go wrong.'

I too was adamant, and said, 'But I am not able to believe in all those wild conjectures which you just made about that insertion.'

Byomkesh said, 'That only shows how weak your mind is – even faith needs a strong will. Anyway, for people like you, empirical evidence is the best way...'" (33).

Through Bakshi linking Ajit Bandyopadhyay to reliance on empirical evidences, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay refutes Sherlock Holmes's claim to the indispensability of

empirical proofs in investigation and projects him as someone of inferior intellect like Bakshi's associate.

While most of the characters in "The Gramophone Pin Mystery" are identifiably Bengali like those in "The Inquisitor", they exhibit a Bhabhaian hybridity in dresses and daily life. Ashutosh Mitra, whose possible physical features, as he ascends the stairs, are deduced by Bakshi in a style reminiscent of Holmes's assumptions regarding Stanley Hopkins in "The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez" (Doyle, *The Complete* 671), displays hybridity through his Malaccan bamboo walking-stick with a silver knob which is perceptively built in the European style, and his gear of buttoned-up black coat made of alpaca wool and well-pleated dhoti (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 34). Significantly, the people attacked by the professional murderer whose pseudonym is Prafulla Roy – Jayhari Sanyal, Kailash Chandra Moulick, Krishnadayal Laha and Ashutosh Mitra – are Bengali businessmen who have had identifiably gained affluence in the colonial era by collaborating with the British colonisers. Roy's assaults of these businessmen achieve an anti-colonial connotation.

Byomkesh Bakshi exhibits his acquaintance with the European standards of living when he switches on the electric fan after Mitra arrives (34). In context of the fact that the electric fan was not in wide usage in Calcutta of the 1930s, Bakshi's exhibits an adaptation of the Western standards of daily life in a degree more than the common Indians even as he retains his Bengali identity. Ajit Bandyopadhyay's exuberance at Bakshi's capability to relate the arrival of Ashutosh Mitra to the

gramophone pin murders (34) and Mitra's praise of his "incredible skill" (38) show the author's attempt to underscore the intellectual excellence of the Bengali detective just like what Watson does in every Sherlock Holmes story. The Bengali inquisitor's description of how he managed to relate Mitra's arrival to the gramophone pin murders (34-5) could be compared to Holmes's discussion about how he could infer that Watson has had been to Afghanistan in A Study in Scarlet (Doyle, *The Complete* 18).

In the narrative Bandyopadhyay depicts Byomkesh Bakshi as "an inquisitor, a Seeker of Truth" who does not "like the word *detective*" (*Picture* 34) and projects him against Holmes who, in A Study in Scarlet, boasts of being the 'only consulting detective' in the world (Doyle, *The Complete* 18), thus demonstrating how, in spite of his excellence and efficiencies, the Indian eschews any pride. Ajit Bandyopadhyay writes,

> "...Byomkesh was deeply drawn to this mystery. Catching wrong-doers was his profession and had gained some renown in the field as well. Much as he hated the term 'detective', he was well aware that for all intents and proposes he was nothing but a private investigator..." (*Picture* 38).

Both Sherlock Holmes and Byomkesh Bakshi try to keep the official law enforcement personnel away from the purview of their investigations. However, whereas Holmes avoids interaction with the police forces to nullify any challenge to his perceived uniqueness in the field of detection, Bakshi, being

an Indian and an amateur inquisitor, maintains distance from imperial forces. It requires mention, in context of Binod's arrest, that while 'public misconduct' and 'getting into a fracas with the police' are punished by the imperial judiciary with a mere two- month imprisonment, any remote association with the nationalist movement in contemporary India was reprimanded by the same court with long term imprisonment and execution (39). Bandyopadhyay's reference to Binod's punishment might be interpreted as an instance of his criticism of British India's executive and judiciary in British India for their partiality and arbitrariness.

In narratives like The Sign of Four and "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" Doyle identifies the Orient with wickedness, chaos and destruction. A reversal of this Orientalist ideology is incorporated in the Byomkesh Bakshi canon. During the time when they are attacked by Prafulla Roy, Kailash Chandra Moulick is travelling in a European car driven by a chauffer in the Western convention (36) while Ashutosh Mitra is carrying a European pocket watch (40). That the same watch protects Mitra symbolically implies his having had gained affluence under the protection and the patronage of the Western colonisers (40). The Occidental connection to annihilation and chaos is further demonstrated when the gramophone pin is identified as one "of an ordinary Edison brand" (46) and when Prafulla Roy asks Ajit Bandyopadhyay to meet him at Kidderpore racecourse, an imperial construction, for murdering him (51). Incidentally, the custom of organising commercial horse races was initiated in India by the British colonisers.

While in the Sherlock Holmes stories like "The Final Problem" and "The Adventure of the Empty House" the air-gun is presented as a formidable and lethal weapon favoured by the members of James Moriarty's gang to commit murders, Bakshi satirises Ajit Bandyopadhyay's suspicion about its usage and refutes it as being "a novelty" (43). Thus Saradindu Bandyopadhyay projects his Bakshi narratives as being directly in opposition to conventions of Doyle's detective stories and decries the White author's conception of criminals as being unrealistic.

Bandyopadhyay reasserts the Indian identity of his detective stories and pits them against the Eurocentric narratives of Doyle, Agatha Christie and G.K.Chesterton when Bakshi relates the excellence of the gramophone pin murderer to Arjuna's shooting a fish in the eye by watching its reflection in water to wed Draupadi as narrated in The Mahabharata (44). While analysing the psychological traits of the professional killer, the inquisitor places himself in the position of an Indian and precisely judges the mentality of another Indian subaltern against the backdrop of an Indian epic initially without visiting the scene of crime.

Though Bakshi does not attach importance to the Holmesian empirical evidences, his scientific knowledge is underscored when Ajit Bandyopadhyay refers the "room next to the drawing room...[which serves as]...his library, laboratory, museum and dressing room" (44). However, whereas Holmes frequently conducts experiments in his laboratory or consults his scrap books in stories like A Study in Scarlet and "The Adventure of the Empty House", the Indian inquisitor

has never been shown as conducting chemical tests or referring to any such book. Bakshi's possessing the library-cum-laboratory is more a sign of his hybridity than its serving any real purpose.

In "The Gramophone Pin Mystery", Bandyopadhyay depicts an overwhelmingly Indian society by referring to such characters as the woman musician whom Ashutosh Mitra visits for musical soiree (45). Other than exposing the custom of women musicians doubling as prostitutes in pre-independence and early post-independence India, the author is in danger of complying with the Orientalist conception of the Eastern sexuality (Said, *Orientalism* 72) while he sensuously describes Mitra's mistress (*Picture* 45). On the other hand, the conservative Indian societal conventions and prejudices are cited when Ashutosh Mitra expresses his inability to marry his mistress because of her courtesan heritage (53).

Cultural hybridity in Bakshi is reasserted when he smokes a European cheroot (45) and exhibits an attraction for silk stockings while Ajit Bandyopadhyay waits for the assailant at Whiteway Laidlaw (50). On the other hand, Doyle's influence on Saradindu Bandyopadhyay is evinced by the facts that Bakshi maintains a complete aloofness while thinking over the details of his case (47) and Ajit Bandyopadhyay, like Watson, remains a besotted associate to the inquisitor praising him at every chance. Bakshi and Ajit Bandyopadhyay, like Holmes and Watson in "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton", disguise themselves before meeting the advertiser (48). Significantly, both the inquisitor and his associate disguise themselves as

Europeans (48, 50). It is also because of his European guise that Ajit Bandyopadhyay is able to avoid being interrogated by the police sergeant while loitering at Whiteway Laidlaw (49). Cultural hybridity is simultaneously demonstrated when even after dressing up as a European, Ajit Bandyopadhyay asks for a betel leaf (48) , the chewing of betel leaves being an Indian custom, and Bakshi impersonating as an Englishman speaks in "flawless Bangla" (50).

Through his characterisation of the corrupt lawyer Bilash Mullick the author satirises those Indians who had amassed money through fraudulent ways by collaborating with and under the protection of the British colonisers. Mullick has been depicted as a villain precisely because he has collaborated with the British imperialists and has exploited the imperial laws for his personal beneficence. Bakshi's irony against the efficiency and impartiality of the imperial law is prominent in his observation that Mullick's "rightful penalty would be death, [which] [,]...of course [,]...is not possible under...the[se]...circumstances" (55). Mullick establishing a liaison with Mitra's mistress at Jorashanko is also important because Jorashanko housed the residence of the Tagores whose heritage included a commercial and cultural collaboration with the imperialists (52).

Even Prafulla Roy is a hybrid character. While launching an attack on Ajit Bandyopadhyay he wears goggles and a black suit both of which were the colonial introductions (62). He not only uses a European bicycle and murders with a European Edison-brand gramophone pin, but also introduces himself as an "insurance

agent" when he goes to meet Bakshi at his house : insurance having been initiated and popularised in India by the British colonisers (55). Later he compares the situation of his standing under a specific lamppost waiting for the *thorn-in-the-flesh* advertiser to that of "a Santa under a Christmas tree" (57). On the other hand, like ordinary Indians he is addicted to betel-leaves (55), and symbolically uses the very Indian addiction as the mean to avoid his arrest at the hands of the imperial forces by committing suicide with a poisoned betel leaf (64-5).

Bakshi's affected insistence on Prafulla Roy's not consulting the police indicates his intended seclusion from the British police and his attempt to maintain his distinction as a private investigator (59). The Bengali detective "[has] not worked with the police ever, and do[es] not intend to start now" (59) in order to avoid being identified as a collaborator of the imperials forces that tortured the Indian revolutionaries. Bakshi's hybridised identity is re-demonstrated in his possessing a telephone – the Western gadget being rare in pre-independence India, his using "English phrases" to speak to the White police commissioner, and in his wearing black suit and rubber-soled shoes before apprehending Prafulla Roy (59-60). He even disguises Ajit Bandyopadhyay identifiably as an Anglo-Indian with "old moustache and French-cut beard" (60).

When he is captured, Prafulla Roy's admires Bakshi as "an artist of a far greater calibre" (64). This might be compared to Baron Dawson's praise of Holmes's acing prowess on the night before his execution as mentioned in "The

Adventure of the Mazarin Stone" (963). It also projects the influence of Doyle's Eurocentric sleuth narratives on Bandyopadhyay who confessedly adopts plots and conventions from such stories and reproduces them in an Oriental perspective, thereby asserting the polarity between the Indian and the English detective fiction (*Saradindu II* 648).

It is important that only in "The Gramophone Pin Mystery" among the thirty-three stories of the canon Saradindu Bandyopadhyay has introduced a White character – the British commissioner of Calcutta Police who converses with the inquisitor in English (Bandyopadhyay, *Saradindu I* 58). Approaching Roy with a handcuff even though he is dead, the commissioner exemplifies the amount of suspicion the British colonisers had had of the Indian populace (*Picture* 65).

While Sherlock Holmes never receives any official award from the British government, "The Gramophone Pin Mystery" concludes with references to Bakshi's receipt of an award from the imperial administrators for his success at the gramophone-pin-murder case. Even as he continues to oppose the Eurocentric conventions of detective fiction in his demeanour and dress, Bakshi insists on receiving the award apparently as a protector of the imperial interests which might be interpreted as a necessary prelude to resistance through cultural *collusion*. It also suggests his growing acquaintance with the British administrators as a step to achieve recognition of Holmes's magnitude. On the other hand, while reflecting on the British government's position vis-à-vis Roy, Bakshi poignantly refers to the imperial custom of hanging the Indians.

Answering Ajit Bandyopadhyay's query about the outcome of his meeting with the White police commissioner, Bakshi says,

> "To start with, he has thanked me on behalf of the police and the government; then, he has expressed his grief at Prafulla Roy's suicide – although this should have made him happy because it has saved the government a great deal of expense and labour. They would have had to prosecute and hang him, you know. Anyway, I shall no doubt receive the award from the government very soon; the Commissioner has informed me that he has arranged for my petition to be cleared as soon as I file it..." (68-9).

The British government's insistence upon acquiring Prafulla Roy's bicycle bell might be interpreted as the imperial consideration of any object belonging to the colony as the rightful property of the colonisers (69).

CHAPTER 5.C.

"WHERE THERE'S A WILL": -

"Arthamanartham", translated by Sreejata Guha as "Where There's a Will", was first published in 1934, and it is another of the four Byomkesh Bakshi narratives that contain traces of Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's anti-colonial ideology the most. The issue of the influence of the English novelists and detective story writers on the author is referred to when Bandyopadhyay mentions the name of a Eurocentric narrative, The Bride of Lammermoor, in course of story (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 93). On the other hand, he challenges the hegemony of the imperial sleuth-story writers by setting his own narrative in an exclusively Oriental locale and depicts his characters as belonging to Bengal and conforming to the Bengali societal norms.

The story, written during a period when the armed Indian struggle against the British colonisers had peaked in Bengal and Punjab, starts with Byomkesh Bakshi and Ajit Bandyopadhyay being summoned by Bidhubabu, the deputy police commissioner of Calcutta Police, to investigate the cause for Karali Charan Basu's murder (89). The police official represents that section of colonised Indians which had been collaborating with the imperial forces and helping them to apprehend people with nationalistic sentiments. Bandyopadhyay simultaneously depicts the policeman's subjugated state when Bakshi observes, "It was very apparent from his tone that he hasn't called me out of his own choice. Orders from…[the British superiors]…is more like it"

(88). Apart from indicating the subservience of the Indian law enforcement personnel to the White British administrators, the statement also depicts Bakshi's growing influence on the colonial police forces.

Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's portrait of Bidhubabu is understandably a mixture of satire and pathos. He himself states that he has rung Bakshi up because "the [White] chief ordered that ...[he]...be called in" and that as an Indian he could not "question why" his White superior has done so (90). Moreover, he is identifiably inferior to the Indian private investigator intellectually and in expertise but is forced to behave as being just the opposite. He is ostentatious and bombastic, and "in the course of charting out his own sterling qualities" he "let slip a lot of secret information from the police files" (89). In short, Bandyopadhyay paints the deputy police commissioner as a zombie-like figure under the procedural clauses of the British administration. Ajit Bandyopadhyay elucidates,

> "Bidhubabu had probably not been particularly dull in his younger days. The commitment and enthusiasm he still...[has is]... remarkable for a man of his age. But trapped in the monotony of routine police work, his brain...[has]...been rendered incapable of anything other than mechanical functioning. In his absence his colleagues referred to him as *Budhhubabu* – Mr. Stupid" (90).

Apart from underscoring the tactlessness and lack of efficiency of the colonial forces, Ajit Bandyopadhyay's above-quoted observation in extension grants Bakshi an insularity from the British-Indian policemen and from the contemporary conventions of European detectives (Bandyopadhyay, *Saradindu II* 647). While Bidhubabu helps the colonisers to perpetuate their domination of India by intimidating the nationalists, the inquisitor helps the police forces only to maintain law and order in colonised Calcutta against the subversive activities of the anti-socials. Importantly, it is because of his distinction from the White imperialists that he is harassed by the deputy police commissioner during his investigations (*Picture* 100-1).

In "Where There's a Will", Bakshi deals with the upper middle class Bengali family of Karali Charan Basu and his family members in contrast with Holmes whose clients usually belong to the aristocracy. Also, unlike Holmes's movements in privately-hired hansom cabs, the detective and his associate travel to a "prosperous place in north Calcutta" by public bus (90). On the other hand, the internal decorations of Basu's house indicate the residents' hybridity revealed in the combination of Indian decorative palms in clay pots and a European aquarium containing goldfishes. Ajit Bandyopadhyay describes,

> "From outside the two-storeyed house had appeared small, but inside it was quite spacious and well furnished, indicating that the owner was well-to-do. Large decorative palms stood in clay pots, gracing the hallway.

> Some goldfish were frolicking in a giant aquarium. The hallway led on three sides to rooms attached with balconies." (90).

Bidhubabu's method of conducting investigation by initially interrogating the domestic helps and other economically-underprivileged people, and the nature of the questions he asks the cook exhibit his conformity to the European formulae for investigation and interrogation (91-2). Trained by the colonisers to be incredulous and suspicious about the Indians, the deputy police commissioner orders all his colleagues to vacate the room before he could narrate the details of Basu's murder to Bakshi and Ajit Bandyopadhyay (92). Through such instances the author also paints realistic pictures of colonised India.

Bakshi's encyclopaedic knowledge about the human physiology as well as literature, reminiscent of Holmes's formidable scientific and Orientalist education, is revealed when he exhibits acquaintance with the process of murdering people by sticking needles at the meeting point of the medulla oblongata and the first cervical vertebra, and refers to Walter Scott's The Bride of Lammermoor (1819) to cite instances of murder for revenge (93). He is also drawn to the evidence and effects of chloroform on human body (96). Significantly, while Holmes's supplements his medical knowledge by conducting practical experiments in his laboratory, Bakshi's knowledge is principally accumulated from texts identifiably written by White Westerners. Bakshi's education imbibed with Orientalist prejudices is, therefore,

defective in comparison to Holmes's and nowhere else does he demonstrate his medical knowledge.

The bedroom of Karali Charan Basu decorated in the Oriental style is depicted as being in contrast to the drawing room with the European aquarium and goldfishes:

> "It was a medium-sized room, sparsely but neatly furnished. A Mirzapuri carpet covered the floor. In the centre of the room there was a teapoy covered with an embroidered tablecloth; in one corner there was a clothes-horse – a folded dhoti and kurta hung on it and polished shoes were arranged in a row below it" (95).

The dhoti and kurta asserts the Bengali identity of the murdered occupant of the room. On the other hand, that Basu had been "quite a prosperous gentleman [,]...[owned]...four or five houses in Calcutta, and...[had]...several lakhs in the bank" suggests his previous collaboration with the colonisers to secure his own prosperity (93). Phonibhusan Kar describes that Basu had "very testy disposition" and "did not "wear his heart on his sleeve" (104). These behavioural traits seem to attest the European conception about the Oriental cunningness and excesses (Said, *Orientalism* 38, 57). On the other hand, he followed the European convention of making wills and deciding his beneficiary by "go[ing]...tap-tap on the typewriter", typewriter being a West-invented gadget (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 104). Thus Basu is perceptively a hybrid character who serves

to accentuate Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's anti-colonial resistance by *resisting* through his cultural ambiguity.

Just as Holmes cautiously examines Enoch J. Drebber's corpse in A Study in Scarlet, the Bengali inquisitor meticulously studies the dead body of Karali Charan Basu (96). But while Holmes's assumptions are based on his analysis of the post-mortem conditions of the body, its position, and an examination of the adjacent areas of the crime for evidences like cigar's ash and footprints left behind by criminals, Bakshi's approach to investigation is psychological. Perceptively exhibiting the Indian fear of and prejudice against corpses, Bakshi moves away form the dead body quickly – an instance that fortifies the Bengali identity of the story (96-7).

The effect of the British system of education on subaltern populace has been exemplified in Sukumar's medical studies and his sister Satyabati's college education (94). The system of education that forces Sukumar to consult books like Gray's Anatomy and others written by White imperial authors was actually directed to make him a *conforming* colonised individual bereft of the powers of objectively understanding his dominated predicament and resisting (98). Naturally, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay has portrayed him as a weak character and in the Byomkesh Bakshi narratives that follow Sukumar never appears as harbouring nationalistic sentiments, thereby never posing any danger for the British colonisers. On the other hand, Satyabati's colonial education identifiably helps her to comprehend instance of her *Otherness* in her being a dominated Oriental woman incorporates. She is, therefore, a strong character who

is a lethal source of danger for the British colonisers characteristically without proper knowledge of the Indian female psychology.

Significantly, Arthur Conan Doyle never provides vivid physical descriptions of women in the Sherlock Holmes stories. Even the perceptively voluptuous Irene Adler has been depicted with dignified restraint in "A Scandal in Bohemia". In contrast, Bandyopadhyay minutely paints the physicality of his female protagonists. In his description of Satyabati in "Where There's a Will", Shakuntala Singh in "Bonhi Patango" and Mohini Das in "Kahen Kabi Kalidas", the writer appears to demonstrate a sensuousness characteristically linked by the Orientalists to the Easterners (Said, *Orientalism* 72). Doyle's conformed to the codes of *Victorian prudery* and insisted on the maintenance of Eurocentric etiquettes, and these might have prevented him from indulging in sensual descriptions of major women characters. No under the obligation of maintain such restraints, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay describes Satyabati in nine sentences that impart her beauty with a strangeness that the White colonisers characteristically associate with the Orient (*Orientalism* 72). Ajit Bandyopadhyay writes,

> "About half a minute later a seventeen or eighteen-year-old girl opened the door and on seeing us, moved aside. With hesitant steps we walked in. Sukumar, who had followed us, went and collapsed on the bed wearily. I had taken a look at the girl when we entered. She was slender, dark and tall. Incessant weeping had turned her eyes red and her face slightly puffy. Hence it was impossible to tell whether she was pretty or not. Her hair was

> tangled and unkempt. While I felt annoyed with Byomkesh for being cruel enough to cross-examine this grief-stricken girl, it was clear that there was a deliberate design lurking behind the somewhat hesitant manner he had decided to put on" (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 100).

When Satyabati visits Bakshi's house, her beauty is more elaborately described and her power of resilience underscored:

> "I had seen Satyabati only once; she had not seemed different in any way from the average educated Bengali girl. Hence, it was remarkable, even unthinkable, that in a time of crisis she would shake off all inhibitions and come to us so directly. When calamity strikes, the greater percentage of Bengali girls turn into wooden dolls. This lanky, dusky girl suddenly acquired a wondrous halo in my eyes. From the tip of her old, dusty, gold-threaded slippers to the ends of her tangled, carelessly-wound plait, everything about her seemed to glow with an unearthly light" (112).

The urgency of this description imparts to Satyabati a certain power and prepares her to become a befitting companion to the anti-colonial inquisitor.

In the Byomkesh Bakshi stories written after 1936, women have been more vividly described and given more pro-active roles, though Satyabati is always shown as a compassionate companion in whom Bakshi finds comfort

and source of sustenance. The writer's association with the Hindi celluloid world as a Bombay-based scriptwriter between 1938 and 1952 led him to employ the female characters with increased vividness in order to add elements of sex-interest, suspense and melodrama to his narratives at an increased level.

Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's depiction of Satyabati in "Where There's a Will" also exemplifies the domination of women in the patriarchal Indian society of the 1930s. Her guardianship is passed from Karali Charan Basu to Sukumar (104), and thereafter to her lover Byomkesh Bakshi (128). Though she has been presented in various roles – that of a beloved in "Where There's a Will", a wife in "Picture Imperfect", or a mother in "Durgo Rahoshyo" – but in all these narratives she is present more physically than intellectually. Bakshi does not consult minutes of investigation with her, and she never goes out unaccompanied except out of sheer despair in "Where There's a Will" (111-6). She travels alone in "Bishupal Badh", but then she has reached an advanced age (Bandyopadhyay, *Byomkesh* 981). She also does not share any outdoor adventure with Bakshi and Ajit Bandyopadhyay. Satyabati's presence in the Byomkesh Bakshi stories is intermittently asserted through speeches that do not possess any link to the main investigative process. Thus she demonstrates domination and patronisation of women in Oriental societies, which could be compared with Doyle's denial of any important part to the female characters of in his Sherlock Holmes stories. Dalim, the only other woman in "Where There's a Will", is a prostitute whom Motilal Kar sleeps with, and has been denied physical presence as well as speeches (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 105).

While Bidhubabu warns Bakshi against "discredit[ing] the police" because he is "not [a] part of the force", the inquisitor reprimands the deputy commissioner for interfering with his investigation, thus demonstrating the disadvantage of *his* being a part of the imperial forces (100). Importantly, the Bengali investigator came to be recognised as an indispensable associate of the official law enforcement department in stories written after the Indian independence in 1947, for example, in "Achin Pakhi" (Bandyopadhyay, *Byomkesh* 660). Although in "Where There's a Will" he maintains an insularity from the imperial forces, he perceptively enjoys a rapport with the White police commissioner and exhibits how, in spite of being a colonised individual, he achieved recognition from the imperialists. While expressing his displeasure with Bidhubabu, he shows acquaintance with the functioning of different departments of the imperial forces and his anger identifiably emanates from his awareness of the subaltern official's helplessness under the British administration. Ajit Bandyopadhyay reports,

> "At this point the mask of politeness slipped from Byomkesh's face. Like a wounded tiger he whirled on Bidhubabu and in a murderous but low tone, said, 'If you continue to hinder me I shall be compelled to inform the Commissioner that you are interfering with my investigation. Are you aware that such cases do not fall under the domain of the general police – it comes under the C.I.D?'" (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 101).

The hostile relationship between Bakshi and Bidhubabu is reminiscent of that between Sherlock Holmes and Lestrade of the Scotland Yard.

In his capacity as an Indian subaltern, a group to which Satyabati herself belongs, Bakshi precisely judges her character and refutes Ajit Bandyopadhyay's keeping her out of the purview of committing murders. He opines, "When a[n]...[Indian]...woman loves somebody, there is nothing she would stop at for him...Satyabati is certainly no ordinary person" (107). On the other hand, Bandyopadhyay realistically depicts Satyabati as a vulnerable Bengali woman in her making no effort to conceal her tears whereas no woman in the Sherlock Holmes stories ever cries (112). Her passionate defence of her brother is based more on intuition and assumptions than on logical reasoning (112-3). With the amalgamation of average appearance and latent sexuality, and conscious defiance and careless beauty in her character and appearance, Satyabati remains the most flawlessly drawn Indian woman in Bandyopadhyay's detective narratives and presents an ideal contrast to White women in Doyle, Christie and Chesterton. The romance between the inquisitor and Satyabati, commencing with her visiting Bakshi's house (111-6) and culminating in their daily courtship (127-8), is unique to Bandyopadhyay's among all the contemporary Indian detective fiction. In an unmatched instance, Bakshi even describes the beauty of her eyes through lines of poetry (117). While stories like "Where There's a Will", "Bonhi Patango" and "Shanjarur Kanta" could be simultaneously read for their love interests, the Sherlock Holmes's stories remain principally focussed on the monothematic investigation.

While Sherlock Holmes follows the Eurocentric custom of visiting theatre-houses and concerts to relax, Ajit Bandyopadhyay asserts that Byomkesh Bakshi likes neither films nor plays and the orchestra remains an overwhelmingly Western form of entertainment (118). The inquisitor also identifies himself as an Indian middle-class believer when he refers to his faith in the lunar ascendancy and in the horoscope prepared by Bhattacharyya, a Bengali astrologer (118). Importantly, Holmes's scientific approach prevents him from consulting horoscopes in any story of the canon. Bakshi displays a trust in the Bengali proverb that people with large ears are perceptively straightforward to the point of foolishness, when he "look[s] attentively at Bidhubabu's large ears, as if he...expect[s]...these to perform some new trick at any moment", thereby also implying that the deputy police commissioner's arrests, interrogations and lectures have been arbitrary and foolish (119).

The will that Karali Charan Basu prepares in favour of Phonibhusan Kar follows the European format and standards for property-transfer promulgated in India by the British colonisers (119-20). Understandably, the date has been mentioned according to the Christian calendar: "...this Twenty-second day of September, Nineteen Thirty-three (by the Christian calendar)..." (119). When the detective points out the invalidity of the will because of the lack of witnesses' signatures , he demonstrates an acquaintance with the proprietorship laws in British India and uses them to prevent mischief being done to the Indians (123).

The Bengali identity of "Where There's a Will" and the other Byomkesh Bakshi narratives is asserted in the male protagonists' addressing each other with the Bengali salutation, "babu" – customarily applied to denote a gentleman. It is also important a distinction that while Holmes in stories such as A Study in Scarlet, The Sign of Four, "The Adventure of the Empty House" and "The Adventure of the Three Garridebs" uses physical force to overpower the criminals, the Bengali detective gives half an hour to Phonibhusan Kar to spend alone in his room while preparing himself mentally to court arrest (123).

Bakshi satirises the contemporary British judicial system for providing channels to the *real* criminals to get away even as it punishes the Indian revolutionaries: "And that is our only hope because his crime will be very difficult to prove in court. You know what juries are like – they are only too eager to give a verdict of 'not guilty'!" (124). Importantly, Phonibhusan Kar exhibits a vulnerability characteristically associated to the Indians by the Orientalists when he commits suicide by slashing his wrist but not by shooting or drugging or hanging himself, which would have normally occurred in Eurocentric detective fiction.

At the conclusion of the story, Bakshi re-identifies himself as an Indian gentleman by dressing himself in silk *kurta*-s and carrying perfumed handkerchiefs (127-8). He plays with Satyabati's name in a Bengali perspective by likening his courtship with her to his quest for "satya", the Bengali equivalent for truth (128).

CHAPTER 5.D.

"PICTURE IMPERFECT": -

The action of "Picture Imperfect", originally published as "Chitrochor" in 1952, occurs in an India that is still under the British colonial control. Actually, "Aadim Ripu" (1955) was the first Byomkesh Bakshi narrative to be presented in context of post-independence India. In this narrative too, like the three others dealt with before, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay has registered his anti-imperil ideology by presenting various aspects that focus on the colonial exploitation of his country and refute the conventions of the Eurocentric detective stories of the West.

The story starts with the author's reference to the European punctuality of Satyabati Bakshi that exhibited in her bringing cups of pomegranate juice to an ailing Byomkesh Bakshi. Ajit Bandyopadhyay observes,

> "I glanced at the clock; it was exactly four o' clock. The clock could be set by Satyabati and her ministrations" (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 195).

It should be mentioned that the first chapter of Dracula (1897) contains the famous Orientalist observation on the lack of punctuality in the East. After rushing to catch the train to Transylvania from Klausenburgh, Jonathan Harker, Bram Stoker's imperial

spokesman, comments, "It seems to me that the further east you go the more unpunctual are the trains. What ought they to be in China?" (Stoker 3).

The easy chair used by Bakshi during his illness is a European-designed furniture (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 195). Similarly, when Satyabati implores him to drink the pomegranate juice because "it'll increase...[his]...blood count", she reasserts her education under the British system as already mentioned in "Where There's a Will" (102) and the role of colonial education in updating Indians with the latest inventions in medical sciences and health care (195). Bakshi's menu comprises of chicken broth and toast, which again conforms to the European standards of diet for the sick (195).

It is important that in spite of her European education and enlightened state, Satyabati does not give primacy to her personal works at the cost of her attention for her husband. She rather exhibits a typical Indian feminine mentality in neglecting her own health to nurse Bakshi (195). Her concern is further demonstrated when on the way to Mahidhar Choudhury's house, she "tenderly wrap[s] a shawl snugly around...[Bakshi]...[,]...so that he wouldn't catch a chill" (198). Through the combination of her colonial education and her conformity to the Indian societal norms, Satyabati Bakshi exhibits her cultural hybridity.

During the period of temporarily lodging in the Santhal Parganas, Byomkesh Bakshi, Ajit Bandyopadhyay, Satyabati Bakshi and the other

Bengali residents of the province form a symbolic Diaspora. Significantly, the inquisitor and his family members seek acquaintance especially with people like Professor Adinath Shome and Dr. Ashwini Ghatak, who traditionally belong to the class of intelligentsia (196). This could be interpreted as the educated subalterns' process of intimidating colonial encroachments through post-union intellectual, literary and societal resistances. The ambivalence of such a society is simultaneously reflected in the story. While Mahidhar Choudhury follows the European custom of organising tea parties and the rickshaw pullers exhibits their European punctuality by arriving "exactly at four thirty" to carry Bakshi and his family to Choudhury's mansion, it is important that the characters use the very Indian "rickshaw" itself (197). It is, therefore, in stark contrast with the Sherlock Holmes narratives where the detective and his associate customarily use hansom cabs and phaetons.

In course of his description of the contemporary Santhal Parganas, the author expresses his satisfaction with a class of Bengalis that had occasionally and sparingly collaborated with the British colonisers for accumulating wealth through trade while simultaneously resisting the imperialists economically, intellectually and culturally. Bandyopadhyay's writes, "...Nearly all the prosperous families in the area were Bengalis" (198). Having referred to "the presence of...mica mines", he relates them to the Bengali settlers' affluence to indicate how through trade and commerce the Bengali settlers in Bihar had gradually transformed themselves into a formidable economic force for the British imperialists to reckon with (198).

While describing the Santhal Parganas, Bandyopadhyay presents a placid atmosphere and deceptively conceals the Anglophobic agitations and violence prevalent in late pre-independence India. The Indian author exhibits a tendency to eschew any violent anti-colonial approach and advocates literary and cultural *collusion* – indiscreet resistance through the presentation of an exclusively subaltern culture and literature that all together banishes the colonisers from their purviews even in the pre-independence milieu.

Mahidhar Choudhury's mansion, with the gymnasium, tennis court and garages, identifiably follows the European architectural pattern (198). His landlordship in pre-1947 India has been realistically depicted as overtly dependent on the British colonisers. Prior to independence, such landlordships as Choudhury's were actually British protectorates. The British administrators who benefited from such arrangements have been satirically referred to as "nabobs" by George Macaulay Trevelyan. He writes,

> "Th[is]...nickname was given to those...who had exploited the...[colonial]...conquests...with an unscrupulous greed...The 'nabobs' raised the price of Parliamentary seats and made themselves otherwise objectionable to the old-established aristocratic society into which they intruded with their outlandish ways." (391).

The guests Choudhury invites to his tea party – Ushanath Ghosh, the local treasurer, Purandar Pandey, the district superintendent of police, and Amaresh Raha, the manager of the local bank – are people whose professions allowed them to exert influence upon the British administrators and thus could have become potential sources for sustaining an Indian resistance through cultural *collusion.*

In his description of Ushanath Ghosh, an Indian administrative employee of the British government, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay perceptively evokes a strangeness that the Orientalists characteristically associate with the Orientals (Said, *Orientalism* 72). His dark complexion, dark spectacles, muffled voice and grim smile make his appearance mysterious (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 199). Importantly, Bandyopadhyay has assigned a Bengali identity to all the characters of the narrative. While Mahidhar Choudhury, Amaresh Raha, Ashwini Ghatak and Phalguni Paul are identifiably Bengali in name and behaviour, Purandar Pandey speaks the Bengali language fluently and prefers the company of the Bengalis (200). Thus the police official is subsumed into the subaltern culture and exhibits hybridity in context of the Indian social, regional and lingual divisions. Malati Shome typifies an ordinary Bengali lady in her blazing scarlet South Indian silk saree, diamond and gold jewellery and her continuous suspicion of her husband for extra-marital affairs (202). On the other hand, when Raha mentions that the arrival of Christmas and New Year leads to the increase in work pressure at the bank he manages, he actually points out the colonial influence upon the culture of the educated Indians who have been subsumed into the traditionally Western celebrations (201).

It is significant that immediately upon learning about the theft of Choudhury's group photograph Pandey indicts the Santhals for stealing it (203). While doing so, the deputy superintendent of police is guided by his perception of the usual lack of awareness, education and etiquette among such tribal people. More importantly, he betrays a prejudice against the dark complexion of the Santhals. Because the police officer is "handsome" according to the Indian standards, he must have been fair-complexioned (200). In his practising discrimination against the dark Santhals, Pandey only re-enacts and exemplifies the characteristic aversion of the White Westerners towards to the dark Orientals and acts as the author's spokesperson for vindicating the real attitude of the British colonisers towards the common Indians.

With his dress of "a scruffy dhoti and cotton shirt" Phalguni Paul typifies an impoverished Indian (204). However, Bandyopadhyay's irony against the Indian collaborators of the colonisers is revealed when he makes the Bengali artist superior in intellectual faculties to Choudhury, Ghosh and Pandey. Choudhury's offering Paul a ten-rupee note for his artistic excellence indicates the progressive devaluation of the art and the artist in late pre-independence India (205).

In "Picture Imperfect" Byomkesh Bakshi re-demonstrates his preference for psychoanalysis to analysis of empirical evidences for identifying criminals. His deduction that Phalguni Paul is an alcoholic by choice and not by avarice

is based on his two such observations: the inexplicable slackness of the artist's lips and his avoidance of looking at food at the tea party. Bakshi explains,

> "First of all...[,]...[I deduced that he is an alcoholic]...from his lips. If you notice an alcoholic's lips, you'll find that they are distinctive: a trifle moist, a little slack – I can't quite describe them but I can identify them when I see them. Second, if Phalguni were famished, he would have looked at the food on the table yearningly; there was still quite a spread upon the table, you remember. But Phalguni did not even spare the food a second glance." (206).

Such a deductive analysis is exactly in opposition to Holmes's approach to detection. The British investigator does not try deciphering the character of a newly-introduced person without first minutely examining the physical details of his or her possessions. For example, he analyses the character of Henry Baker in "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" and that of James Mortimer in The Hound of the Baskervilles by carefully examining the felt hat and a Penang walking stick, respectively (Doyle, *The Complete* 183, 430). Bakshi also applies psychoanalysis to explain sexual jealousy among human beings – a subject that Doyle never deals with in his Sherlock Holmes narratives. Referring to the story of an over-protective male ape in a zoo, the Bengali inquisitor goes on to prove that his wife would abhor the physical proximity between him and Rajani Choudhury because of sexual jealously, while simultaneously mentioning like a conservative Bengali middle-class individual that the jealousy shows up whenever there

is a free interaction between men and women. Commenting on the primate's aggressive behaviour, he explains to Satyabati,

> "This isn't smartness, it's emotion; in simpler terms, it's sexual jealousy. And I hope you will not deny that this is a streak that runs in humans as well. It is certainly present in men, but perhaps even more so in women. If I were to get too close to Mahidharbabu's daughter, Rajani, you wouldn't like it, would you?" (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 207).

While saying so, Bakshi exhibits his acquaintance with the precise psychology of the Indian women in his position of as an Indian male. The issue of sexual jealousy is further exemplified in Bandyopadhyay's portrayal of the suspicious nature of Malati Shome displayed in her open animosity to Rajani Choudhury (208) and later, to Satyabati Bakshi (223).

As an Indian, the author provides substantial details of the Hindu customs that including the issue of the characteristic aversion of the Hindu males to remarrying widows, and a belief that as an Indian widow is expected to demonstrate her widowhood by wearing white sarees, cropping her hair short and avoiding non-vegetarian food items (208-9). On the other hand, being a Bengali himself, he depicts how ordinary Bengali women occasionally indulge in slandering others. While Malati Shome vituperatively decries Rajani for dressing up gaudily in spite of her widowhood "to trap…men" (209), Satyabati Bakshi curses Shome to "rot in hell forever"

when the latter suspects her of adulterous ventures (223). In presenting an Indian society with all the societal customs, formalities and prejudices prominently depicted in stark contrast with the conventions of the European society of the Sherlock Holmes narratives, and in his total exclusion of the White colonisers from a narrative set in pre-independence India, Bandyopadhyay posits a subaltern *resistance text* against the Eurocentric detective stories produced by Doyle, Christie and Chesterton. Even Ushanath Ghosh's White superiors are never physically introduced to readers.

Adinath Shome's narrative about Rajani Choudhury's briefly-married husband exemplifies the early-twentieth century Oriental dream of being subsumed in the rich Occidental society that, ironically, has had gained affluence through commercial exploitation of the Oriental resources (209). For the Easterners the European imperial centre remains a utopia, and by sponsoring his son in law's tour to Britain Mahidhar Choudhury behaves as a collaborating Indian who has gained prominence and ostentation under the patronage of the colonisers and shares an affinity for the West (209). Adinath Shome is himself an Indian with an imperial British training (209). Significantly, both these Indians have been shown as suffering. While Rajani's husband dies in an air-crash en route to England, Shome is being constantly harassed by his domineering wife.

"Picture Imperfect", like other Byomkesh Bakshi narratives, is replete with references to the psychological traits typical to the common Indians. Malati Shome, for example, tears off her husband's group photograph in which he stood beside Rajani Choudhury (210). Rajani's secret courtship with Ashwini Ghatak

through instances like slipping folded notes in his pocket (210) and conversing with him in whisper in her garden (220-1) is a realistically-depicted picture of improbable lovers in the conservative Indian society. While Doyle, with the exception of the Jefferson Hope-Lucy Ferrier courtship in A Study in Scarlet (Doyle, *The Complete* 39), does not describe details of love-relationship, Bandyopadhyay vividly paints conversations of lovers as well as married couples in stories like "Picture Imperfect" (Rajani Choudhury-Ashwini Ghatak), "Bonhi Patango" (Shakuntala Singh-Ratikanta Choudhury), Deepa Mukherjee-Probal Gupta and Deepa Mukherjee-Debashish Bhatta ("Shanjarur Kanta"), and imparts to his narratives a distinction from Doyle's detective stories.

In course of his description of Ushanath Ghosh's reticence at getting photographed with Shome, Rajani Choudhury and Amaresh Raha, Adinath Shome explains that Ghosh "is especially in awe of his superiors in the [contemporary British] government" and that the colonial "government wouldn't like it if a civil servant associated too freely with commoners" (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 211). He thus underscores the British government's insistence on the maintenance of its employees' insularity from the general Indians lest they come to harbour nationalistic sentiments and disclose details of the colonial administration to the revolting Indians. In a footnote to the original version of the narrative, the writer himself explains Ghosh's anti-Indian mentality through a poignant statement, "The British colonisers were still ruling India during that time" (Bandyopadhyay, *Byomkesh* 257). Such rigorous concealment of the basic aspects of colonial governance helped the imperialists to perpetuate their domination of the Indian natives. Similarly, Pandey's free association with the Indian

intelligentsia even after his being a government official might be explained as the colonial strategy of keeping the colonised individuals under surveillance through regular interaction to detect signs of nationalistic sentiments that characteristically emanated from the educated subaltern populace.

Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's depiction of conjugal strife between Adinath and Malati Shome, and between Bakshi and Satyabati is a realistic portrayal of the domestic situations of average Indian families (Bandyopadhyay, *Picture* 214-5). Bakshi exhibits his adherence to patriarchal norms when he blames the Bengali women for domestic discords, even as he exposes the insecurity of such women:

> "And your sympathies are always with the woman. Failing to win their husbands' love, women are torn by jealousy, and yet they have no sense of how they can make their husbands love them..." (214).

On the other hand, Ajit Bandyopadhyay's observations regarding his celibacy pit the Byomkesh Bakshi narratives in direct opposition to the Sherlock Holmes stories (232). In the latter canon, Holmes himself remains a celibate while Watson marries Mary Morstan. Bound by the norms of European etiquette, the British investigator never reflects upon his own avoidance of marriage while Ajit Bandyopadhyay easily gives vent to his personal feelings.

Similar to "Where There's a Will", Byomkesh Bakshi, in "Picture Imperfect", exhibits cultural hybridity in his dress. He combines dhoti and punjabee with a pair of European socks when he and Ajit Bandyopadhyay visit Ushanath Ghosh's residence in the civil servants' colony that is symbolically segregated from the locality of ordinary Indians through a compound wall (215-6). But in exception to "the little figurine of a fairy, gilded with silver [that] the magistrate's wife had presented" him, Ghosh's house is without any decorative European furniture and thus stands in stark contrast with the elaborately furnished rooms of the Sherlock Holmes narratives (217). The civil servant's fear of losing his job because of his physical deformity stresses the characteristic ruthlessness of the colonial government in treating its subaltern employees even in cases of handicaps (218).

While spying on the nocturnal activities of Adinath and Malati Shome, Ajit Bandyopadhyay symbolically approaches Watson's role in providing efficient assistance to the detective (223-4). By presenting a collage of mysterious characters in darkness, Bandyopadhyay approaches Doyle's narrative technique in The Hound of the Baskervilles. But while Watson actually embarks upon physical adventures involving strenuous movements, actions and dangers, Ajit Bandyopadhyay remains a distant spectator and, significantly, does not move or act readily.

Amaresh Raha's process of murdering Phalguni Paul also gives an Indian context to the narrative and distinguishes it from the general European crime stories. While Raha first opiates Paul and thereafter disposes him in a

well (247), European criminals in the Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot stories use guns, knives, poison or lassos to readily dispatch their victims.

It is important that troubles occur only when the principal characters of "Picture Imperfect" intend to leave for the imperial metropolis of Calcutta at the climax of the story (242-3). This might be interpreted as the author's postcolonial response against the affinity of the general colonised populace for the imperial metropolis. With the exception of Pandey, Bandyopadhyay presents characters associated with the colonisers as defective or evil. While the French cut beard-sporting Amaresh Raha, employed as a manager in a British-controlled bank, is a murderous villain (228), Ushanath Ghosh has been portrayed as cowardly and lacking in self-respect (199-200). Mahidhar Choudhury's estate is a British protectorate; he owns an eight cylinder European car, and exhibits an Occidental punctuality while sending it Bakshi's lodging "at nine o' clock sharp" (241). Thus linked to the colonisers, he exhibits a hypocritical prejudice against widow-remarriage even though the concerned widow is his own daughter (244). Ironically, he had married Rajani Choudhury off at fourteen, and after she becomes a widow, keeps her dressed up as an unmarried lady (208-9).

In spite of being a private investigator without any compulsion to disclose his deductions, Byomkesh Bakshi does not reveal the name of Phalguni Paul's murderer until the end of the narrative. This is an instance of Bandyopadhyay's adherence to the norms of the European detective stories where a communication gap is sustained between the intelligent detective and his comparatively

unintelligent foil until the climax. Bakshi's action might be reviewed in perspective of the European-initiated custom of maintaining investigative secrecy by the investigating officials. The inquisitor strategically reposes his trust in the power of the imperial police to coax Mahidhar Choudhury into lending him his eight-cylinder car during his final departure to capture Raha (238). On the other hand, the writer denies a pro-active role to the British policemen when Bakshi single-handedly approaches the bank manager at the railway station to apprehend him (243). By committing suicide Raha not only avoids detention by the colonisers and but also negates the role of the colonial judiciary in judging a member of the subaltern. Raha's possession of an arms licence underscores the system in British-India of issuing licensed firearms to bank and treasury officials to enable them protecting themselves from the Indian nationalists who frequently raided banks and post offices to collect funds for sustaining their freedom movements (243).

Byomkesh Bakshi's description of the deductive steps he followed to identify Amaresh Raha as the criminal at the end of the narrative (244-8) closely resembles the Sherlockian process of elimination – "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth" expressed in The Sign of Four (Doyle, *The Complete* 66). However, while Sherlock Holmes vindicates his deductions through rigorous outdoor adventures, Bakshi relies only upon psychological analyses to arrive at infallible conclusions.