



"HISTORICAL ARCHIVES: A STUDY OF CITY, MEMORY, AND HISTORY IN *BADSHAHI ANGTI*"

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Abstract : This paper explores how the city gives a rich narrative landscape in which it transcends its conventional spatial role, coming forth as a complex, multifaceted character interwoven with historical consciousness and cultural memory in the detective novel *Badshahi Angti* by Satyajit Ray. The city in any detective fiction has an impact on the formation and development of the plot. The detective and the city in detective fiction in which the story is contextualized act parallelly in the narrative. The paper focuses on the role of the city as a living archive that keeps, transforms, and reinterprets collective historical experiences through the relationships between physical geography, historical memory, and storytelling. The analysis will also delve deep into the multilayered identity of the city, and how architectural fragments, historical traces, and cultural inscriptions become narrative aspects in *Badshahi Angti*. The objective of this paper is to depict how Indian Detective fiction, especially the Feluda series written by Satyajit Ray ensures the preservation of historical and cultural aspects of a city.

Keywords: *Cultural memory, Badshahi Angti, Feluda, historical memory, Indian detective fiction, city.*

Introduction

The relationship between city, memory, and history is a powerful and complex theme in literature, as it intertwines the lived experiences of individuals with the broader narratives of a nation's past. In detective fiction, the city plays an important role in the development of the plot. One of the most popular Indian Bengali detective fictions is the Feluda series written by Satyajit Ray. The Bengali sleuth Feluda loves to travel around the Indian subcontinent but wherever he travels crime follows him. On the bigger picture, the areas which he has travelled to give the readers a brief idea about that place. The historical and cultural background of that place works parallelly in the development of the plot ultimately leading to the investigation of the main crime. The stories give a vivid description of those places similar to a travelogue. The description of certain areas events or places in the particular city mentioned in the story retains the historical and cultural memory of the place in the reader's mind.

Research Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative descriptive-analytical research design based on an interpretive approach to look at how geographical spaces, architectural elements, and narrative construction are interwoven in Satyajit Ray's *Badshahi Angti*. This research methodology serves as an attempt to explore how the city moves beyond its traditional spatial significance to take on a manifold character imbued with historical consciousness and

cultural memory. The interpretive nature of literary analysis and the complexity of exploring spatial, historical, and cultural features within a narrative framework made the qualitative approach appropriate. The main research method adopted was a close textual analysis of *Badshahi Angti* by supplementing it with the theoretical framework of historiography. This methodological framework, therefore, allows for a comprehensive review of how geographical and architectural elements function in the text both as narrative devices and repositories of cultural memory. The qualitative approach thus allowed deep engagement with textual material while still allowing the consideration of broader historical and cultural contexts that inform the narrative.

Interplay of Geography and Storytelling

Satyajit Ray's *Badshahi Angti* reveals the subtle interaction of geography with storytelling through a very sophisticated historiographical lens, where geography itself becomes a dynamic agent of historical consciousness. While retracing Feluda's investigative journey, the cityscape transforms into a palimpsestic document through layers of history, culture, and human experience, weaving a rich tapestry of collective memory. The geographically descriptive elements operate in multiple historiographic functions, notably by creating a dynamic space for investigation in which historical traces are embedded within spatial configurations. The imagery of a vehicle known as 'tanga', the historical place 'Bara Imambara', 'the residency', etc all contribute to the rich history and geography of Lucknow ultimately becoming the major backdrop of the story. The story of Wajid Ali Shah during the train journey from Lucknow to Haridwar narrated by Bonobihari Bose also adds to the historical past of Lucknow. The song that was written by Wajid Ali Shah when hummed by the Bengali detective Feluda gives a foreshadow of the crime that will unfold further in the story. In this context, the intermingling of history and storytelling happens using the theory of historiography

Treatment of geography goes far beyond mere description. It concretizes what historians call "cultural geography" which is an approach to understanding space as a living archive of cultural and historical meanings. Every locality, landmark, and site embody distinctly cultural and historical values, all serving as a gateway by which the discursive possibility of the narrative explores broader, cultural identity, historic legacy, and social transformation themes. The geographical markers are replete with historical connotations that in each space resonates with the "ghosts of old Lucknow's nawabi past" which is a metaphorical representation of how spaces preserve and transmit historical memory. As Feluda moves through the city's spaces, each location becomes a trigger for historical connections, revealing how geographical features serve as anchoring points for historical and cultural narratives. This approach stands by postmodern historiographical perspectives that see space not as a static background but as an activist of meaning production. Geographical aspects of the novel highlight the interplay between modernity and tradition, where city geography determines not only physical movements but also the rhythm of historical interpretation. The three types of Ganga River can be seen from Lucknow, Haridwar and Laksmanjhula as explained by Feluda in the narrative is a reference to the intermingling of geography and storytelling. Their journey from one geographical location to another also ensures the continuity of the story.

More importantly, Ray's geographical narrative takes on the purpose of character development through a historiographical lens. Feluda's experiences with urban spaces reveal an epistemological approach; in other words, powers of observation, historical knowledge, and an ability to operate within complicated social environments become methods for historical understanding. The detective's movement becomes this kind of historical investigation in which spatial navigation is at the same time the process of historical interpretation. In the novel "Bhool Bhulaiya" is another place where the detective hides the emperor's ring around which the whole crime scene revolves.

Architectural elements in *Badshahi Angti* emerge as complex historiographical artifacts that transcend mere physical description. Employing a nuanced approach to architectural memory, Ray transforms constructed environments into physical embodiments of cultural legacy and historical periodization. The architectural fragments become critical instruments of historical consciousness, where each building, monument, and architectural detail constitutes a physical link connecting different historical periods and enabling fluid transitions between past and present. This architectural approach to the novel seeks and develops historical notions of decay and preservation, in which worn buildings, falling facades, and renovated monuments are metaphorical texts narrating themes greater than historical change and cultural continuities. It is seen as encoding complex cultural forces across temporal dimensions.

The features of these architectures are seen as the representation of collective memory deposits, as buildings and structures act as physical archives not only in storing historical events but also entire ecosystems of cultural practices, social relationships, and community identities. Ray includes architectural elements as vital narrative devices that connect built environments to storytelling and memory transmission. These architectural fragments therefore act as advanced transitional bridges between material reality and narrative meaning, illustrating the integrated historiographical principle of how spaces serve not just to be passive backgrounds but active agents in the building and interpretation of historical experience.

In one of the research articles titled *Literary Theory and Historical Writing* the author mentions that “the history is not only an object we can study and our study of it; it is also and even primarily a certain kind of relationship to the past mediated by a distinctive kind of written discourse. It is because historical discourse is actualized in its culturally significant form as a specific kind of writing that we may consider the relevance of literary theory to both the theory and the practice of historiography.”(White 1) In this context, the colonial and post-colonial history is combined with the rich culture of Lucknow. The narrative in the *Badshahi Angti* emphasizes the rich postcolonial history through the architectural marvels of Bara Imambara, Residency, etc. According to the narrative the residency is an area where Sepoy Mutiny took place during colonial rule. Sir Henry Lawrence fought with the sepoys yet lost that fight. This Architectural marvel becomes of utmost importance in the development of the plot because Feluda, the detective in this novel, encountered his first attack in this place. The crime that took place also adds to the history of the Nawabi past of Lucknow. The emperor’s ring that was stolen was a part of Mughal history, it was said to be Aurangzeb’s ring. Pyarelal who was one of the kings of Lucknow had that ring and he gave it to Dr Shrivastav, a highlighted character in the story. This whole process of passing on the expensive ring from one generation to another in the novel can also be suggestive of the preservation of history through literature.

The climax of the story takes place in Haridwar which is quite far from the rich historical past of Lucknow yet the location contributes to the unfolding of the climax scene. The treehouse that is in an isolated jungle in Haridwar where the detective confronts the criminal highlights the importance of a geographical location in detective fiction. Ray most probably chose this location to give the readers a thrill of the climax scene while referencing the interplay of geography and storytelling.

Limitations

This research is limited as it does not have an adequate amount of detailed resources specifically targeted towards *Badshahi Angti*, primarily because it is derived from a Bengali literary context that could therefore limit the scope of discussion. The concept of historiography is also insufficiently discussed in existing literature; therefore, there might be shortcomings in understanding the concept within the context of discussion.

Recommendations

Future researchers and scholars should focus more on broadening the aspects of historical accords in Bengali Literature especially in Bengali Detective fiction. In the context of Detective fiction, more researchers should come up with a comparative analysis of Bengali and other Indian detective fiction. Expanding the historiographical analysis by exploring how this particular novel reflects or challenges historical narratives would deepen the understanding of its historical context. For further research on this field talking to experts and scholars who are specialized in this kind of historiographical research is also recommended.

Conclusion

The novel *Badshahi Angti* develops its plot completely around the Nawabi history of Lucknow. The architectural marvels ensure the development of the plot ultimately connecting the detective in the investigation of the crime committed. The interplay of history, geography, and storytelling is explored in this novel. The Feluda series by Satyajit Ray attempts to preserve the rich culture of various places that the Bengali sleuth Feluda has visited and major and minute descriptions of these places transform from fiction to reality

acting like a travelogue for readers. But at the same not completely asking the readers to follow it blindly like a map.

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