

The Unassuming Hero: Re-reading Inspector Ganesh Ghote in Keating's *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*

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Abstract

The creation of a compelling character that instantly resonates with readers is a primary goal for any writer. For a story to succeed, its characters must be both engaging and emotionally impactful. This holds particularly true in detective fiction, where iconic characters like Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot have contributed to the popularity and enduring success of their stories and the genre as a whole. These characters are well-known for their distinct eccentricities, which set them apart. In contrast, Inspector Ganesh Ghote of the Bombay CID, created by British writer Henry Reymond Fitzwalter Keating (1926-2011), lacks such flamboyant traits. Ghote, a quintessentially Indian detective, was brought to life by Keating before he had even visited India, with the first nine books of the 26-book series written without firsthand experience of the country. Ghote is modest and unassuming, solving crimes through integrity, persistence, determination, and hard work. Despite lacking the flamboyant qualities of his more famous counterparts, Ghote has earned a place among the great detectives of fiction. This article examines the character of Inspector Ghote in *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train* (1971), arguing that it is his portrayal — rooted in relatability and perseverance — that has resonated with readers and contributed to the success of both the series and its author. This article explores whether Ghote's character meets the formulaic standards for a successful, enduring detective figure, as outlined by John Cawelti in his essay, "The Study of Literary Formulas." (1976) Moreover, the article showcases how even an understated detective like Ghote can leave a lasting impact on readers, balancing tradition with innovation to create a timeless detective.

Keywords: Detective Fiction, Character Reading, Inspector Ghote Series, Keating, Crime, Indian Detective

Introduction

Detective fiction remains one of the most enduringly popular genres since its formal debut in 1841 with Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. There are numerous reasons behind its appeal, some attribute its success to the genre's formulaic structure and plot-driven narratives, others emphasize the puzzle-like nature of the stories and their characters. Some critics of the genre also adhere the genre's popularity to its pleasure element inherent in the genre or the escapist ideal world it constructs. For instance, American cultural critic John G. Cawelti believes that the genre allows readers to experience a range of emotions without real-

life complexities. Readers understand that any uncertainties will be controlled and ultimately resolved by its formulaic structure.¹ P. D. James also praises the pleasurable experience detective fiction offers readers,² while Australian crime scholar Rachel Franks highlights the satisfaction derived from a well-resolved ending.³ These factors all contribute to its timeless allure. According to Dorothy L. Sayers, “[t]he first essential, the life and soul of the detective story, is the plot and the characters come second.”⁴ Sayers and other critics of classical detective fiction argue that the plot is the defining element, asserting that the genre thrives when it adheres to a traditional formula centred on the narrative or plot. Deviating from this formula, in their view, compromises the intellectual and literary integrity of the work.⁵ Yet, contemporary detective fiction writers have successfully integrated variations into the classic framework, blending new twists with classic formulas to create fresh, engaging narratives.

Ultimately, the figure of the detective remains a key driver of the genre’s popularity. The creation of a compelling character that instantly resonates with readers is a primary goal for any writer. For a story to succeed, its characters must be both engaging and emotionally impactful. Cawelti identifies four essential character roles in classic detective fiction: the victim, the criminal, the detective, and those threatened but unable to solve the crime.⁶ Central to this narrative framework is, undoubtedly, the detective. When one thinks of detective stories, names like Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, and Father Brown often overshadow the intricate plots and puzzles that define individual tales. These iconic characters have contributed to the popularity and enduring success of their stories and the genre as a whole. Stephen Knight emphasises the role of “an investigative agent”—an amateur sleuth, a private investigator, or a dedicated police officer—who drives the narrative. These skilled individuals unravel the mysteries, restore harmony, and hold wrongdoers accountable.⁷ Detectives are not mere plot devices; they embody the essence of the story, forging emotional connections that ensure their lasting appeal. Cawelti argues that successful stories elicit identification with characters, claiming that “unless we are able to relate our feelings and experiences to those of the characters in fiction, much of the emotional effect will be lost.”⁸ Similarly, Franks notes, “If a character is too difficult to embrace—if I find that I cannot make an emotional connection, if I find myself ambivalent about their fate—then a book is discarded as not being to my taste.”⁹ These observations underscore the vital role of character development in creating emotionally engaging detective fiction. In this context, iconic detectives like Holmes and Poirot have captivated readers not just through the intellectual

¹ Heta Pyrhönen, ‘Criticism and Theory’, in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, eds. Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Boston: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 47.

² P. D. James, ‘Murder Most Foul’, *The Paris Review*, 3 August (2020). At: <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2020/08/03/murder-most-foul/>.

³ Rachel Franks, ‘A Taste for Murder: The Curious Case of Crime Fiction’, *M/C Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2014).

⁴ Dorothy L. Sayers, ‘Aristotle on Detective Fiction’, in *Unpopular Opinions* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946), p. 180.

⁵ P. D. James, ‘Critics and Aficionados: Why Some Don’t Enjoy Them and Why Others Do’, in *Talking about Detective Fiction* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 133.

⁶ John G. Cawelti, ‘The Formula of the Classic Detective Story’, in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 91.

⁷ Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1980) p. 8.

⁸ John G. Cawelti, ‘The Study of Literary Formulas’, in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 18.

⁹ Franks, ‘A Taste for Murder’.

intricacies of their cases, but through their eccentric personalities, brilliant minds, and distinctive quirks. Their memorable traits have elevated their stories to classics, securing their place in literary history.

However, not all detectives follow this flamboyant mould. Inspector Ganesh Ghote (pronounced Goh-té) of the Bombay CID, created by Henry Raymond Fitzwalter Keating (1926-2011), exemplifies a quieter, more understated detective figure. H. R. F. Keating, was a prominent British crime fiction author, known for his extensive literary contributions of over fifty books. He served as the Chairman of the Crime Writers' Association (CWA) from 1970 to 1971 and held the presidency of the Detection Club from 1985 to 2000. Keating created the memorable crime-solving charlady, Mrs Craggs, and, under the pseudonym Evelyn Harvey, penned seven police procedurals featuring the character Harriet Martens, a woman chief inspector. In addition to his fiction work, Keating produced notable critical writings, including *Understanding Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: A Guide to 'The Phenomenon of Man'* (1969), co-authored with Maurice Keating, *Sherlock Holmes: The Man and His World* (1979), *Whodunit? A Guide to Crime, Suspense and Spy Fiction* (1982), *Crime and Mystery: The 100 Best Books* (1987), *The Bedside Companion to Crime* (1989). However, Keating's most significant literary legacy is defined by 'the Inspector Ghote' series, which consists of twenty-six novels set in India. This series not only incorporates the rich cultural backdrop of India but also delves into universally relevant philosophical themes. Inspector Ganesh Ghote of the Detection of Crime Branch, Bombay CID is the titular hero of the series. The first book of the series *The Perfect Murder* was published in 1964. This novel won the *Crime Writers' Association's* prestigious *Gold Dagger Award*¹⁰ and introduced Inspector Ghote, a unique international detective, further establishing Keating's reputation as a novelist who offered a distinctive approach to the detective genre. The first nine books of the series, including *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train* (1971), were written before Keating set his feet in India in 1975. Yet, his portrayal of Bombay and India's cultural and social landscape is both nuanced and accurate. Meera Tamaya in her book *H.R.F. Keating, Post-colonial Detection: A Critical Study* (1993) applauds the author commenting, "[h]ere was an author who did not talk about a generic Indian, as many do, but understood the immense cultural and linguistic gulf that exists between Indians from different states and different castes."¹¹ He deserves credit for an accurate grasp of the intricacies of a complex heterogeneous India.

Unlike the grand personalities of classic detectives like Holmes or Poirot, Ghote is quintessentially an Indian detective, modest and unassuming, solving crimes through perseverance, sheer determination, and dogged efforts. In Ghote's case, his down-to-earth and relatable personality makes him stand out, demonstrating that a detective can be memorable not only for eccentric traits but also for their integrity, determination, and methodical approach. What is particularly intriguing is that Keating had never visited India when he began writing the 26-book Inspector Ghote series, and yet, he was able to craft Inspector Ghote as an authentic and grounded figure, that would join the pantheon of the greatest sleuths in detective fiction.

¹⁰ The Gold Dagger Award is given by Crime Writers' Association for the best crime novel by an author of any nationality, originally written in English and first published in the United Kingdom during the judging period. At: <https://thecwa.co.uk/awards-and-competitions/the-daggers/gold-dagger/>.

¹¹ Meera Tamaya, *H. R. F. Keating, Post-colonial Detection: A Critical Study* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), p. 9.

That is why Ghote has been regarded by many as “a genuine addition to the ranks of fictional detectives” and “one of the great characters of the contemporary mystery novel.”¹²

Inspector Ghote Goes by Train, the seventh book in the series, is an inverted detective fiction¹³ where the protagonist, Inspector Ghote, travels to Calcutta on the iconic ‘Calcutta Mail’ train to escort a notorious master trickster, A. K. Bhattacharya, back to Bombay for trial. Keating’s portrayal of Inspector Ghote is remarkable not because of the detective’s grand gestures or genius but due to his relatability. Ghote’s quiet determination and human flaws make him a character who evokes empathy from readers, embodying the very principle that Cawelti notes about identification with the character. Through *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, Keating reveals how an ordinary character, when placed in extraordinary circumstances, can captivate readers, and leave a lasting impression. Apart from being a story of apprehending the criminal, the book is also a story of 1970s India. Keating offers a vivid exploration of India in the 1970s, using the journey aboard the ‘Calcutta Mail’ as a backdrop for the story, the train journey becomes a lens through which Keating explores both the vast country outside the train and the moral, philosophical, and psychological dilemmas faced by the characters inside the train. Through details of dress, language, food, mannerisms, nomenclature, and the journey by Indian railways, the novel presents a richly textured view of the country, despite Keating’s geographical distance from the setting at the time of writing.

Thus, this article examines the character of Inspector Ghote in *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, contending that it is his portrayal — rooted in relatability and perseverance — that has appealed to the reader and has made the series and the writer popular. This article explores whether Ghote’s character meets the formulaic standards for a successful, enduring detective figure, as outlined by Cawelti. It also demonstrates how a detective like Ghote—understated but deeply human—can leave a lasting impact, blending the traditions of classic detective stories with innovation to become a timeless figure in literary history.

Ghote: The Unlikely Hero

In his insightful formula literature Cawelti highlights a balance between convention and innovation, asserting that while formulaic works follow established patterns, they must also introduce unique elements to remain engaging. He explains, “To be a work of any quality or interest, the individual version of a formula must have some unique or special characteristics of its own, yet these characteristics must ultimately work toward the fulfillment of the conventional form.”¹⁴ Detective fiction, as a subset of formula literature, exemplifies this, requiring writers to follow certain patterns while also offering fresh twists by adding special and unique touches of their own to it. Keating had already written eleven conventional, British detective novels but enjoyed only modest success. When he moved his setting to India and created the desi Indian detective, Inspector Ganesh Vinayak Ghote, he found fame and recognition. Cawelti further explains that the key to creating successful formulaic art lies in reenergizing familiar characters and situations without completely deviating from them: “[t]he

¹² Quoted in John M. Reilly (ed.), *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 881.

¹³ An inverted detective fiction is a story of apprehending the criminal. It is also known as “howcatchem.”

¹⁴ Cawelti, ‘The Study of Literary Formulas’, p. 10.

power to employ stereotypical characters and situations in such a way as to breathe new life and interest into them is particularly crucial to formulaic art of high quality since the creator of a western or detective story cannot risk departing very far from the typical characters and situations his audience has come to expect.”¹⁵ This and the previous statements by Cawelti suggest that though the writer should add novelty to the stereotypical characters and situations they should not completely depart from it.

Yet, Keating has departed from both. He based the setting in India, a different location, and created a detective who does not have any of the stereotypical eccentricities of established figures. At first glance, Inspector Ghote may seem an unlikely candidate for literary fame. Ghote diverges significantly from the traditional detective mould. Rather than a larger-than-life, eccentric figure like Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot, Ghote is a humble, methodical, and deeply human character. He is not brilliant in the way Sherlock Holmes is, nor does he display the almost theatrical flair of Poirot. Instead, Ghote relies on his integrity, perseverance, and determination—qualities that make him relatable to a broad audience. His methodical approach, coupled with a deep sense of duty, positions him as a character readers can connect with on an emotional level. His imperfections, diffidence, and humanity are in stark contrast to the often-unapproachable genius of his fictional counterparts. Unlike the bachelor detectives of the detective fiction, Ghote has a wife, Protima, and a son, Ved. Ghote is best described by Vaseem Khan in the introduction to the ebook edition:

a detective of considerable resourcefulness and tenacity. Ghote is not your typical western policeman. There is little of the maverick about him, no melodrama, no bitter divorces in his past (he is dedicated to his wife Protima), no hard-charging, hard-drinking machismo. He is a minor cog within a vast engine of bureaucracy and at the same time accepts this and chafes against it. He is set above the common man – by virtue of his uniform – and yet condemned to forever belong to the lower echelons of that vast stratified populace that gives India such colour and depth.¹⁶

Ghote sets off on what seems to be a routine train journey to retrieve a prisoner in Calcutta. However, the trip quickly spirals into a captivating adventure as he finds himself surrounded by a motley crew: a clever trickster, a wandering guru, two American hippies named Mary Jane and Red, and Ramaswamy, an Inspector of Forms and Stationery from Madras. The mundane journey to Calcutta quickly morphs into a complex investigation of the identity of A. K. Bhattacharya, the master trickster. His task is to bring back A. K. Bhattacharya. Ghote’s keen observational skills and patience shine as he unravels the layers of identity and intrigue surrounding Bhattacharya. Ghote, through shrewdness and patience, unravels the mystery that Bhattacharya was cleverly travelling incognito as A. K. Banerjee opposite him in the same train compartment. His journey back to Bombay concerns bringing back Bhattacharya, his identity known, back to Bombay. The stakes rise as Ghote must not only secure Bhattacharya’s return to Bombay but also prevent his escape and extract a full confession from the trickster. Each encounter on the train adds a new layer of complexity, as Ghote deftly balances the chaos

¹⁵ Cawelti, ‘The Study of Literary Formulas’, p. 11.

¹⁶ Vaseem Khan, “Introduction,” in H. R. F. Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train* (E-book: Severn House Digital 2020).

created by his fellow passengers with his unwavering commitment to justice. Despite Bhattacharya's cunning attempts to evade capture, Ghote's determination and resourcefulness come to the forefront. As the train hurtles toward VT station, Ghote's relentless pursuit culminates in a tense showdown, where he must confront both Bhattacharya and his fellow passengers. Just when it seems Bhattacharya might slip through his fingers—injuring Ramaswamy in the process—Ghote's strong will prevails. By the time the train pulls into VT station, he has successfully apprehended the trickster, showcasing his unyielding resolve and sharp intellect in the face of adversity.

What makes Ghote compelling is his ability to reflect the everyday challenges of a regular individual while still operating within the high-stakes world of crime-solving. His character illustrates Cawelti's notion of 'stereotype vitalization,' where Keating takes familiar detective tropes and breathes new life into them through Ghote's modesty, self-doubt, and commitment to justice. Cawelti explains why formulaic literature remains popular by suggesting that individual works often feature stereotype vitalization, which extends their relevance beyond a specific time or culture.¹⁷ He identifies two ways in which this 'stereotype vitalization' occurs: incorporating contradictory traits and adding human complexity.

A character may embody seemingly contradictory traits, which makes them more compelling. Cawelti explains this by giving an example of Sherlock Holmes, who is portrayed as a highly rational detective, but also possesses qualities of a romantic poet—intuitive, dreamy, and a drug user. This contrast makes such characters more intriguing and memorable. In the present text, Keating applies this principle to Ghote, who is described as “a very human web of contradiction and counterpoint: shrewd and knowing, yet self-effacing and bumbling; pompous and prim, yet sensitive and self-deprecating; determined and tenacious, yet full of self-doubts and anxious yearnings; lonely yet uxorious; maladroit yet charming; a mignon of the law, but often sentimental and at all times humane.”¹⁸ Ghote is a distinctly Indian detective, a middle-aged, married officer in the Mumbai police. Unlike the larger-than-life, charismatic detectives typical of crime fiction, Ghote is a quiet, unassuming figure often underestimated by those around him. First DSP Samant gives him a mere task to travel on a mundane train journey to retrieve A. K. Bhattacharya. Then, the confident trickster underestimates Ghote and dares to disguise himself to travel in the same carriage as Ghote. He does not inspire awe or command attention, even among his colleagues, or readers. His demeanour is timid and nervous, and he remains obedient to his superiors. He is timid to have confident A. K. Bhattacharya sitting directly opposite him in the train compartment. He is nervous in front of the technologically advanced Calcutta Police.¹⁹ Ghote's shrewdness and self-doubt come to the forefront during his encounter with Mrs Sulbha Chiplunkar at Wardha station. From their first meeting, he suspects her identity upon noticing her steel-rimmed spectacles had plain glass. He follows the words of Dr Hans Gross from his book *Criminal Investigation*: “Everything which appears unnatural should be considered as suspicious and unauthentic.”²⁰ Still, he hesitates to deny her entry into the reserved train bogie, fearing the repercussions of being wrong. However, beneath this seemingly meek exterior lies a detective with a remarkable sense of

¹⁷ Cawelti, 'The Study of Literary Formulas', p. 11.

¹⁸ John M. Reilly (ed.), *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 881.

¹⁹ H. R. F. Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train* (New York: Thorndike Press, 2005[1971]) p. 177.

²⁰ Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, p. 257

integrity, perseverance, and an innate understanding of human nature. These contradictions make Ghote a multidimensional figure, distinct from the stereotypical detective archetype.

Ghote may not be flashy, but he is undeniably effective at his job. He ultimately breaks down A. K. Bhattacharya to get his confession. He achieves the desired result by being methodical and resorting to his strong will. When A. K. Bhattacharya escapes his custody to enter a different carriage, Ghote methodically figures out where the trickster could have escaped: “Churningly Ghote pushed every scrap of information he had gathered, every item he had deduced about Bhattacharya into the mill of his mind. There was an answer somewhere. Put a person into a known situation and they would react in a certain way. He knew what Bhattacharya’s situation was.”²¹ He even does not hesitate to get on the roof of the train carriage to get hold of the escaping trickster.²² Ghote’s strengths stem from his keen insight into people and his empathy, shaped by an acute awareness of his humble beginnings. His sensitivity to the nuances of class and society gives him a unique perspective on the human condition, allowing him to navigate both the criminal world and the bureaucratic intricacies of the police force. His modesty and lack of pretence make him approachable, but his commitment to justice is unshakeable. He even risks his life to get on the train roof to catch the trickster. He maintains his sense of humanity, never seeking to be a hero. Instead, he works within the system, facing obstacles with patience and persistence. As his last resort for getting the confession, he prevents A. K. Bhattacharya “from sleeping in order to wear him down” and thus prevents him from talking which “was a refinement he had been lucky to hit on.”²³

In his 1989 short story collection *Inspector Ghote, His Life and Crimes*, Keating reflects on the inspiration behind his character:

Inspector Ghote came to life one day in 1963. I was sitting in my study, in the red armchair by the window ... reading a geography book. I had decided that my next detective novel was to take place in India ... and one of the few notions I had about India was that things there were apt to be rather imperfect. Good symbolic stuff. Then, out of nowhere, into my head there came this man. Or some parts of him. A faintly worried face. Certainly, a pair of bony shoulders. A certain naïvety, which should enable him to ask the questions about the everyday life around him to which my potential readers might want answers.²⁴

Keating explains that Ghote was created as a man with a certain innocence that allowed him to ask questions about everyday life in a way that resonates with readers. His imperfections, and innocence, combined with dogged determination, make him a relatable figure—an “everyman” caught in the complexities of crime and justice. This theme of imperfection and humanity is central to Keating’s portrayal of Ghote. Ghote’s modesty contrasts with Bhattacharya’s arrogance, serving as a symbol of the dangers of overreaching ambition, choosing to travel by a slow, humble train rather than fly, stands as the antithesis of the myth of Icarus, who perished by flying too close to the sun. While Bhattacharya embodies this hubristic figure, Ghote

²¹ Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, p. 311

²² Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, p. 313

²³ Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, p. 271.

²⁴ H. R. F. Keating, *Inspector Ghote, His Life and Crimes* (London: Arrow Books, 1990), p. 1.

remains grounded, a reflection of his belief that perfection and arrogance often lead to destruction. Thus, when Bhattacharya states that “we can fly ... Assert our independence. Look down from above ... By the marvellous power of the aeroplane,”²⁵ Ghote responds to Bhattacharya that it “is what is wrong. I tell you it is wrong. Wrong to go so high, wrong to like to see so much wrong, wrong.”²⁶

Despite all this information or descriptions about Ghote, the reader does not know what exactly Ghote looks like. He is a physically shadowy figure with Keating once stating that “in the beginning [I] saw a pair of shoulders only, thin and bony shoulders with a burden always upon them ... I do not believe the fellow altogether knows what like are Ghote’s feet.”²⁷ Keating had not visited India so he could not provide all the physical details of Ghote. Keating describes Ghote’s appearance through his photograph which appears in *The Times of India* as “A grey featureless face stared straight forward above the open collar of a white shirt, a small whitish blob indicated the tip of the nose, a dark set line the mouth.”²⁸ This display of a paradoxical combination of Ghote’s traits along with his unique persona heightens his appeal among the reader.

Cawelti’s second method suggests that a stereotypical detective can be vitalized by adding human complexity or vulnerability, making the character more relatable. While his physical presence remains shadowy, Ghote’s inner life is intricately detailed. Keating’s portrayal of his inner world reveals a man constantly grappling with self-doubt, questioning his values and loyalties. Ghote, despite having captured the trickster A. K. Bhattacharya, doubts himself and is afraid that he who is “the champion Bombay thief-taker must have appeared a very dull fellow” in front of the technologically advanced Calcutta Police.²⁹ He is frequently unsettled by the presence of the two hippies.³⁰ This inner conflict reveals his vulnerability, as he also feels intimidated by “the little balloon-shaped cook” sharing the space.³¹ At times, his naiveté lends a comical air to his character—he goes so far as to compliment the cook’s meal to avoid conflict and make the cook his ally, ultimately consuming a substantial portion of unpleasant “mutton vindaloo.” This innocent choice nearly proves disastrous when he discovers the food has been poisoned by opium. Through these contradictions, Ghote emerges as a richly layered character who embodies both the challenges and charms of human nature.

Ghote: A Testament to Humanity and Integrity

Ghote’s vulnerabilities make him more than just a stereotypical detective; he is a richly human character. Thus, Meera Tamaya notes that the reader likes Ghote because of the “way every vibration of Ghote’s psyche is recorded... Ghote ... emerges as one of the most introspective, deeply human characters in detective fiction.”³² This is clear to the readers when Ghote’s

²⁵ Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, p. 27

²⁶ Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, p. 28

²⁷ H. R. F. Keating, ‘Inspector Ghote’, in *The Great Detectives*, ed. Otto Penzler (New York: Little, Brown and Company 1978), p. 112.

²⁸ Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, p. 1.

²⁹ Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, p. 177.

³⁰ Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, p. 52.

³¹ Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, p. 224.

³² Tamaya, *H.R.F. Keating, Post-colonial Detection: A Critical Study*, p. 4.

vulnerability leads to moments of embarrassment or failure, such as when he is outsmarted by the trickster A.K. Bhattacharya, or poisoned by opium or when is assailed by the one-eyed barber and his fellow tradesmen.³³ Ghote is gullible but not weak; these episodes of humiliation only serve to highlight his resilience and stubbornness. Each humiliation he faces only reinforces his unwavering dedication to justice, showcasing a quiet strength that defines his character. Unlike more aggressive or infallible detectives like Holmes or Poirot, Ghote's triumph lies not in defeating his opponents but in maintaining his integrity and dedication to justice. Where Holmes thrives on intellectual superiority and the allure of infallibility, and Poirot exudes flamboyance and meticulous planning, Ghote embodies a more relatable, human approach to detective work. His patience and persistence, often dismissed by others, eventually break down even the most hardened criminals like A.K. Bhattacharya. Bhattacharya's arrogance is no match for Ghote's quiet determination, leading to a long confession of his fraudulent activities.

Ghote faces a moral dilemma when he learns from DSP Samant that A. K. Bhattacharya, arrested in Calcutta, is actually a local card-sharper named A. K. Biswas. Ghote is ordered to return. This forces Ghote into a profound self-reflection about his values and loyalties. He trusts his instincts, and suspects that A.K. Banerjee, travelling in the same train compartment, is A. K. Bhattacharya, the real trickster. Ghote also finds himself confronted by Bhattacharya's attempts to bribe him. Despite facing fierce opposition from various quarters, including the hippies, Mr Ramaswamy, the cook, and Mrs Chiplunkar, he bravely pursues the arrest. Ghote's recognition that his purpose lies in the pursuit of truth distinguishes him as a person who embraces the risks and responsibilities of that choice. Unlike classic detectives, who manipulate situations with their intellectual prowess, Ghote's strength is rooted in his persistence and unwavering moral compass. He navigates the intricacies of human nature with a profound understanding that goes beyond mere deduction; he connects with individuals on a fundamental level, often winning over hardened criminals through patience and integrity rather than intimidation. His internal struggle regarding Bhattacharya exemplifies this personal battle. Faced with a corrupt system and the temptation of bribes, Ghote confronts his values and loyalties. Unlike Holmes, who operates outside societal norms, or Poirot, who meticulously orchestrates justice, Ghote's commitment to truth is deeply personal. His decision to pursue Bhattacharya, despite significant resistance, highlights his steadfast resolve. His dedication to justice is unwavering, even when faced with pressure to abandon his quest or turn a blind eye. In his relentless pursuit of truth, Ghote consistently chooses the harder path, standing firm against all obstacles. Ultimately, Ghote's dedication to justice does not seek the grandeur of fame or the admiration of others. Instead, he finds fulfilment in the quiet assurance that he has remained true to himself and his principles. In a world filled with moral ambiguity, his pursuit of truth, albeit fraught with challenges, elevates him to a unique stature among detectives—a representation of the ordinary individual who, through tenacity and integrity, can achieve greatness in the most understated yet profound manner.

Keating, thus, brings depth to Ghote's character, offering a fresh take on the typical eccentric supersleuth who solves mysteries purely for cerebral pleasure. Ghote's struggles, his ethical dilemmas, and his ultimate commitment to truth ensure that he remains a relatable yet

³³ Keating, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, p. 150.

formulaically grounded detective figure. The formula structure of detective fiction does not restrict Keatings but, in the words of P. D. James “are liberating rather than inhibiting of their creative imagination.”³⁴

Conclusion

Inspector Ganesh Ghote may not embody the larger-than-life persona of classic detectives like Holmes or Poirot, but his simplicity and his unpretentious quality sets him apart in the realm of detective fiction. Keating’s nuanced portrayal of Ghote offers readers a refreshing and grounded take on the detective genre, demonstrating that heroism can be found in the ordinary, as much as in the extraordinary. He is not a stereotypical detective but “emerges as one of the most introspective, deeply human characters in detective fiction.”³⁵ All these make him a relatable character. Ghote’s introspection and humanity resonate deeply, reminding readers that a detective’s strength lies not in infallibility, but in resilience and authenticity. His journey, marked by relatable struggles—navigating bureaucratic challenges, balancing personal problems, and confronting self-doubt—transforms each story into a profound examination of the human experience, making them far richer than mere crime narratives.

Cawelti’s observation that identification with characters is essential to a story’s success is particularly applicable to Ghote’s case. Readers relate to his persistence in the face of adversity, his commitment to justice, and his ethical dilemmas. He represents the “everyman” detective—a figure who triumphs not because of an extraordinary gift but through hard work and dedication. This human quality of Ghote invites readers to invest in his journey, rooting for him as he confronts both external obstacles and inner conflict. Moreover, the fact that Keating, a British author, could so convincingly craft a character who feels intrinsically Indian speaks volumes about his skill as a writer. His meticulous research, and imaginative and empathetic storytelling allow Ghote to transcend cultural boundaries, winning hearts worldwide. Ghote’s unassuming, yet determined nature has endeared him to readers, making the series a global success. Otto Penzler’s recognition of Ghote in *The Great Detectives* (1978) underscores his rightful place among the genre’s elite, a testament to his lasting impact.³⁶ As Keating poignantly noted, “I don’t think Inspector Ghote will now ever die. At least he’ll live as long as I do.”³⁷ Indeed, whilst Keatings may rest peacefully in his heavenly abode, Inspector Ghote has achieved immortality in the world of detective fiction.

³⁴ P. D. James, ‘The Art of the Detective Novel’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. 133, no. 5349 (1985), p. 638.

³⁵ Tamaya, H.R.F. *Keating, Post-colonial Detection: A Critical Study*, p. 4.

³⁶ Otto Penzler (ed.), *The Great Detectives* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1978)

³⁷ Khan, *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*.