

5 Culture, Intellect, and Emotions: The Romance of Masculinity and Leisure in the Detective Novels of Satyajit Ray

Private Detective! So far, I have only read about them. I must have devoured at least a thousand stories of these leisurely detectives. If I felt the same devotion and dedication towards Jadab Chakraborty, K.P. Bose, and Nesfield's textbooks as I had for famous detectives like Byomkesh, Jayanta–Manik, Subrata–Kiriti, Blake–Smith, I wouldn't have lived in such misery today. But all this time, these truth-seeking, mystery-revealing sleuths lived in my fantasies. I could never have dreamed that they could be present physically in this mortal world – and that too in this city of Calcutta.
Sankar³⁰⁴

The association of childhood and leisureliness is a recurrent theme in modern South Asian literature. One aspect of this association is manifested in the emotion of nostalgia, where childhood is retrospectively perceived and remembered as a time of unhindered, idyllic, leisurely existence, particularly in the context of pre-colonial subjectivity, seen as free from the westernised divisions of work and leisure times. Another aspect of the association of childhood with otium, leisure, and idleness is expressed in the carefree nature of childhood, beyond the toils of adult life and its inevitable concerns with regulation, acceleration, and production. However, the latter remains open to the possibility of both disciplinary forms of education and the inculcation of an appreciation of fulfilling idle leisure, of being encultured through an adequately captivating pedagogical approach, as already demonstrated in [Chapter 3](#). While Rabindranath Tagore's outlook on leisure and pedagogy addresses a significant discourse in the Bengali literary context (debatably a broader South Asian context), he was certainly not alone in these endeavours. Neither were these the first attempts at bringing about that enchanting, leisurely flavour to children's reading and learning in Bengal. In fact, Tagore has operated in parallel to other innovative literary endeavours to enhance children's learning in colonial Bengal within a pedagogical project that sought to educate and entertain.³⁰⁵ Some notable names in

304 Sankar, *Caurāṅgī* (2007), 17. Translation mine.

305 See Satadru Sen (2004) and Gautam Chando Roy (2012) for a detailed reading.

these endeavours are those of his nephew, Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951) and the renowned Bengali poet and humourist, Sukumar Ray (1887–1923).

Sukumar's son, Satyajit Ray, extended the pedagogical project initiated by Sukumar's father, Upendrakishore Ray (1863–1915). Through generations, the Ray family posited themselves as a harbinger of a certain kind of education, carved carefully out of the concepts of culture and knowledge/intellect that emerged from their experiments with modernity.³⁰⁶ The concept of culture in modern Bengal, as Andrew Sartori (2008) has shown, underwent various formulations, particularly in the twentieth century: it is seen to have “provided [the] framework both for the optimistic pride and the anxious pessimism of modern Bengali identity, as well as for Bengal's ambivalent relationship to conceptions of national and global modernity” (2008: 4). Elite Bengali culture evolved as a dynamic response ranging across several influential intellectuals of modernity; from Rammohan Roy's liberalism to Bankimchandra's call for a Hindu ‘national’ culture, and Rabindranath's universalist, aesthetic notion of culture, notably established in art and literature. Satyajit's conception of culture, as several scholars, including Sartori, have argued, resonated deeply with Rabindranath's notion of “aesthetic self-cultivation”, which the latter championed as an exalted attempt, thus claiming the lexeme *saṃskṛti* (purification) over *kṛṣṭi* (cultivation) (Sartori 2008:3). This aesthetic self-cultivation gradually became the hallmark of the Bengali concept of culture/*kāl'cār*.

Reading Satyajit Ray's popular detective fiction, this chapter locates this particular notion of aesthetic self-cultivation that evolved through debates in colonial modernity and post-Independence era of development, as intricately linked to notions of otium, especially in an escalating, capitalist, disciplinary setting. Culture, in this context and texts, has to be read as a concept entangled with emotions of pride and self-aggrandisement, as well as fear of loss, discussed and expressed in multiple ways, with its complex history as the “subjective moment of capitalist society” (Satori 2008: 232). In Bengal, the reified notion of culture is deeply entrenched in political historicity and consciousness of an intellectual social class – the *bhadralok*. *Bhadratā*, i.e., civility or gentility, becomes inseparable from the cultured Bengali subjectivity. Locating these peculiarities of Bengal's cultural-intellectual reverberations within a global cosmopolitanism, the aim is to understand conceptions of leisure in postcolonial Bengali literature. Satyajit Ray is a significant figure in this transitory and anxious period in Bengal – shifting from what was once understood as a prestigious position, expressed through “high” notions of culture and political-intel-

³⁰⁶ Ashis Nandy (1995), here quoted and contextualised from Sengoopta (2016), 2 of 35, Introduction.

lectual rebellion during the late-colonial period to a precarious political sidelining in the aftermath of India's independence. Growing up and encultured during the late-colonial period, Satyajit became a public figure, almost as if he were India's cultural ambassador after Independence, winning accolades as one of the greatest filmmakers of modern times. Simultaneously, he became one of the most widely read and beloved writers in Bengal, seen by many as the last of the icons of the so-called Bengal Renaissance. One reason why Ray continues to feature among the most famous writers in Bengal is his figurative translation of the old world into the new through his beloved fictional characters in their tryst with a new national and global identity – detective, scientist, and raconteurs – who are entrepreneurs of culture and intellect in a fast-changing world. Ray's writing of this new world centres knowledge and adventure within an axis of leisure, enjoyment, and morality, continuing the educate-and-entertain pedagogic formula begun by his ancestors.

In this chapter, I explore Satyajit Ray's popular fiction, the detective *Pheludā* novels (novellas and stories, too), to identify leisureliness as a pedagogical element and method in twentieth-century Bengali literature. Located between genres of children's literature (although 'children' is a misnomer in this case) and detective fiction, the *Pheludā* series forms an essential narrative in postcolonial Bengali literature, addressing questions and dyadic concerns like past/history and present/postcoloniality, empire/metropole and nation/periphery, work/leisure, and idleness/engagement. In the post-Independence setting, an opportunity for adapting older traditions into innovative deviations opens up, where concepts of culture and intellect are seen to be inherently linked to the experience and ideas of leisure in these texts. However, they are more than merely cerebral concepts. As this chapter argues, culture and intellect are concepts deeply entangled with emotions (of pride but also others) in this Bengali context, firmly rooted in the history of the sentiment of *bhadratā* or civility. At the same time, in these narratives, intricacies of otium with culture, civility, and education/intellect are laden with an emphasis on masculinity, suggesting a highly gendered conception of leisureliness. The chapter returns to the topic of pedagogy and otium to unpack its recurrence in Bengali literary trends. Cutting through the various sections of the chapter is the idea of leisureliness that recurs as topic, activity, concept, method, and mood; this leisureliness, I argue, remains entrenched in the notion of *aesthetic self-cultivation*, propagated by both Tagore and Ray. At the same time, certain notions of masculinity seem to be inherent to this pedagogy and self-cultivation, directing us to a gendered and privileged variant of otium.

In the first section of the chapter, I provide a background to the 'educate-and-entertain' pedagogical project that began during colonial times, which Satyajit takes recourse to in his postcolonial writings. After tracing a genealogy

of his literary pursuits to his ancestors and his family-run magazine for children, I read the entanglements of the figures of the modern detective, the investigative *flâneur* and the historian to arrive at possible negotiations of the figure of the cultural-intellectual Bengali *bhadralok* of leisure. This approach then opens up a discussion on the relationship of knowledge and idleness, through which I introduce the fictional world of Ray's Pheluda as the postcolonial detective – a potential figure of otium. This claim is strengthened by the argument that his cultural-intellectual enterprise enables him to transform his work into leisurely pursuits while infusing leisure with scholastic interests. In section three, I address the concept of culture as entangled with emotions – and intricately linked to intellect – as central to the Bengali *bhadralok*'s identity. I also address the *bhadralok*'s relationship to the familial and the familiar; these relations are significant for the possibility of a leisurely and gentlemanly attitude to life. In section four, I read the leisurely and unfettered lifestyle embodied in these narratives by exploring the notion of masculinity with echoes in certain formulaic detective narratives. However, the masculinity in Ray's narratives continues to differ from theirs through the postcolonial Bengali variation of respectability and culture, as posited against colonial assertions of masculinity. In the concluding section, I return to questions of pedagogy but also to new directions of genre, capitalism, and production. How does the modern fantasy of detective fiction, located in the postcolonial-capitalist axis, negotiate thrill, calm, excitement, and alienation? How does the Bengali concept of culture and sentiment of social respectability respond to a scholastic and ascetic life of investigation in a world directed towards acceleration? What roles do emotions play in this journey of thrill and intellectual curiosity? These are some of the key questions this chapter explores to understand the mediation of otium in the context of escalation and growing precarity.

5.1 The Legacy of Sandeś: Contextualising the *Pheludā* Detective Novels in Postcolonial Bengal

Satyajit's grandfather, Upendrakishore, a pioneer writer-illustrator of children's literature, musician, painter and printer-publisher, was sincerely invested in the late-nineteenth-century project of renewing and reforming children's literature.³⁰⁷ He opened his own printing and publishing house, U. Ray & Sons, and issued what became the most popular Bengali children's magazine, titled

³⁰⁷ For a detailed understanding, see Gautam Chando Roy (2018).

Sandesh ³⁰⁸ (1913 onwards). He introduced the novelty of beautifully sketched and coloured illustrations for the texts he wrote for children. His son, Sukumar, having studied print technology in Britain, joined the project, editing the magazine from 1915 to 1923. Sukumar's literary genius found expression in the genre of 'nonsense' verse and prose, the most famous of these being "*Ābol Tābol*" (1923) and *Hayabarala* (1921). The significance of this family enterprise, the magazine *Sandesh*, as Upendrakishore claimed, was its approach to pedagogy: "through pastime pleasures, there is much to be gained and learnt, like through games and play, we can improve our body and mind".³⁰⁹ Upendrakishore and Sukumar, unlike contemporary children's writers and educators, brought in an association of 'friendship' with those they sought to address, i.e., the child reader. They destabilised the stringent hierarchy between children and adults and the markedly moralising tone hitherto employed in children's literature, thereby modernising the genre through a blend of artistic intelligence and entrepreneurial genius.³¹⁰ Chandak Sengoopta (2016) sees the magazine as a culmination of Upendrakishore's multiple careers, "combining his literary gifts, artistic abilities, technological wizardry, and artisanal insistence on doing everything with his own hands" (2016: 6). They aimed at fashioning the subjectivity of "a new kind of child"; this new child would be one who would learn much through "pastime pleasures" (Dutta 2018). This reading is instructive in recognising the multifaceted and multiple formative ideas behind the detective series this chapter explores. Penned by Sukumar's son, Satyajit Ray (1921–92), the *Pheludā* detective series, initially published in the same magazine (revived by Satyajit in 1961), embodies the characteristic innovation and radicalisation that the Rays initiated in colonial Bengal as well as the familiar (even the familiar) and the exciting, global trajectories of post-colonial India.³¹¹

This brief history helps unpack the literary (and entrepreneurial) project that Satyajit was invested in, which found expression both in his globally appreciated cinema and in his popular Bengali literary contributions, most

³⁰⁸ The name reflects the typical puns and word games for which the Rays are known. While *Sandesh* is the name of a popular and widely consumed Bengali sweetmeat, it also means 'message' or 'news'.

³⁰⁹ In a piece titled "Kathābārtā", written by Upendrakishore in the magazine's first issue. Source: *Sandesh 100* (Documentary film) by Soumyakanti Dutta, 2018.

³¹⁰ See Sengoopta (2016) Introduction.

³¹¹ Chowdhury reads the politics of this family-run magazine as instructive towards locating Satyajit Ray and his works, especially his detective fiction, the widely popular *Pheludā* stories (Chowdhury 2015), 110.

iconic of which remain the *Pheludā* series.³¹² I read these novels as his literary contribution towards the discourses of work-leisure and idleness-engagement – discourses that Satyajit (as well as the Rays before him) was deeply interested in and invested in. As an artist of newly independent India, portraying a Bengali subjectivity in culture and sensibilities through the relatively new media of cinema at a global platform, an heir to the erstwhile Brahmo secular education and enculturation in colonial India, Satyajit was not only keen on discourses of postcolonial modernity, but he also expressed his attitudes to the changing values of this new India. For him, core concerns of such values were subjectivity and determination, central aspects of the concept of otium. While Satyajit's films can arguably provide for a fascinating reading of idleness, leisure and inaction, an exploration of his literary contributions, notably the detective series, can lead us to an invigorating discussion on the discourse of otium and leisure in Bengali literature after Independence; not least because as literary texts, these narratives and characters have now charted new journeys, adapting to transformations located in the global and the local.

With his first appearance in *Sandés* in 1965, in a story titled “*Pheludār Goyendāgiri*” (Pheluda turns detective)³¹³ Satyajit's young sleuth became the eponymous hero of a series of detective stories and novellas (35 in number) that ran until 1995.³¹⁴ The world of *Pheludā*, created by Ray, gained immense popularity in Bengali literature that remains unparalleled. Although Bengali crime and detective fiction have a long and complex history, most scholars agree that Western writers profoundly influenced the modern detective genre in Bengali.³¹⁵ Gautam Chakrabarti remarks on the Bengali *bhadralok's* “anglophiliac leisure” and his invincible fascination with and consumption of Anglo-European detective fiction (2012: 256). The twentieth century saw a fresh emergence of detective fiction in Bengali, which reached its zenith with the Byomkesh Bakshi novels penned by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay (1899–1970). Although Byomkesh and Pheluda are vastly different in characterisation, Satyajit's Pheluda became

³¹² Satyajit also created the popular genius-mad-scientist – Professor Shanku/*Śanku* – in his other literary series for children, often seen as a significant postcolonial science-fiction narratives in Bengali. Apart from these two long-running series, he also penned the stories of Tarini Khuro and a great number of short stories, many of which deal with mysteries, humour, the occult, and ‘nonsense’.

³¹³ Translated by Chitrita Banerjee & Gopa Majumdar as “Danger in Darjeeling”. Ray (1996).

³¹⁴ Satyajit passed away in 1992. Some *Pheludā* narratives, for instance, *Indrajāl Raha-sya*, were published posthumously.

³¹⁵ For a good discussion, see Sukumar Sen's extensive chronology in *Krāim'kāhinir Kāl'krānti* (1988).

Byomkesh's successor in Bengali crime fiction and remains unvanquished. The *Pheludā* stories attained great popularity amongst Bengali readers due to their close resemblance to the postcolonial context and the appeal of the narratives amongst readers of all ages. Ray's narratives epitomise the familiar *bhadralok* sensibility, forging rational thought, global cosmopolitanism, and a Bengali appropriation of culture and intellect.

Shirking both white- and blue-collar jobs, the protagonist, typical of fictional detectives, represents a character interested in vast, excessive knowledge, intelligence, and an almost arrogant sense of superiority. In his appreciation of knowledge, the detective approaches the idealised occupation of a scholar of the world, ironically described on his business card as 'Pradosh C Mitter³¹⁶, Private Detective'. The stories have three central characters and a returning antagonist/criminal. The protagonists are the detective, Pheluda (Pradosh Mitter); the narrator, i.e., Pheluda's accompanying young cousin Topshe (Tapeshe Ranjan Mitter); their friend, the celebrated writer of popular Bengali crime thrillers, Lalmohan Ganguly, a.k.a. *Jatāyū*/*Jatayu*, a mythical bird, and his *nom de plume*. Topshe, the young narrator, represents Ray's ideal reader, the male Hindu Bengali adolescent. Lalmohan Ganguly serves as a strategy of self-mocking humour, ridiculed as the writer of commercial thrillers. The trio embodies a Bengali 'familiarity' and local flavour, unlike the formulaic duo of standard detective narratives like Holmes-Watson, Poirot-Hastings or Byomkesh-Ajit. Ganguly primarily serves as a foil to both Pheluda and Topshe, who are intelligent and intellectually stimulated. The villain, Maganlal Meghraj, a corrupt Marwari businessman, provides the figure of the 'other' in this familiar, pleasant Bengali set-up. Meghraj's character is designed around suspicion and fear. In contrast, Ganguly provides scintillating humour intrinsic to his nature, tying the strange world of crime and murder in a neat bow of enjoyable adventure enriched with friendship.

The idyllic world of *Pheludā* created by Ray is in stark contrast with growing unemployment in Bengal, reflected in contemporary novels of Sunil Gangopdhyay (1934–2012) and Sankar (1933–) – novels, some of which Ray adapted in his cinematic projects (for example *Pratidvandvī* [1970], *Jana Aranya* [1976]). This seemingly naïve world of detective fiction, initially created with the child reader in mind, evolved into a nuanced, complex body of literature over the decades as its publication platform changed from *Sandesh* to the esteemed literary magazine, *Des*, in what is now commonly known as 'crossover literature'³¹⁷. Sandra Beckett points out that while not necessarily addressing a dual readership, crossover fiction tends to blur the distinction between two traditionally separate readerships –

316 Mitter is a standard anglicised version of the Bengali name Mitra.

317 I thank Elizaveta Ilves for drawing my attention to this 'crossover' genre discussion.

the child and the adult (2009: 3). This holds for the *Pheludā* narratives; but, in this case, the intended readership is not the child but young adults/teenagers, in Bengali, *kiśor*. While the series brings forth the Ray family's contribution towards the 'education and entertainment' project³¹⁸, it also emerges as a socially relatable yet fantastical escape that appeals to readers from various age groups. A significant aspect of this appeal is the aesthetic self-cultivation that resonates with both young, curious readers, as well as the adult Bengali reader, for whom knowledge, intellect and a specific 'cultural capital' remain significant concepts, enmeshed with their Bengali identity and the emotion of pride. The first couple of narratives were admittedly loosely constructed and intended for children; however, Ray enhanced the complexities of the narratives as early as the first novel in 1966/7. They were now written for young adults and adolescents (gradually, as the child narrator's age increases but only within the limitations of early teenage years). Eventually, these texts found a prominent place within the mainstream literary tradition, having a broad emotional appeal among a 'crossover' readership. A significant aspect of this appeal is negotiating an acceptable modern fantasy of a leisurely life that resists mundane, monotonous, and manual work. This remarkable feat is achieved through a pedagogical approach where knowledge, curiosity, and intellect are perceived as ends unto themselves, resisting utilitarian results apart from the over-arching, ambiguous function of restoring balance in the world order and restoring pride in community identity.

In recent decades, detective fiction and children's/young reader's literature have undergone a critical wave, liberating them from dismissive and formulaic reading, enabling what was earlier marginalised at the periphery of literary traditions to claim a more central place in literary studies. For quite some time, modern detective fiction served as an equivalent to the fantasy-adventure genre in the West, for example, in the works of M. Riley, Dorothy L. Sayers, and even G. K. Chesterton.³¹⁹ Historian Parimal Ghosh points out the significance of 'extraordinariness' in the figure of the detective that makes the genre reminiscent of the adventures of yore (n.p. [Chapter 6]). The extraordinariness of such narratives places the detective in the position of the modern 'hero'. In portraying the detective's character, the modern hero is often described as a person of leisure who resists the monotony of manual labour, bureaucracy, and servitude. While a leisurely pace of life is associated with most detective narratives (Christie's *Marple*, even *Poirot*; Chesterton's *Father Brown*), the history of modern

³¹⁸ For a detailed overview of how *Sandés* contributed to shaping children's or young adult's minds in the early twentieth century, see Gautam Chando Roy (2012).

³¹⁹ See Chesterton, "A Defense of Detective Stories" (1923), 227. See also John M. Reilly (1980), xi.

detective fiction is embroiled in the hustle of urbanisation. As urban centres and overcrowded cities spread out of bounds, the anxieties and disquiets of urban life gave way to the genre of deep and wide observation. Drawing on this unique and inherent contradiction within the genre, Walter Benjamin conceptualised the idle *flâneur's* transformation into the “unwilling detective” (1983: 41). Recent criticism of detective fiction attempts to question earlier formulations and patterns of the genre to claim a more complex understanding of the epistemological formations of not just a society, but of societies and the intersectionality of nations, races, and cultures, “especially between imperial powers and their colonial territories” (Pearson & Singer 2009: 3). Drawing on these relevant concerns, I read the *Pheludā* narratives to claim a correlation between modern fantasies of a leisurely, rather autonomous, independent lifestyle in the post-colonial setting of Calcutta. Simultaneously, these fantasies of leisureliness are seen to have an emotional allure, equally among young and adult readers, towards intellectual prowess, knowledge, and the life of the (rational) mind.

5.2 The *Bhadralok Flâneur*: Knowledge, Production, and Cultured Leisure

Copious studies have been conducted on modernity’s leisurely urban figure, the *flâneur*, since Walter Benjamin’s reconstruction and rereading of this persona.³²⁰ Although it is impossible to unpack the precise meaning of *flânerie* owing to its elusiveness (Tester 2015: 1), the various attempts to address the figure of the *flâneur* as an integral aspect of the experience of modern urban metropolis continue to open up many possible readings and interpretations of the ‘myth’ of the *flâneur*.³²¹ In their probing analysis of this urban figure, Janet Wolff, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, and David Frisby read the figure of the *flâneur* in its various portrayals of the privileged male of the bourgeois class who surveys the city (2015). David Frisby focuses on the links and overlaps between the detective and the *flâneur* through a reading of Benjamin’s own methodology (Frisby 2015). For a serious study of the detective and the *flâneur* as symbolised in the same figure, he returns to the ‘ambiguity’ of the *flâneur*. This ambi-

³²⁰ Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 1983 [1969].

³²¹ By myth, I here refer to the simple meaning of the word and point to the possible deconstruction of the ‘myth’ allegedly engendered by Benjamin himself. See Martina Lauster’s article on Benjamin’s opaque, contradictory, even illogical portrayal of the *flâneur* (2007).

guity is not only the result of sudden historical shifts in mid-nineteenth century Paris (from where the modern European figure emerged) but also a consequence of the various (textual) interpretations (and reconstructions) of the *flâneur* in the works of Charles Baudelaire as well as Walter Benjamin. This ambiguity, fundamental to the *flâneur*, is depicted in the two contradictory and complementary aspects – “sometimes verging on that of the mere stroller, at other times elevated to that of the detective, to the decipherer of urban and visual texts” (Frisby 2015: 82).

In the previous chapter, I argued against inflating the idle, aimless strolling, the *āvāragardī* of Manto’s marginalised characters with the practice of *flânerie*, so deeply entrenched – at least culturally and emotionally – in the European male gaze. The emotional make up of Manto’s *āvārah* is laced with colonial melancholy and critical resistance against colonial capitalism; reading that itinerant state of mind and movement under colonial capitalism as an expression of *flânerie* is ironic, to say the least. This does not mean, however, that *flânerie* remains the prerogative of the European, nineteenth-century male. Bruce Mazlish has suggested that the *flâneur*, a figure of the *ruptures* of Western modernity, has given away, in his journey from an inward spectator to a shift outward “to a global terrain and its representations” (Mazlish 2015: 57). While one should remain cautious of reading different cultural expressions of idle observations in the tradition of European or even Parisian practice of *flânerie*, the expression is often used – and at times can be helpful – in exploring itinerant journeys and loose forms of investigation and their intertwinement with globalised notions of production. Here, I explore the tradition of European *flânerie* as profoundly associated with the philosophical project of the modern detective of fiction. Then, I analyse Ray’s use of these associations located in European cultural nexus and their transformation to postcolonial urban India by adapting *flânerie* into the Bengali concept of ‘culture’. This is the premise for the postcolonial detective to locate himself in a global terrain – his wandering and observant strain emerges from the modern Bengali context of knowledge, production, and culture.

Benjamin suggests that the *flâneur* “learns” to catch things in flight, i.e., a form of self-cultivation is crucial in developing the faculties that transform the idle *flâneur* into an invested historian or a detective in search of and hungry for knowledge. This knowledge is inadvertently a result of “logical construction” (Benjamin 1983: 41–42), enmeshed in the networks of *being* and *doing*. Keith Tester argues that the Baudelarian poet’s ontological basis is in ‘doing’, even if nothing, not just in ‘being’ (Tester 2015: 5). Reading detective fiction as texts of *flânerie* as well as texts of collecting deep knowledge of historical and logical research, is simultaneously to read for leisure. The reading is oriented towards a more comprehensive understanding of how these fictional figures then embody the prototype of the ‘hero’ in modern texts, harking back to the figures

of the adventurer, even the hunter, in what Frisby calls “the oldest kind of worth that above all may be most closely interlinked with *idling*” (Frisby 2015: 93). What is common to these figures is the feeling of pursuit, a desire to satisfy a quest and an inherent potential of transformation through spontaneity. Although even idling is an action full of possibilities, the *flâneur* has always been depicted as someone not entirely purposeless but as someone who aspires to *retain* his purposelessness and autonomy against the rise of commercial utilitarianism. One difference between the idler and the *flâneur* is in their diverse spatial dimensions³²² – the *flâneur* needs the city, the crowd, society, something to frame and nourish his idling. Another difference is what this space represents: the modern, industrial city that is under the control of a governing state, technological encroachments, and capitalist forces. These differences are significant in appreciating not only the intersectional and translatable aspects of modernist readings of the *flâneur* but also the contradictory and paradoxical nature of idleness and otium.

Frisby argues that *flânerie* must explore the activities of observation, reading and producing texts (2015: 82). While supposedly passive observation and reading are still generally in sync with the idleness of the *flâneur*, what is stressed to the forefront is the more invested one of text ‘production’. In this, the *flâneur* approaches the figure of the historian, the investigator looking for clues, connecting fragments of information and producing an archaeological text. The text is an investigation into the signifiers of the city, of its social fabric: like the historian, the *flâneur* attempts to “listen carefully to sounds, stories, scraps of quotations as well as search for clues amongst the ‘dead data’ of the metropolis – just like the detective”, as someone who straddles both the past and the present (Frisby 2015: 93). The sensory investment of the *flâneur* then expands from mere looking to listening and even touching as he deconstructs and reconstructs texts (Frisby 2015: 93).³²³ The detective of fiction, often created from historical figures, can also serve as a purveyor of history, through narrative production. The collage of “meaningful” images of “logical construction” collected by the *flâneur*, the fictional detective, and even the historian then turns into the production of the literary text. On the one hand, it originates in a seemingly non-utilitarian urge of activity, stemming from a spontaneous urge

³²² In the meanings of negotiations of everyday space or social space, for instance, in the writings of Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre.

³²³ The comparable methodology for the historian and detective (or at least the detective of fiction) – collecting evidence, interpretation, and explications – has been explored extensively by Robin Winks (1978) and Ray Browne and Lawrence Kreiser (2000), among others.

to look, listen and observe, “catch things in flight”. On the other hand, as a complete, finished, produced text, emerging out of “the ability of which the *flâneur* likes to boast”, it ends up as a commodity itself, seeking a marketplace (Benjamin 1983: 40). Benjamin emphasises that the *flâneur* (and the fictional detective too), as a reader of the crowd of the city, which embodies an intoxication with commodities, “shares the situation of the commodity” (Benjamin 1983: 55). Only, his is abandoned by the crowd – an abandonment Frisby reads as “uprooted”. As the *flâneur* partially turns into a commodity, *flânerie* is transported, too, towards a literary activity, of reading, of the interconnectedness of the text as city and city as text (Frisby 2015: 98–99).

We observe a fluid embodiment of the *flâneur* as well as *flânerie*, in relation to the production of literary texts – more precisely, the construction of the detective of detective fiction. Frisby suggests that the only possible direction *flânerie* after Benjamin can move towards is reading, thereby turning *flânerie* and the *flâneur* into literary commodities, taking them out of the confines of the mid-nineteenth-century Paris (Benjamin already discusses the *flâneur* in the context of Berlin and London). My aim in referring to and summarising these various takes on the *flâneur* is oriented towards a point of departure wherein we can locate the functionalities of the *flâneur*’s fundamental ambiguity beyond Western modernity and its European setting, most prominently as a representation that is a prerequisite to its character. All these aspects can be read together towards an analysis of the fictional detective beyond Western modernity, as he is, in the words of Baudelaire, “away from home” and yet feels “at home anywhere”, “at the very centre of the world” and yet, “to be unseen of the world” (Tester 2015: 3). From this point of departure, I now introduce the fictional detective this chapter focuses on, and his uprooted context beyond the ruptures of Western modernity.

Pheluda, or Pradosh Mitra’s story is located in the ruptures of modernity, reverberating through the nineteenth and twentieth-century histories of the Indian subcontinent. It is a story of being uprooted and abandoned, but also one of quest – aptly fitting to the “unruly” and “inchoate” “nature of ‘India’s experiments with the modern”” (Sengoopta 2016: 2; Nandy 1995: 245; c.f. 307). The narrator of the *Pheludā* stories, the detective’s young nephew, Topshe or Tapesh, reveals their family history at the beginning of the novel *Rajāl Bēṅgal Rahasya* (*Royal Bengal Mystery*, 2015 e [1974]).³²⁴ Their fathers were four brothers who grew up in a village in undivided Bengal, specifically in present-day

³²⁴ There are inevitable anomalies in this narrative of family origin, which eventually becomes central to a reading of this series. In the first story, Topshe mentions Pheluda as his mother’s sister’s son. Their surnames were different – Mitra and Bose (2015). Phe-

Bangladesh. The eldest brother, the estate manager of a *jamidār/zamīndār*, had a gift for hunting; he hunted tigers, deer, and wild boars in the forests of Madhupur. The second was Jaykrishna, Pradosh's father, who had great physical strength and prowess and a sharpened intellect; he became a teacher of Mathematics and Sanskrit at Dhaka Collegiate School. An early widower, he died a tragic, untimely death, leaving behind his nine-year-old son. The third brother renounced all worldly affairs, turned to asceticism, and travelled west. The youngest of the brothers, Tapesh's father, Binay, although not daring like his other brothers but "strong in convictions" (Ray 2015e: 376), followed the conflicted path fashioned by the ruptures of colonial modernity. Like millions of educated high-caste young men from the countryside, he landed a white-collar job and settled down in the metropolis of Calcutta, becoming a *bhadralok*. He took in his orphan nephew, who grew up to be a brilliant detective and a role model to his son, the young narrator.

This tracing of ancestral origins and an uprooted identity is significant in two ways: firstly, in making the stories utterly relatable to a significant proportion of Bengali readers whose families underwent similar uprootedness, journeys, and quests of civility through the tumultuous years of India's compressed, chaotic modernity, political independence and the two partitions of the subcontinent. Secondly, it helps trace the many aspects that constitute the oft-contested but resilient, over-arching identity of the Bengali *bhadralok* at this junction of Bengal's socio-cultural history. This story of origins, as is widely known, is strikingly similar to Satyajit's childhood circumstances.³²⁵ Moreover, stories of family origins, moral and legal inheritance, relationships between father and son, and between the colonial and the postcolonial are recurring themes in these narratives. The family, the familial, and the familiarity (in the social history of Calcutta) of the *bhadralok* form the backdrop of these narratives. Attention has been repeatedly drawn to the almost exclusive *bhadralok* clientele that Ray's detective chooses to cater to – this being read as the detective's (and

luda's surname was retained as Mitra. However, in the third story, "*Kailās Caudhurīr Pāthar*" (Kailash Chaudhuri's gemstone), Pheluda introduces Topshe to his client as his paternal uncle's son (2015: 85). This grows into their familial standard narrative. These breaks in narrative construction are clarified in a late story, "*Ambar Sen Antardhān Rahasya*".

All quotations are from the collection, *Pheludā Samagra*, Vols. I and II (2015) published by Ānanda Publishers. Each narrative is marked according to the reference listed in the bibliography. All translations from the Bengali original are mine unless mentioned otherwise.

³²⁵ Sukumar died when Satyajit was nine. See Satyajit's memoir, *Yakhan Choṭo Chīlām* (2005 [1982]).

Ray's) attempts at coming to terms with the contemporaneity of Bengal's history. On the one hand, this is played out in the decline of the landed, wealthy Bengali *bhadralok* class and, on the other hand, in garnering hopes for the future of the *bhadralok* of modest means and aspirational civility.

The *bhadralok* detective/*flâneur*'s story thus straddles these two horizons of history. In a fictional, critical letter written by Maganlal Meghraj, Pheluda's arch-enemy, Kaushik Bhaumik asks: "So who is this Mr Mitter in the midst of the collapse of his own generation-in-class?" (2017: 248). The shrewd Meghraj offers an answer that is significant for our reading of these narratives and locating their response to leisureliness within this complex social backdrop. Mr Mitter, writes Meghraj (Bhaumik), is an extremely clever man who becomes a detective to dodge "all encounter with history – political and economical" (Bhaumik 2017: 248). He becomes, instead, a historian who is beyond the forces of history, in control of history and aims to manoeuvre history through his production of texts. Writing on Mr Mitter's (Pheluda's) portrayal in the two super-hit Ray films based on his detective, Meghraj compares him to the declining *bhadralok* class of this time, also repeatedly portrayed in Ray's films:

In short, in becoming a private detective he avoided the fate of all the other heroes of his class in Mr Ray's films made around the time of *Sonar Kella* and *Joi Baba Felunath*, heroes who tried to make a living through jobs. I noticed Mitter's utter disinterest in money, only taking that much that he deserved/was enough for his genteel lifestyle. (Bhaumik 2017: 249)

However, his lifestyle does not remain so genteel after all. Pheluda's prosperity, as Bhaumik (in Meghraj's voice) comments, increases, and he gradually becomes almost gentrified, although not really wealthy. Spanning roughly four decades, these narratives are an intriguing read given the slippery political and economic situation in Bengal at the time. The narratives preempt the neoliberal, global economic shifts in Bengal before they occur. This hopefulness, this leisurely lifestyle, the idealised Bengali cultural masculinity embodied by the detective has only one secret: that of intellect, his "intelligent brainwork" – in Bengali, *buddhi* – as Meghraj points out in annoyance, that "form of work that is a fetish for you Bengalis" (Bhaumik 2017: 251). The figure of Pheluda acquired a cult status in the years of his literary production, boosted by the two films *Sonār Kellā* (1974) and *Jāy Bābā Phelunāth* (1979)³²⁶, written and directed by Ray himself. As we will see in the final section, the *Pheludā* brand has now spiralled into many afterlives in the new millennium. What had started as a

³²⁶ These are the years of the films' release. The novels were published in 1971 and 1975, respectively. All quotations are from the 2015 edition by Ānanda Publishers.

harmless detective adventure for children in the first story evolved into an intriguing text encompassing historical, social, and cultural debates about the Bengali *bhadralok* identity, gender, and trans-mediality. The potential to read these narratives in the light of leisure, labour, and the discourse of otium has always been evident and, yet, not fully realised so far.³²⁷

In their first appearance in “*Pheludār Goṃendāgiri*” (2015 a [1965]), Pheluda is twenty-seven years old and Topshe is thirteen years and six months. The cousins are travelling with Topshe’s father to Darjeeling during the holidays. Reunited with old friends, Topshe’s father spends the days in a leisurely manner, chatting and playing cards. We meet the narrator, a young Bengali male teenager who is observant, inquisitive, and confident. As we gather from his first mention of Pheluda, he is often infantilised and chided by his older cousin, but only affectionately. This bond between brothers becomes a central aspect of the series as it develops (later, from the novel *Sonār Kellā* onwards, the two are joined by the middle-aged Lalmohan Ganguly). In this first story, the characters are not finely chiselled. Written to give young readers a taste of good, harmless detective fiction, it is a simple, formulaic but enjoyable adaptation of the standard British detective fare that Ray would have been brought up on. The curious boys stumble upon a mysterious case concerning an elderly acquaintance threatened with nasty anonymous letters in blue envelopes. The cousins solve the mystery only after the culprit leaves Darjeeling. This delayed resolution is balanced as no actual harm is done, and the culprit sends a final letter to own his culpability and reason it with a childhood grudge. The flavour of a leisurely adventure set in Darjeeling possibly worked wonders with young readers. Darjeeling has been a favourite spot amongst Calcutta Bengalis looking for a few days of respite and fresh air of the hills. As the duo traverse the picturesque city, the reader is taken on a trip too: idling in the famous Mall, browsing through antiques in curio shops, drinking coffee and hot chocolate on the rooftop terrace of the legendary Keventer’s restaurant, and all this, in the simple, enjoyable reading of a detective story, released just around the holidays.³²⁸

The resounding success of this first story must have inspired Ray to write the second, longer narrative – a proper novel following Pheluda and Topshe and their penchant for mystery, this time to the historical city of Lucknow, in *Bād’sāhī Āṃṭi* (*The Emperor’s Ring*, 1966–67). Significantly, this is the only narrative where Pheluda is reported to have a job in a private company. He had been working for two years and could join his uncle and cousin on a trip to

³²⁷ Although it is off-handedly mentioned in Pujita Guha’s article (2019), 381.

³²⁸ This first story was published and serialised from December 1965 to February 1966.

Lucknow for the Durga Puja holidays. We get an insight into Pheluda's character and talents: he plays a mean game of cricket, knows around a hundred board games, is good with card tricks, knows how to hypnotise people, has an astonishing memory, and is amazingly ambidextrous. Apart from these, what draws Topshie to Pheluda is the latter's ability to use his powers of observation and logic and his vast knowledge of foreign (Western) detective fiction. These interests and hobbies had turned him into a skilful, unprofessional detective through patient learning and prolonged self-cultivation. Attention must be paid to the Bengali phrase used in the text: "śakher detective". Śakh is a bengalised adaptation of the Urdu/Persian *śauq*, with which the present study initiated its course, albeit in the context of Wajid Ali Shah's nineteenth-century Lucknow. This *śakh* – a desire or an urge to indulge in activities purely out of pleasure, in a leisurely manner acquired new dimensions of 'vocation' through the century, transforming the concept itself. The insufficient English translation of this later use would be 'amateur sleuth', which robs the phrase of the feeling of positive self-determination.³²⁹ Influenced by a utilitarian outlook, the middle-class/*bhadra* society perceives Pheluda as whimsical and odd, owing to his fancy for these otiose activities and interests or *śauq*. He is considered eccentric (*ādḥ'pāg'lā, khām'kheyāli*), even lazy (*kūre*), although few could match his intelligence/*buddhi* (Ray 2015b: 21).

This eccentricity and laziness in his character are balanced with his sharp observation and intelligence to make Pheluda Ray's quasi-*bhadralok* hero in postcolonial Bengal of declining Nehruvian socialism, struggling communism, and impending capitalism. He trains and sharpens his faculties through his hobbies, is most productive in his idleness, and like the *flâneur* and the hunter, "catches things in flight". He becomes Baudelaire's *prince*, "who is everywhere in possession of his incognito" (Benjamin 1983: 40).³³⁰ This incognito not only entails anonymity but also gives him access to vast knowledge and intellect that separates him from and makes him superior to the crowd. Pheluda's feats of investigative *flânerie* are presented masterfully in cases like *Gyāṁtake Ganḍagol (Trouble in Gangtok, 1970)*, *Jay Bābā Phelunāth (The Mystery of the Elephant God, 1975)* and *Gorasthāne Sāb'dhān (Trouble in the Graveyard, 1977)* as the detective-*flâneur* takes control of the city in each case – Gangtok, Benares,

³²⁹ The English word 'amateur', originating in the Latin *amare* – to love, has acquired slightly negative connotations over time, now used to mean not good/professional enough. This disjunct in doing what one loves and in doing it skillfully or 'professionally' itself reveals the disjunct of work and otium in modernity.

³³⁰ The prince analogy is also put forth by Chesterton; the detective story, an adventure in elfland (1923).

and Calcutta. When asked by Jatayu, in *Jay Bābā Phelunāth*, if he had ever been to the city of Benares, Ray's sleuth answers with the flair of a textbook *flâneur*:

One has to note certain scents while describing Kāśī [Benares]. The complex odour of burning incense, cattle excrement, and algae, along with the scent of human sweat, is characteristic of the lane leading to the Vishwanath temple. When one leaves the lane and approaches the main road along the riverbank, it is a relatively neutral, odourless experience. Then again, when one begins to descend the steps to the riverbank, the repulsive smell of goat herds becomes strong enough to cause nausea. But if you keep walking down the steps, you will be greeted with a pleasant scent, constituting the essence of earth and water, *ghī* and sandalwood, the scent of flowers and more incense. (Ray 2015f: 431)

In *Bād'sāhī Āṃṭi*, Pheluda lectures Topshe on the architectural delights of the city – the shrine of Bada Imambara, the mazes of Bhulbhulaiya, and the history of the Residency. He recounts their enchanting pasts, praising the architectural creativity and imagination of the erstwhile kings and *navābs*. When they reach the city, they are received warmly by Topshe's father's friend, Dhuru Kaka/Mr Sanyal³³¹, an advocate who lives in Lucknow. The mystery revolves around the theft of an invaluable ring with a diamond and precious gemstone, which reportedly belonged to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. It was left in the safe-keeping of their host and goes missing. Pheluda takes up the responsibility of retrieving the ring and restoring Sanyal's image. As Pheluda and Topshe investigate, they roam the city, traverse the Bhulbhulaiya labyrinths, stroll around the market areas of Hazratganj and follow a suspect all the way to the railway station. Although the city is unknown to them, through swift observation and idle knowledge, they become the *princes* incognito, in control of the crowd and the city. Leaving Lucknow behind, they set out to travel to Haridwar and Laxmanjhoola and encountered the culprit in a forest on the way. At the end of the novel, after the culprit is caught and order is restored, Topshe claims Pheluda as the emperor of mysteries (2015b: 82).

From this second narrative onwards, certain themes are set. An important and recurring theme is that of history, historical knowledge, constructing and deconstructing historical narratives, and the central role the past plays in solving the mysteries of the present. In almost all the narratives dealing with theft, the stolen object bears an immense relevance to the past, particularly to India's past – be it the precious diamond ring given by Emperor Aurangzeb to his rescuer (*Bād'sāhī Āṃṭi*), the invaluable Italian antique violin of Indranarayan inherited

³³¹ Kaka, or Kākā, is Bengali for a paternal uncle who is usually younger than one's father. The narrator addresses Dharendra Sanyal in a familial manner – Dhuru Kaka.

from his ancestor (“*Bos'pukure Khun'khārāpi*”, Murder in Bosepukur, 1985), or the priceless ruby of Peter Robertson (*Rabārt'saner Rubi/Robertson's Ruby*, 1992).³³² The theft of these historical objects, antiques and artefacts, which belong to a more extensive pre-colonial past, and Pheluda's success in restoring them to their rightful owner(s), often to the postcolonial Indian state, has to be read in two ways. Firstly, here, the detective extends into a historian with deep and intimate knowledge that approaches specialisation. Secondly, and significantly, these narratives need to be read as postcolonial re-fashioning of the Western detective story, particularly against the colonialist narration of the Orient as the dangerous, impenetrable, and mysterious topos. While I explore these postcolonial re-writings and re-readings of detective fiction later in the chapter, I conclude this section placing Ray's figure of the Bengali/Indian detective at the crossroads of embodying these figures as mentioned above – of the *flâneur*, the historian, and the detective vis-à-vis the figure of the Bengali/Indian *bhadralok*.³³³

Not only are the origins of the *Pheludā* narratives located within a *bhadralok* social backdrop, but the readership of these narratives, embodied in the “politics of desiring the ideal child, the boy, as intrinsic to the formation of the subject in colonial Bengali literature for children” as shown by Sayande Choudhury (2015: 111), is also a significant factor. With his intrinsic colonial subjectivity, this ideal child, the Bengali Hindu boy grows up to become the postcolonial, independent *bhadralok*. As with the identity of the postcolonial *bhadralok* (the world of the original, wealthy *bhadralok* being lost), the vantage point located by Ray for his detective figure too, is of a discontinuous origin – “neither too young nor too close to adulthood” (Choudhury 2015: 113). The literary platforms where Pheluda thrives, i.e., *Sandēs* and *Deś*, are essentially literary locations that cater to the *bhadralok* readership. Even his fictional locations at the constructed peripheries of actual places in Calcutta are so-called *bhadralok* neighbourhoods. Parimal Ghosh (2016) provides an interesting reading of Pheluda's fictional addresses in the real city. While his initial address is noted as Tara Road, he later moves towards the south, from Rabindra Sarovar Lakes to Rajani Sen Road. What made Ray choose these localities for his detective's residence? “The answer could lie in the perceived ambience of the neighbourhood, in the mid-1960s, when the stories first began to appear”, writes Ghosh: “The place was developed around the time of World War II, and, therefore, did

³³² For all English names of novels and stories, translated and published titles are in italics. For untranslated or unpublished narratives, titles are translated verbatim and written without italics.

³³³ The historical and contemporaneous identity of the *bhadralok* is explored in detail in the next section.

not have the weight of tradition behind it in the way north Calcutta had. Nor was it the exclusive upper class, select address that lay immediately to the south of Park Street.” These neighbourhoods then had the “right mix of openness and adequate *middle class ease*” (Ghosh 2016: n.p. Ch. 8.).

Travel and mobility are other markers of a *bhadralok* identity that the fictional detective takes recourse to. Mobility, migration, and re-location are central to the identity of the Hindu *bhadralok*, who have migrated to the city of Calcutta from various parts of Bengal and later travelled abroad. In an Introduction to Benjamin’s collected essays, Amit Chaudhuri (2009) refers to this mobility and migration of the *bhadralok*, asserting that his only ‘possession’, in lieu of land, is perhaps what Pierre Bourdieu “misleadingly called ‘cultural capital’, often materialized in ‘a collection of books’” (2009: n.p.). Although there are many reasons to be sceptical of Chaudhuri’s comparison of Benjamin to a *bhadralok*, what is significant in this comparison is embodied in this *cultural capital* that is romantically aspired and persistently constructed, embodied in factors such as ‘introspection’ and ‘gentility’. Benjamin, or in this case, Benjamin embodying a thinker, a *flâneur*, an artist, is compared to the Bengali *bhadralok* through the histories of “cultural capital”, “marginality”, and “imaginative extravagance”. What can possibly be taken away from this facile comparison is the contemporaneousness of the “self-defeating romance, the fantasy, of *bhadralok* pedagogy, learning, and autodidacticism” in marginalised contexts of subjugation, migration, and colonial history. I would argue that within these peripheries of identity, narrative, and society, the iconic status that Ray’s *bhadralok* detective acquires resonates with the *bhadralok* romance of intellectual *flânerie*, but only if and when associated with cultural civility, or *bhadratā*, of the exclusively Hindu Bengali male. Through a fictionalised and culturally domesticated form of idleness, he can become an observer, hunter, and even a *prince*. However, although one of uprootedness, his inheritance lies in his social status, which defies the logic of marginality, at least in the context of Bengal. His idleness is derived from the tradition of self-cultivation and arsenal of self-training and acquiring knowledge (or what Pheluda calls *magajāstra* – literally, brain-weapon) in the era of fast-approaching economic liberalisation and globalisation. The romance of idleness is thus central to the *bhadralok*’s cultural profile, not simply in nostalgia for the decline of his social class but also balanced with *civilised* or *cultured* forms of wandering or *flânerie*.

5.3 *Bhadratā* and *Buddhi*: Bengali Concepts of Culture and Intellect

The social category of the *bhadralok* requires some discussion vis-à-vis concepts of culture and intellect as they are central to these texts. Exploring these

entangled concepts as formulating an affective identity in modern Bengal is central to understanding attitudes to otium. Furthermore, it provides an extensive understanding of the balance between leisurely freedom and disciplinary pedagogy inherent to the *Pheludā* narratives and their popularity in Bengali literature. While in the earlier stories, Pheluda is more of a *flâneur*, a lazy but intelligent individual, a quasi-*bhadralok*, his characterisation edges closer to a well-mannered, prim and proper, ‘cultured’ figure of the *bhadralok* as the narratives gain popularity through the celebrated novels and films, *Sonār Kellā* (novel 1971, film 1974) and *Jaṃ Bābā Phelunāth* (novel 1975, film 1979). Simultaneously, the discourses of work and hobbies, leisurely reading and acquiring knowledge emerge as deeply nuanced in these novels vis-à-vis his *bhadralok* identity. In the next section, I discuss the discourses of leisure and work extensively, locating work and leisure as discourses of a specific Bengali formulation of genteel masculinity. Here, I extend the *bhadralok* analysis based on the historically evolving central concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘intellect’ to then read the entanglements between these concepts for Ray’s postcolonial sleuth. The discussion of the *bhadralok* will not extend beyond its relevance in the narratives since most existing research and debate on the *bhadralok* class tends to fall into the sociological study; my interest here, although linked to the social history of the category, is the concept of *bhadratā*, or civility, woven with ideas of regulated and cultured leisure in these narratives.

Culture and intellect or intellectualism (or its forbearer, education) have constituted the central *problématique* in readings of *bhadralok* identity for a long time. Studies by Andrew Sartori (2008), Tithi Bhattacharya (2005) and Hia Sen (2013) have shown that culture, education, and intellectualism are central concepts around which the identity, emergence, and decline of the *bhadralok* have been charted out. Earlier scholarship on the *bhadralok* sees the role of education as “the hallmark of *bhadralok* status” (Broomfield 1968). A synthesis of Western and Indian/Bengali aesthetic (literary, artistic, sartorial) culture as “material practices” is understood as the significant difference between *bhadra* (respectable) and *abhadra* (not respectable, others), rendering the *bhadralok* an *elite* status (Broomfield 1968: 6–8). This is not contradictory to Partha Chatterjee’s (2015) claim that for the nationalist *bhadralok* under colonial authority, “the domain of intellect and culture”, in his famous words, the “spiritual” domain, would emerge as a “sovereign territory”, transforming into the nation’s own “civil society” (Chatterjee 2015: 14). This spiritual domain was, in turn, created with the educational and reformist imports of the West (for example the puritan Brahmo reforms or the impact of Enlightenment). Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) discusses how through “associations with the literary and political groups” thriving in the city of Calcutta in the early twentieth century, the social practice of *āḍḍā* gained a certain “respectability”, attaining the cultural-

intellectual characteristics of the *bhadralok* (2000: 194). Although Chakrabarty does address the “flaws” of *āḍḍā* as a *bhadralok* practice (2000: 181), his reading almost reinstates such practices of feeling “at home in modernity” as the prerogative of the cultured, literate, and intellectual community.

Sumit Sarkar offers a more nuanced argument concerning this seemingly direct relationship between education/intellectualism and culture vis-à-vis the *bhadralok*. According to him, the *bhadralok* is an elastic, heterogeneous composite of colonial Bengal, and their penchant for culture and intellect must be further analysed as more complex and contradictory than taken for granted (Sarkar 1997 c: 287). Hia Sen makes a pertinent point that towards the end of the nineteenth century, “the fine lines between class and status group become hazy” (2014: 62); the social identity of the *bhadralok* is, after all, one of self-definition. The *bhadralok* emerged first under colonial rule, with social status constituting the foundation of the community. Access to and adoption of English colonial education was further hoisted for the community in the emerging culture of print codified as materialised knowledge. While the rich *bhadralok* class declined through the nineteenth century, the *bhadralok* community began to constitute mostly of the middle/poor but respectable classes, often employed as clerks in the administration, serving under the practice of ‘salaried job’ as a largely middle-class livelihood (since their high caste had always had a denigration for manual labour).³³⁴ And while the diversity in the social category has been emphasised, the colonial *bhadralok* is often tangled with the Bengali middle classes, particularly in the context of ‘Bengali culture’.³³⁵ In their scorn for manual labour and ambition for a better life, the *bhadralok* acquired Western education to fashion a specific culture (which also evolved as something indigenous, allowing the *bhadralok* to critique the West) as their own sustenance and arsenal.

The search for a socially recognisable *bhadra* (civil, cultured) existence drew this social class mainly to the city of Calcutta, thus entailing the migration and mobility from the village to the city as a significant part of the identity. While the significance of the trinity of education, culture and intellect remains undebatable in the identity markers of the category, there seems to be confusion in the classes occupied by them, even more pronounced in terms like

³³⁴ Sarkar gives us a conceptualisation of the *bhadralok* as “a middle-class (*madhyasreni, madhyabitta*)”: “below the aristocracy [...] but above the lesser folks who had to soil their hands” (1997 a), 169.

³³⁵ Often characterised by an appreciation for science and education, love for literature, music and art, with strong convictions and political beliefs. See Hia Sen for a detailed understanding (2014), 66–68.

'bhadralok class'. Tithi Bhattacharya makes a significant intervention by asserting that it is "essentially an ethic, or a sentiment, held for various reasons by individuals from different class positions", which has been mistakenly read as "a social whole, even as a single class" (2005: 52). But this sentiment is not necessarily shared amongst Bengalis of various sections; Muslim Bengalis seem to cause certain fissures in the definitions of the community, but such an argument needs more space.³³⁶ I investigate the concept formative to the (Hindu) bhadralok, i.e., respectability, civility, or *bhadratā*, characterised by culturalism and intellectualism.³³⁷ These characteristics are rooted in the aspirations that gave emergence to the category in the first place, reached its zenith in the nineteenth century and remained as the *bhadralok*'s romance, in what Amit Chaudhuri calls "the fantasy, of [...] pedagogy, learning, and autodidacticism" in the aftermath of freedom in the twentieth century.³³⁸ The romance and brand of culture and intellect allow the *bhadralok* to continue to shun manual labour (the attributes of lower castes and rural Bengalis) with an ever-lasting scope for further learning and intellectual ambitions. *Bhadratā*, then becomes an affective conceptualisation rooted in histories of self-cultivation that Bankim formulated as *anusīlan* and Tagore championed as *samskṛti*, culminating in the bengalised concept of *kāl'cār* (culture). I read this concept in its dual expressions in these narratives – of intellect as reading practices and culture as genteel/respectable mannerisms – both perfectly suited to the pedagogical project.

Satyajit Ray inherited the various tumultuous shifts that the *bhadralok* identity has undergone through a century and more. In postcolonial, independent India, Ray carried his *bhadra* inheritance into his profession and, like his father and grandfather, chose an 'odd' career, first working as a commercial artist and then becoming a pioneer filmmaker. In his study of Ray's cinema, Chidananda Das Gupta (1994), writing about the forces behind Ray's work in the context of newly independent Bengal, rightly points out that "[h]is mentor was not Marx but Tagore", establishing Ray as the last of the nineteenth-century *bhadralok* intelligentsia (Das Gupta 1994: xiv). Nevertheless, Ray inhabited various worlds. Although he grew up in pre-independent India, his work as an artist evolved in and addressed the predicaments of post-independence India of Neh-

³³⁶ See Tithi Bhattacharya (2005), 28, 31–32; Sartori (2008), 197–223; Parimal Ghosh (2016) n.p. Ch. 4.

³³⁷ Rochona Majumdar (2019) has studied *sabhyatā* as civility/civilisation. While *sabhyatā* can be explored as civility on an intercultural level, *bhadratā* is the more affective, quotidian practice of living with markedly civilised, cultured, genteel manners.

³³⁸ While the elite *bhadralok* class has gradually declined, the elite *bhadralok* culture remains dominant in Bengal. See Hia Sen (2014), 63.

ruvian socialism and the condition of the *bhadralok* in that context. Not only is Ray's cinematic work invested in the trials and tribulations of this social category, but his literary production, both the science-fiction series *Prapheśar Śāṅku* and the detective series *Pheludā*, as well as the armchair tales of the adventurer-raconteur, *Tariṇī Khuro* (Uncle Tarini), are all extensions of his engagement with the predicaments of this community. However, Ray's two media of production – cinema and literature – saw two very different approaches to the *bhadralok*'s conditions (Nandy 1995: 240). This difference is best played out by the very different conditions of the *bhadralok* youth as presented in his films in the 1970s and in the detective fiction he wrote at this time. A major difference is Ray's evocative treatment of the *bhadramahilā* (the respectable woman, the female counterpart of the *bhadralok*) in his films and their complete absence in his fiction (more discussion on this later in the chapter). Nandy refers to this split in his creativity as his heritage that harks back to his family's "aggressively rationalist, anti-hedonist" anglophilia, their fulfilling of the "civilizing role" stimulated by the modern institutions of the Raj. He also highlights the inner tension in Satyajit and the Ray family and their various exploits and contributions "between unfettered imagination" and "disciplined rationality". Nandy's essay explores the consequence of this 'split' in Ray's works, focusing on his fiction, of which he writes as "the second Ray", who is described as "pedagogic" and "masculine", "guided by an implicit concept of 'healthy pastime' or 'healthy fun'" (1995: 263). The concepts characterise almost all of Ray's fictional worlds, which deal with the *bhadralok* and his romance with culture and intellect, woven with his disciplinary, rationalising, regulated notions of civility or *bhadratā*.

To return to the *Pheludā* narratives, the series, taken together, is an impressive literary work in parts that studies the various kinds of *bhadralok* in their heterogeneity. Amongst his clients, we see mostly the landed gentry, established patriarchs who fulfil the role of sentinels of the declining wealthy class, like Ambika Ghoshal in *Jay Bābā Phelunāth*, as well as the honest, working-class *bhadralok*, for example Mukul's father, Sudhir Dhar in *Sonār Kellā*. While gradually, his clientele begins to narrow down to a more affluent community, Pheluda and his close acquaintances also portray various *bhadralok* characteristics. Amongst the central, recurring characters, we see two very different explorative portrayals of the *bhadralok* – the almost-ideal, extraordinary, quasi-*bhadralok* in the character of Pheluda, and the ambiguous, ordinary but identifiable *bhadralok*, Lalmohan Ganguly. Rochona Majumdar gives voice to the *bhadra* sleuth in a fictional letter written to Topshe on his negotiations of the *bhadralok* identity:

I was (and am) a member of the modern Bengali middle class. But I am no bourgeois householder. I am committed to rationality and enjoy reading on

various topics, though not in a goal-oriented fashion. I thirst after knowledge and prize a scientific temper. I am neither Holmes nor Hardless. (Majumdar 2017: 242)

His avoidance of a domestic life allows him to exist tangentially with the *bhadralok* identity, turning him into a quasi-*bhadralok*. Simultaneously, his attachment to friends and extended family place him at the centre of the genteel community. His *bhadratā* and his respectful mannerism make him an acceptable member of the community. His reverence for elders, for the unspoken norms of respectability in *bhadra* society strengthens this aspect. Despite his extraordinary intellect, he remains well-mannered; his only flaw remains his addiction to cigarettes.³³⁹ He often carries a .32 Colt revolver but mostly relies on his grey matter. For solving cases and pastime pleasures, he is often narrated as reading, flipping through pages in various reclining positions, immersed in gathering knowledge in otiose forms.

The other *bhadralok*, Lalmohan Ganguly, is also portrayed through intellectual and literary exploits, although Ray's comic take of him renders him a foil to the actual intellectual, Pheluda. Ganguly makes many errors in his understanding of various topics; on their first meeting, he talks about his fascination with the camel and his exploration of the animal's capacities in his thriller set in the Sahara, *Sāhārāy Śiharaṇ* (Shivers in the Sahara), where he mentions that the camel stores water for days in its stomach. Pheluda corrects him, explaining that it is not the stomach that stores water, but the fat in the camel's hump is oxidised to form water, which then sustains the camel (Ray 2015 d: 193). Full of admiration, Ganguly is thankful and concedes, promising to rectify the mistake in the next edition. Various types of *bhadralok* portrayals are scattered through the narratives. Topshe's father is the stereotype of the *bhadralok* householder. Another recurring portrayal of the *bhadralok* is that of Sidhu Jyatha, who is quite like Pheluda but even more knowledgeable. He is retired, having lived a fascinating and often idle life in his time. In their various depictions of the *bhadralok*, the narratives also address a variety of stages in the life of the *bhadralok*, ranging from Sidhu Jyatha to Tapeshe, the *bhadralok* in training. The various portrayals in these narratives are balanced by both an idle, non-conjugal, adventurous life of free will and spontaneity as well as rigorous learning, intellectual investments, and constant but leisurely work (reading, writing, and investigating) – in short, aesthetic self-cultivation and an intellectual cosmopolitanism.

339 Smoking is far more acceptable to a *bhadralok* society compared to the drugs Holmes was addicted to. See Lila Majumdar's essay, "Phelucāḍ", in *Pheludā Samagra*, Vol II. Also published in *Sandeś* Special Issue, *Pheludā Tiriś* (1995).

5.3.1 Reading as Leisurely Self-Cultivation

In *Jay Bābā Phelunāth*, Topshe reveals that since there were no exciting cases for days, Pheluda had plenty of leisure, during which he read innumerable books, continued his regular yoga, reduced smoking, played chess, and watched quite a few films (Ray 2015f: 432). Leisure is often the premise from which cases emerge. *Jay Bābā Phelunāth* begins with Jatayu's whim to travel together to Benares to witness the wonders of the sensationally omniscient Machlibaba/Mach'libābā (the fish saint). Pheluda, sceptical of such supernatural powers of saints and godmen, is convinced to travel for possible inspiration during this leisure time: "You have no case in hand, and I have no plot in mind" (2015f: 432). The world of *Pheludā* appears idyllic and leisurely, but this leisureliness requires constant engagement. The ability of the *flâneur* to catch things in flight is not only acquired through idleness in these texts but also through self-cultivation and discipline. However, this notion of work is – as already explicated, not opposed to otium. It is work done on one's own terms, with a deep sense of self-determination and self-fashioning. One significant and recurrent activity in these narratives is that of reading. Reading is oriented towards acquiring knowledge to solve cases, as well as aimless, leisurely, and pleasurable, for both Pheluda and Topshe.

Through the progressing narratives, Pheluda's knowledge grows, as does Topshe's education; his powers of observation are further sharpened as Topshe notices significant details in new cases. With almost every new case, the reader is introduced to a new aspect of India's history or a new geographical exploration within the new map of India, thus insisting upon a postcolonial *bhadralok* orientation towards knowledge of both the new and the old homeland. Pheluda and Topshe are portrayed as adventurous nerds and a thorough reading of their exploits is sure to add to every young reader's accumulation of general knowledge and intellect, all the while integrating a respectable, morally upright, and genteel response in relation to society, nation, and the inevitability of crime. In this section, I focus on three novels of the series – *Sonār Kellā* (*The Golden Fortress*, 1971), *Jay Bābā Phelunāth* (meaning 'hail Lord Phelu', translated as *The Mystery of the Elephant God*, 1975) and *Gorasthāne Śāb'dhān* (*Trouble in the Graveyard*, 1977). This reading is directed towards the *bhadralok* portrayal of Pheluda, who sharpens his intellect with reading. *Sonār Kellā* surrounds the mystery of recurrent memories of Mukul Dhar, a boy of eight years old; Mukul describes memories of a past life, and his depictions of deserts and forts signal the landscape of Rajasthan. Mukul remembers peacocks flying, battles fought, colourful gemstones, and a golden fortress. This incident draws attention from the press, and greedy goons attempt to kidnap him. Pheluda travels to Rajasthan accompanied by Topshe to retrieve and rescue Mukul. On their journey,

the two meet Lalmohan Ganguly, better known as Jatayu, the famous writer of Bengali adventure thrillers.³⁴⁰ According to Jatayu, his fictional hero, Prakhar Rudra, closely resembles Pheluda. From this adventure onwards, the trio becomes inseparable, which is displayed in Jatayu's reference to the group as 'The Three Musketeers'.

The novel begins on a delightfully leisurely note, bringing together the culture-intellect dyad of the *bhadralok* and his relaxing start to a Sunday morning. Pheluda had been reading. He slams the book shut, snaps his fingers twice, and wraps up with a magnificent yawn, pronouncing aloud, "Geometry". Topshe deduces from the brown paper-covered book in Pheluda's hand that he must have loaned it from their elderly uncle, Sidhu Jyatha.³⁴¹ Sidhu Jyatha loves books and is possessive about them. However, he always makes an exception for Phelu as he takes utter care of the books he borrows. Topshe receives a long lecture regarding the significance of geometry. Lighting his favourite brand of cigarette, Charminar, and exhaling two rings of smoke, Pheluda explains how life, atmosphere, nature, and everything surrounding us are geometrical. This long lecture is not really concluded in the Bengali text but ends with an ellipsis. For a reader, Topshe's recounting of Pheluda's monologue and drift and his shift in narration expresses an amusing mix of an adolescent's roving attention span, as well as a slight jab at Pheluda's nerdish instincts (2015 d: 182). Pheluda is described as an avid, voracious reader, sometimes reading several books simultaneously. His knowledge of most subjects, places, and discipline is acquired through reading. In fact, Pheluda picked up investigation as a hobby after a thorough reading of Arthur Conan Doyle's detective fiction. He demonstrates a keen interest in the works of Edgar Allen Poe and Émile Gaboriau in the story "*Ghur'ghuṭiyār Ghaṭanā*" (The incident at Ghurghutiya, 1975). In *Sonār Kellā*, Pheluda reads up on parapsychology to understand scientific and psychoanalytical approaches to the elusive subject of reincarnation, the initial source of this case. His mentor figure, Shidhu Jyatha, heavily influences Pheluda's reading practices. A thorough *bhadralok*, a historian, collector, and literary *flâneur*, Sidhu Jyatha is also a raconteur. He is, in all senses of the term, an encyclopedia. And every time Pheluda is troubled while acquiring knowledge, he only has to visit Sidhu Jyatha's flat. Topshe remarks that Sidhu Jyatha reads so much that he never had time for a family: "he never married; instead of a wife, he has books for a family" (Ray 2015 g: 595).

340 Ganguly's *nom de plume*, Jaṭāyū, is taken from the mythical bird of the same name in Rāmāyaṇa. Jatayu witnessed Ravana abduct Sita and attempted to fight Ravana.

341 Jyatha, or *yaṭhā*, as opposed to Kaka, is Bengali for a paternal uncle older than one's father.

In *Gorasthāne Śāb'dhān*, Pheluda reads Charlotte Godwin's historical diaries from 1858–62 to arrive at a clue to the mysterious incident of the graveyard. In this novel set in Calcutta, the case's background is constituted by Pheluda's recent obsession with the history of Calcutta and his endless reading, viewing pictures and investigating maps. Simultaneously, an incident at the old Park Street Cemetery provokes his suspicion. The trio investigate, and Pheluda, with the help of Sidhu Jyatha and his knowledge of old newspapers and India's history, gathers clues to the secrets of an old English family, the Godwins, and a priceless artefact that may have been hidden in the grave of Thomas Godwin for more than a century. This is one of the few narratives where the Bengali *bhadralok*'s elasticity is extended to his colonial history, exploring the familial entanglements of Englishmen and women with Bengali Hindus. The two strands of the existing Godwin families are portrayed in an intriguing feat of social history as a mystery – one strand of the family is integrated into *bhadralok* society, with English-Bengali names like Michael Narendra Biswas, living in New Alipore, and the other, retained the English family name, Marcus Godwin, struggling with a penury-struck life in the shadowy location of Ripon Lane. Pheluda's obsession with reading and knowledge in this novel leads him to solve riddles constructed with abbreviations (2015 g: 603) that lead him to key clues like photographs of Charlotte Godwin and her beloved *bhadralok* husband.

Anindita Mukhopadhyay emphasises these reading practices as a traditional *bhadralok* attitude to intellectual stimulation, referring to Satyajit's concurrence with Upendrakishore's "understanding of literature as culture" (Mukhopadhyay 2019: 336). Pheluda's attitude to reading as aimed towards idle but vast acquiring of knowledge extends to reading Indian epics; their sacred value fades away, releasing them as texts of literary heritage and culture. Before I conclude this section on reading as an expression of *bhadralok* material culture, I want to draw attention to the most significant (young) reader and writer in these narratives, Topshe. Although Topshe is a school-going youth, his formal education and school-related activities are absent in these narratives. School, rather school holidays, are used strategically as a backdrop to many cases so that he can accompany Pheluda on their adventures without missing school.

Notwithstanding his formal education, Topshe is presented with a curious mind and a love for knowledge and reading. He has, for example, Pheluda's library, experience, and knowledge to fall back upon whenever anything interests him. He loves reading for pleasure. In *Sonār Kellā*, on meeting Lalmhoan Ganguly, Topshe is incredibly excited as he has already read a couple of Jatayu's novels. In the novel *Bāksa Rahasya* (*The Mysterious Case*, 1972), Topshe is enthralled after reading the adventures of Captain Scott. Like Pheluda, Topshe, too, reads aimlessly, endlessly, and leisurely. This culture of reading is the most significant pedagogical aspect of *bhadralok* culture in these narratives,

harking back to Ray's predecessors' earnest pedagogic endeavours to educate and entertain. Even when Topshe is not involved in reading, the otiose, quotidian time he spends with his older cousin is quite instructive towards the expansion of his knowledge:

Pheluda's latest obsession is old Calcutta. While investigating a murder in Fancy Lane, he discovered that the word Fancy, in this case, is an anglicisation of the Bengali word '*phāsi*', to be hanged. Almost two hundred years ago, Nandakumar was hanged in this area. That is how the obsession began. In the last three months, the number of books he has read on old Calcutta, the maps he has explored, and the pictures he has seen are countless. Of course, this has been an excellent opportunity for me to learn a lot – particularly after spending two entire afternoons in the Victoria Memorial. (Ray 2015g: 588)

The cultural-intellectual *bhadralok* project forms a central theme in these narratives that transform from a *bhadralok* sentiment and romance towards an instruction in training young Bengali boys to continue this tradition (of aesthetic self-cultivation). In their work on the enculturation of emotions and children's literature, Pascal Eitler, Stephanie Olsen, and Uffa Jensen argue that "emotions emerge as concrete effects of historical invention, as social products [...] and as a question of practical knowledge" (2014: 3). For Tapeshe, and intended young readers, reading these narratives spun around a *bhadra* society and an ideal *bhadralok* sleuth who champions immersive reading and aimless acquiring of knowledge does not only create emotions for intellect but also helps perpetuate this tradition of intellectualism, as an end unto itself. *Bhadra-tā*, the modus operandi of the *bhadralok*, is to be explored in the affective response of respectability and responsibility. This affective response is portrayed as Bengali culture, in which the *bhadra* sleuth is remarkably portrayed as different from the usual detachment of detectives. Pheluda is rational but also responsive and responsible. The Indian postcolonial detective retains and preaches the morality of his *bhadra* or respectable status.

5.3.2 Responsibility and Respectability: The *bhadra* Sleuth's Moral Feelings

In *Sonār Kellā*, Topshe recalls their visit to Sidhu Jyatha's flat before they board the train for Rajasthan; Sidhu Jyatha tests Pheluda on the history of fingerprinting and its role in criminology. Pheluda winks at Topshe and responds, "I might have read it somewhere... cannot really recall at the moment". Topshe writes, "[o]f course, he remembered. He kept his mouth shut to please Sidhu

Jyatha” (Ray 2015 d: 192). This is only one of the many ways Ray portrays Pheluda as respectful towards his elders. The same respectful and respectable sensibility is conveyed on the many occasions where Pheluda shows respect and affection for Lalmohan Ganguly, although the latter ends up muddling things rather than solving them. Ashis Nandy writes of ‘respectability’ as something that nineteenth-century social reformers in Bengal added to the equilibrium of the East and the West, or what Nandy quotes Chidananda Das Gupta in referring to as the “Tagorean synthesis” (Nandy 1995: 247). Respectability is thus an associative affective expression for the *bhadralok* identity of the nineteenth century, which merged, as Nandy points out, “values of Enlightenment – scientific rationality, uncritical acceptance of the theory of progress, and secularism with aspects of Indian high culture” (ibid.). To further ascertain the Bengality of this civility, we only need to pay attention to the portrayal of Pheluda’s enemy, the non-Bengali corrupt businessman.

Pheluda’s middle-class Bengali genteel behaviour is showcased, almost flaunted, in his disinterest in money. Simultaneously, this is starkly portrayed against the material greed of his commensurate arch nemesis, the Marwari businessman Maganlal Meghraj. The non-*bhadra* stereotype of Meghraj is only too obvious; historically, the Marwari (originally from Rajasthan) business community constitutes a large section of Bengal’s affluent classes. In *Jay Bābā Phelunāth*, the sleuth encounters his antagonist, the corrupt and greedy Meghraj, while attempting to retrieve an exuberantly expensive statuette of the Ganesha/Ganeś on behalf of his wealthy *bhadralok* client, Umanath Ghosal. Meghraj is shown to take his inherent *abhadra* (disrespectful) notoriety as his pride in profession. He openly admits that he paid far less than its worth when he purchased the statuette. He attempts to bribe Pheluda, failing which, he threatens the *bhadralok* detective to stay away from his business.

Further, in a delightfully well-written scene, Meghraj, at his peak of uncivil behaviour, inflicts terror upon the timid Ganguly, making him the target of a sadistic and theatrical knife-throwing session. Meghraj returns in two other narratives, *Gyāṁtake Gaṇḍagol* (Trouble in Gangtok) and “*Golāpī Mukṭā Raha-sya*” (Mystery of the pink pearl) and from this first meeting in Benares Ganguly develops an invincible fear of the villain. Meghraj mocks Pheluda for his honesty and refusal to be bribed, but also for his familial associations – with Topshe, whom he mockingly calls ‘cousin’ and Ganguly ‘uncle’. The presence of *abhadra* (uncivil) criminals like Meghraj seem to threaten the leisurely and pleasant world of the narratives, which functions perfectly in their resplendent, civil, and undisturbed pace.

Although Pheluda, in keeping with the Western/British detective formula (as exercised in narratives of Hercule Poirot, Jane Marple, Father Brown or Endeavour Morse), is portrayed as celibate, single, and without any love inter-

est, he is certainly situated within the familiar and the familial; the familiar and the familial are significant aspects in the social world occupied by the Bengali/Indian postcolonial detective, strategised to express his civility and good manners. His close associations with the retired, eccentric Sidhu Jyatha and his deep friendship with the comical, warm-hearted Jatayu strengthen his ties with the familiar setting of the *bhadralok* society. Several aspects of the narratives establish the familiar and familial nature of this world of the Bengali detective. Firstly, the very name of the detective, who develops investigation from a hobby to a profession, is retained as a close acquaintance, the guy next door, by adding the suffix *dā*, a common Bengali abbreviation of *dādā*, referring to an older brother. This naming of the professional detective through a familial address has drawn the attention of scholars like Sayandeb Chowdhury (2015) and Suchitra Mathur (2006). Chowdhury sees this naming as a suggestive association with the Bengali *raconteur* genre, claiming a literary lineage from the stories of Ghanadā, the brotherly storyteller and his adventures, penned by Premendra Mitra.³⁴² Mathur reads this naming as a subversive mimicry of the colonial idea of selfhood, in which she sees Pheluda as an Indian reincarnation of Sherlock Holmes, but a reincarnation that complicates the “simple Western Self vs. native Other binary” (Mathur 2006: 91).³⁴³

The familial and familiar storyteller vibe lends a flavour of leisurely ease to this narrated world of crime and deception. For those in the narratives who do not call the detective ‘Pheluda’, the variations are Phelu (as used by Sidhu Jyatha and Topshe’s father, the elderly extensions of family), Phelu Babu (as used by Lalmohan Ganguly to show both respect as well as affection; they also address each other as *masāi*, comparable with ‘mister’). There is also Phelu Mit-tir (the Bengali colloquial pronunciation of his name), which is used by certain Bengali rivals and gangsters. Meghraj is not a part of this Bengali familial or familiar sphere; the distance between them is shown in his formal, anglicised

342 Chowdhury compares Pheluda and Ghanada in terms of their Bengali-ness and keen interest in knowledge. However, Ghanada is a more sedentary figure, an armchair storyteller, compared to the mobile, action-oriented Pheluda. See Chowdhury (2015), 120.

343 As Mathur asserts, the name Pheluda is not only a ‘nickname’ but also a deceptive one since it constitutes two parts – the nickname Phelu and the suffix *dā*. While *dā*’s familial connotations have already been addressed, Phelu is an unusual nickname for the character’s real name, Pradosh. Pradosh means evening, nightfall or twilight, while Phelu/Felu, although a Bengali nickname, easily signifies the aural collocation of the English verb ‘to fail’. Although there is no direct suggestion that Phelu is derived from the English ‘fail’, for a writer who loves puns, it is not too far-fetched to read this nickname as a teasing twist for someone who is outstanding in everything he does.

address – ‘Mr Mitter’. Pheluda, likewise, is seen to address him with the formal ‘Maganlal *jī*’, where ‘*jī*’ is the Hindi/Urdu suffix used to show respect to an older person or a person with authority. Of course, in this case, the ‘*jī*’ is used satirically to rub the *respectable/bhadra* behaviour in rather than any actual acceptance of Meghraj’s authority. Ray epitomises Pheluda’s success in one of the most popular novels, *Jay Bābā Phelunāth*, where Pheluda beats several antagonists and reveals their fraudulence, particularly that of the deceptive saint, Machlibaba. Pheluda eventually exposes the saint to be a money-laundering fraud. His defeat of the Baba (saint) and other adversaries, including Meghraj, justifies the title of the narrative, *Jay Bābā Phelunāth*, literally hailing him.³⁴⁴ Finally, the various familial, familiar, and endearing ways of naming Ray’s sleuth are taken beyond the textual narratives to a readers’ world by Ray’s cousin and prominent Bengali writer of children’s literature, Lila Majumdar, in an essay titled “Phelucāḍ”. Majumdar writes, addressing the child reader of *Sandés* (where this essay was first published), “Did you know, enthralled by his feats of intelligence, I secretly call him Phelucāḍ”. The addition of the suffix *cāḍ* (Bng. the moon) is an expression of endearment for a young boy who deserves it and who proves to be a very good boy. These several approaches to naming someone whose profession is defined by his peerless intellectual prowess help the narrative create a Bengali sense of sociality, where sharp intellectual work does not require one to be detached or emotionally inaccessible.

The argument that, ironically, the family forms a central aspect in these narratives is also well-reasoned in the cases Pheluda solves in the set-up of his clientele. Exploring this aspect, Chowdhury rightly claims that most of Pheluda’s cases are linked to crimes that signify “a pivotal moment of crisis in the familial archetype” (Chowdhury 2015: 123). Most cases involve a male family member gone wayward and is often involved in the crime (mostly theft of valuable family heirlooms and artefacts). Pheluda’s job is also “a moral imperative to find closure to family fissures and restore order to a *naturally edifying bhadrolok* familial order” (ibid.), as demonstrated in several novels, including *Jay Bābā Phelunāth* and *Gorasthāne Śāb’dhān*. It forms the backdrop of other adventures like *Raḃāl Beṅgal Rahasya*, *Ghur’ghuṭiyār Ghaṭanā*, “*Bos’pukure Khun’khārāpi*” and *Ṭin’toṛeṭor Yīsu*. This portrayal of the familial, however, is exclusively masculine. In fact, as most scholars have asserted, the entire world of Pheluda is strikingly singled out as masculine. The protagonists, antagonists, and clients – none of them seem to have any significant feminine presence in their lives, except for a handful of cases like “*Ambar Sen Antardhān Rahasya*”

344 Adding the suffix ‘*nāth*’ expresses Pheluda’s authority and victory as the ‘lord’ and ‘master’.

(The disappearance of Ambar Sen, 1983) and “*Ḍāktār Munṣīr Ḍāy’rī*” (Doctor Munshi’s diary, 1990). Male servants, cooks, and gardeners tend to domestic needs – be it Pheluda’s household or his affluent clients.

Young men in these narratives tend to remain unmarried, while older men are conveniently widowers. As Chowdhury’s essay’s title claims, Pheluda appears to be an “ageless hero, sexless man” (2015). Neither Pheluda nor Topshe, not even Ganguly, is ever shown to have any faint interest in any member of the other sex, nor are they, in any manner, depicted as homosexuals. Nevertheless, there is a deep sense of attachment, affection, and friendship among the trio. It is this missing element of sexual encounters and even essential feminine presence, combined with the respectability of *bhadralok* romance, which allows the narratives to become, in many ways, a depiction of a leisurely world undisturbed by the troubles of the heart and domesticity. This world order focuses on the woes and dilemmas of a section of the *bhadralok* in the absence of the *bhadramahilā*, where ruptures in familial relations between brothers or between father and son allow a problem to arise. Similarly, the absence of the feminine (and consequential entanglements and attachments) presents Pheluda and his gang with the opportunity or leisure to investigate. They then successfully restore the *bhadralok* world order with the employment of the self-reflectively desirable intellect and culture trope. In the following section, I explore and analyse this entirely exclusive masculine world of the detective and its centrality to a lifestyle where work itself turns leisurely and leisure time is adequately harnessed to acquire skills and knowledge in an otiose and enjoyable manner in the presence of the familial, but in complete absence of the feminine.

5.4 Leisurely Men, Lessons for Boys: Games, Masculinities, and Livelihood

In response to repeated questions on the absence of women in the *Pheludā* narratives, Satyajit Ray is frequently quoted from a letter written to a friend on this dilemma, where he does not justify the issue but explains that “[d]etective fiction written for young adults does have its limitations. Most crime elements are adult in nature and hence have to be left out” (Chowdhury 2015: 124). While Ray’s claim that these narratives are meant for children and young adults is much contested today by scholars, the argument here is that the idyllic, leisurely world of *Pheludā* is made possible due to the absence of sexual or amorous intrigue, or simply, in the absence of women altogether. In this world, the pace of life is leisurely. The thrill and excitement of mystery, chase, and hunt are balanced with the slow pace of life, the patient pursuit of leisurely hobbies, and indulgence in the ‘good life’. Pheluda knows of the best restaurants and cafes,

and he only smokes cigarettes of the Charminar brand.³⁴⁵ This leisurely mood extends beyond the protagonists and is perpetuated by clients hailing from the 'leisured classes' of postcolonial India; these leisurely men have fascinating intellectual hobbies, like reading, writing, travelling, performing, and even hunting. This idyllic world is devoid of disturbances from the socio-economic or political unrest that was the lived experience of these decades in Calcutta and Bengal. Similarly, they remain undisturbed by the presence of women. But it would be wrong to presume that these absences are simply covered up; in fact, when read against Ray's portrayals of the times in his other works, these absences emerge as negotiated and require in-depth investigation. In this chapter section, I formulate two ways of reading masculinity in the narratives central to the gendered construction of a leisurely life. I first formulate how this leisurely lifestyle for the sleuth and his coterie is made possible through exclusively masculine homosociality. I then explore this particular 'Pheluda' brand of masculinity as a refined and emotionally active one against the backdrop of colonially asserted forms of the arrogant male hero.

5.4.1 The Intriguing Masculinity of Leisurely Lifestyles

The range of indulgent leisurely activities in the *Pheludā* narratives can be broadly organised into two categories. One is to be sincerely interested in artefacts, objects, and histories, like Narendra Biswas's fascination with old Calcutta and its colonial encounters or Dr Munshi's professional as well as personal interest in psychology and emotions. The other is a pronounced depiction of *wanderlust* and travel. Mobility, travel, and new geographical ventures constitute a recurrent theme in these narratives, like in *Ṭinṭoreṭor Yīśū*, *Bākṣa Rahasya* and others. *Wanderlust* is not only the established well-to-do clientele's prerogative but also depicted as both the professional requirement and pleasurable excursions for Pheluda, Topshe, and Jatayu. Like the first story, many of the narratives begin with a desire to travel, leaving Calcutta for a change of air. The absence of women in the protagonists' lives allows them spontaneous, unhindered mobility. But this has to be read in Ray's other works outside the literary narratives of Pheluda. For example, in the novel *Sonār Kellā*, Topshe concludes that he, too, will travel to Rajasthan with his cousin in search of the kidnapped Mukul. A few lines later in the text, he mentions that when he informed his father about their upcoming trip, his father expressed enthusiasm and encour-

³⁴⁵ The Charminar cigarette brand was originally produced by royalty in Hyderabad, the Vazir Sultan Tobacco Company, started in 1929.

agement (Ray 2015d: 188). But in the cinematic version of the same narrative (also directed by Ray), Topshe's mother is given a voice, raising the question of missing school. Ray seems to suggest that the presence of women can potentially raise obstacles to leisurely and spontaneous mobility.

Travel, mobility, and geographical explorations, either for work or leisure, mark these novels as texts of transposing the erstwhile colonial-Western detective narratives set in the peripheries of the Empire to the postcolonial revisions and subversions of the native sleuth. In "*Landane Pheludā*", these travels culminate in the postcolonial sleuth's walk to Baker Street. Topshe writes that although there is no such address as 221B, Pheluda strolls towards a close enough number and pays homage to his inspiration, saying out loud, "*Guru*, I would not be who I am if not for you" (Ray 2015j: 587). This salutation is also Ray's re-appropriation of Holmes' fictional references to the spectre of colonial India (most famously in *The Sign of Four*, "*The Speckled Band*", etc.), where he could not travel during his fictional life, as well as the incommensurate gap between the famous detective of the Empire and the postcolonial sleuth. While Pheluda travels to London to solve a case of lost identity, Topshe and Jatayu take immense pleasure in idle strolls around the streets of the metropolis. Referring to these various depictions of leisurely and adventure-seeking postcolonial *bhadralok* agency, Anindita Mukhopadhyay explores the portrayal of masculinity in these narratives. "Masculinity means hunting, travelling and nationalism", writes Mukhopadhyay in relation to her reading of these narratives as "children's games and adults' gambits" (2019). Harking back to Upen-drakishore's pedagogical entanglements with 'play', these narratives, written with young adults in mind, offer a certain play on the original trope of idling and hunting. The recurrent theme of hunting as a leisurely indulgence for Pheluda's *bhadralok* clientele echoes big-game/criminal hunting for Pheluda and Topshe. Thus, *śakh* (activities of pleasure) and *śikār* (hunting) become central to these narratives of adventure, while travel, both historical and contemporaneous, local and international, becomes a rite of passage for the genre of postcolonial detective fiction to formulate subversive expeditions into the erstwhile colonial metropole. Addressing these strains, I read the romanticised masculine life of leisure in the novels *Rayāl Bēṅgal Rahasya* (1974), *Ṭiṅṭoreṭor Yiśū* (1982) and *Rabār't'saner Rubi* (1992). Simultaneously, I refer to some of Ray's films to compare the portrayal of unfettered leisurely masculinity in these genres.

Hunting and idling as leisurely activities for the postcolonial detective come together in the novel *Rayāl Bēṅgal Rahasya*. Like several narratives, this novel also begins at leisure.

27 May, Sunday morning, 9:30. Temperature: 100 degrees Fahrenheit. It was during our summer holidays. After solving a recent murder mystery in For-

dyce Lane, Pheludā earned quite a bit of fame and cash and was enjoying his leisurely rest [*biśrām*]. I was adding a few Bhutanese stamps to my collection when Jaṭāyū arrived at our place. (Ray 2015e: 374)

Jatayu proposed a trip to the forests around Dooars in north-eastern Bengal, near the Bhutan border. A famous writer-hunter, the author of the thrilling book *Bāghe-Banduke* (Of tigers and guns), Mahitosh Singharay, had invited him. The Singharays are a *jamidār* Bengali family, tracing their ancestral roots to Rajputana. At this point in the narrative, Topshe mentions with great excitement their collective family history of hunting as a leisure activity. Referring to Pheluda's fascination with forests and hunting, he mentions that his cousin's favourite novel is Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Āraṇyak* (*Of the Forest*, 1976). Although he has never indulged in game-hunting, he is a pretty good shot and, if required, can shoot a tiger unfailingly. The lack of masculine pastime activity of hunting game in this generation of the Mitra family is over-compensated by Pheluda's (and Topshe's) hunting down criminals, a metaphor for 'big-game hunting' (Mukhopadhyay 2019: 331). Topshe corroborates this by explaining Pheluda's philosophy of hunting: "It is much easier to understand and gauge the intentions of animals when compared to the complexities and entanglements of the human heart. Thus, hunting down criminals is no less an achievement than hunting a tiger" (Ray 2015e: 376). The mystery revolves around the Singharay family's tradition of hunting, a hidden family treasure, and the signs of a man-eater in the forests near their ancestral home. But hunting as an arrogant masculine activity is critiqued in this narrative; it is only appropriated in the metaphor of hunting down criminals to restore the world order and not to annihilate animals.

Another late novel on travel and adventure, *Ṭintoreṭor Yīśū*, or Tintoretto's Jesus, incorporates Pheluda's flair for knowledge of European Renaissance art and his fascination with Indian/Bengali artists. Once again, the narrative begins with the trio travelling out of Calcutta in Jatayu's car for a breath of fresh air. On the road, they meet Nabakumar Niyogi, who invites them to his nearby ancestral home in Baikunthapur for lunch. Struck by the mention of Baikunthapur, Pheluda recalls reading an article on the Niyogi family by Raja Bhudev Singh in the *Illustrated Weekly* magazine. The article focused on the artistic career of Chandrashekhar Niyogi, who travelled to Rome to study painting. Nabakumar introduces himself as the grandson of Chandrashekhar, his father, Soumyashekhar, the artist's nephew. Agreeing to join Nabakumar at Baikunthapur in a while, he informs his companions about the article on Chandrashekhar, detailing his artistic journey to Rome, his marriage to an Italian woman, his return to India after her death, and his turn towards an asceticism afterwards (2015h: 174). On their arrival at the Niyogis' two-hundred-year-old ancestral

home, Topshe is astounded by the aure of heritage, culture, and the family's affluence. Everyone gathers around a life-size portrait of Anantanath Niyogi, Chandrashekhar's father. A discussion follows on the artist's life, and it is revealed that there is indeed an Italian painting of Christ amongst the collections. However, Nabakumar does not know much about it since art is not his forte (his interest is in vintage cars), neither his father's (who is devoted to classical music) nor that of his younger brother, Nandakumar. They are also introduced to a visiting journalist, Rabin Chaudhuri, writing a biography on Chandrashekhar. Through this accidental encounter with the Niyogi household, various mysteries emerge, and the painting, identified to be an invaluable work by the Renaissance maestro Jacopo Tintoretto, eventually goes missing. Pheluda, Topshe and Jatayu travel to investigate. Their investigation takes them to Bhagvargarh in Madhya Pradesh to meet Raja Bhudev Singh and to Hong Kong, where the painting is supposedly transported to be sold to a foreign buyer. The mysteries are finally solved, and Pheluda retrieves the priceless painting from the clutches of the foreign art collector, albeit this time, with the indispensable help from Rabin Chaudhury, who is revealed to be Chandrashekhar's grandson.

Although both plots require Pheluda to travel, the lines between travelling for work and leisure are blurred as one may lead to another through spontaneous turns in the narratives. The financial costs of these travels – taken up by Pheluda himself in earlier cases like *Sonār Kellā* (since Mukul's father is only a humble bookseller), are compensated in the later narratives by his affluent clientele. While Kaushik Bhaumik comments on Pheluda's increasingly ameliorating lifestyle vis-à-vis his international travel and his fame amongst the Bengali community outside India, even in a novel as late as *Ṭiṅṭoreṭor Yiśū*, Topshe explicates Pheluda's financial uncertainties:

By 'our car', I mean Jaṭāyū's green ambassador. I am not sure Pheludā will ever earn enough to be able to afford a car. A private investigator's income in this country is insufficient to buy a car or a house. For some time, though, Pheludā had been considering leaving our flat on Rajani Sen Road to live on his own. My father had affectionately reprimanded him on hearing this. "Just because you've earned a bit, you plan to leave us! What will happen in case your income drops?" After this, Pheludā never raised the issue again. (Ray 2015h: 171)

At the same time, Pheluda does earn well, especially in the later cases, when he becomes familiar with the Rajas and *jamidārs* in these stories. Sayandeb Chowdhury mentions Pheluda's preference for a certain kind of clientele – "mostly the gentry, part of a declining demography of a once-influential class, custodians of heirloom treasures and collectors of curios" (2015: 121). Although dotted by servants, gardeners, cooks and drivers, the clientele's household has

almost no women in them, or rather no feminine presence with any significant role in the mystery or its resolution. The same holds for Pheluda, Topshe and Jatayu. The two recurrent male non-*bhadra* presences in the narratives are those of Srinath, the household help at Topshe's parents' home, who is always ready with an unending supply of tea and snacks for Pheluda and company, and Haripada Babu, Jatayu's faithful driver.

Pheluda's fondness for this class of old, well-off, professionally successful men is reflected in his close friendship with Lalmohan Ganguly. Ganguly is depicted as a celebrated writer of cheap thrillers with ridiculous names like *Ārakta Ārab* (Bloodshed in Arabia) and *Haṇḍuras'e Hāhākār* (Howling in Honduras). However, he earns much more than Pheluda does. Ganguly is always ready to help Pheluda, be it in accompanying him and Topshe on their adventures for sheer support or offering the services of his car and chauffeur whenever required. Hence, although Ray portrays Pheluda as living in a fantastic world where crimes are only limited to theft and, at the most, murder related to theft, the economic practicalities of living such a life are not entirely absent from these narratives. Admittedly, too many fortunate conveniences allow Pheluda to continue living a private detective's life in postcolonial India. Therefore, while a seemingly leisurely life is romanticised, the struggles of earning a decent livelihood are not treated as fantastically as Shankar's protagonist from the novel *Caurāṅgī* illustrates (see epigraph). Although Pheluda does receive a few fat cheques from his impressed wealthy clientele, he never asks more than he requires; he will never be rich enough to buy a house or a car. He remains a middle-class quasi-*bhadralok* who inhabits the sphere of the *bhadralok* but lives at a tangent through his playful, *flâneur*-like, challenging profession. And while spontaneous leisure could be enjoyed during an investigation and travel or after a case has been solved, Topshe observes that Pheluda always places "duty first" (Ray 2015 h: 217).

Ray's depiction of a masculine, leisurely lifestyle in the *Pheludā* narratives and films is in stark contrast with the growing unemployment, poverty, and alienation so vividly portrayed in his own films of the time. Most scholars of his cinematic works distinguish between his other films and his *Pheludā* films based on children's versus adult films.³⁴⁶ This is perhaps because the films were based on his own stories and novels of the *Pheludā* series, which were often considered children's literature, admittedly by Ray himself. But this simple dichotomy of children's literature versus adult's literature, or children's films versus adult's films, is proven not to function when it comes to Ray's *Pheludā*

³⁴⁶ See, for example, Chidananda Das Gupta (1994), 112; Andrew Robinson (2004), 233.

narratives, be they literary or cinematic. I now turn briefly to comparing the masculine world of Pheluda, insulated from women, and the masculinity portrayed by Ray's other young male protagonists of his films. This comparison aims to help us understand the thin balance that Pheluda's character walks on in the socio-economic and political reality of Calcutta in the 1970s, where he thrived, the background to this leisurely pace of work-life conjunction. While the *Pheludā* narratives had become extremely popular in the 70s, Ray expanded their possibilities by making two charming films based on these novels, also in the 70s. This is also the decade when Ray made his Calcutta trilogy, constituting of the films *Pratidvandvī* (*The Adversary*, 1970), *Simābaddha* (*Company Limited*, 1971) and *Jana Araṇya* (*The Middleman*, 1976). All three films, too, are based on literary texts: *Pratidvandvī* by Sunil Gangopadhyay and the other two by Shankar. The common predicament of all three films is the tug-of-war between successfully landing a job (or, in the case of *Simābaddha*, getting promoted) and retaining one's ethical, moral, and amorous sensibilities.

Both Siddhartha (the protagonist of *Pratidvandvī*, played by Dhritiman Chatterjee) and Somnath (of *Jana Araṇya*, played by Pradip Mukherjee) have a difficult time trying to find suitable jobs. Both eventually land unsatisfactory occupations (of a salesman and a middleman, respectively). By then, however, they have lost something they treasured in their lives and personalities. After his father's death, Siddhartha, an outstanding student of medicine, must give up his education, his close friendship with Keya and his challenging life in Calcutta to take up a small, alienating job as a salesman in a provincial town. Somnath scores only moderate results in his studies despite being a brilliant student. Unable to find employment, he creates a job himself by working as a middleman; in the process, he loses his ethical integrity. Shyamal (of *Simābaddha*, played by Barun Chanda) has a well-paying job as a sales manager in a British manufacturing company based in Calcutta. But he must stoop to corruption and abuse deprived factory labourers to obtain a promotion. All three men have to take recourse to an ethical compromise. Their moral conflicts, humanitarian responsibilities, and ethical integrity are projected onto their relations with the women in these narratives: Siddhartha's only possible happiness in Keya's company is lost as he leaves Calcutta, Somnath is aghast when he realises that his work has led him to seek out vulnerable women like Juthika (his friend's sister), and Shyamal reaches the height of his career by robbing helpless labourers and falls in Tutul's eyes.

The usual jobs that the novels of Sunil Gangopadhyay and Shankar refer to are those of clerks and salesmen; the more successful ones are managerial positions at best. Suranjan Ganguly writes of Ray's Calcutta trilogy as "an artist's anguished response to the debasement of a whole culture" (2000: 114). "In it, he portrays a city without hope, where corruption is rampant, jobs are rigged,

mothers pimp for their daughters, and the unemployed wander the streets. His middle-class protagonists – all young men – are the victims of a dehumanizing rat race...” (ibid.). This is at complete odds with the portrayal of Calcutta in the *Pheludā* series, where progressive professionals and the landed gentry thrive. And yet, the world of Pheluda is not completely removed from reality. As mentioned, he too, despite his success as a private investigator, is not financially independent enough to live in a flat of his own. But unlike Somnath and Siddhartha, Pradosh does not hanker after employment; in fact, he leaves his tedious job to pursue a profession that interests him; in the process, he trains, disciplines, and cultivates the same skills in his younger brother. Like Siddhartha, he does not restrain from speaking his mind, but he is not forced to leave the metropolis. He travels only for investigation and leisure. The city is Siddhartha’s adversary; for Pradosh, it is the ‘arcades’ of his *flânerie*.

Compared to the black-and-white brutal world of these job-seeking young Bengali men of the 70s, Pheluda’s world is shot in colour in the films. And unlike the vulnerable, adamant, and melancholic females in the lives of Ray’s other young men, Pheluda does not have to deal with women. Unhindered by romantic love and unperturbed by sexual passions, Pheluda, like multiple other detectives, particularly his “*guru*”, Sherlock Holmes, remains at leisure to pursue his intellectual interests. The objects of his passion and desire are acquiring knowledge, solving mysteries, and setting the world order right. But unlike Sherlock Holmes’s Victorian “toxic masculinity” (Morgan 2021: 538–40), Pheluda’s postcolonial masculinity is a different brand of softened manliness – neither toxic nor emotionally vacant. His emotions and affections are expressed through respect for his elders, friendship, familiarity, and fraternity, and through his ability to communicate beautifully with children like Mukul and Ruku. Thus, the world of *Pheludā* remains insulated, even protected from the presence of women and possible obstacles from romantic or domestic life. Pheluda walks a fragile line beyond which is spread the precarious social reality of chaotic Calcutta. An unencumbered and affordable fantasy of a leisurely lifestyle is only possible with these negotiations of respectable and responsible masculinity. This lifestyle can only afford the time and space for self-cultivation and enjoyable pedagogy. Like Shidhu Jyatha, he, too, does not have the leisure for women.

5.4.2 Between Effeminacy and Hypermasculinity: Postcolonial Manliness

In narratives where masculinity is projected to the forefront, one can observe a sharp criticism of a specific type of toxic masculinity generally associated with male heroic figures. While certain ideals of masculinity are mocked in

these narratives, for instance, the exaggerated masculinity exemplified in Jatayu's fictional hero Prakhar Rudra, the *Pheludā* narratives also offer particular ideals of masculinity. However, the ideals critiqued in other characters are not entirely different from those depicted in the protagonist-sleuth. Similarly, while in *Rajāl Bēngal Rahasya*, the depiction of heightened masculinity through hunting as a manly pastime activity and demonstration of courage is eventually questioned, in an earlier novel, *Bāksa Rahasya*, the same activities of big-game hunting and travelling (albeit in the colonial era) of an illustrious Bengali, Shambhucharan Bose, is admired and appreciated. In this section, I demonstrate that the masculinity depicted in Pheluda's character is an intriguing balance of male heroic qualities and a protective, familial, even one that promotes a certain kind of ease or leisureliness – a postcolonial variation of masculinity.

Anindita Mukhopadhyay claims that although both hunting and travelling were “extant in elite practice in pre-modern India”, their transmission into print as recorded encounters of victory against wild beasts and wild terrains is a “colonial development” (2019: 333). Ray responds to this colonial masculinity in Pheluda's postcolonial hunting of criminals in civil society rather than animals in the forest. Historically, the colonial assertion of masculinity has been projected in the binaries of the ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’:

The physical organisation of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour-bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and more hardy breeds... (Macaulay 1888: 411)³⁴⁷

Unpacking the historically constructed categories of the ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ propagated in the nineteenth century, Mrinalini Sinha (1995) argues for reading colonial power dynamics through the lens of colonial masculinity. This constructed image of masculinity is intricately tied with imperial social formations of the time and the various changes that took place vis-à-vis strategies of colonial rule and collaborations between indigenous elites and colonial authority. On the descending scale of masculinity, while the industrious and manly Englishman was positioned as the ideal, other forms of masculinity, especially the “politically self-conscious Indian intellectual”, often represented in the not-so-industrious figure of the middle-class Bengali Hindu man, were deemed as “unnatural” or “perverted”, and most infamously, “effeminate” (Sinha 1995: 2).

³⁴⁷ From Macaulay's *Essays*, quoted in John Strachey (1903 [1888]).

These accusations of unnatural effeminacy and feebleness in the Bengali male were taken seriously and responded to by several Bengali intellectuals. Bankim responded to these allegations in several essays, for instance, in “Bhār-at Kalāṅka” (the stigma of India) and “Bānālir Bāhubal”. He responds to these charges of effeminacy and calls the Bengali man to rectify his reputation. On the one hand, Bankim defies the colonial logic of heat and climate as responsible for the Bengali’s feebleness; on the other hand, he claims that it may be possible for Bengalis to attain strength and power, if not mere physical prowess. “*Udyam*” (enthusiasm and effort), “*aikya*” (unity), “*sāhas*” (courage) and “*adhyabasāy*” (diligence) are the four characteristics that can liberate Bengalis of these allegations of feebleness. However, Bankim notes, first and foremost, there needs to be a strong emotion of desire – “*abhilās*”, a fervour amongst Bengalis that will drive them towards effort and enthusiasm and give up the pleasures of idleness, “*ālasyasukh*” (Chattopadhyay 1954b: 213). Like the colonial rulers, Bankim, too, seems to associate these allegations of feebleness with laziness, idleness, and a sedentary life. In the nineteenth century, assertions of Bengali sedentariness and exuberant leisureliness have been further enforced and critiqued by both the ‘*bābu*’ satires of the early nineteenth century as well as the later *bhadralok*’s affinity for *cāk’ri* or office work/desk jobs. Through the nineteenth century, the Bengali effeminate man then emerged as two distinctive although at times overlapping categories – the landed gentry elite *bābu/bhadralok* and the middle-class *cākurījībi* or salaried *bhadralok*. Advancing into the latter half of the twentieth century and post-Independence Bengal, such categories and their typical masculinities are deemed redundant. Satyajit Ray proposes a different postcolonial conception of masculinity in his literary fiction. This concept of masculinity rejects colonial allegations of effeminacy in the sleuth’s impeccable physical prowess; at the same time, it refrains from adhering to notions of hypermasculinity despite showcasing “physical strength and masculine markers such as enhanced muscles, broad shoulders, more-than-average body size”.³⁴⁸

For narratives based entirely on the stories, events, and actions of men, the Pheluda narratives not only express an indifference to notions of hypermasculinity but also often convey a critique of it. Although Pheluda is admittedly inspired by Sherlock Holmes, in no way does he display the toxic masculinity projected in Holmes. See, for instance, Watson’s description of Holmes’s emotional inaccessibility with regard to women:

348 See Hans Harder’s reading of hypermasculine heroes in Bengali comics, “Hypermasculinity in Bengali Comic Books” (2020). <http://www.tasveergharindia.net/essay/hypermasculine-bengali-comics.html> accessed on 4th June 2021.

It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen; but as a lover, he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. (Doyle 1960: 417)

While Pheluda has been arguably saved by his creator in not giving him the chance to feel love or not for a woman, he is never shown as devoid of emotions. It appears that the Victorian binaries of feeling and reasoning do not hinder the postcolonial detective who easily balances razor-sharp intelligence with an agreeable (even warm at times) personality. This twist on the emotional rewriting of his Holmes-inspired sleuth is arguably Ray's response to colonial constructs of masculinity, where the postcolonial sleuth does not rely on an empire-driven urge to hunt, usurp, and oppress or express machismo at the expense of the vulnerable.

Pheluda emerged from the contrasting, even conflicting notions of masculinity, morality, and cultural background, as divergent as fictional detectives like Holmes, Poirot, and Morse, real British detectives serving in the Empire, and the long line of Bengali literary detectives – Hemendra Kumar Roy's Jayanta, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's Byomkesh Bakshi, and Nihar Ranjan Gupta's Kiriti Roy. Pheluda is the culmination of all these inspirations and emerges as the first postcolonial sleuth in this setting, negotiating his colonial inheritance and inhabiting a world where he dares to critique colonial hegemony. Challenging the facile critique of Ray's works as devoid of 'ideological concerns', supplemented by 'humanistic richness', Chandak Sengoopta claims Ray was not only preoccupied with 'colonialism and nationalism' but that his later, more mature work (his films) "continued to combine a strongly anticolonial viewpoint with a shifting perspective on Indian nationhood and an unequivocal commitment to cultural cosmopolitanism" (2011: 374).

While cultural cosmopolitanism is significant in most of his works, Ray's strong critique of British colonialism is merged in many of these stories with a strong sense of indigenous nationalism and national pride, a signifier of liberated masculinity in these stories.³⁴⁹ This complex postcolonial masculinity is recurrently portrayed through the detective's successful attempts to prevent Indian cultural heritage (in the form of historical artefacts) from being sold to foreign buyers, often depicted as greedy, wealthy and insensitive to Indian heritage and history. Sengoopta reads this in various films, particularly in one

³⁴⁹ This is corroborated by several scholars. See Sengoopta (2011) and Mukhopadhyay (2019).

based on Ray's novel *Rabārī'saner Rubi* (2011: 385–86). While on a leisurely trip to Birbhum in Bengal, Pheluda, Topshe, and Jatayu encounter two young British men, Peter Robertson and Tom Maxwell. Robertson has travelled to India to return a magnificent ruby, which his ancestor looted while serving the East India Company. Tom Maxwell, on the other hand, the descendant of a brutal, murderous nineteenth-century indigo planter, is only interested in photographing India's poverty. Pheluda makes an exception in this case and downplays his feats by allowing a local inspector to deal with the crime. The inspector, a descendant of an indigo plantation worker whom Maxwell's ancestor killed, solves the case and avenges his family. Later, when Pheluda speculates on the case, he extends emotional support to the inspector, saying that he would have done the same. Sengoopta rightly remarks that this is a departure from the "strict moral norms" usually maintained in the detective series. Not only is Pheluda seen to curtail his masculine prowess and pride, but he also expresses empathy towards those who have been wronged.

Having already made his trilogy on flawed ideas of masculinity as projected in the films *Kāpurūṣ* (*The Coward*, 1965), *Mahāpurūṣ* (*The Holy Man*, 1965) and *Nāyāk* (*The Hero*, 1966), Satyajit Ray fashions his famous sleuth through negotiated ideals of masculinity. The Pheluda brand of masculinity is neither feeble nor toxic, nor does it display a hypermasculinity that is often a characteristic of strongmen narratives. This emotionally active, brilliantly intelligent, and physically invincible brand of masculinity is a deliberated and refined response to the historically persistent cliché of the effeminate, sedentary Bengali in his local setting, comfortable with his bookish, self-retrospective intellect. It is also a resounding response to the colonial construct of the manly Englishman in his penchant for adventure, travel, and hunting. The postcolonial homage that Ray pays to Conan Doyle is in contrast to Holmes' misogyny and Pheluda's affability. Pheluda displays emotions of wonder, friendship, love (although not romantic love), and national and cultural pride. His genteel behaviour, heightened sense of protectiveness towards victims, respect for traditions and the elderly and open-minded interactions with children soften his pronounced masculine traits of the *flâneur*, the hunter, and the adventurer. This softening of a potential hypermasculinity is negotiated in his lifestyle – his constant companions – Topshe is much younger than him, and Jatayu – much older than him. The affordability of a leisurely lifestyle in the difficult years of Nehruvian nation-building is romanticised, but it is simultaneously balanced with monetary parsimony. Even this austerity is highlighted as a positive masculine trait in contrast to the financial decadence of his arch-enemy. Through this Pheluda brand of postcolonial masculinity, Ray responds to the historical cliché of the "unnatural" and "effeminate" Bengali but also, perhaps, to Bankim's call for effort, unity, courage, and diligence. However, Phe-

luda is still missing a strong fervour or passion (*abhilāṣ*) for progress. This absence is possibly due to the constant feeling of leisureliness – in work and life – that is projected to be the hallmark of the *bhadralok* or, in Bankim’s words, *ālasyasukh* – the pleasures of idleness.

5.5 A Pedagogy of Promise: Adventure, Comfort, and Leisurely Ease

In this final section, I address questions of genre, leisurely reading and consumption, textual reinterpretations, and the many afterlives of the *Pheludā* series to ascertain that these narratives open a new space for leisureliness in the post-Independence Bengali literary field. On the one hand, the ambiguity of genre helps enhance this leisurely sensitivity, as readers of all ages enjoy these novels and stories, supposedly written for a young audience. On the other hand, these leisurely feelings towards the texts allow several textual reinterpretations, resulting in a kind of textual *flânerie*. *Pheludā*’s many interpretations and adaptations make these texts both texts of nostalgia as well as texts of the future, turning them into texts of transgression. Multiple documentations assert that the *Pheludā* narratives were written primarily for children.³⁵⁰ In an essay on the makings of *Pheludā*, Satyajit’s son Sandip Ray recalls the oft-quoted 1969 conversation between his father and the editor of the literary magazine *Deś*, Sagarmay Ghosh. After reading the initial *Pheludā* narratives and Ray’s first exploration of the sci-fi narratives of *Praphesar Śāṅku*, an impressed Ghosh had asked Satyajit to write a detective novel for the Durga Puja/Autumn issue of the magazine. Surprised by the request, Satyajit had initially brushed it off since he believed that he did not write for adults: “Eventually, bābā gave in to Sagar bābu’s adamancy and said that he could try writing detective novels for young readers [*chotoder*]” (Sandip Ray 2017: 54).

A significant predicament with such assertions and their interpretations is in translating the Bengali word ‘*choṭo*’ into English (as ‘children’). Although there is much debate around the “neat categories” that divide the emotional world of ‘children’ and ‘adults’, young people aged six to early teens are considered ‘children’ in most Western societies (Eitler et al. 2014: 3–5). Nonetheless, *choṭo* in Bengali, meaning little, small, or young, is essentially constructed around a relational notion; ‘who is younger to whom?’ is the definitive element in such descriptions. And it is this dilemma that the gradual narratives of the

³⁵⁰ For example, Satyajit wrote to Saroj Bandyopadhyay in the letter, quoted in Chowdhury (2015), 124.

Pheludā texts are spun around. Topshe is younger than Pheluda, who is younger than Lalmohan Ganguly, who, in turn, is younger than Sidhu Jyatha. Each ‘*baro*’ (Bng. big, older) is also ‘*choṭo*’ to the older generation. Therefore, while the initial stories were considered *choṭo-der*, due to Tapesh, the young boy lending his voice to the narrative, the intended reader’s age group is widened as he grows older. Exposed to a world of crime, Tapesh’s psychological and emotional maturity grows in leaps and bounds, unlike other young boys of his age. Although the crimes depicted are primarily concerning the theft of historical artefacts and a few murders, Tapesh is witness to an exceeding number of crimes, exploring the darker side of human nature. From being a young boy of thirteen and a half in the first story penned in 1965 – who is afraid of a mask in the darkness of the night – he turns into a young man (although with no significant difference in age – not even five years!), who is confident while shooting a revolver in *Ṭinṭoreṭor Yīṣu* (1982). The sheer freedom Tapesh has, spending time with his older cousin, solving crimes, and adventuring around India and abroad, is hardly consistent with the life experiences of young boys of his age and class. He is also the author of this world of Pheluda – fulfilling all the activities of idleness, knowledge, and literary production. However, we hardly hear about the publication or monetary feats of Tapesh’s writing, infusing these narratives with a kind of textual *flânerie* that remains indifferent to market production.

An appreciation of the *Pheludā* narratives as belonging to the genre of children’s narratives is perhaps provoked by the two cinematic adaptations by Ray (Das Gupta 1994: 112) where such a reading, as rightly pointed out by Kaushik Bhaumik, is possibly due to the two child characters, Mukul and Ruku, who feature as the figures of mystery in the two narratives. Scholars have commented on the young boys in Ray’s films to formulate a better understanding of the space and role given to children in these narratives as well as to understand Ray’s nuanced pedagogical project in relation to his depiction of boyhood.³⁵¹ As mentioned, Pheluda, like his creator Satyajit, has a charming relationship with young boys or children in general. In “*Ambar Sen Antardhān Rahasya*”, his conversation with the young girl (there are only two mentions of young girls in the narratives), Runa, and his indulgence of her desire to trick the detective constitutes the central predicament of the narrative. Moreover, Ray gives excellent attention to Runa’s readings of the narrative, where she accuses Tapesh of writing lies – referring to confusing Pheluda’s identity as his maternal cousin in the first story and paternal cousin later. Pheluda addresses her questions and criticism by clarifying that it was a mistake since Tapesh tried to write ‘fiction’/

351 For a detailed reading, see Anindita Mukhopadhyay (2019), 343–51.

story/“*gapper mata bāniye*” (2015i: 222–25). Pheluda’s encounters with the young boys in his stories are fascinating. In the texts analysed in this chapter, and particularly the two films, his exchanges and understanding of little boys’ worlds call for comment, even briefly. Both Mukul and Ruku are young boys, rapt in imagined worlds of their own. Pheluda treats these worlds and their meanings very seriously. Pheluda repeatedly encounters wondrous young boys with great imagination and talent. Nayan in *Nayan’rahasya* (The Mystery of Nayan, 1990) is another example of an innocent but gifted young boy whose powers of understanding numbers tempt greedy and corrupt men. In each of these stories, the mystery surrounds the little boys and their imaginations and gifts, and they are finally able to live a freer, more normal life once the mystery is solved.

Thus, Pheluda becomes a surrogate guardian of these boys, a protective mentor, but also a friendly adult who believes in the boys’ worlds. Like Ray and his ancestors, he forms bonds of friendship with these boys, which allows him to solve adults’ crimes as well as the predicaments of young boys. Perhaps it is this fascinating relationship with the boys’ world that turns these narratives into children’s literature.³⁵² However, as is often the case with certain kinds of children’s literature that are now called ‘crossover’ literature, these narratives do address “a diverse, cross-generational audience that can include readers of all ages: children, adolescents and adults” (Beckett 2009: 3). Although the term ‘crossover’ literature is a recent coinage with the *Harry Potter* boom and other fantasy genres that appeal to a broad age-inclusive audience, Sandra Beckett has shown that this is far from being a recent phenomenon: “one of the oldest and most universal forms of crossover literature is folk and fairy tales” (Beckett 2009: 4). While the on-and-off raconteur style of the *Pheludā* series does hark back to oral literary traditions, these novels and stories are very much a *reader’s* narrative, a modern, postcolonial fantasy, so to speak. It is rather strange that for a fantasy, Ray attempts to merge literature intended for young adolescents with the crime genre. Much of this fantasising is rendered as friendly and leisurely travel narratives and cultural-intellectual pedagogy in disguise. The pedagogical aspect does not come across as such, owing to the tones of adventure, leisurely travel, and a familial sleuth. These aspects allow the *Pheludā* narratives to formulate an independent and emotionally curious subjectivity, and retain the pedagogical enterprise in their ‘healthy pastime’ flavour. In the story “*Landane Pheludā*”, Ray clarifies his earlier assertions of these narratives as children’s literature when Dr Jyotirmay Sen recognises the trio in one glance:

³⁵² See also Chowdhury’s notes on Pheluda’s friendship and pedagogical values (2015), 120–21.

‘You are Mr Pradosh Mitter!’ the gentleman said, sitting on his sofa. ‘Of course, you are better known as Pheluda. I understand this is Topshe, and this must be Jatayu. The narratives of your investigation are read by people of all ages in my household. You are like an acquaintance, someone we feel we know well. What can I do for you?’ (Ray 2015j: 573)

What is more common to the *Pheludā* narratives and crossover literature is the feeling of belonging, or ‘fandom’ that allows for various reinterpretations of these texts, from literature to other media.³⁵³ Many of these novels and stories were adapted into radio plays on a popular weekly program titled ‘Sunday Suspense’. Simultaneously, the *Pheludā* narratives were adapted as comics in both Bengali and English. As digital media took over earlier activities of leisure and consumption, the *Pheludā* narratives refashioned in the form of audiobooks, eBook reader apps, and a web series on the Bengali video-streaming platform, *Addatimes*. Pujita Guha remarks that the detective’s “invitation into the contemporary also produces a concomitant undercurrent of nostalgia (2019: 381)”. She emphasises that this nostalgia is particularly “a retro-fetish for the older mediatic forms with which Feluda is associated” (ibid). While she focuses on these digital adaptations and the *Pheludā* narrative’s mobility across screens through a study of affect as ‘bodily sensations’, I argue for the other emotions produced through the reinterpretations as well as the nostalgia for the originals.

While this chapter has only focused on Ray’s textual and cinematic adaptations of the narratives, we must acknowledge the various emotional ways in which Ray’s sleuth captures the imagination of the Bengali reader/audience. The text transgresses temporal and spatial boundaries, crossing over not only reader’s age groups but cultural settings too, as *Pheludā* is now a text also set in Dhaka, not just Calcutta, in a return of sorts, to his roots in undivided Bengal. Earlier, *Pheludā* was also adapted into a Hindi production, *Kissā Kāthmāṇḍu Kā* (The episode in Kathmandu, 1986), which did not work well.³⁵⁴ The BBC also aired two episodes of the series – the celebrated *The Golden Fortress* and *The Mystery of the Elephant God* in 2007, as radio plays. The texts have now indeed travelled across languages, cultural settings, media, and multiple interfaces, growing in their commodification as objects of pleasure and leisure. Ironically, Pheluda himself, embodied in these narratives, approaches the “many objects

³⁵³ See also references to this concerning the *Harry Potter* narratives in Beckett (2009), 1.

³⁵⁴ It has been argued that this was primarily due to Ray’s charming narrations in the observant but modest voice of Topshe, infused with camaraderie and humour that could not be adequately translated into Hindi.

whose trafficking he had traced” in the originals to become a commodity (Guha 2019: 384).

As *Pheludā* ventures into various avenues of textual consumption, not too different from Benjamin’s *flâneur*, the world of the sleuth retains its charm in the romanticised leisurely ease, quotidian and familiar Bengali sense of *bhadralok* comfort. Writing of the BBC adaptations and *Pheludā*’s travels to London, Abhijit Gupta predicts the texts’ everlasting success:

Posterity will be kind to the Feluda stories. [...] The stories will survive because they captured a time and a place perfectly, and created an illusion of changelessness. Feluda sleuthed at a time when the Cold War was coming to an end and an era of technological revolution about to begin. Yet, he appears untouched by these changes, utterly comfortable in the looseness of his baggy kurta-pyjama. Perhaps it is this sense of comfort that we crave—and find—in the Feluda stories. (Gupta 2007)

This infusion of crime with comfort and thrill with a leisurely ease, this romanticised yet realistic world of the postcolonial *bhadralok* sleuth introduced by Ray retains the title of the most famous detective fiction in Bengali. From Ray’s memories of his mother translating stories of Arthur Conan Doyle to him as a child, the tradition of storytelling in the Ray family was taken to its zenith through Ray’s *Pheludā* series, as homage as well as ‘writing back’ to his favourite author.³⁵⁵ Satyajit Ray has, thus, completed the pastime-pedagogy project initiated by Upendrakishore and Sukumar while handing over the reins of creativity in the form of *flâneur* fictions beyond his family’s prerogative. And although for Bengali readers, *Pheluda* manages to remain the *bhadralok* next door, he promises to return recurrently, in what Keith Tester explains in the context of the *flâneur*’s ontological bases, as *doing*, not merely *being*. While Ray’s young middle-class male protagonists (in films, particularly of the Calcutta trilogy mentioned earlier) are often caught in the dilemma of what Suranjan Ganguly defines as “action and its antithesis – inaction” (116), *Pheluda* overcomes the dialectic of “thinkers and doers” by his subversive (in)action – he does (his job) through thinking. *Pheluda* transgresses history, socio-economic reality, and contemporaneity while ambidextrously holding onto *bhadratā* and *flânerie*. Nevertheless, he remains in nostalgia, as the purveyor of perseverance and pleasure, in his returns through an original medium of otium, stories.

³⁵⁵ In his memoirs, Ray writes that he could never forget two stories by Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Terror of Blue John Gap” and “The Brazilian Cat” (2005), 15.

5.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored the romanticised negotiations of leisureliness as a way of life for the postcolonial urban Hindu Bengali *bhadralok* in the figure of Ray's detective, Pheluda. While Pheluda remains extraordinary in his knowledge, physical prowess, and intellectual abilities essential to his leisure pursuit-turned-profession, he also continues to remain ordinary in a familial, familiar, and emotionally accessible manner. Both his extraordinary and ordinary characteristics are skilfully woven into the *bhadralok* concept of culture, *bhadratā*. At the same time, this concept of culture already consists of a privileged notion of intellectualism and aesthetic self-cultivation. Ray, an artist inhabiting several worlds, I have claimed, is inspired by the European figure of urban modernity, the *flâneur*; nonetheless, the investigative *flânerie* his detective indulges in is formulated in postcolonial reorientations of the figure. Not only *flânerie* and idleness but also leisurely activities like reading, hunting, and travelling are seen to be cultured and regulated, not necessarily towards escalated notions of productivity; this regulation can be traced, instead, towards a rendering of leisure as a disciplined pursuit of interests/*śakh*, and of work as leisurely, thus making the romance of a leisurely work-life equation acceptable.

Pheluda's leisurely lifestyle is supported by convenient familial relations, loyal friendships, and his affluent clientele. However, the leisureliness, although approaching levels of gentility in later narratives, remains within the bounds of austerity. This leisureliness is also enabled by the complete absence of women in the sleuth's life. The lack of sexual and romantic passions for Pheluda (as well as his companions) seems to breathe in an idle spontaneity that permits a mood of liberated, slow-paced, but enjoyable life, straddling crime and leisure, thrill and cool-headedness. The Pheluda brand of masculinity is based on a critique of colonial constructs of Bengali men as effeminate and feeble; simultaneously, it steers consciously clear of the toxic or hypermasculinity that is prevalent in strongman narratives. Although admittedly inspired by Sherlock Holmes, Ray's postcolonial *bhadralok* sleuth is not remotely misogynous. While this refashioning has been read in the chapter as a postcolonial critique-in-homage to the toxic masculinity of the detective emerging out of the Empire, Pheluda is highly critical of colonial domination in his cultured and informed portrayal of nationalism. It has also been shown that the leisureliness and ease embodied in these narratives render the postcolonial sleuth an affable, approachable, and emotionally accessible member of his community. He certainly displays emotions and feelings, even if they are rational feelings. I have also read his ability to communicate earnestly and affectionately with children as an integral quality of his logical and intellectual faculties. The chapter identifies a leisurely approach towards pedagogy in Pheluda's training of his young

cousin, who not only learns with enthusiasm and enjoyment through their shared adventures but also returns the favour in narrating their exploits in these texts of *flânerie*. The pedagogical project is infused with promises of adventure but also of safety and comfort in a shared sense of a feeling of community and the promise of leisureliness in the ways of living, learning, working, and feeling.