CHAPTER 7.

CONCLUSION:

Commenting on the "truth value" of a fictional text in The Mirror and the Lamp, Meyer Howard Abrams opines that *fictional sentences* (italics mine) should be regarded as referring to a special world *created* by the author that is analogous to the real world, but possesses its own setting, beings and mode of coherence (Abrams, *The Mirror* 272-85). In the Sherlock Holmes and Byomkesh Bakshi canons, Arthur Conan Doyle and Saradindu Bandyopadhyay have also created their respective personal worlds containing their personal creations : the detectives, their associates, the police officials and the criminals, and private settings: the indigenous plots facilitating actions of the detectives and other important characters. However, the locales of actions in these narratives are real cities: the British imperial locus of London and the subaltern metropolis of Calcutta in British-India. The London in Doyle presents a faithful picture of the metropolis in late-Victorian and Edwardian periods when the British colonialism had reached its zenith, whereas Bandyopadhyay's Calcutta continues to assert its position as the former capital of British-India (until 1911) where the armed Indian resistance against the colonisers culminated in the 1930s and which, since then, had been witness to almost all the social, cultural and intellectual upheavals of late pre-independence and early post-independence India. Moreover, in context of Abram's observation, no incoherent situation, with the exception of "Shaiylo Rahoshyo", is found either in the Sherlock Holmes or Byomkesh Bakshi stories. It might, therefore, be postulated that both Doyle's and Bandyopadhyay's

narratives possess the Abrams-ian "truth value", and command relevance as principal representatives of the sub-genre of detective fiction.

According to Ajit Kumar Banerjee, the detective fiction is a "middle class art and taste" (244). He quotes at length from Howard Haycroft's observations on the ingredients of the sub-genre in Murder for Pleasure: The Life and times of the Detective Story (1942):

> "The transcendent and eccentric detective, the admiring slightly stupid foil; the well-mentioned blundering and unimaginativeness of the official guardians of law; the locked-room convention, the pointing finger of unjust suspicion; the solution of surprise, deduction by putting one's self in another position...[;]... concealment by means of the ultra-obvious; the staged ruse to force the culprit's hand...the expansive and condescending explanation when the chase is done..." (244-5).

In course of vindicating the fiction's 'middle-class' identity, Banerjee explains,

> "The detective novel has the distinction of celebrating not deeds but the human reason. Its heroic elements consist in the battle of the wits between the detective and criminal and atmospheric elements (pursuit and chase in the urban labyrinth). It is a pastime literature which celebrates the intellectual rather than the deeds" (245).

In context of Banerjee's observations, the Byomkesh Bakshi stories could be identified as more conforming to middle-class taste and hence appear nearer to the realm of *proper* detective fiction than the Sherlock Holmes narratives. Byomkesh Bakshi identifiably belongs to the middle class, and lives a mundane life in Calcutta with Satyabati, his son Khoka, and Ajit Bandyopadhyay, and in most of his adventures he deals with the problems typical to Bengali middle class and in rare cases upper middle-class people. In contrast, Doyle never clarifies Holmes's position on the British social helix even as most of his clients belong to the aristocratic sections of the British society. Though Holmes and Watson start as boarders in a rented flat on 221B Baker Street, London, it is important that Doyle never specifies the condition and sources of Holmes's monetary reserves. Watson, however, details on his financially underprivileged condition in A Study in Scarlet:

> "I had neither kith nor kin in England, and was therefore as free as air – or as free as an income of eleven shillings and six pence a day will permit a man to be. Under such circumstances I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the empire are irresistibly drained. There I stayed for sometime at a private hotel in the Strand, leading a comfortless, meaningless existence, and spending such money as I had considerably more freely than I ought. So alarming did the state of my finances become that I soon realised that I must either leave the metropolis and rusticate somewhere in the country, or that I must make

> a complete alteration in my style of living. Choosing the latter alternative, I began by making up my mind to leave the hotel, and to take up my quarters in some less pretentious and less expensive domicile" (Doyle, *The Complete* 13).

Although Stamford informs Watson that Sherlock Holmes is willing to share a "suite in Baker Street" identifiably because of financial constraints, the investigator never appears to suffer from low monetary reserves in the other fifty-nine narratives (13).

Banerjee's characterisation of the detective novel as celebrating the human reason and not deeds appears, once again, to apply more exclusively to the Byomkesh Bakshi stories than the Sherlock Holmes narratives because the Bengali inquisitor gives primacy to psychoanalytical approaches where as Holmes depends on strenuous outdoor adventures and minute examination of the physical evidences. On the other hand, Haycroft's observations perceptively appear more relevant in the European context and applicable primarily to the English and French detective stories. It, therefore, applies that the Eurocentric English detective fiction and the Indian detective stories possess indigenous and distinctive characteristic features which appear relevant only when they are judged in the Western and Eastern social perspectives.

Importantly, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay was the first Indian litterateur in colonial India to use his native detective narratives for the first for counteracting and negating the perceptive uniqueness and omnipotence of the Eurocentric

detective stories. It deserves mention that while early Indian detective stories written by Priyanath Mukhopadhyay, Panchkari Dey and Dinendra Kumar Roy testified to the direct influence of style and methodology of Orientalists like Doyle, Christie and Chesterton that actually subsumed their narratives in the realm of colonial literature, Bandyopadhyay successfully manipulated his Byomkesh Bakshi stories to assert his nationalistic sentiments and demonstrate basic errors inherent in the imperially compatible narratives.

Sherlock Holmes, to reiterate, is a typical British citizen who adheres to a strictly European lifestyle and food habits and who boasts that he is "the only one in the world...[:]...a consulting detective" (Doyle, *The Complete* 18). His self-assurance and confidence that border on pride make him refute every eminent literary character like Dupin and Gaboriau and scientific hypothesis like the Copernican theory that do not emanate from Britain or cater to the British imperial ideology (Doyle, *The Complete* 16). In the Holmes canon he explicitly identifies himself as a subject of the British Crown, whose chief responsibility is to ensure continuation of peace and prosperity in the imperial locus of England and apprehend or exterminate any anti-social, seditious or Oriental individual like Tonga of The Sign of Four with the potency of intimidating the English imperial interests. The detective's pride and arrogance might be attributed to Doyle's living through the period of *Victorian complacency*. His dismissal of the French detectives C. Auguste Dupin and Lecoq respectively as "very inferior fellow" and "miserable bungler" is not only a sign of his exterminating any challenge to his perceived omnipotence but also a coloniser's attempt at nullifying competition for the Empire and chance of dominance by other imperial powers (18).

In most of the Sherlock Holmes stories, the detective exhibits a concern for either India, one of Britain's major colonies, that was under the direct British rule when Doyle published his detective stories between 1887 and 1927, or the United States of America, a colony of Britain until 1776. This particular behavioural trait of the sleuth exemplifies Doyle's Orientalism and advocacy of the spread and perpetuation of the British imperialistic control. Sherlock Holmes, therefore, remains the White detective who disciplines and punishes the Orientals and other colonised populace as well as the White anti-socials who interferes with the governance of the imperial nation, thereby positing a threat to its existence as a formidable coloniser.

When Saradindu Bandyopadhyay confessedly considered composing indigenous stories in 1929, the Eurocentric litterateurs like Holmes, Christie and Chesterton had long been enjoying hegemony in the realm of sleuth fiction (*Saradindu II* 646). Countering the popularity of the Sherlock Holmes stories, which Ousby, et al., describe as "the most famous and enduring contribution to detective fiction by any single writer", required not only a deft construction that decentralises aspects of White supremacy and involves encyclopaedic coverage, but also some specialties that would mark the intellectual prowess of the newly conceived investigator and project him, his methodology and his nationality as being at par with and exactly in opposition to Holmes's (*The Wordsworth* 850). Even though he began as a subaltern individual in a British colony, Byomkesh Bakshi soon garnered sufficient popularity to project himself as a formidable opposing force to Doyle's British detective. Moreover, having become

the centre of anti-imperial activities by the nationalistic Indians, Calcutta – the cultural capital of contemporary India – came to suitably counteract London's importance as the locus of colonial culture.

In direct opposition to Holmes's European dress of tweed coat and deerstalker cap, Bakshi sports Indian garments like *dhoti-punjabee*. He also follows ordinary Indian food habit and exhibits traditional Hindu faith. It significant that while Holmes despises the middle class values, Bakshi himself belongs to the Bengali middle class society and embodies its ethical values (Kayman 49). To exemplify, he exhibits the characteristic Indian middle-class aversion to owning automobiles in "Bishupal Badh" (Bandyopadhyay, *Byomkesh* 971). Even though he perceptively accepts the Orientalist division of people into four colours – White, Yellow, Brown and Black – based on their complexion, Bandyopadhyay successfully demonstrates how his brown investigator counters every aspect of Holmes's omnipotence through his native intelligence and investigative excellence. The causes for Bakshi's extraordinariness and popularity lie in his being an ordinary representative of the Indian subaltern populace in every aspect of life, while eschewing Holmes's eccentricity or Poirot's French mannerisms. Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's Byomkesh Bakshi narratives have thus remained representative Oriental postcolonial texts which would continue to counteract the perceived uniqueness and qualitative superiority of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories.