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Female Detectives in Bengali Fiction: Special Focus on Detective Krishna, Detective Gargi and Detective Mitin

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Abstract: *Bengali literature is considered one of the ancient literatures of India. For a long time, Bengali writers have portrayed various aspects of society in their writings according to the depth of their feelings. As a result of long-term societal changes, the content of literature has also changed repeatedly worldwide. Sometimes war, sometimes peace, sometimes revenge, sometimes a forgiving attitude or other situations have forced people to change their mental and character structures. This change and its level have been presented to the reader by writers according to their own views, ideas and tastes over time. It has been observed that the plot of a story or novel typically has different ups and downs. The inquisitive reader seeks to discover its intended destination by navigating these twists and turns. Such writings were composed long ago in the context of world literature from a perspective that is well-known and popular today.*

Key words: *Ancient literatures, attitude, situations, own views, ideas, tastes, intended destination, navigating.*

Introduction –The subject of crime is not new, so it can be said that the detective story was born, perhaps unknowingly, or due to the need and experience of the situation. For instance, if a king were to govern a kingdom peacefully, he would require wise people, an army, and individuals from various social classes. Similarly, when a crime was committed, it was necessary to identify the culprit, locate the source of the crime and the criminal, and prove their guilt. This drive to prove, stemming from curiosity and necessity, led to the development of various methods and their applications through experimentation. Consequently, new horizons emerged, new questions were raised, and the causes of organized crime were determined—these were initially the primary motivations for writing detective stories. According to linguist Sukumar Sen, the first woman in Bengali literature to write a detective story was Sarlabala Dasi. Although the detective written by Sarlabala Dasi was a man, this cannot be overlooked when discussing detective stories in Bengali literature. The reason is that the foundation stone of this genre was laid by Saralabala. Gradually, many people began writing detective stories, and the female detective character became one of their stories. In this discussion, we have mentioned the names of three famous and popular female detectives. The first one to be named is the character created by Prabhavati Devi Saraswati (1905-1972), Detective Krishna. Prabhavati Devi's literary talent has enriched Bengali literature for a long time. Her stories have been widely appreciated and have been adapted into films. Some of her stories have also been translated into other languages. It is undeniable that Prabhavati Devi's literary achievements were widely recognized for some time. However, contemporary research and discussions among her contemporaries are shedding new light on her work. Krishna's intention was to portray Prabhavati Devi as a strong and independent woman, unlike the typical Bengali girl. Having lived in Burma for a long time and having a father who was a high-ranking police officer, Prabhavati Devi was molded to his expectations. Riding horses, speaking multiple languages, exercising and maintaining a well-built physique were all traits that Krishna admired. When we consider Krishna's stories in the context of literary criticism, we can see that the suppressed aspirations of her mind have been expressed through her characters. Both Krishna's parents were killed by assassins, which instilled in her a strong desire for revenge from a young age. Despite being kidnapped by a notorious bandit, her morale remained unbroken. In creating the character of Krishna, the writer seems to have revealed a latent desire for women to be able to defend themselves in dangerous situations. This may explain the slight lack of charm in Krishna's character. The two other female detective characters we are discussing have not faced such dire circumstances as Krishna. The environment and the writer's mindset in which Krishna's stories were written are quite different from those of the other two characters, which creates a time and situational gap between them. Krishna's first novel was published in the magazine 'Bharatbarsha' in 1924. The stories, written sometime before or after India's independence, captivate readers with Krishna's character and the unique structure of the writing. This difference between Krishna's stories and the other detective stories we have discussed is evident in the way Krishna becomes deeply entangled in the mysteries she seeks to unravel. The situation or context in which she can solve the mystery by measuring it from outside the mystery is not present in many parts of Krishna's stories. Naming usually plays a special role in detective stories. In most cases, Krishna's name is mentioned in the naming of Krishna's stories, such as "Krishna in prison", "Krishna's journey", "Krishna on the path to freedom" or "Krishna's expedition". However, there are also stories where Krishna's name is not mentioned, but he is the main character, such as "Graher Pher",



“Hatyar Pratisdh”, “Kalanki Chand” or “Gupta Ghatak”. The second detective in our discussion is Gargi. In this case, the biggest debt to the readers is the character of Gargi, a female detective created by a few male writers. She is written by Tapan Bandyopadhyay (1947–). We have included Gargi’s name in this discussion because, although Gargi is close to Mitin in terms of time, there is a gap between her and Krishna. However, Gargi’s stories are numerous. The author has created the plots of Gargi’s stories by mixing her personal life, work, experience in various government offices, practicality and logic. Gargi is married, but her marriage was somewhat problematic. Later, her husband, recognizing her talent, appointed her to a high position in the company. While running a large soap company, she is equally eager to solve mysteries with effortless skill. In Gargi’s stories, the author has imagined Gargi as a ten-armed Durga. No problem is a problem for her. Later, she gets Sonali Chapa as her assistant. Due to the author’s writing achievement, we see the character he wrote in different situations. Gargi, an ordinary woman who wants to easily get out of dangerous situations, wants to find out the mystery or the root cause of the problem. The plots of these stories are spread across various stories, such as the story of a child being changed from a famous hospital, which is a familiar image representing the traditional male-female child problem. Again, Gargi’s various stories feature murder as a means to uncover secret documents from large corporations or solve family mysteries. As a reader, the primary challenge with Gargi’s stories is their length, but they are otherwise filled with mystery and suspense. The two detective characters discussed above were written for adults to some extent. However, the character of Mitin Masi, created for a teenage audience, is undoubtedly the most notable. Suchitra Bhattacharya (1950-2015) introduced Mitin Masi to readers in the early 1980s. Presenting one mind-blowing adventure after another, Mitin Masi quickly captured the hearts of readers. Mitin Masi’s mystery-solving stories for teenagers consist of 14 books. Additionally, there is one novel and three major stories in which Mitin solves a mystery. A unique aspect of Suchitra Bhattacharya’s writing was that it encouraged teenagers to develop a conscious appreciation for nature and the earth. Consequently, in almost every story written for teenagers, there is a strong emphasis on the beauty of nature. The writer aimed to convey the message that animals, plants, the sky, rivers and seas are in danger of destruction due to their association with humans. She was deeply concerned about this issue and sought to raise awareness through her writing. It may not be necessary to state today that women are not behind in any work in the world. However, only a conscious writer expresses his responsibility and commitment to society through writing. Suchitra naturally created Mitin with great thought. She could have created other characters who are more powerful. Among them would be the image of a real hero. As soon as we read their stories, our minds will become excited. We will begin to think that as a reader, this person can come out of the storybook and solve the problems in my real life. However, coming out of this circle and in a chaotic mood, she presented a simple married woman of 30-32 years as a detective. Who has a child at home and has to oversee every family task. In other words, she has come out of unrealistic imagination and selected one of the characters we see around us every day, as a female detective. Surprisingly, the character of Mitin aunty reached the peak of popularity. Perhaps the readers and all of us were waiting for such a character, who is very close to us. Whose speech, thoughts are related to our normal life, who does not have miraculous divine powers, who has the ability to think scientifically, try to explain a matter with logic and above all, the ability to find the culprit. All the mysteries that Mitin Masi creates as a detective are not just for children. The author has written three major stories and a novel for adults. While reading the stories, it can be observed that the author has composed the narrative of each story by focusing on different types of topics and adapting them to the environmental situation. That is, there is never any boredom between the stories. In fact, if the same story is repeated again and again in juvenile literature, they lose the enthusiasm to read. This idea has always been working in the author’s mind. Therefore, she consciously and mentally has rotated the female detective she created in different types of situations. On one hand, the mystery of the story can be concentrated in the dense jungle of Surendra, while on the other hand, one crime after another occurs in the heart of Kolkata. During family travels, we encounter unknown miscreants who are engaged in the illegal export of national goods and amass significant profits. These smugglers pose a dangerous threat, disregarding human life and willing to go to any lengths to obtain their targets. In another story, the setting is the dense jungle of the Sundarbans. A scientist has dedicated his life to his laboratory, believing it will benefit human society. The sudden disappearance and subsequent return of the scientist create a compelling chapter of mystery. Despite police involvement, they prefer to verify the environment from Mitin’s perspective. The presence of government police and Mitin’s request for their assistance demonstrate that she has earned respect and a place in their eyes through her successful resolution of various mysteries. Typically, detective stories by various authors do not depict the close relationship between private detectives and the police. Solving a



mystery before the police might damage their reputation. However, in Mitin’s case, such an incident did not occur. She received the necessary assistance, and with her help, the police department successfully resolved several incidents. Another notable aspect of Suchitra Bhattacharya’s writing is her extensive exploration of India’s history and its people through her various works. This demonstrates her awareness and intelligence. When crafting the plot, she skilfully weaves historical elements into the narrative, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of old Kolkata. Bhattacharya also does not shy away from incorporating stories about the Portuguese, English and Armenian traders who once inhabited this Indian soil. Her keen sense of judgment and sharp observation enable her to delve deeply into the subject matter. For instance, the religious customs and rituals of a Chinese family in her story come to life vividly. Bhattacharya consistently presents the wisdom of religion from a scientific perspective, challenging readers’ preconceived notions. She encourages readers to explore the world beyond their immediate surroundings, fostering a sense of discovery and a desire to confront injustice. By bridging the gap between men and women, Bhattacharya demonstrates that injustice is never suppressed and that even those who commit it cannot conceal their wrongdoing. Her personal life was marked by a commitment to truth, resilience in the face of adversity and a determination to survive. It is unfortunate that she passed away before we could fully appreciate the depth of her fighting mentality and tender heart in her writings.
