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Telling tall tales: The figure of the storyteller in select Bengali fiction

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***Abstract*:**

The importance given to experience as a critical element for the storyteller by Walter Benjamin in his essay "The storyteller" unites the two most (arguably) popular storytellers in Bengali literature for children and teenagers — Ghona-da and Tarini Khuro. They claim to have experienced the tales they narrate to their attentive listeners. For Ghonada, the tales border on what Linda Hutcheon has described as "historiographic metafiction". For Khuro, the narratives are mostly tall tales from their own lives but exaggerated to suit the curious ears of the young audience.

This paper aims to understand the narrative elements of storytelling, with references to a few of their stories. The first two volumes of Tenida and the stories of Tarini Khuro in Golpo 101 would be the primary texts for this study, along with Benjamin's essay. The common factors in all the short stories around and about these characters would be analysed to formulate a pattern which would analyse and understand other such storytellers in a similar setting. A structuralist understanding of these stories would be posited, with the help of Deleuze's "How do we recognise structuralism."

***Keywords*:** Storyteller, narrative, Ghonada, Tarini Khuro, structure.

Telling Tall Tales: The Figure of the Storyteller in select Bengali fiction

As children, many of us were accustomed to demanding stories as a bedtime luxury (and otherwise), predominantly from the octogenarian section of the house, in which we resided. A large portion of what we heard was from books meant for such purposes, like *Arabian Nights*, *Aesop's Fables*, *Thakumar Jhuli*, and so on. However, on the off-chance that our grandparents spun a tale out of their lived experiences, it kept us hooked for a longer time. This element of personal interspersing in a narrated tale entices a listener more than a story about a distant king in a foreign land who marries a princess because these are people whose identity is unknown to the listener. The storyteller in fiction, however, presents us with a different kind of discourse. The metatextual effect created by the tale-within-the-tale, and the

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overlap of the author-function[2] with the narrator within the story, create a bubble of incredible curiosity amongst the listeners within and the readers outside the story. When an element of personal experience (often exaggerated) is regularly the direct subject matter of such a tale, instead of it being an anecdote in most tales, and only occasionally the main subject, the listeners grow an attachment to such lucidity and the ridiculous impossibility of such stories.

The importance of storytellers in the lives of children is a two-way street. The storytellers, whether in reality or fiction, presume the children to be their ideal audience since they do not have an optimum capacity to question the authenticity of the stories. In a scenario where the listeners are not children, but the reasoning and thinking adults, what implications does the storyteller have? Especially in a fictional set-up, the politics of storytelling need to be revamped for the postcolonial reader and listener. A story, with its unique, heterogeneous combination of both readers and listeners (and in some cases, readers and listeners within the story as well, like the 'found' manuscripts of Professor Shonku), places the storyteller in a unique position. In the eyes of the unquestioning child, they are the ones who provide them with the sense of adventure, and exposure to a world which is inevitably foreign to them.

In a fictionalised context, therefore, the storyteller's agency is partially shared by the author and is partially left to the imagination of the reader. In the postcolonial Bengali backdrop, the storyteller gains more agency due to the Bengali notion of *adda,* where a group pf people just sit and while away their time, while talking about everything from sports to rocket science. Bengali literature has many such storytellers as authors, who use their first-person perspective to tell stories or introduce a character to tell the stories that they would rather not narrate from their perspective. Satyajit Ray's Topshe (Tapesh Ranjan Mitra), who narrates the Feluda adventures to the readers, Sunil Gangopadhyay's Santu (Sunanda Ray Chowdhury), who is the narrator for the Kakababu series of stories, or Saradindu Bandhopadhyay's Ajit Bandhopadhyay, who narrates the Bymokesh stories to the readers. Though none of these has the tale-within-a-tale feature, all of them are essentially an illustration of the act of storytelling in real life.

[2] Michel Foucault's idea of an author-function posits that there is no single author of any text, rather an author-function which assimilates the contribution of the "author" along with every other agency that might have contributed to the completion of that text.

The segment of Bengali literature which is predominantly for children has three such popular characters – Tenida, Ghonada and Tarini Khuro. The similarity in their nomenclature regarding a familial and respectful relationship places all of them on an already established pedestal from which they will not be dethroned at any cost. This hierarchy allows them to exploit their listeners for favours; the two *dadas* more so than the Khuro. In a significant number of Ghonada stories, Shibu, Sishir, Gour, and the narrator Sudhir arrange for a lustrous meal for their storyteller, with the precise purpose of extracting another tall tale from the man. In Tenida, however, the "six-foot-tall nightmare for the British at the Kolkata Maidan" himself snatches away bites of food that Pyala, Habul or Kyabla might be having at the moment. In some cases, we see him demanding an edible incentive to continue with a tale on which he had them hooked. Tarini Khuro, being an aged man, cared only for raw tea, and export-quality *biri*[3], where he carried the latter himself (probably because he could not have asked his listeners, minors as they were, to provide him with a *biri*).

This paper will focus on the last two characters from that list, as Tenida often participated in real-life and real-time adventures with his friends and juniors, whereas the tales of the other two characters were almost always exclusively narrated. The alienation imparted due to this deliberate distancing from the action described in the tales makes the stories all the more exciting, both for the listeners within and the readers outside the fictional narrative of the stories of Ghonada and Tarini Khuro. For this purpose, I would only be considering the first two volumes of the *Ghonada Samagra*, as there is an unprecedented change in the tone, language, style and content in the third volume which cannot be discussed or included within the purview of this paper.

A comparative analysis of the two characters with textual instances would reveal that while they have certain structural and narratological similarities, these two storytellers are fundamentally different from one another in many key aspects. In addition to the characteristics that the characters themselves exhibit, there is a major difference in the perspective of their writers as well. While Ray published most of the Tarini Khuro stories in the children's magazine *Sandesh*, Premendra Mitra's audience was more broad and versatile.

[3] A *biri* is a cheap, cylindrical and smokable leaf with tobacco rolled inside it. It is popular in Bengal and other parts of India, mostly among people who cannot afford a cigarette. However, Tarini Khuro smoked a biri because he liked it, and not because of financial incapability.

The element of science fiction, for Ray, came with his other creation Professor Shonku, and that of retelling of history seldom occurs. While Ghonada shares a relationship of superiority with the other occupants of the mess they inhabit, Tarini Khuro exhibits a relationship of equality with his listeners. The point of similarity, however, is the relationship of codependence that these two tellers share with their listeners. This is true for Tenida as well, as he cannot survive in peace without showing some *dadagiri*[4] to his listeners. Similarly, Ghonada cannot go long without the company of his appeasers, as numerous instances from the tales display. Perhaps the least amount of explicit codependence is displayed by Tarini Khuro, but that can be attributed to the fact that there are not many stories on him, as compared to Ghonada who has three volumes of complete stories and Tenida who has the solo volume.

In the stories of Ghonada, Premendra Mitra brought science-fiction to Bengalis in the wrap of historiographic metafiction. Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* wrote, "One of the few common denominators among the detractors of postmodernism is the surprising, but general, agreement that the postmodern is ahistorical. It is a familiar line of attack, launched by Marxists and traditionalists alike, against not only contemporary fiction, but also today's theory—from semiotics to deconstruction." (87) This act of deconstruction comes to the readers by deliberately altering historical facts in simultaneous jest and sincerity. For instance, in the story "Tupi" (The Cap), Ghonada claimed that he had climbed Mount Everest, tied to an abominable snowman with a lasso. The story was written before the maiden summit of Everest in 1953, as is mentioned in the story itself. Ghonada has, in other stories, taken the responsibility for the Second World War, finding Uranium, tektites, assisting in the invention of artificial chlorophyll, and other such significant feats. Mitra walks the line between fantasy and absurdism with such deft precision, that even the listeners within the story get confused as to whether the stories are real or not.

In the second volume of the Ghonada Samagra, an institution named "Mou-Ka-Sha-Bi-Sh" (MKSBS) – an abbreviation for Moulik Kahini Shaar Biponon Shongostha [An organisation to provide and distribute original story summaries] [5]makes an appearance. They

[4] A form of dominance expressed on younger people by a senior male member, based on the exclusive virtue of them being senior.

[5] The translations quoted in this paper are done by the author of this paper unless otherwise mentioned in the citations.

write incessant letters to Ghonada, claiming that the stories which Ghonada narrates are made up, and soon he will run out of original ideas to please his listeners for a sufficient amount of time. Fantastic as they are, Premendra Mitra does not let the readers discard the tales as completely falsified, or even imaginary for that matter. When MKSBS challenged Ghonada in their second letter, by testing the limits of his knowledge through trick questions, or when the four inhabitants of 72 No. Banamali Naskar Lane[6] wanted to do the same at the beginning of the aforementioned story "Tupi", the author always made it a point to prove Ghonada's superiority, at least in terms of knowledge, by showcasing how these immature storytellers fall too little too short regarding factual or historical accuracy.

The oral element has always been of paramount importance to the genre of storytelling, both in reality and in fiction. In that context, the readers are somewhat amused to learn that Ghonada is afraid of letters coming to him from anywhere. (Mitra, *Ghonada Samagra 2* 293). The letters, which take up the last quarter of the second volume of Ghonada stories, have some resonances with the act of writing diaries. Anwesha Maity in her paper on Ghonada's tall tales analysed this aspect from a different angle, where she wrote,

> The narrative devices of the tall-tale and the diary, especially where the narrator is also the hero of the tale, necessitate the occurrence of the tale in the past … in the Ghana-da series, this narrative device [of the tall-tale] creates a lacuna in the conventionally accepted understanding of colonial history itself. By deliberately inserting the tale in a history which, as written in a verisimilar 'frame storyworld,' finds no mention of any such occurrence, the tall-tale prompts its reevaluation from a postcolonial perspective. (51)

The "frame storyworld" is built by Ghonada, but the contributors are spread out across the room which he famously inhabits.

This postcolonial perspective is better reflected in the first volume of the stories, where he claimed responsibility (or credit) for achievements which were typically assigned to the British, or Europeans/Americans in general. However, the element of storytelling remained constant in both volumes. Often, Ghonada was seen to sabotage the almost

[6] The address of the mess in which Ghonada, the narrator and the other characters live.

exclusively outdoor plans of the group, by enticing them to stay behind. In stories like "Ghori" (The watch), it was a derby between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan, where only the four inhabitants planned to go without their supreme leader, whereas in a story like "Knecho" (The worm), all of them had planned to go fishing together. While the former could have been out of spite, the latter was definitely from the all-consuming fear of his bubble of superiority being burst open, especially at outdoor sports, at which he claimed to be an expert on multiple occasions. An article entitled "The Insectesimal tall tale: Historical catachresis and ethics in the science fiction of Premendra Mitra" argues, "In Mitra, the tall tale operates as an embedded narrative and is initiated by a specific comment by one of the interlocutors, generally a member of the audience of the tale, who inadvertently precipitates Ghanada's narrative." (Bhattacharya and Hiradhar 4)

Premendra Mitra plays around with this element of interlocution, most notably in the story "Dada" (The elder brother"), where a cameo character appears, claiming to be superior to Ghonada in age, lived adventures and tall tales. Using the perfect set-up of almost a year's absence of Ghonada from the mess, this unnamed man appears at the scene, as if maliciously aware of the inhabitants' propensity to give undue advantages and favours to anyone who would entice them with a tale. However, the alleged superiority takes an ironic turn the moment Ghonada returns to the mess, spoiling the heroic element of *dada*'s tale by a simple interjection:

> "Yes, I have returned in one-piece", said Ghonada.
>
> "How Ghonada, how?", we screamed in unison…
>
> "Why are you so shocked? It was not half as difficult as it sounds. I asked it one question.[7] The game was as good as over by that."
>
> "What was the question, Ghonada?"

[7] The reference here is to a machine which had gone beyond its purview and was continuously consuming humans in its quest for knowledge.

> He said, with a wry smile, "I asked, what came first, the plant or the seed? It is still thinking about that. Might as well have extinguished its thirst for knowledge and itself in the process."
>
> *Dada* suddenly bowed down to touch Ghonada's feet and left the room without further ado. (Mitra, *Ghonada Samagra 1* 125-126)

This masterful, clever, yet simple question, which is a variation of the egg-chicken question, goes a long way to point out how a tall-tale can be blown apart by a single detail.

The inhabitants of the mess attempted the same, notably at the end of the story "Chunch" (The needle), where Ghonada was attempting to salvage and assist Rene Laval with the invention of a mystery substance, which remained unidentified till the last paragraph of the story. Ghonada had a ready answer to the inquisitive "So, what was the holy grail for which such a fiasco was necessary?" … "You still don't get it? It was chlorophyll." (Mitra, *Ghonada Samagra 1* 237). These details, along with elements like revealing only tempting details from a story and waiting for the listeners to request him to carry on, are what make Ghonada a great storyteller. These details hold the story together, and it comes as no surprise that Ghonada alone has access to such crucial points of information. Even in the aforementioned story, "Tupi", when the inhabitants of the mess tried to trick Ghonada by uttering the Tibetan names of Mount Everest, only Ghonada knew the correct name, Cho mo hiyan mi (The purest water on Earth).

In the story "Haansh" (The Duck), this is exactly what he does, after a new occupant of the mess, Bapi Dutta, is furious at him for cooking the ducks he had set aside to take home for his family. Not only did Ghonada alleviate his anger by spinning a tale around the anonymous yet highly-priced duck, but he also started the tale thus,

> On 13th July 1935, I was about to lose my way on the world's highest plateau due to a blinding blizzard; one of the shrewdest villains of the world, Faun Brull was breathing on my shoulders as a hyena after its prey. I knew I cared not for the loss of my life but my repute, and I had just witnessed a ghost at sixteen thousand feet altitude. Thank God I was able to kill the *changu* [the local name for the wolf] with my last bullet! (Mitra, *Ghonada Samagra 1* 159)

Instances such as these prove the ability of Mitra to give away certain aspects of the plot, in a manner resembling a trailer, so that everyone wants more.

Such intricate detailing without any idea of the plot was bound to keep the regular listeners hooked, but it did the trick on Bapi Datta as well. He sat there, his hands still bearing the smell of the ducks whose loss he had almost forgotten, and ended up bringing ducks to the mess more often than the inhabitants cared for. Such instances abound in the tales, but one of the most interesting aspects of the tales presented in the second volume of the stories is the effortless anachronism in them. Not only does Mitra aware the readers of Ghonada's first appearance at a much later stage, but he also allows him to correct passages, stories and anecdotes from *The Mahabharata*. Such diachronic anachronism not only posits Ghonada's steadfast position as the sole storyteller in the context of this mess irrespective of time but also adds an air of omnipresence to his character who was at least human till the end of volume one.

An article called "Bengali fiction for the teenagers" by D. K. Chakravorty clusters the characters of Ghonada, Tenida, Harshavardhan, Govardhan and a few other iconic characters created by the writers of the *Kallol*[8] era. Though this paper does not take into consideration the character of Tarini Khuro, the essence of it allows for the iconic storyteller to find his place among these characters who have won the hearts of teenagers. This survey-like article finds itself starkly contrasted by the likes of Walter Benjamin's essay "The storyteller" where Benjamin analyses the works of Nikolai Leskov to understand the nuances of storytelling (83). It is the figure of the storyteller which binds these two fictional characters together, and the hitherto mentioned justification for the choice of them as the subject matter for this paper falls perfectly in line with the distancing of the storyteller from reality, as both Ghonada and Tarini Khuro take immense pleasure in effortlessly creating a wall of distance between the listener and the tale. By talking about locations which are "remote" and alien to the listeners, these storytellers ensure that the absence of the lived experience ties the listeners to them in an obligation, thus nurturing their role as the centre of all attention.

Tarini Khuro, one of the three recurring characters created by Satyajit Ray, has a comparatively narrower range of stories, many of which are more believable than even the

[8] The *Kallol* era mainly consists of Bengali writers after the demise of Rabindranath Tagore. The nomenclature came from a magazine named *Kallol.*

most placid Ghonada story. The fundamental differences between these two characters lie not only in their respective ages and their nomenclature – Ghonoshyam Das is the *dada* (elder brother, or in this case, a generic senior) of the listeners, while Tarini Charan Banerjee is the *Khuro* (uncle), but also in the nature of the stories they tell. While Ghonada mainly focuses on science fiction and an alternate retelling of history. Tarini Khuro attempts to make the tale the independent centre of his attractiveness. In the stories which feature him, Tarini Khuro approaches a new job or business, and problems find him, much like how mysteries find another of Ray's characters, Prodosh Chandra Mitra, popularly known as Feluda. The element of similarity, however, rests in the way these two characters solve the problems which they face, and the way they narrate the experience to their ardent listeners. For both Tarini Khuro and Ghonada, storytelling is not merely a hobby, but their calling in life.

This element of storytelling and problem-solving is best reflected in the arguably metatextual story "Golpoboliye Tarini Khuro" (Tarini Khuro as a storyteller), where *Khuro* is hired by the wealthy Balvant Parekh, apparently to help the latter with his insomnia. It eventually turned out that Parekh was appropriating the stories told by Khuro as his own, and publishing them without giving *Khuro* any credit. Tarini Khuro decided to defeat plagiarism by plagiarism and narrated a story of Sarat Chandra Chattapadhyay as his own, which Parekh then sent for publication. Unsurprisingly, the publishers got to know of the origin of the story, and Parekh was punished for his heinous act, with a dose of his own medicine. Not only does Ray warn the readers against plagiarism, but he also shows how storytelling is a nuanced act. The adventures of Tarini Khuro are his own, which are then stolen by Parekh and published in a Gujarati magazine in the narrative of the story. These stories, in real life, are the creations of Ray. Who then assumes the position of the storyteller in those tales which are found nowhere except their mention in passing in "Tarini Khuro as a storyteller"? The reader is also left to wonder if some of these stories were repeated to Poltu (the narrator of Tarini Khuro's stories) and his friends in the other stories which Tarini Khuro shares with them, and the readers find published, as works of Satyajit Ray.

This set-up resembles the Bengali culture of *adda*. Though there are a few fundamental differences between the set-up of the Tarini Khuro stories, and that of a typical *adda*, these do not disqualify the former as a variation of the latter. Debarati Sen defines *adda* as

> A kind of informal social talk in Bengali, among friends and colleagues, but its content is always of intellectual significance, addressing issues such as local/global politics, art, literature, and music. Casual conversations and gossip are common in many societies, but the creative performance of this genre by Bengali elites made *adda* a marker of an urban middle-class identity, especially in response to the cultural hegemony of British Imperialism. (521)

From this definition, the interactions between Ghonada and his listeners seem to be a more appropriate fit for this. However, the key element of reciprocity is lacking for both the sets of listeners, more so in the case of Tarini Khuro, who is rarely interrupted while he is narrating his tales.

Despite these differences, it can be argued that the almost exclusively one-way conversations by Tarini Khuro are a kind of adda because it involves a variety, which Sen in the aforementioned quote talks about. Tarini Khuro has discussed the nuances of magic, movies, sports, astrology, superstitions, storytelling, hunting, ghosts, robbery, fraud and so on. While delineating on these topics, Khuro encountered several characters, none of whom were ever found in more than one story. The surprising and almost unbelievable element, however, is that there are three characters, Maharaja Gulab Singh, Daku Tota Singh and amateur actor Ramanimohan Chatterjee[9] who look like Tarinu Khuro at different points of time, to the point where the characters in the story confuse them with Khuro.

This is a narrative technique of storytelling, where the storyteller brings in elements and motifs from the hitherto popular stories into his later tales, to keep the listeners enticed. This is somewhat similar to the argument on embedding made in the article "Notes on Narrative embedding", where the authors opined that embedding can be of different types, which would include the acts of insertion, subordination and homogeneity. (Bal and Tavor 43) This is the embedding which Khuro does effortlessly. He inserts elements from his formerly narrated tales, and ever so often, makes it seem like the tale he is about to narrate is the best and most exciting one the listeners would ever get to enjoy, thus subordinating his

[9] These characters occur in the stories "Maharaja Tarini Khuro", "The wealth of Seth Ganga Ram" and "Tarini Khuro in Tollywood".

storytelling from the past. However, he manages to maintain the element of homogeneity by keeping some traits of his character consistent throughout the many adventures, like his dislike for stability, his polymath nature, and his tendency to visit new places without having a solid plan thereafter.

These characteristics of Tarini Khuro place him in the line of storytellers who tell the story for the exclusive sake of it. Walter Benjamin in his aforementioned essay dealt with the works of Leskov, while simultaneously delineating the nuances of storytelling. For instance, when Benjamin writes:

> In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers. But if today "having counsel" is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others. After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding. To seek this counsel one would first have to be able to tell the story (85)

The readers are immediately reminded of how Tarini Khuro implemented counsel in his stories. In "Tarini Khuro in Tollywood", he showed how one can step up selflessly at the hour of someone's need whom they barely know, while in "The duel at Lucknow" Khuro tried to make his listeners aware that love is transcendental. He does all of this while packing these tales in a wrap of suspense or humour – in the former story it is he who demoralises the recruit Ramanimohan by disguising as a fortune teller, which shatters Ramani's confidence, while in the latter tale, the love story between Hugh Dramond and Isabella materialised in their ghosts re-enacting the day of a fearsome duel.

The difference in age between the two characters (Ghonada and Tarini Khuro) becomes insignificant because their tales are told in the past when they are about the same age. However, the fact that Khuro is an octogenarian does have something to do with the common Bengali notion of the grandparents in a family being the primary source of stories for the children, more often than not. Though Khuro objected to being called "dadu" (Grandpa), he could not possibly have asked school kids to call him Tarini *da.* The age of the listeners also becomes important in this context, as the target audience for both the set of stories is not the same. However, the fundamental difference between these two characters is not in their age, but in their location with respect to the listeners. While Ghonada lives in the

constant company of the listeners, Tarini Khuro takes a walk and reaches his listeners, as and when he pleases. This seems like the logistical reason behind Ghonada having a lot more stories than Tarini Khuro. It is important to note that Ray did not specify a single instance where Sunanda, Nyapla and the other listeners had sought Khuro out. This takes away a lot of agency from the listeners. Even in Tenida, we can see the narrator Pyala going out and meeting Tenida at a neutral location, which does not happen for Tarini Khuro. This aspect places Khuro a little higher as far as his agency as a storyteller is concerned, but takes away a lot of opportunities for interaction, thus giving Ghonada the edge from a different perspective.

These elements contribute to the argument that the storyteller is a figure who changes his stance, attitude and methods of storytelling to suit the purpose of the story he is telling. Tarini Khuro and Ghonada are fictional characters themselves, whose stories are narrated to us by a different storyteller (Poltu and Sudhir, respectively), which in turn is but an imaginative concoction of the pens of Satyajit Ray and Premendra Mitra, both of whom are master storytellers. The metatextuality comes to the fore as this story-within-a-story sheds some light on the art of storytelling itself. A part of it rests in the ability to structure the narrative in such a way that the reader/listener is hooked till the end. Giles Deleuze in his essay "How do we recognise structuralism" had pointed out seven tenets of structuralism, and these storytellers follow the majority of them in most of their stories, if not all. For instance, the fifth criterion of the "serial", where Deleuze states that signifiers unfold linearly, following Sassure's tenet that the signifier has a linear character (182). This criterion is enacted in the way the events are narrated by Khuro or Ghonada: one character follows the other, and incidents do not come jumbled up in the way they do while remembering something.

The authors take great care to arrange the events in a linear chronology while arranging the stories in an anachronistic pattern, as has been already mentioned with the example of Ghonada. For Tarini Khuro, the order in which the stories appear in the collected volume *Golpo 101* (*101 Stories*) is not necessarily the order in which they took place in Khuro's life. This anachronism in the order of publication displays some rudimentary characteristics of the last tenet of structuralism according to Deleuze: "from the subject to practice" (189). This criterion belongs to the future, and in that act of anachronism, it is

related to the instance at hand. If a story is narrated from the past at a present moment, then it remains as an indelible mark on the memories of the listeners and readers, which they could refer to in the future. Thus, justifying the title of the last criterion of Deleuze, the storytellers like Khuro or Ghonada move swiftly from being the subject of their own stories which they narrate to practising the art of storytelling itself. This practical act happens in the future corresponding to the time in which the stories took place, which is why this criterion sits well with the instances at hand.

These criteria enlisted by Deleuze structure the stories and the stories within the stories in an essentially metatextual loop. This element of metatextuality not only enhances a structuralist reading of the texts at hand but also contributes to the possibility of extending such a reading to the broader horizon of storytelling in general. If one goes beyond the studied texts in this paper to the realm of *Arabian Nights* or *Aesop's Fables* or even *The Mahabharata* for that matter, it becomes apparent that all of these are essentially a manifestation of storytelling. For instance, The Mahabharata is told to Lord Ganesh by Veda Vyas, and the condition is that the latter cannot stop his narration at any point and the former has to understand everything before he writes it down. Perhaps the structural hero in this scenario is the text itself, which goes through innumerable interpolations and modifications, and yet remains a unique experience in itself irrespective of the version read by anyone. Storytelling can thus be argued to be essentially structuralist, where the differentiation between the signifier and the signified is the key to an individual and independent understanding of the same story by two different listeners or readers.

The structural implications of the stories that these characters tell are manifold. However, not all of the criteria enlisted by Deleuze are followed in the stories which have been discussed or considered in this paper. The fourth criterion of the differentiator and differentiation, for example, is almost nowhere to be found. These exceptions and anomalies argue that the nature of the stories is only borderline structural, and not an exemplary model. The structural nature of the stories also reveals the nature of the storytellers themselves. Since structuralism claims that understanding one unit of an entire system would give the reader a comprehensive understanding of the entire system, could the structuralist implications of the stories narrated by storytellers have certain similarities where understanding the fundamental tenets of one such story would give us the key to unveiling the secret of all the other ones?

The anomalies which come up while situating the primary texts of this paper in the context of Deleuze serve as an impediment in such a generalisation.

Therefore, the subtle yet sure differences in the stories themselves make them unique. Both Tarini Khuro and Ghonada position themselves as superior to their listeners, and as a result, the narrator places them above the readers while they are narrating their tales from a secondary perspective. It is interesting to note that neither Poltu nor Sudhir was ever seen with a notebook in their hands. In addition to raising the question as to how did they manage to remember the stories in such intricate detail, especially when so much of the story's length is dominated by Khuro and Ghonada's monologues, it also established Tarini Khuro and Ghonada as supreme storytellers. Paired with Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief", an attentive reader would not take long to understand that Poltu and Sudhir, who are but a disguise of Ray and Mitra, have concocted these stories themselves, and then told these stories to the readers as the tall-tales of Tarini Khuro and Ghonada. In a continent and context far from Walter Benjamin, these two stalwarts, with some support from other Bengali storytellers like Tenida, establish themselves as a distinct class all together. The harmless deception of who the storyteller is, contributes to the partially structuralist reading of the stories, as they are all imagined tales, and the awareness of the authors has prevented them from being completely categorised as structuralist blocks. Readers of these tales stand amazed and in awe, as they wonder how these tall tales are spun out of nothing but pure and unadulterated creativity, allowing the unsuspecting reader to enjoy the tales, while keeping enough opportunity for the scholar to dissect their tales along the lines of Deleuze and Benjamin.

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