



# Ibne Safi's Detective Fiction: An Exploration of Ethical Challenges

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**Abstract:** Literary critics have demonstrated intellectual bias when it concerns acknowledging Ibne Safi's unique stature in the realm of Indian crime and detective fiction. Despite the fact that detective and crime fiction is not included in the realm of standard and serious literature, most of the western writers have achieved prominent status in literary ranks. Apart from satiating the readers' thirst for intrigues, curiosity, amazement, inquisitiveness and eliciting the elements of eeriness, sensation and dread, the novels are full of pun and humour. While entertaining the readers, the writings very subtly prompt them to respect law and order, social and moral values and brim over with nationalism. Ibne Safi's aim was that his work should serve a social purpose. Serious concepts are presented by Ibne Safi in very lighter vein by employing jovial and humorous style which is assimilated with natural ease in his prose. Safi's works hold a mirror to the society. He blends past experience, contemporary reality and future possibilities in his action packed racy plots. The writings instil hope, moral values, courage and righteousness in the readers and encourage them to transform their dream of living in a utopia into a reality. Safi advises the youth to avoid spreading rumours which promote communal, racial and religious prejudices. The underlying message behind these moral injunctions is to pave the way for the establishment of a law abiding society. Safi, to some extent, refrains from presenting the obvious things in his plots by adopting the method of direct counselling for the readers. Readers are provided with the opportunity to arrive at their conclusions by reading between the lines. Safi tries to show his preferences in a casual way by making his heroes promote human values and refrains from passing value judgements on what he considers to be right or wrong.

**Key Words:** Ethics, existential realities, crime, detection, detective, humour, satire, protagonist, psychology, philosophy, criminal.

Safi's novels were published at a time when prominence was given to progressive movements in the literature of every language. Scientific temper and liberalism were the order of the day in all the prominent genres. Classical Urdu literature preferred to embody principles and literary values. But Ibne Safi selected the genre which had no place in canonical literature to unleash his literary skills. In order to gain considerable readership in the said genre, the writers of popular fiction considered that a little entertainment, explicitness and indecency is required. However, Ibne Safi successfully resisted the onslaught of indecency, obscenity and showed determination to proceed on the time tested virtuous path of literary and moral values without getting affected by the popular and contemporary environment. Even while introducing prominent and lovable female leads in his novels, Safi has never shown them as attractive physical objects for eliciting sensual pleasure, the phenomenon which the readers witness in Ian Fleming's adventures featuring James Bond. This reveals the innate values and goodness of the author himself and his concern towards moral and ethical consciousness. Despite this tendency to rise above the popular trend and in a way pruning it, he was not accorded his rightful place in literary ranks as a consequence of rebelling against the common norms. Most of the western writers have achieved prominent place in literary history despite crime and detective fiction genre not being considered as serious and standard form of literature. Intellectual bias has been clearly displayed by literary critics when it relates to acknowledging Ibne Safi's singular and unique status in the realm of Indian crime and detective fiction. Readers find themselves so engrossed in reading because of the ease and fluency of his style that they cannot help but finish the novel at hand. This ability to hook the readers is not in consistency with not awarding him the place he deserves in canonical literature and is a sign of sheer ignorance and prejudice and a deep discrimination. The consistency and interest which Ibne Safi has managed to maintain in his works is a proof of his artistic prowess. We don't find any precedent in Crime literature of the subcontinent which displays such sophisticated ideas and purity of thoughts which occur to him. However, we come across various shades of infatuation, love, lust and obeisance which never go beyond the ethical limit.

The period of partition made him reflect about the existential harsh realities. The way the noble concepts of nation and religion were misinterpreted by certain political and religious speakers, resulted in the violent bloodshed and deep emotional wounds. Even those who spoke voraciously on peace and communal harmony could not stop the horror which unleashed after the independence. Ibne Safi pondered over the crisis and concluded that such disasters could be avoided only if people start respecting fellow human beings as individuals and uphold the dignity of law and order and moral and ethical values. With this dual purpose of improving the ethical standards of the people while instilling a law abiding nature in them, Ibne Safi took up his pen and opened a new chapter in the annals Indian detective fiction. Apart from providing solace to the tired minds he wanted to kindle patriotic fervour, humanity, kindness, respect for law and a hatred for crime among his readers. His art of writing was thus revolutionary and purposeful in nature.

Any religion is just for human beings to guide him and offer hope. Ibne Safi shows equal respect for all the religions and stresses upon inculcating tolerant nature and values for universal brotherhood and wellbeing. His very first novel, *Diler Mujrim*, (1952) highlights this virtue of tolerance. Here Dr. Shoukat, is brought up by Sabitha Devi, the bosom friend of his biological mother. Dr. Shoukat has great admiration and affection for the gentle woman and considers and calls her as mother. This benevolent gesture of religious and cultural tolerance is upheld by Ibne Safi in a number of his novels and is a stark contrary view of brotherhood and fraternity coming after the deadly riot during the Indian partition and alleviates and assuages the hurt and tormented psychologies. This value of tolerance and peaceful coexistence is thus propagated by Safi in his writings.

Another thought provoking and notable aspect of Safi's works is that they give us an idea and glimpse of the next 21<sup>st</sup> century world, while being contemplated and penned during 20<sup>th</sup> century. He presents a number of possible technological and medical inventions while also contemplating about their baneful and positive impacts on society at large. Apart from satiating the readers' thirst for intrigues, curiosity, amazement, inquisitiveness, eliciting the elements of eeriness, sensation and dread, the novels are full of pun and humour. While entertaining the readers, the writings very subtly prompt them to respect law and order, social and moral values and brim over with nationalism. Ibne Safi's aim was that his work should serve a social purpose. He wanted to instil courage and hope among his readers as he firmly believed that the germs of crime breed in a lack of social justice, hopelessness and despair. He doled out antidotes for such negative emotions and refreshed the tired and monotonous outlook of a war sick mentality. He encapsulated his serious messages for the society in the garb of humour. The plots spring from sheer reality and encompass social, national and international matters. It is not just detecting through a maze of red herrings, but an unmasking of human psychology is what we find in Ibne Safi. His works lay bare human follies and weaknesses in such a manner that none of the readers takes offence. He employs the device of humour to subtly expose these human frailties offering a healthy criticism on them in a very lucid style and pleasing language. In a way he gives social, moral and psychological counselling to the distressed minds. His disposition of humour is a literary one which artistically reflects contemporary life, culture and trends. Safi was unhappy with the social injustice, moral degradation, anti- social tendencies, hopelessness, despair and international agents choosing the subcontinent to hatch and execute their conspiracies. While his satire is very poignant and aims to set right the follies, his humour is very light veined and spontaneous. It makes the readers cope with the harsh reality they come across and the great burden of social responsibility that the author is entrusting them with. His literary style, coupled with an insight of human psychology, and an impulse of creative thinking makes his readers read between the lines and arrive at the inherent intended message.

We don't find any encouragement of isms or political policies in Safi specifically. He simply makes the readers reflect on the contemporary socio-political situations and try to comprehend their own responses and ideologies through the view point of the main characters and protagonists. Evil is always made to pay through the development of the plot. Logical arguments and procedures lead the miscreants to the point of punishment. The dignity of eastern values, systems and cultures is always upheld by Ibne Safi through snide comments at those characters who display a kind of penchant for indecency in the name of liberalism.

The significance of intelligence and logic over mere physical reflexes is highlighted through the portrayal of characters such as Qasim whom we find in the World of Espionage Series, Joseph Magonda, the most faithful employee of Ali Imran in the Imran Series. Time and again Faridi and Imran offer opinions and while upholding the greatness of eastern culture. We find them reprimanding the offenders who cross their limits. The character of Captain Hameed, Qasim and Fayyaz, the Superintendent in Crime Department are portrayed as gender sensitive. We never find them violating the social and moral values. The intellect and thinking of the readers is usually polluted by authors in the name of modernization, free writing and liberalization. Ibne Safi, to some extent, refrains from presenting the obvious matters in his plots and does not choose the method of direct counselling.

The writings help the readers to arrive at their own objective conclusions by reading between the lines. The protagonists promote the human rights and help the readers in understanding the demarcation between right and wrong and abstain from passing value judgements. The lovable and humane characters created by Safi will be forever alive due to the envious readership they have earned. The protagonists are not accorded any super human stature, intellect or strength. At times they too inadvertently become prey to evil conspiracies. However as the denouement approaches, the readers witness that the poetic justice is done. The unmistakable protagonists notwithstanding, in every plot, Safi introduces a noticeable unique character who remains etched in the memories of the readers due to a philosophical or psychological angle associated with him/her.

Besides being an ardent scholar of Psychology and Philosophy, Ibne Safi displayed a good knowledge of the fine arts in his writings. His poignant view on contemporary global politics and political awareness is evident in a statement in one of his works *Jonk ki Wapasi* where he states, “The organized crimes committed by the governments are not crimes, they are political strategies and diplomacy. Crime is often one which is committed by individuals”.

Ibne Safi’s protagonists are at the heights of goodness and moral perfection. They never indulge themselves in moral degradation. Faridi is once offered bribe in lakhs to set a criminal free. Faridi retorts that one can find him relieving himself on a pile of millions when it is the question of national security. This attitude is Safi’s message to the youth to safeguard their integrity against such evil and tempting offers. Although we find Hameed craving for the company of beautiful and intelligent women, it is always within ethical limits. Faridi however never displays any kind of emotional weakness and abstains from getting too close to the fairer sex whom he both respects and considers a distraction in his ardent pursuit of purging the society of crime. Love never finds place as a motif in his novels. Ibne Safi avoids making this noble feeling a guilty pleasure resulting in desire for revenge, jealousy and possessiveness. Even the detectives stay away from this emotion as their falling in does not correspond with the conventions of the genre and this impulse poses a challenge to the analytical and logical capacities of the detective. Emotional desires of love, romance and passion are associated with the realm of subconscious and interior passion which must be mastered by the logical and tough sleuth who has to establish his mastery over the external situations and impose order and coherence over the hitherto chaotic and illogical circumstances attracting his assistance.

Serious concepts are presented by Ibne Safi in a humorous and lighter vein by employing jovial style which he could assimilate in his literary prose with a kind of natural ease. We witness his writings holding a mirror to the contemporary society. Safi blends in his racy plots, contemporary reality with past experience and future possibilities. The writings try to instil courage, moral values, hope and righteousness in the readers and encourage them to transform their dream of living in an ideal world into a reality. The writings indirectly inspire the readers not to spread rumours spreading communal, racial and religious prejudices. The underlying thought behind these moral injunctions is to pave the way for establishing a law abiding society. We thus find him propagating and spreading kindness for fellow human beings while trying to inculcate respect for law and order. Imran and Faridi are never joyous on either killing or capturing a criminal whom they rarely detest. They, on the other hand, wonder whether the mere death sentence or capturing of a criminal will end anti social tendencies from the society. They prefer rooting out criminality rather than criminals. In a few cases, we find them dejected at the death of an innocent victim or an inadvertent accomplice. Their reactions and responses display sensitive nature which cries and worries at the demise of values and humanity.

Whenever the detectives are confirmed about the justice of their actions, villainous nature of their adversaries and the code of justice and honour which is at stake, they take the law into their own hands and break themselves free from the inflexibilities and technicalities of the official procedure. This personal code of justice could be both milder and harsher than the prescribed code of law. This power of acting as a judge and an individual with Olympian superiority transcends the detectives' character from merely being agents of justice and rational analysts to that of being a judge in his own rights. There are stories where the challenge of using fast physical reflexes and courage dominates the challenge of facing fine intellectual speculations. After the war the routine analytical detectives seemed less relevant and the need to introduce spy thriller and instil the detectives with missions having national significance rather than individual cases was felt. Hence we find both the detective duo of Faridi and Hameed and also Imran getting engaged in a number of adventurous missions which take them out of the state and country in pursuit of criminals and agents of the enemy camps while dealing with the complexities of life.

Ibne Safi did not restrict his artistic prowess to the specific conventions of a particular genre with its own limitations. He aesthetically approached the genre in relation to more universal and larger literary archetypes with their own prospects making it the essence of all literatures. But his following the norms to a great extent helps the reader in bringing in their own past experiences with the formula. Moreover the artistic decisions he made with or without using formula in different stories made him stand tall in the contemporary writers of the genre. His individual version has its own characteristics and uniqueness which work towards fulfilling the objective of the traditional form. Many writers have applied this artistic principle of opting variations in theme. These distinguishing features are very subtle and fleeting such as developing an ingenious mystery, unforgettable adventure or a memorable character while not stretching and taking liberty with the formula to the point of breaking. He presents stereotypical characters and situations by breathing a new dimension, life and interest in them by adding new and unexpected elements. These stereotypical characters and situations transcend their historical and cultural moment and sustain interest for later generations too. This became possible due to imbibing the personal vision of its creator. Ibne Safi who has created an everlasting saga still awaits to be recognized as

an important writer of canonical cult. Such a great writer's popularity and fame cannot be confined by political borders. The critics must understand this element of the author and include his works in serious literature rather than in pulp fiction.

Aesthetic literary works are a result of not only the authors themselves but the society which they are a part of. As the crime and detective fiction finds a large readership in society when compared to canonical texts, the authors tend to be sensitive to the contemporary social issues and environment and try to replicate the same. This is all the more significant because crime touches upon the social lives of individuals and springs from it resulting in social exchange. Ibne Safi presents a routine blending and an expert fusion of imaginative dreams and actual reality in his plots. He could be termed as a progressive writer because of his underlying messages with deep insight.

The recurring characters are designed with a depth, operating in a very interesting manner. Usually, the way Imran operates creates an illusion making both the criminals and novice readers of the series that he doesn't pose any significant threat or challenge to them. However, this illusion explodes by the end of the novel where he unmistakably affirms his authority in a very subtle manner. This fascinating and intriguing portrayal of protagonists does not change from story to story. Although he does not overtly portray the detectives as mere ratiocinating analytical human machines, their extraordinary genius is not missed by the readers. This quality is coupled with their unusual psychological empathy which helps them in understanding both the victims' and the criminals' psyche. The criminal's personality with uncanny impulses resulting in truncated humanity is a match to the detectives' abilities.

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