



Adolescent Spirit of Adventurism and Inquisitiveness: A Comparative Study of Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five* and Sasthipada Chattopadhyay's *Pandab Goenda*

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Abstract

When a child passes through exposure and experience to the stage of adolescence, she or he is chiefly guided in young imagination by the spirit of adventurism and inquisitiveness. It is both a release from the drab routine life of school and bullying of the elders at home and society, and a way of exerting the new-found ecstasies of life. The virginity of mind searches most eagerly and passionately for the truth, and innocent sense of boldness is ever hungry to unravel the seeming mysteries of life. This paper proposes to make a comparative study of the British writer Enid Blyton and the Bengali writer Shasthipada Chattopadhyay who, despite gaps of place, time and gender, have exploited this spirit most successfully in their respective efforts to tell detective stories involving young boys and girls. In the process, the paper intends to draw attention to an interesting facet of pop-lit, a cult that has already become a part of mainstream literary culture.

Keywords: Childhood and Adolescence, Adventurism and Inquisitiveness, Detective Stories, Comics, Graphic Romance

In Chapter II of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as A Youngman*, we find an exciting aspect of adolescent awakening. Joyce writes of his young hero Stephen Dedalus newly shifted to Blackrock with his family: 'He became the ally of a boy named Aubrey Mills and founded with him a gang of adventurers in the avenue. Aubrey carried a whistle dangling from his buttonhole and a bicycle lamp attached to his belt while the others had short sticks thrust dagger wise through theirs. Stephen, who had read of Napoleon's plain style of dress, chose to remain unadorned and thereby heightened for himself the pleasure of taking counsel with his lieutenant before giving orders. The gang made forays into the gardens of old maids or went down to the castle and fought a battle on the shaggy weed grown rocks, coming home after it weary stragglers with the stale odours of the foreshore in their nostrils and the rank oil of the sea wrack upon their heads and in their hair'. Joyce depicts here Stephen's playfulness in the first stage of adolescence. In this conflicting stage between childhood and early youth, a boy is most passionate about blessed snaps of innovative playthings. The nursery rhymes and bedtime stories help a child to stretch his imagination to cope with the world around him. With years and experience, with comics, thrillers, and graphic romances of super-heroes, the

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boy begins to take himself seriously, and he gets ready to con different roles of the world of the elders. He develops a spirit to challenge the world in his own way, and to apply his brain to solve different problems, personal or social. Adventurism and inquisitiveness begin to take a more serious and meaningful turn, and the young boy, with his mind already permeated in lofty idealism and the superheroes from myth, history, and academics, strives to make his presence felt. The girls of that age-group have the similar spirit of sportiveness and adventurism, but the expression most often is different. As biologically and psychologically, they struggle more than their male counterparts and they are intrinsically aware of their natural power of dominance on them, they inspire their male counterparts in adventurism and quest in an active way. So when boys and girls of this age-group work hand in hand, the result most often is surprisingly creative. This creative space has been explored imaginatively by writers again and again, more particularly from during the first half of the Twentieth Century.

Perennial human penchant for mysteries, riddles and puzzles found varied expressions from time immemorial, as we find recorded in the *Old Testament* story of 'Susanna and the Elders', *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles and 'The Three Apples' from the *Arabian Nights*. Inquisitiveness and adventurism found innumerable fictional expressions from the oldest times and detective insights in such fictions were not altogether absent. These rudimentary forms led to the conscious modern efforts for a sub-genre of crime- thrillers known as detective stories. *Zadig* (1748) by Voltaire and Caleb Williams (1794) by William Godwin must have inspired modern Western tradition of detective stories, the first examples of which having been set by the American poet and prose writer Edgar Allan Poe in form of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841). *Eccentric and Brilliant C. Auguste Dupin* of Poe happens to be the first fictional detective who also prefigures in *The Mystery of Marie Roget* (1843) and *The Purloined Letter* (1845). Soon the genre achieved pan-European popularity and Emile Gaboriau in France and Wilkie Collins in England gave the form further consolidation. With the arrival of Sherlock Holmes in 1887, the immortal detective of Arthur Conan Doyle, detective stories found a new opening. This private detective of 221B Baker Street in London, with his friend, assistant and biographer Dr. John H. Watson, gave the world of crime-thrillers a new direction with astute observation, deductive reasoning and forensic skills to solve difficult cases.

Van Dine (1928) in *Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories* observes: "The detective story is a kind of intellectual game. It is more – it is a sporting event". The budding minds are intellectually very sharp, and they have a tendency to unravel 'whodunit' things in a playful way. The maturity and market viability of print culture exploited this psychology by alluring writers to attempt detective stories for children, often centering the story on a group of boys and girls, trapped or challenged, coming out in flying colours. Such a story arrests child reader's emotions with suspense, and a successful finale of the story provides interesting catharsis: stories are commercially viable, and children or young ones are overjoyed after an emotional escapade from the monotony of the everyday world around them. Even when children are not directly the target readers, a good many writers of detective stories found an unprecedented response from them. Therefore, sleuths like Dupin, Holmes and Poirot are the idols of the little readers whose never-ending thirst for unraveling mysteries found latest icons in the fantastic world of the werewolf or the zombie.

When Sherlock Holmes made his entry into English world of detective fiction, Enid Blyton (1897-1968), an extremely prolific writer, novelist and a poet, was only 10. Her sensibility developed during the golden period of detective fiction in England with Arthur

Morrison, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayres, Ngaio Marsh and Margery Allingham at the peak of their career. Her first book, *Child Whispers* (1922) was a collection of poems the title of which clearly indicating her target readers. She wrote on education, natural history, fantasy, mystery and biblical narratives. Her writings for children sold more than 600 million copies, and these have been translated into some 90 languages. Still enormously popular among child readers, Enid Blyton is best remembered for her Noddy, Famous Five, and Secret Seven and Adventure stories. The success of *Adventures of the Wishing- Chair* (1937) and *The Enchanted Wood* (1937), both dealing with the phantasmagoric world children love so much, gave her confidence enough to try her hand in detective stories for children, with a group of school children as the protagonists. Such efforts were already made by Franklin W. Dixon in *The Tower Treasure* (1927) with Frank and Joe Hardy as the detectives; Caroline Keene in *The Secret of the Old Clock* (1930) with Nancy Drew as the little detective of a whole series; Margaret Sutton in *The Vanishing Shadow* (1932) with Judy Bolton; and Harriet Adams in *By the Light of the Study Lamp* (1934) with Louise and Jean Dana as the little sleuths. In 1942 came out the first novel of Blyton's Famous Five series, *Five on a Treasure Island*. The title makes an interesting inter-textuality as two famous titles readily come to our mind: *The Treasure Island* (1883) by R.L. Stevenson and *The Coral Island* (1858) by R.M. Ballantyne; and enduring success of both these fictions must have been in Blyton's mind in her title and theme. With illustrations by Eileen Soper, *Five on a Treasure Island* became so successful that 20 more books on the Famous Five were written by Blyton up to 1963, and the characters of Julian, Dick, Anne, George (Georgina) and Timmy, the dog became household names in England.

Keith Robinson in an article published on March 15, 2006, under the title, *Meet the Characters*, says:

The Famous Five are four decidedly upper- class children with a mongrel dog who solve mysteries and get tangled with smugglers and other criminals. They want nothing more than to have a great time strolling about the countryside and have picnics, but these adventures just keep coming along and getting in the way. (2006)

So, these school-goers can not strictly be called detectives, but with the zeal of their early youth they go about solving problems in their own way. Julian, Dick and Anne the siblings who get together with their Tomboy- type cousin Georgina, a girl so desperate to be a boy that she crops her hair and struts about doing boy things and likes to be called George; to go for their first adventure with the pet-dog of George named Timmy to Kirrin Island. This island is owned by the parents of George, Mr. and Mrs. Kirrin whom Julian Dick and Anne call Uncle Quentin and Aunt Fanny. Most of the Famous Five adventures are centred on the Kirrin Island. The first involves a shipwreck and the final discovery of the treasure which, interestingly, changes the fate of Mr. and Mrs. Kirrin. The second, *Five Go Adventuring Again* (1943) makes a search for a thief in Kirrin Cottage with the discovery of an old map. The search for the smugglers in George's island comprises *Five Runaway Together* (1944) and *Five Go To Smuggler's Top* (1945). *Five on Kirrin Island Again* (1947) involves Uncle Quentin, the scientist, alone in Kirrin Island, allowing nobody. The Famous Five find out that he is not alone there. His moves are being watched every moment! Another interesting story in Kirrin Cottage is told in *Five Have Plenty of Fun* (1955). Berta, a spoilt American girl, seeks their help in hiding from kidnappers, and they risk the dangers of helping her. Kidnapping as a motif occurs again in *Five Get Into Trouble* (1949) when Dick having been kidnapped is mistaken for somebody else. He is finally tracked down to a lonely, abandoned house. The Famous Five have other sorts of experiences like coming across a circus troupe on

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their caravan holiday in *Five Go Off in a Caravan* (1946); tracking down an escaped convict in *Five On a Hike Together* (1951); and solving various other mysteries and problems in stories like *Five Go Off to Camp* (1948), *Five Fall Into Adventure* (1950), *Five Have a Wonderful Time* (1952) and the final story, *Five Are Together Again* (1963).

Kirrin Island forms a sort of 'El Dorado,' the land of heart's desire, not merely for the Famous Five; it is the dreamland for the child readers all over the world who read the exploits of the Famous Five. Every child has a Kirrin Island in his or her soft bosom, and all children passionately share the experiences of the protagonists. Enid Blyton was a trained teacher of the kids and she knew very well what a growing child was most happy with. Every child, like the Famous Five, wants to pass holidays amidst fun-fiesta. They long for a release from the world of school-books and home-works and 'Don't do this. It's silly' type of comments from the elders. Those who cannot afford this, grasp the volumes of Blyton for a visit to 'fairylands forlorn.' Blyton provides a lucrative alternative in printed form for children all over the world tired of shadow-boxing with the world around them. Commenting on the enduring popularity of her *Noddy* and *The Famous Five*, Blyton said: "...my love of children is the whole foundation of my work."

Even in her struggling life, Blyton was able to keep her childhood unaffected within her heart. Victor Watson pertinently observed that her works reveal an "essential longing and potential associated with childhood." It is interesting to note here that George's character was modeled by Blyton's own daredevil spirit when she was of that age. Her works may not be compared with the best in English, nor can we crown them as canonical, - but her place in the category of pop-lit can hardly be called in question.

Modern Bengali culture of *Goenda Kahini* or detective stories developed mostly under British influence. The unprecedented popularity of Sherlock Holmes series inspired Bengali writers and readers alike, and starting from the popular series *Darogar Daptar* (The Journal of a Police Inspector) by the retired police officer Priyanath Mukherjee in 1890s down to the latest Z-Bangla TV serial *Goenda Ginni* or *The Detective Wife* (2016), the Bengalees have been enthralled by the sleuths like *Kirity Roy* by Nihar Ranjan Gupta, *Feluda* or *Prodosh Ranjan Mitra* by Satyajit Roy and *Byomkesh Bakshi* by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay. Innumerable other stories with various other detectives have been attempted by different writers; all of them were more or less popular. With the maturity of the genre came up detective stories with target readers: the popular series by Sunil Gangopadhyay, with *Kakababu* (the retired and disabled Director of the Archeological Survey of India, Mr. Raja Roychowdhury) and his nephew cum assistant, Santu had enduring popularity with young readers; the aunt-niece team of Mitinmasi whose original name is Pragyaparamita Mukherjee, and her niece Oindrilla, popularly known as Tupur, a series by Suchitra Bhattacharya, earned great popularity with the adolescent girls among others; and, of course, *Pandab Goenda* by Sasthipada Chattopadhyay, the first of its kind in Bengali children's literature with three boys and two girls and a one-eyed dog comprising the detective team.

No doubt the young narrator, Topseh Ranjan Mitra or Topshe, the cousin of Feluda, the very icon of Bengali detectives, had a profound influence on the budding minds. Feluda appeared first in 1965 as a suave, sharp and dashing detective of 21 Rajani Sen Road, Ballygunge, Kolkata, and, even after the death of Satyajit Roy, Feluda continues as the hero of Bengalees from 8 to 80, thanks to the filmic enterprises of Sandip Roy, the worthy son of Satyajit Roy, as a continuation of his father's mastery on the celluloid. Almost equally popular among the children is Santu, the young narrator of the *Kakababu* series. This space

for the children in detective fiction was explored by Samaresh Basu in his Gogol series with little Gogol solving problems that thrust upon him. Lila Majumdar wrote stories with *Gupi and Paanu* as the little masters solving various problems with the help of Chotomama and Binu Talukdar, and Ashapura Devi had Tapa and Madna, the little slum-dwellers, as the self-styled detectives. Sasthipada Chattopadhyay comes to the field with this legacy to back him up. But the immediate impetus for Chattopadhyay was the Famous Five series by Enid Blyton.

Born in Howrah near Kolkata in 1941, Sasthipada was related to the Ananda Bazar group under various capacities for a long time and contributed prose writings in prolific number. His detective series, *Pandab Goenda* is read extensively in West Bengal and Bangladesh. He is also remembered for mystery, travel, and other forms of writings like *Rajasthan Vromon*, *Purnotirthe Vromon*, *Vangor Rahashya*, *Himaloyer Noy Devi and Chotur Goenda Choturavijan*. However, the detective series *Pandab Goenda* gave Sasthipada a permanent place in Bengal children's literature. The first story, *Pandab Goenda* was published in 1981, and the instant and enduring success of the concept of five middle-class Kolkata boys and girls in their early youth with one-eyed native dog, Ponchu intrigued the children and teen-agers alike, and the continued popularity of their adventures led to the publication of 18 full volumes of the escapades and bravados of the five little sleuths. Bablu, the eldest, with lanky Bilu, and spirited Bhombal, are the three boys of the neighborhood, who take two sisters of their acquaintance, Bacchu and Bichchu to gang up as the Bengali famous five with their faithful and daring dog, Ponchu.

They roam about the city and come across various experiences, much in the line of the Famous Five. They meet regularly at the abandoned compound of the the Mitras of the neighbourhood, popularly known as the 'Mittir Bari'. The early stories like *Mittir Bari Rahashya*, *Kalitalar Baganbari*, *Dashnagare Gundaraj*, *Jipsi Nacher Araley*, *Banamalir Bipad* and *Sadhubeshi Shoytan* involved various escapades and encounters of the *Pandab Goenda* in and around Kolkata. With age and experience, they go about outstations like Ghatshila, Bishnupur, Puri, and Darjeeling. Everywhere they smell something clandestine and, despite threats, kidnapping and, at times, life risk, and they solve the problems of smuggling, theft, murder, and other sorts of anti-social activities.

Chattopadhyay was an avid reader of both Bengali and English detective stories. His indebtedness to Enid Blyton can easily be understood by the formation of story-line and character conception. The generic name, *Pandab Goenda* links up the mythical Pandavas of *The Mahabharata*- Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva; who fought together against the clandestine designs of the Kauravas.

They, too, passed through various adventures and experiences during their forced 'Vanawas' for twelve years, and confinement in cognito for another year. They fought against the forces of evil jointly, and finally they upheld the essential precept of Indianism – 'Jatha dharma, tatha joy,' meaning 'the righteous alone can have the final victory'. This spirit of Indianism has been registered in various episodes and encounters faced by the modern little Pandavas. Chattopadhyay presented the characters and episodes in absolutely feasible way. The story *Laalbai-er Guptadhan* is replete with the history of Bishnupur, a semi-town in the district of Bankura, which was once the capital of the Malla Dynasty. Similarly, *Durjoy Daarjeeling* is written in such a way that the young readers enjoy the thrill of travelling to the famous hill-station and at same time get emotionally involved in the suspense of a thriller. *Puridhame Dhindhumar* gives the similar effect of touring the favourite sea-resort of the Bengalees, Puri in Orissa in the east coast. This Indianization has made the stories absolutely

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enjoyable, though the basic idea was foreign. Blyton presents a world where ginger beer flows and ham rolls are a staple diet, and the Famous Five enjoy the strolling over the country-side or the sea-side as their pass time during their vacations.

Sasthipada takes up the basic format, but his adolescent protagonists, unlike their English predecessors, are not the students of expensive boarding schools, meeting during the holidays to go off on camps or to the seaside. The given socio-economic realities of Kolkata of 1980s render Sasthipada's teen-agers rooted to their home ground with very little interference from their parents. They are the Bengalee children with fish and rice for their staple food, and they are just like other children in any Bengalee neighbourhood, - simple-minded, inquisitive, bubbling with the thrills of life, and ready to undergo dangers and hazards for the right cause. These little detectives are forever popular as they smack of no stardom or super-humanism: they are of us, and they are always around us.

The meeting point of Blyton and Chattopadhyay is their phenomenal popularity among the children. As Julian, Dick, Anne, George and Timmy are the household names in English-speaking world, so are the names of Bablu, Bilu, Bhombal, Bachhu, Bichchu and their dog Ponchu in Bengali-speaking world. The Famous Five series has been adapted for the stage, film and TV again and again with immense success. *Pandab Goenda* has been taken up by 'Softtoons' for animation series with tremendous response from the children. Both writers played a significant role in exploring the vast recess of child psychology, and both have underlined the prospect of children literature even in this complex modern world where intellectual go-getting has definitely narrowed the space for children literature. It is all the more laudable in case of Sasthipada Chattopadhyay, as he had to struggle more resolutely in the world infested with the comic and graphic versions of *Phantom*, *Mandrake*, *Tintin* and *Tarzan* along with *Gopal Bharh*, *Bantul the Great*, *Nantey-Fantey*, *Handa-Bhonda* and the like. Reading the exploits of the Famous Five or *Pandab Goenda* is rewarding for elders also, as such fantasies have a nostalgic effect on the adult mind, and it reunites the bond of the elders with the littluns, which at times get strained due to the pressures of post-modern existential crises.

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