

# From Clues to Cracks: Social Faultlines in the World of Byomkesh Bakshi Tales

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## Abstract

This paper examines Byomkesh Pawrbo (2016) as a cinematic text that uses the detective genre to critique underlying currents of social decay in postcolonial Bengali society. Detective narratives usually, focuses on solving the crime by the detective but in the process lies some underlying social issues which are often not highlighted. The role of the detective here then becomes more than just a crime solver. While addressing these issues he becomes a social critique. Byomkesh pawrbo is a murder mystery set in a remote and picturesque locale where the film unfolds layers of corruption, moral ambiguity, and the erosion of ethical values beneath the surface of a seemingly tranquil community. Byomkesh, operating as a Satyanweshi or truth-seeker, becomes a lens through which the audience encounters the social fissures that traditional institution like law, family, and community fails to address. The paper argues that crime depicted in the film is not an isolated act but a part of a larger societal trouble, including the exploitation of power, the commodification of relationships, and the fragility of trust in a nation that is still grappling with evolution from a colonial to post independent era. Through this analysis, the study situates the detective narrative as a critical space for interrogating the tensions between appearance and reality, tradition and change, and justice and decay in contemporary Indian discourse.

**Keywords:** detective fiction, social critic, detective, Byomkesh Bakshi Satyanewshi, film studies

## Introduction

The detective narrative in general serves as a source of entertainment to its readers but when it comes to a role of detective there are very few detective narratives where the detective unravels the deeper layers of the crime, he acts as the critique to the causes social, political, social etc that lead to the crime. One such detective narrative that focuses on detective acting as a critique is a Bengali detective Byomkesh Bakshi. Detective Byomkesh Bakshi is a fictional detective by written by Saradindu Bandopdhyay. Byomkesh identifies himself as a Satyanewshi i.e the truth seeker who not only solves the crime but unravels the deeper truths regarding the crime through his unique crime solving method. The novels of Byomkesh Bakshi are adapted in various movies and tv series in regional Bengali language as well as in Bollywood as well. One such movie is the Byomkesh Pawrbo directed by Arindam sil released in the year 2016. Set against the backdrop of the Dooars region in 1948, the film follows the eponymous detective Byomkesh Bakshi as he investigates a series of murders linked to the illegal arms trade. Beneath the surface of this murder mystery lies a tapestry of social decay, moral ambiguity, and institutional failure.

## Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative methodology, which is suited to exploring the complex, socially embedded meanings within texts. Thematic analysis allows for flexibility and depth, making it an appropriate choice for dissecting cinematic content where visual, verbal, and symbolic cues contribute to meaning. The film

Byomkesh Pawrbo (2016), directed by Arindam Sil, serves as the primary source. Scenes, dialogues, character arcs, and cinematic elements are examined to uncover recurring patterns that reveal the film's critique of social conditions in a transitional post-independence Bengal

### **Byomkesh Bakshi as the Satyanweshi: Truth-Seeker or Signifier of Disruption**

In classical detective fiction, the detective is the agent of reason, symbolizing the return to order. However, in Byomkesh Pawrbo, Byomkesh Bakshi does not function as a figure of epistemological certainty. While his title Satyanweshi implies a seeker of truth, poststructuralist theory reminds us that “truth” is not a fixed or discoverable entity but a product of discursive constructions. Derrida's concept of *différance* the idea that meaning is always deferred and constructed through a play of differences applies directly here. Byomkesh's “truth” is never singular. His investigation only reveals a complex network of lies, half-truths, motivations, and identities. Each character in the narrative speaks their own version of truth, none of which fully cohere. Characters like DSP Purandar Pandey and Major Sanyal reflect the complicity of state and military power in perpetuating violence and exploitation. Their actions reveal how institutional trust has eroded, and how power is manipulated for personal gain. In this context, Byomkesh stands as a lone figure of integrity, navigating the moral grayness with a quiet yet unwavering sense of justice. As such, the detective does not uncover “truth” but exposes the impossibility of total knowledge. The Dooars region, where the narrative unfolds, appears idyllic but harbours secrets and violence beneath the surface. From a poststructuralist viewpoint, this spatial duality undermines the binary between the rural (associated with purity) and the urban corruption. The forest and the hills, typically symbols of mysticism and isolation, do not function as neutral spaces they are encoded with colonial histories, militarized borders, and illicit activities such as the arms smuggling plot. The seemingly tranquil space is fractured, a mirror of the fractured identities and institutions it contains. The setting becomes a text to be read—layered, unstable, and shifting.

### **Deconstructing Institutions: Law, Family, and Nation**

Poststructuralism, especially in the Foucauldian sense, posits that institutions are not sites of neutral authority but rather apparatuses of control and surveillance that construct subjectivities. Byomkesh Pawrbo critiques several such institutions. Law enforcement in the film is shown to be ineffectual, complicit, or passive. Instead of enforcing justice, it is shown as susceptible to corruption and manipulation. This aligns with Foucault's notion that power is not simply top-down but is dispersed through various nodes in society. Family another foundational institution, is portrayed as deeply fragmented. Relationships are transactional or secretive—affairs, betrayals, and hidden motivations abound. The sacred familial bond is no longer a site of truth or unity, but of rupture and ambiguity. Finally the nation-state, newly independent in the film's timeline, is itself in flux. The presence of military characters and the arms trade serves as a critique of a country still wrestling with colonial aftershocks. National identity, far from being cohesive, is revealed as fragile and ideologically fraught. The use of natural landscapes in the Dooars region evokes a sense of isolation, which mirrors the isolation of characters from moral and communal grounding. Lighting and *mise-en-scène* often contrast surface tranquility with undercurrents of darkness, symbolizing the deceptive calm that masks social rot. The film's pacing, use of silence, and selective exposition all contribute to a tone of moral ambiguity and slow-burning revelation. Derrida's emphasis on the instability of language is particularly relevant in a film where communication is often coded, secretive, or misleading. Characters with multiple identities, shifting

motivations, and false narratives complicate the act of naming a central concern in poststructuralist critique. Even the name Byomkesh—once a stable cultural signifier of rationality and virtue is problematized. In Byomkesh Pawrbo, he is not just a solver of mysteries but a disrupter of illusions. The film, through its linguistic play and narrative ambiguity, suggests that identity is performative and contingent. For example, characters often speak in double entendres or riddles, and letters or reports are falsified. This linguistic instability reflects the poststructuralist view that language cannot be trusted to represent reality transparently—it only creates other texts, other signs, in an endless chain of signification.

## Conclusion

Byomkesh Pawrbo succeeds not just as a mystery thriller but as a profound commentary on the state of Indian society in its postcolonial phase. Through its intricate plot, layered characters, and philosophical undercurrents, the film uses the detective genre to challenge viewers' perceptions of justice, morality, and identity. Byomkesh, as a Satyanweshi, is not merely a solver of puzzles but a seeker of moral truth in a world increasingly defined by its absence. This reimagining of the detective figure as a social critic rather than a law enforcer makes Byomkesh Pawrbo a significant text in Indian cinematic discourse. It invites audiences to look beyond the surface of crime fiction and recognize the genre's potential to serve as a mirror to society's deepest flaws. As India continues to redefine itself in the 21st century, such narratives remain vital in questioning whether true freedom has indeed been achieved—or merely assumed.

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