The Bhadralok as Truth-Seeker: Towards a Social History of the Bengali Detective

Author(s): Gautam Chakrabarti
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Summary/Abstract: The figure of the socially-engaged detective who transcends his – a highly gendered agency operates here – generically-sanctioned roles as a glorified
intellectual mercenary or "gumshoe", solver of conundrums and "tangled skeins", champion of the rule-of-law and keeper of the last resort, while attempting to uphold a universe of moral and ethical values that, simultaneously, do not stray too far from the high road of societal and political acceptability, is a figure to conjure within the literary history of Bengal in the twentieth century. In the present essay, the attempt will be made to study, through a comparativist's prism, this gravitas, endowed by society, which is associated with the image of the successful private investigator in Bengal; often, his is a voice striking a blow for the spirit of rational enquiry, as with Feluda, and, in other cases, he upholds the dignity of the traditional order/s, while exposing its/their soft underbelly of moral corruption and criminal collusion, as with Byomkesh Bakshi.

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Basalstrasse 9
60487 Frankfurt am Main
Germany
Amtsgericht Frankfurt am Main HRB 53679
VAT number: DE300273105
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10.00-10.30 Gautam Chakrabarti, RLA College, University of Delhi, India / Freie Universität Berlin, Germany, The Bhadrakali as Truth-Seeker: Towards a Social History of the Bengali Detective. 10.30-11.00 Mimma Congedo, University of Milan, "The Enchantress of Florence": Salman Rushdie's Fatehpur Sikri. 11.00-11.30 Coffee break. Chairperson: Danuta Stasik. 11.30-12.00 Daniela Rossella, University of Potenza, Italy, Ahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇam "[that one] I call a brahmin" Buddhism and society as they are reflected in the Vajrasūcī attributed to Aśvaghoṣa. 12.00-12.30 Danielle Feller, Laus The Bhadrakali as Truth-Seeker: Towards a Social History of the Bengali Detective. 2012. Gautam Chakrabarti. Was the father of Bengali theatre a Russian? Or were the brief adventures in India of Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedev (1749–1817) 'a mere blip on the screen of Bengali performance history'? Already widely travelled in Europe, Lebedev, influenced by the then current belief that India was the cradle of civilization, arrived in Madras in 1785 during the virtual hegemony of the East India Company in the sub-continent. Inspired by his attempts to master the ancient Sanskrit tongue, he eventually set up a more. 1
Bhadralok (Bengali: ভাড়ালোক bhôdrolôk, literally "well-mannered person") is a Bengali term used to denote the new class of 'gentlefolk' who arose during colonial times (approximately 1757 to 1947) in Bengal. It is still used to indicate members of the middle class. Most, though not all, members of the bhadralok class are upper caste, mainly Brahmins, Baidyas and Kayasthas. There is no precise translation of bhadralok in English, since it maps economic and class privilege on to caste ascendancy.