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*The Tools and Technique of Satyajit Roy for Making Detective Fiction*

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## **The Tools and Technique of Satyajit Roy for Making Detective Fiction**

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### **Abstract**

Satyajit Ray (1921-1992) created Feluda, a detective fiction series, in the time of post-independence era of India. He adapted styles of western writers as well as Indian authors. From west, English novelist and story-writer Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) was most influential of all. Among Indian writers, he was influenced by Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay (1899-1970). Apart from the influences, he found his own way of establishment in the field of detective story telling which was done according to the need of his time. His story structure has explicit three stages. First, introductory depiction of a probable problem. Second, the events and actions for which detection to be made. Third, the solution, who has done and how it is done. To keep the storytelling witty and fun-filled, he used the components like word puzzle, symbolic or metaphoric words, telegram message etc. One of the important aspects of his writing is that he created his own satire in the form of Lalmohan Ganguly. Lalmohan is a funny character in his story who represents faulty detective storytellers. Specially those who doesn't know the proportion of exaggeration to create the character of a detective. Satyajit's stories revolve around historical artifact theft or travel adventure in most of the cases. He almost avoided dead body inspection and horrors of death as a subject of his fiction. The language of his story contains features of upper-middle class people of 1970's Bengal. His narrative relies more on thrilling experiential description than mere depiction of crime.

### **Key words**

Storytelling, fun-character, exaggeration, malapropism, sign language, travelogue, detective

### **Introduction**

In the beginning, the structure of a detective fiction is represented by the outcome of all important events, the chronology later. The process of discovering the chronology of 'events' is called detective work. The conventional stories which are not the detective ones, 'ending' of the narrative is determined by the actions and reactions of small moments throughout the narration process. Here it is the opposite. From reader's point of view, it is starting to find the whole story from the outcome. Any detective story is actually a journey of finding the 'story'. The criminal wants to hide a criminal action or actions, and on the other hand, the detective brings that incident to the fore with the help of logical deductions, analysis and supporting evidence. The author also includes his potential reader in this process of discovering the criminal. A predetermined story frame is prepared in advance. From the beginning, the reader is given some clues, so that the reader can discover a little as a detective himself. Some information is hidden for the final episode. The success of a detective story is determined by

the harmony between these two. This half-revealed and half-hidden narrative requires a capable language style that can accommodate this structure.

## Method

The method of textual analysis like word formation, sentence structure, paragraph shifting, semantic structure, discourse analysis all these tools are taken for understanding the language, structure and genre created by Satyajit Ray. Metaphor-symbols-sign languages are also discussed as it is connected with the area of discussion from the perspective of linguistic analysis.

## The tools & techniques

1.

The narrator is an important part of every storytelling. It observes everything and let the reader know what is happening. It is of two types. One is internal narrator who knows everything about the character, including the unexpressed thought process, future plans, motives, behavior etc. The other one is external narrator who is only able to observe and understand from outside. It has to depend on the frequency of situations or experiences to form a perspective. It cannot go beyond that limitation. <sup>1</sup> The narrator used by Satyajit Ray (1921-1992) in Feluda series is that of second type. Feluda's younger paternal cousin Tapesh Ranjan Mitra or Topse assist Feluda in his adventure missions. From these experiences he gathers a perspective about Feluda. He shares it as a story. Along with this, he also plays an important role in the journeys of adventure with Feluda. From there, he accumulates necessary context as first-hand information. This is the basic structure of Ray's detective fiction. Although Topse is mentioned as maternal first cousin of Feluda in several of the early stories, later in the story 'The Disappearance of Ambar Sen' (1983, Anandamela), Feluda takes it upon himself to say that,

First, he wrote it as my maternal first cousin, but then he tried to write it like gossip. I started to scold him and then he started writing the truth. In fact, the paternal cousin is right. <sup>2</sup>

('The Disappearance of Ambar Sen')

In Topse's statement, in addition to Feluda's mental structure and tendencies, the criminal's crime, psychology, and the background of the criminal incident are revealed one after another. This narrative style reveals the essential structure of Satyajit's Feluda story series. First, a context or background is created for a possible event, and then the 'event' is made to happen very quickly. For example, at the beginning of the story 'The Key', a lot of information is analyzed about the font order of the names of Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy. Then comes the story of the treasure left behind by Samaddar, which will require such an analysis to find. At the beginning of the story 'A Killer in Kailash', the conversation between Feluda and Topse also brings up the topic of the amazing creations of India and the world. For example,

the architecture of the Pyramids of Egypt or the Qutub Minar of Delhi in India. This is the so-called 'plot' or 'fabula' (according to Russian formalists) of detective stories, where a relatively less eventful but suggestive event is brought before the possible event. Almost the same structure is found in the Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930). According to the research of Yu K. Scheglov (1975), '... description of detective story structure deals in detail only with the 'other story' or prelude to the Sherlock Holmes stories, i.e. the coming together of Holmes, Watson and the initial narration of the problem situation before the investigation proper begins'<sup>3</sup> ('Towards a Description of Detective Story Structure', 1975). In other words, a prelude is added to the Sherlock Holmes story long before the main detective story begins. That too is included in the detective story, but it is not directly related to the criminal incident. However, this method is not adopted in the stories written by Agatha Christie (1890-1976). In her stories the main criminal incident is narrated from the beginning to the end. The story does not need the 'context' to initiate the chronological events of finding the criminal. However, some parts of that narration are left at the end of the story to create a surprise. In the case of Feluda's story, Satyajit Ray has adopted Arthur Conan Doyle's structure. Not Christie's method.

In most stories, a suggestive sentence is used to move from this initial stage to the next eventful stage. For example,

□ Feluda, despite being such a great detective, did not realize that it would not be easy to fool me with his tricks now, because my mind is already telling me that this time, I will spend my vacation in Rajasthan <sup>4</sup>

(‘The Golden Fortress’)

□ A road came out ... it came out through such an accident that it makes my head spin when I think about it. <sup>5</sup>

(‘A killer in Kailash’)

□ The incident that happened the next morning can be said to be the beginning of our adventure. <sup>6</sup>

(‘The Criminals of Kathmandu’)

□ I knew in advance that Feluda would take the case. <sup>7</sup>

(‘Crime in Kedarnath’)

In the first example, the narrator indicates that an adventure is awaiting through the suggestion, 'my mind is already telling me this time, I will spend my vacation in Rajasthan'. In the next, the description is loaded with eventful verbs like 'it (the road) *came out* through such an *accident*' or 'my head *spin*'. All these eventful verbs make the reader anxious and curious to know what happened next. What was the accident or the happenings which made the narrator's head spin, these questions create immense curiosity to continue the reading. In the last two examples, verbs are straight enough to indicate that somewhat a thrilling account is about to be shared. Like 'can be said to be the beginning of our adventure' or 'I knew in advance'.

In the main stage of a detective story, shocking incidents like theft or murder definitely happen suddenly. So is the case with Feluda. However, in the last part, where the hidden plot

is revealed, Topse gives some early signs that this time the mystery will be solved. For example,

□ Feluda did not answer. He was staring at the picture in awe. I noticed that he had a great sense of concentration. <sup>8</sup> ('The Anubis Mystery')

□ Feluda did not answer this and looked at the fort and said, 'You know, Topse --- this strange golden light. The pattern of the spider web is clearly visible before your eyes. <sup>9</sup> ('The Golden Fortress')

□ Archimedes exclaimed this Greek phrase with joy, as if he had discovered something. ... I couldn't understand what Feluda had found. <sup>10</sup>  
( 'Royal Bengal Mystery')

□ My mind tells me we are moving towards the final act of the play. <sup>11</sup>  
( 'The Secret of the cemetery')

In the first three examples, Topse, the narrator, directly shows to the reader that Feluda is on the verge of solving the case. In the first, narrator noticed 'a great sense of concentration'. In the next, Feluda himself said metaphorically, 'the pattern of spider web is clearly visible', which means the pattern of the crime is clear to him. In the third, the narrator shared Feluda's joy for being able to search the truth. In the last, Topse shared his experience of frequency about Feluda when Feluda solve any case. It is indirect narration of shifting from second stage to third or final stage.

Almost all of Feluda's stories are divided into these three general stages. The first stage is the beginning of a possible criminal incident or the initial story, then the second one, eventful action-reaction phase, then the final stage, revelation of the investigation and the results obtained.

## 2.

Within Feluda's stories, there is another writer, Lalmohan Ganguly, whose narrative run parallelly to the detective work of Feluda. He is characterized as a detective novel writer by own choice but he loves to accompany Feluda in adventure journeys. During the journey, his funny activities create comic relief in the midst of suspenseful action and drama. He is also known as Jatayu, whose novel's hero is Prakhar Rudra. Jatayu's mystery adventure novels have strange and exaggerated names. For example, 'Atlantic Terror', 'Tingling in Sahara', ' Vampire of Vancouver ', ' Lamentation in Honduras', etc. These names can be placed alongside the names of Feluda's original stories. For example, 'A Killer in Kailash', 'The Criminals of Kathmandu'. If we compare the names, we can see that there is a difference between them in the degree of exaggeration. A little less in Feluda's story and a little more in Jatayu. Otherwise, the mutual phonetic harmony of the words used in the story name has been preserved in both cases. There is not much difference between the name of Feluda and the name of Jatayu's fictional hero.

Pradosh Mitra (Feluda's real name) and Prakhar Rudra (Jatayu's hero). In special situations, this Pradosh Mitra takes on the image of Prakhar 'Rudra' (Rudra means lord Shiva who punishes when gets very angry with wrong-doers) and punishes the criminal. But Pradosh Mitra remains the familiar 'Feluda', a common Bengali youth, in real life, hiding his 'detective' identity. He does not live with the image of Prakhar Rudra. In fact, this is the difference between a good detective story and an 'ordinary' one. It is based on the sense of proportion of how much will be revealed and how much will be hidden. Otherwise, the external pomp of the detective can become a source of laughter. Before Satyajit, except for Byomkesh, the detective story series, written by Sharadindu Bandyopadhyay (1899-1970), the other story writers like Hemendra Kumar Roy (1888-1963), Panchkari Dey (1873-1945) or Nihar Ranjan Gupta (1911-1986) gained temporary popularity, but it did not last long due to this lack of balance. Satyajit Ray was aware of that weakness, so he created Jatayu as a satire of Feluda.

Carrying the tradition of Sukumar Ray (1887-1923), a famous sketch artist and non-fiction fun creator in Bengali, Satyajit used the technique of creating fun by playing with words. With the help of this, the reader can enjoy a little change of taste at the moment of tension. However, the source of such sayings and techniques is embedded in Jatayu's activities. They are used in the story while maintaining naturalness in his dialogues. For example,

- Truth is Stronger\* Than Fiction <sup>12</sup>  
(‘Incident on the Kalka Mail’, 1972, Sharadiya Desh)
- Tele-pathetic\* / Telepathic <sup>13</sup> (‘A Killer in Kailash’, 1973, Sharadiya Desh)
- Rashtrakuta / Rashtraput\* <sup>14</sup> (Ibid)
- Lumbini / Lumumba\* <sup>15</sup>  
(‘The Criminals at Kathmandu’, 1980 Shardiya Desh)
- Ends Well That Alls Well\* <sup>16</sup>  
(‘The Disappearance of Ambar Sen’, 1983 Anandamela)

Each marked word, used in the example, is a pronunciation close to the original recognized word in a particular language. Many times, the mispronunciation becomes another homophone in the same language. As a result, the mispronounced word does not fit into the semantic structure of the entire sentence or with the whole context. That is why it becomes a cause for laughter. This unintentional error of a character has a terminological identity, i.e. malapropism. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2008), malapropism is ‘A confused, comically inaccurate use of a long word or words’<sup>17</sup>. In the first example, the English word stronger\* is used. The common proverb is ‘Truth is *stranger* than fiction’. That is, reality is stranger than fiction. But if the word stronger is used instead of stranger, the meaning changes. It means, reality is stronger than fiction. Here the meaning of the proverb has changed. Similarly, tele-pathetic\* and telepathic are completely different words of English vocabulary.

Specifically, the word 'pathetic' is associated with painful experiences. Here it has no semantic similarity with 'telepathic' as 'telepathic' means someone who has the psychic ability to transmit their thoughts with other people. In the next example, the original naming word 'Rastrakuta' is a Bengali lexicon which indicates the royal Indian dynasty of southern and western India who existed from sixth to tenth century. But according to Lalmohan's wrong pronunciation it sounds 'Rastraputa'\* which is closed to the original pronunciation but it carries no meaning. In the next one, Lumbini is also a Bengali naming word which recognizes a Buddhist pilgrimage place situated in Nepal. But he makes it 'Lumumba'\* which carries no morphological value. The original meaning of the English proverb in the last given example has also changed due to the use of malapropism. The general meaning of the proverb is All's well that ends well. The meaning has changed in Lalmohan's pronunciation -- Only when all goes well, the ending is well.

3.

Feluda's stories use various types of signals or signs in the process of revealing and hiding information. Signals can be created in many ways. Sometimes using a fraction of a word, riddles- telegram messages- events in memory, words taught to birds, musical notation --- all can become signals. This can be seen from a few stories.

In the story 'The Emperor's Ring' (1966-1967, Sandesh), the word 'Spy', an obscure word used during the death of the deceased wealthy businessman Piyari Lal Seth. When we get into the real truth, we see that it is a fraction of the word 'SPIDER'. Piyari Lal was killed by showing him a spider. The fear of spider caused him to death. That is the information he wanted to give before dying. The narrator shares the starting syllable '*spi*' of the full word 'Spider' at the beginning of the story, the rest is revealed at the end of it. In the story 'Murder in the Mountains' (1986, Sharadiya Desh), the word 'Vish' written in a notebook is found, which means poison. This is actually a fragment of the name '*Vishnudas Balaporiya*'. Which at first glance may seem like a way of death by poisoning. But at the end of the story, it is understood that it is part of the name of assassin. In the story 'The Royal Bengal Mystery' (1974, Sharadiya Desh), a whole puzzle is found in Bengali. The puzzle--

The old tree is twisted

Hands count rice (bhat) five (panch)

Find the right answer in the right direction.

Conjoint Falgun tree and palm tree

Uproot between the two

Searching for the meaning of the business of the Nawab. <sup>18</sup>

While searching for the meaning of this riddle, one has to come across another parallel riddle. There are some clues that are related to the brave warrior 'Arjuna' of the Mahabharata. <sup>12</sup> In the case of the first riddle, the intended meaning of the riddle is hidden in the difference between the meaning of homonymic words. For example, the word 'Bhat' (anna) means 'food'

and the word 'Pancha' means 'five'. The union of these two words makes the Bengali word 'Panchanna' (Pancha + Anna), i.e. fifty-five. In the second riddle, the name of the brave warrior Arjuna of the Mahabharata is associated with the word 'Falguni'. It is another name of Arjuna is 'Falguni', as he was born in the Bengali month of 'Falgun'. In the story, one needs to read Falgun tree as the Arjun tree for solving the clue. It is noteworthy here that the code has been created by slightly changing the original usable words. In the translated English version of the story, it is little different from the Original Bengali codes to hide the clues differently. The English riddle serves the hidden clue purpose for the treasure hunt situation in the story successfully but it loses the parallel riddle, as the English words doesn't bear connotations of Bengali culture and mythical resource. It simply goes like this –

'Old Man hollow,  
pace to follow,  
people's tree.  
Half ten, half again  
century.  
Rising sun,  
whence it's done,  
can't you see?  
Between hands,  
below them stands,  
yours, it be.'<sup>19</sup>

Which simply means one has to go towards Eastern direction and has to dig the ground between the two trees in order to find the hidden treasure.

In the story 'Trouble in Gangtok' (1970, Sharadiya Desh), the phrase of the telegram has been used, which is a symbolic one, necessary for decoding information. 'SICK MONSTER' --- Although this phrase does not seem relevant at first glance, it is later seen that 'SICK' is the abbreviation of 'SIKKIM'. 'MONSTER' is the abbreviation of 'MONASTERY'. In the story 'The Locked Chest' (1975, Sandesh), the Bengali phrase 'Trinayan o Trinayan ektu jiro' (Three eyed, oh Three eyed please rest) is taught to the pet-bird, which contains the secret code of the symbolic key hidden in the art of pronunciation. It means Tri > Three, 'nayan' > Nine, alphabetic 'o' > Zero, 'ek' > Eight, 'tu' > Two, 'jiro' > Zero --- 390820. A similar story is 'The Key' (1973, Sandesh). There, the basic seven tunes (key musical notes) of music have been used as signals. To create this signal, the method of acrostic word formation<sup>20</sup> (Acrostic Word) has been adopted. The same method is used in the story 'The Mysterious Tenant' (1980, Sandesh).



This way Satyajit created own style to structure a detective story. A reader is expected to be a knowledgeable person to understand and enjoy not only the detection process but the riddles, pun, symbols from a huge resource of culture.

4.

Detective story is treated as a popular culture genre which is a complex mix of travel account, adventure story and an application of intellect and scientific knowledge of the surroundings to catch the criminal. During First and Second world war, the genre developed and weaponized with the advancement of research in the fields of psychology, narcotics, medicine, chemical effects on human body. Later it is flourished with the traits of entertainment like travel accounts mixed with thrill and adventure, study of knowledge about historical places and artifacts.

Satyajit Roy has taken two of the aforesaid components. Travel experience with adventure, knowledge of history, mythology and valuable historical artifacts. He almost excluded dead body expertise explanation in his storyline. Though according to the critics, dead body is very important, 'Because in crime fiction death is the start of something, not the end. More often than not, the body in some shape or form begins the story. Without the body, without the murder, there would be no fiction. Thus, death is the beginning of the investigation.'<sup>21</sup> Satyajit avoided such death accounts very consciously. There can be many reasons behind this. As his target audience was teen age kids of 1970's Bengal. Perhaps he was not ready to disclose harsh reality to young minds for the sake of entertainment. Secondly, at that time, Bengal kids and adolescents were exposed to too much bloodshed and dead-body-news in everyday newspaper. Naxal movement, Bangladesh war, partition deaths etc. all the factors were enough to experience death every day. His detective, Feluda, is a person from that time in Bengal. Therefore, Satyajit chose for more shuttle and encouraging things for his audience than dead body. This is the reason his detective stories are based on travel, historical knowledge, language pun-riddle and youthful adventure.

His alternative context was also ready. In the post-independence era, educated common Bengali middle class was thirsty for travel, dared to explore all over India and abroad. At that time, they traveled to various places not only to perform pilgrimages, but also to accumulate amazing travel experiences. Feluda's stories are made to have enough food for the wanderlust of Bengalis. The setting of all the stories is in places that are geographically or historically interesting to visit. This is also an important feature of Satyajit's Feluda story. The story locations are set up in the places like Bombay (Now Mumbai), Delhi, Benares, Himalayan territory of Nepal, Orissa's coastal border, Rajasthan, Kashmir etc. which are the popular travel destinations outside Bengal. As a result, the vocabulary of his characters contains a considerable number of words from Hindi and other non-Bengali, Indian vocabulary.

With the insurgence of traveling in foreign countries like European and non-European continents from late nineteenth century, many travelogues were written to include the experiences of Bengali middle class. In 1892 Swami Vivekananda wrote to Shankarlal, 'We

have to travel, we have to go to foreign lands... if we have to really reconstitute ourselves as a nation, we have to freely mingle with other nations.'<sup>22</sup> This was not only Swami Vivekananda's vision and thought, it was the thought of common educated Bengali society of late nineteenth century. They not only traveled; they wrote travelogues. According to critics, sharing the experience of adventures or explorations of new travel locations was modern form of self-expression.<sup>23</sup> After independence, this trend gained more popularity than ever before. Writers like Parimal Goswami (1897-1976), Manoj Basu (1901-1987), Debesh Das (1911-1998) Prabodh Kumar Sanyal (1905-1983), Uma Prasad Mukhopadhyay (1902-1997), Sd Mujtaba Ali (1904-1974), Annada Shankar Roy (1904-2002) gained immense popularity with their travelogue written in the post-independence era. Satyajit himself written a few travel accounts in his essays. In the stories like 'Feluda in London' is the expression of this trend. The author effortlessly uses words from English, Italian, German, and French glossary of words mixing with Bengali colloquial, creating the reflection of Bengalis who have travelled the world and retained the habit of reading foreign stories and novels. To reflect the colloquial of such upper-class Bengali family, Satyajit included foreign lexicon in Bengali dialogues of characters. However, due to this diversity of vocabulary, Feluda's story remains a story of a specifically educated upper-middle class Bengali.

## Conclusion

The period of publication of Feluda's story is from the mid-sixties to the late seventies, extended till eighties decade of Twentieth Century. This historically eventful, ten to fifteen years' time period of Bengal did not leave any impression on the language of the story or on the context or the characterization. As a result, the concept of language-change through time does not work as the characters grow older. The language has been kept the same. So, the time gap is not a determining factor here. It looks a bit superficial. The language structure of Feluda's story is built according to the common language of post-independence upper-middle class colloquial of West Bengal. That language is the 'vernacular' of highly educated, elite, foreign-educated Bengalis of Kolkata. It is not the language of ordinary hard-working mass people or common folk. From the criminals in the story to the detectives/police, all belong to the same class. So, their spoken language is also exactly the same. There is no identifying marker to differentiate the characters through dialogues. However, to capture the tension and adventure, the verbs of the descriptive sentences are always eventful, which are placed with a luxurious and visually beautiful location context. Satyajit's identity is not confined only as a storyteller, he is also an extraordinary maker of films. Therefore, any description in the Feluda-story contains very much visual sensation. Some of the stories are converted into movies by himself. Feluda series is fully packed with entertaining ingredients for all kind of readers but mostly for adolescents who can connect themselves even after many generations. Therefore, the text is still very popular and relevant to the readers of today.

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