

Interrogating The Politics Of Anonymity Among The Writers Of Detective Fiction : A Study

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ABSTRACT

If we go through the Bengali detective fictions which are greatly inspired by Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes's stories, we can notice an interesting fact. Stories like "HarimotirHatyakando", "OdbhutHatyakari", "Sindhuker lash", "Jal Raja" etc. have been published anonymously (SekalerGoyendaGolpo, ed. by Arindam Dasgupta) There is a possibility that these stories are written by women writers and like many women writers and artists they could not expose their name, which was a common picture of Victorian age in our country and also in Europe. The Bronte Sisters, Mary Anne Evans and many of the women novelists had to use pen names to pursue their creative genius. This problem has been addressed by Gilbert and Gubar in their work *The Mad woman in the Attic* as "Anxiety of Authorship". I think the anonymity of the above mentioned detective fictions calls for a thorough research. Who are these anonymous writers? Can this identification open a new room or Bengali women writers? This paper would try to address these questions.

Keywords:- Detective Fiction, Women writers, Anonymity, Crime, Pseudonyms

Ever since writers started writing, time and again, it has been seen that writers chose anonymity while penning down their work. From O Henry to George Elliot, readers have witnessed many remarkable pen names. The need for anonymity can be a lot of reasons. Some of the reasons may be personal while some of them may be society driven. Even a famous writer like Agatha Christie wrote some of her stories under a pen name Mary Westmacott. Another famous writer Raymond Chandler used the pen name Benjamin Black. Another great crime writer Alfred Alexander Gordon Clark wrote under the pseudonym, Cyril Hare. Writer John Innes Mackintosh wrote under Michael Innes. Robert Bruce Montgomery was the pseudonym used by detective novelist Edmund Crispin. Another female detective writer, Josephine Tey, who penned the detective novel "The Daughter of Time", wrote under the pen name Elizabeth Montgomery. Some writers used pseudonyms to draw a line between their private and professional lives. Some writers wanted to keep their identity hidden. Writing as a profession was risky as a profession and more so for the female writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Often to branch out to other writing genres authors have used anonymous identity so it doesn't jeopardise their reputation. As J K Rowling used the antonym of Robert Galbraith to branch out in the crime and mystery genre.

Many Indian writers during the British Raj used to write using pen names. Some of them used names of deities to show respect towards their muses. Although today the entire world knows about the authors behind Feluda, Byomkesh Bakshi, there are many literary texts dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth century whose authors' real identity still remains a mystery. Arindam Das' collection of short stories by anonymous writers show that a large number of writers chose anonymity. In Bengal alone, a huge amount of detective stories were written from 1894 to 1915. Tamil writer CS Laxmi wrote under the pen name Ambai, presented us with detective Sudha Gupta. Eminent writer Mahasweta Devi was often penned as Sumitra Devi. There were many Indian male writers who used female names to hide their real identity. But the quest regarding why writers needed this anonymous personality to write detective fiction remains a mystery as many of the detectives from the early times remain untraced. It could have been possible that many of the literary works in the detective fiction genre were written by women authors. The society's structure may have made it impossible for certain

women authors to write under their real names. The key factor responsible for anonymity might be the social structure. The rigidity and myths in society on writing being an unsuccessful career option, was a question of sustainability and survival for the authors. The opportunity of publishing and promoting books was not as wide as today and thus it created a void in tracing the writers of the time. Male writers may have used anonymous names to avoid coming under the radar of the government or to avoid people knowing about their secret passion as writing was not considered as a job with huge monetary benefits. Female writers may have used anonymous names because the social structure would have prevented them from writing anything in the first place.

Writers indulging in writing down political details of the time to hold the mirror in front of society were often punished and stigmatised as criminals by the governing bodies. Writing anonymously provided them with the freedom of writing and raising their voice for their main agenda. Women often were not considered seriously as writers. Their insecurity imposed by society often caused them to hide their real identities (Sohn et al 145-161). It was more important for the women writers of the time to publish their writing rather than focus on fame and hence not using their real name was not a concern for them. Their male counterparts on the other hand wrote anonymously to focus on their day jobs. They did not want their writing to be the subject of embarrassment or scrutiny. However, due to varied reasons for choosing anonymity, one cannot be sure about the exact number of literary works written by female Indian writers pre independence of India.

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