CHAPTER - II
CREATIVE APPROACHES
TO THE CHARACTERS OF THE MAHABHARATA
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2.00 INTRODUCTION

Bankim Chandra was born on 26th June, Tuesday in 1838 at 9 p.m., and his birth place is Kathalpara which is located at 24 Pargana. His father, Jadab Chandra was the deputy collector of Midnapore. His mother's name was Durga Sundari Devi. Bankim Chandra had three brothers. His brothers were Shyama Charan Chattopadhyay, Sanjeeb Chandra Chattopadhyay and Purna Chandra Chattopadhyay.

When he passed the B.A. examination in 1856, he was doing his L.L.B. in Presidency College. He was appointed as the Deputy Magistrate in the year 1858. His first wife was Mohini Devi and she died at the age of sixteen years. At the instance of his father, Bankim Chandra tied the nuptial knot with Rajlakshmi Devi.\(^2\)

The Introduction of 'Vishva Mela' (World Fair) in the month of April of 1867, imbued Bankim Chandra with Patriotism, and that

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2. Ibid, P. 62.
spirit of Patriotism was bloomed in some of his novels. Since April 1872, Bankim Chandra began to edit the monthly magazine titled, *Bangadarshan* where the episodes of his novels, *Visha Vriksha* was published serially.

He was a prolific writer throughout his life. He wrote novels like *Kapalkundala, Devi Choudhurani, Sitaram, Anandamath* etc. and collections of essays like *Kamalakanter Daptar, Bibidha Prabandha, Samya* etc. He breathed his last on 8th April, 1894.³

In Bengal, the personalities who have analysed the characters of the *Mahabharata*, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay is one of them. Bankim Chandra has discussed on the said epic on several occasions. During these discussions, the characters of the *Mahabharata* have often been included in the thematic approach to the epic.

**The Chief Protagonists of the Mahabharata : in Bankim Chandra's Point of View**

2.01 **DRAUPADI**

The character of Draupadi, is portrayed in the *Mahabharata* as a gem of a woman, with an exquisite grace and beauty and a rare personality.⁴ On the occasion of 'Svayamvara', following the failure

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3. Amitrasudan Bhattacharya, *Bankimchandrajibani*, P. 798
of many suitors in hitting the target, Karna picked up the bow and towed the rope to aim an arrow. But, Draupadi objected to choose Karna as the bridegroom, because Karna belonged to the charioteer caste.\(^5\)

Bankim Chandra notices the indomitable spirit of a blue-blooded princess\(^6\) in her. Undoubtedly, Bankim Chandra indicates the natural spiritedness rather than the trait of regal boastfulness. Bankim Chandra is amazed at the cool yet extemporaneous decision of Draupadi in refusing Karna, the son of a charioteer, as her bridegroom in that domineeringly influential court and that too without caring for the opinions of her father and of her elder brother. When we notice Bankim Chandra to glorify the spiritedness of Draupadi through the refusal of Karna as her suitor, our cherished expectation is hurt. Bankim Chandra did not mention the common fact that the refusal of Karna by Draupadi had a political cause behind it, whereas the Indian history has plenty of examples of marriages of convenience.

When a critic of the present age remarks on the *Mahabharata*,

‘... সেকালের স্বয়ং সত্তায় বীর হরণের ক্ষেত্রে কন্যার ইচ্ছাই শেষ কথা ছিল না। রাজনীতির চাল ছিল। ছিল সামাজিক মান মর্যাদার প্রশ্নও।’\(^7\)

[In the ceremony of choosing ones' bridegroom oneself from

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amongst a number of invited regal suitors at that time, the desire of the girl in aspect of choosing her bridegroom was not the final or the ultimate word, rather it was subject to a political trick or was a question of social status.]

Draupadi’s Father and brother held the same opinion as that of Draupadi and hence,

‘দ্রৌপদীর কর্ণ-প্রত্যাখ্যান আমাদের কাছে অপ্রত্যাখ্যিত মনে হয় না।’

[The refusal of Karna by Draupadi is not totally unexpected to us.]

Bankim Chandra observes this pride of Draupadi through the deportments of herself following the defeat of the Pandavas in the game of dice-playing or gambling.9

Again, through the silent invocation done by Draupadi to Krishna,10 a human incarnation of Vishnu to protect her modesty, reveals the psychological knowledge of Vyasadeva to Bankim Chandra since it is observed by Bankim Chandra that the versifier of the Mahabharata could see through the depth of the ocean like human characters as if he could possess the esoteric power of

9. i. Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), Mahabharatam, Sabhaparva, 64.7, P. 525.
   ii. Ibid, 64.15-16, P. 527.
reflecting unknown or distant things on the face of his nails. Hence, the pride of Draupadi is humbled in the face of the most critical moment of her life, rather “ভয়াধিকে হাদয় অবীভূত হইল।”¹¹ (her heart melted with overwhelming fear.)

In this context, there is an important matter worth discussing, that is, the trait of fear in the character of Draupadi as it is observed by Bankim Chandra here, is missing in the character of Draupadi directly in the *Mahabharata*. In the *Sabhaparva* when Duhshasana had tugged the long hair of Draupadi and her hair got dishevelled and half portion of her clothes were stripped off, Draupadi became “ঈমতমর্ষে চ দহমানা”¹²

[She got ashamed of it and her anger flared up.]

Thus, in the epic, anything about the fear of Draupadi has not at all been mentioned. Here, Bankim Chandra is creative in finding direct fear in the character of Draupadi, whereas in the *Mahabharata* it is revealed indirectly.

In the *Sabhaparva*, Bankim Chandra feels the virtuousness of Drapadi reflected through her act of acceptance of the boon granted to herself by Dhritarashtra. When Dhritarashtra expresses his wish to grant Draupadi the third boon, Draupadi did not agree to receive

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12. Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), *Mahabharatam, Sabhaparva*, 64.34, P. 532.
the third boon.\textsuperscript{13} Bankim Chandra has said,

\begin{quote}
‘ঢোপদী স্ত্রীজাতি বলিয়া তাহার হৃদয়ে দর্পণ প্রবল, কিন্তু তাহার ধর্মোসাবায় অসামান্য... এই অসামান্য ধর্মাণুনোগণ এবং তেজস্বীতার সহিত সেই ধর্মাণুনোগণের রমণীয় সামঞ্জস্য, ধৃতরাষ্ট্রের নিকট তাহার বরঘন কালে অতি সুন্দররূপে পরিস্ফুট হইয়াছে।’\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

[Since Draupadi belongs to the fairer sex, she is conceited within herself, but her virtuousness is profound. At the moment of her acceptance of the boon granted by Dhritarashtra, the pleasant trait of her profound virtuousness is perfectly blended with great prowess which has been beautifully manifested.]

This protagonist in question, i.e., Draupadi, repeatedly attracts Bankim Chandra. The narrative of Jayadratha\textsuperscript{15} included in the \textit{Vanaparva} reveals the traits of prowess and virtuousness in her character and makes Bankim Chandra attracted to her. He observes that the prime element of the pleasantness in Draupadi’s character is

\begin{enumerate}
\item Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), \textit{Mahabharatam, Sabhaparva}, 68.34, P. 576.
\item i. Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.) : \textit{Mahabharatam, Vanaparva}, 219.1-17, PP. 2183-2186.
\item ii. Ibid, 220.1-22, PP. 2186-2191.
\item iii. Ibid, 221.1-22, PP. 2192-2196.
\item iv. Ibid, 222.1-28, PP. 2195-2205.
\item v. Ibid, 223.1-28, PP. 2206-2213.
\item vi. Ibid, 224.1-21, PP. 2214-2220.
\item vii. Ibid, 225.1-60, PP. 2220-2232.
\item viii. Ibid, 226.1-24, PP. 2233-2238.
\end{enumerate}
the perfect blend of her virtuousness and regal pride.\footnote{Jogeshchandra Bagal (ed.), \textit{Bankim Rachanavali}, Vol. II, P. 196.}

In fact, this is the revelation of the deep regard of Bankim Chandra offered to the magnanimous woman. He is always fond of the prowess of woman. Hence, his feelings are expressed through the informal discussion with Srishachandra Majumder. As Bankim Chandra comments on the female protagonists created by himself:

‘এদেশে স্ত্রীরাই মানুষ, সেকথা আমি বুঝাইবার চেষ্টা করিয়াছি। ইউরোপের যত মনস্বিনী স্ত্রীর কথাই বল খাঁসীর রাণীর চেয়ে কেউ উচ্চ নহে। রাজনীতি ক্ষেত্রে অমন নাযিকা আর নাই!’\footnote{Somendranath Basu (ed.), \textit{Kacher Manus Bankim Chandra}, P. 15.}

[I have tried to establish the fact that in the true sense, the womenfolk is the real human being in this country. You cannot find any nobler woman even in Europe in comparison to the queen of Jhansi who is unparallelled in the realm of politics.]

Again, someone from the critics discovers the inspiration of worshipping the Divine Mother,\footnote{Tarasankar Bondyopaddhyay, “Bankimer Matripuja” in Sajanikanta Das (ed.), \textit{Sanibirer Chithi}, Bankim Sankhya, P. 59.} under which this inspiration about the queen of Jhansi emanated in the mind of Bankim Chandra. This inspiration of worshipping the Divine Mother is also found in worshipping the idol of the Divine Feminine just the way it is excerpted from the sacred hymn 'Vande Mataram.'
Draupadi had to be victimized repeatedly - be it in the court of Dhitarashtra\(^{19}\) or sometimes in the court of king Virata.\(^{20}\) Each and every trait of this unique woman is extra ordinary. She got married to all the five suitors in a single day.\(^{21}\) Of course, an explanation of this novel incident is given, which is linked to her previous birth.\(^{22}\)

Apart from being an unprecedented event at that time, this incident still remains to be a thought-provoking one, till present days too. Some scholar defines it as 'One case of polyandry.'\(^{23}\) Again, Swami Vivekananda thus puts, "this was evidently a glimpse of the past polyandrous stage"\(^{24}\) in the past. But according to Bankim Chandra, there is as esoteric theory of the Hindu scripture behind it, that teaches to keep one detached even after remaining wilfully amidst the sensuous world to a great extent. He opines that Draupadi ‘हस्तिजातिर अनासंग धर्मेर मूर्ति-स्वरूपी’\(^{25}\) [Herself is the embodiment of the mundane detachment practised by the woman.] Bankim Chandra adores her as a virtuous as well as a pious lady. The purpose of her religious practice and the idol of her worship, i.e., the pentad of her husbands or the Pandava quintette is identical- since the pentad of her husbands

\(^{19}\) Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), *Mahabharatam, Sabhaparva*, 64.29, PP. 530-531.

\(^{20}\) Ibid, *Virataparva*, 15.7-9, P. 126.


\(^{22}\) Ibid, 190.1-53, PP. 1875-1888.

\(^{23}\) K.M. Sen : Hinduism, P. 75.


appears to herself single and identical. As Bankim Chandra puts it,

‘যেমন প্রকৃত ধর্মামৃত্যুর নিকট বহু দেবতাও এক ঈশ্বর মাত্র——ঈশ্বরই
জনীর নিকট এক মাত্র অভিযুক্ত উপাস্য, তাম্রেনি পঞ্চ স্বামী অনন্যবিশ্বাস্তা
দ্রৌপদীর নিকট এক মাত্র ধর্মাচরণের স্থল। তাহার পক্ষাপক্ষ, ভেদাভেদ,
তিনি অত্যন্ত নাই; তিনি গৃহময়া নিয়ন্ত্রিত, নিন্দিত, নিরন্তর হইয়া অনুষ্ঠিয়
কর্মে প্রবৃত্ত। ইহাই দ্রৌপদী-চরিত্রে অসামঞ্জস্যের সামঞ্জস্য।’

[As for a truly pious soul, myriads of deities appear just
identical- since it is the God alone who is inseparably the one and
only adorable for the wise persons, similarly, the pentad of her
husbands is the only space for the religious practice observed by the
detached Draupadi. She is far beyond the discrimination between
supporters as well as antagonists, or any discriminatory treatment.
She is desireless while doing her household duties; and she
gets herself engaged in the duties to be performed by herself. Here
lies the symmetrical trait amidst all the assymetrical traits in the
character of Draupadi.]

This theoretical interpretation of Draupadi’s five husbands, has
not been supported by some critics. But we may say that the analysis
by Bankim Chandra is one of the part of unrefined and ancient Hindu

27. i. Sukumari Bhattacharya, Prachin Bharat Samaj O Sahitya, P. 88.
   ii. S.L. Bhyrappa, “Mahabharata ; My Attempt at a re-creation” in R.N. Dandekar
religion. From this side Bankim Chandra’s creative approach can be observed.

Bankim Chandra observes the incident of the procreation of the five children, legitimately born of each pentad of Draupadi’s husbands in the light of the virtuous practice as it is ascertained by the Hindu scriptures. He states that the procreation of a male child is a virtuous practice as it is ascertained by the Hindu scriptures, and the desistance of a householder from this virtuous practice is a vice. But, this religious need can be fulfilled by only one male child, and hence the procreation of more than one male child is nothing but the result of concupiscence and thus is useless for serving the scriptural virtuous purpose. Bankim Chandra says,

‘...দ্রৌপদী ইন্দ্রিয়সূচে নির্লিপ্ত; ধর্মর প্রয়োজন সিদ্ধ হইলে, স্বামিগণের সঙ্গে তাহার ঐশ্বরিক সম্বন্ধ বিচ্ছিন্ন হইল। স্বামীর ধর্মার্থ দ্রৌপদী সকল স্বামীর ঔরসে এক এক পুত্র গর্ভে ধারণ করিলেন; তৎপরে নির্লিপ্ততঃ আর সপ্তান গর্ভে ধারণ করিলেন না। কবির কৃত্তিতার এই তাত্ত্বর্ণ।’

[Draupadi was abstinent and disinterested in any sensualism; when the scriptural virtuous purpose had been served, the sensual relation between herself and her husband was severed. In order to serve the scriptural virtuous purpose for the sake of her husbands,

Draupadi had conceived five male children following her copulation individually with each of her five husbands, one after another. Following her abstinence thereupon, she had never conceived any child. This is significance of the poetic imagination.]

The comment of Draupadi’s physical relation with her husbands, has been opposed by one critic. But we must say this analysis of Bankim Chandra cannot be discarded as completely illogical and non-ethical. To gift babies for husband is one of the duties of a married woman. And by giving birth to five children, Draupadi had successfully completed her duty. But Draupadi was not an ordinary woman. The tune of ‘Vairagya’, i.e. stoicism, which is found in the Mahabharata, Draupadi was also aligned to the same tune. Her performing ‘Brahmacharya’, i.e., asceticism, was accurately in the same tune of the Hinduism. In this context, the philosophy of Sriramkrishna may be mentioned here where he used to advice that after giving births of one or two children, the couple should lead the life as brother and sister.30

So we can say that Bankim Chandra has shown his creativity by adding a new dimension to the study of the character of Draupadi.

30. Srima, Sriramkrishna Kathamrita, P. 399.
2.02 KRISHNA

The character of Krishna is a highly controversial one in our country. The great poet Vedavyasa makes this protagonist to play one of the pivotal roles through which the whole of the circle of the potential human life gets imbued with the emotions. In the Rajasuya Yajna, arranged by Yudhisthira, Bhishma considered Krishna to be the person worthy to worship when it was the time to place offerings to the most deserving person.\(^{31}\)

In the *Mahabharata*, this protagonist is the most abstruse person who is a politician as well as warrior while he plays the philosopher in the *Gita*.\(^{32}\) Again in the *Bhishmaparva* the trait of the supernatural and unworldly self-assertion of this protagonist, being the intimate companion of Arjuna, surprised us. An unfailing music of virtuousness is hearkened by us; after making our bodies thrilled and making stirred from the core of our hearts- which has turned the ordinary person who is the adviser and strategist of the Pandavas into an eternal incarnation. He appears to be one of the last warriors of the age of the *Mahabharata* with his peerless trait reflecting spirituality and the dual aspects of this persona highlighting two spiritual dimensions of Hinduism have truly fascinated some critic who says, "The two

\(^{31}\) Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), *Mahabharatam, Sabhaparva*, 35.27-30, PP. 305-306.

\(^{32}\) Sudhirchandra Sarkar (compiled), *Pauranik Abhidhan*, P. 125.
elements of Hindu thought can be clearly seen in Krishna's personality; he sometimes speaks for all-pervading Brahman, giving expression to the abstract Upanishadic philosophy, but at other times he speaks as a human being as the friend of Arjuna, giving him the practical advice of the hour. Again, Swami Vivekananda discovers the exemplary character in Krishna who is ‘Purushottama’. 

It may be noticed here that the tendency to behold Krishna as the Supreme being appears to be a dictum authorized by our scriptures. But he has also been viewed as a common man. Of course, Bankim Chandra, a great thinker of the Nineteenth Century, has observed Krishna from a specific view of his own. The context to Krishna has been reflected in the literary compositions penned by Bankim Chandra in the form of similies. Sometimes, the incident of the abduction of Subhadra by Arjuna, or the incident of abduction three princesses of the Kingdom of Kashi by Bhishma along with the incident of abduction of Rukmini by Krishna etc., has been mentioned in the literary compositions penned by Bankim Chandra. In one of his books titled *Muchiram Gurer Jiban Charit*, the chief protagonist Muchiram is seen to make himself up for the role of Krishna in a

34. Prasun Basu (ed.) Manindra Roy (tr.), *Vivekananda Rachana Samagra*, P. 557. 
37. Ibid, P. 533.
Jatra. Of course, that actor playing the role of Krishna definitely never belonged to Kurukshetra, the horrid war field. Then, we see the names of Krishna and Arjuna mentioned besides the names of Dushyanta, Pururaba and Hanumana at the time of discussing the first ever space-traveller in the essay titled *Gagan Paryatan* included the phase titled *Vigyana Rahasya*. Certainly, the fact has been mentioned here that a French scientist Pillatr De Rozeer was the first among the space-travellers boarding spacecraft. Bankim Chandra comments in this context, ‘…তিনিই মনুষ্য মধ্যে প্রথম গগন পর্যটক। কোনাও, দুর্বলতা, পুরুষব্য, কৃষ্ণভূজন প্রভৃতিকে মনুষ্য বিবেচনা করা অতি দুষ্টের কাজ।’

[He was the first among the space-explorers, as it will be obviously an act of insolence to consider Dushyanta, Pururaba, Krishna, Arjuna etc. to be just other human beings.] In another essay titled *Prokrito Ebong Oti-Prokrito* the author refers to the incident of the ‘Kaliyadamana’ from the *Bhagavata* in the context of the description of superhuman activities by the great composers of the epics. Still, Bankim Chandra opines that, the poets have described the celestial characters after the human characters and hence the readers or the audience can easily identify themselves with them. Therefore, although Srikrishna is imagined as the partial or the holistic incarnation of the Supreme Self, yet he is a human just like any other

39. Ibid, P. 137.
human being. Bankim Chandra thus remarks,

‘মানবচরিত্রগত এমন একটি উৎকৃষ্ট মনোবৃত্তি নাই যে, তাহা ভাগবতকারকৃত শ্রীকৃষ্ণচরিত্রে অর্ক্তিত হয় নাই। এই মানুষিক চরিত্রের উপর অতিমানুষ বল এবং বুদ্ধির সংযোগে চিত্রের কেবল মনোহারীত বৃদ্ধি হইয়াছে; কেন না কবি মানুষিক বলবৃদ্ধির সৌন্দর্যের চরমাংকর্ষণ সৃষ্টি করিয়াছেন। কাব্যে অতিপ্রাকৃত সংস্থানের উদ্দেশ্য এবং উপকার এই এবং তাহার নিয়ম এই যে, যাহা প্রকৃত, তাহা যে সকল নিয়মের অধীন, কবির সৃষ্টিতে অতিপ্রকৃত সেই সকল নিয়মের অধীন হওয়া।

[There is not a single virtuous trait of any human character that has not been attributed to the character of Srikrishna by the composer of the Bhagavata. The attribution of superhuman strength blended with sharp intelligence adds to the captivating charm of the character sketch; since the composer has created the highest excellence of beauty along with enhancing the human strength. The purpose, the benefit and the rule of providing the supernatural element in the poesy are that, the supernatural elements created by a poet should follow the rules that regulate the usage of the natural elements in the poesy as well.]

While interpreting the theory of 'Nirlepa', Bankim Chandra cites the example of Krishna surrounded by myriads of wholes. According

to Bankim Chandra, this trait of 'Nirlepa', should not be confused with the so-called trait of renunciation. Citing a verse from the *Gita*, he has pointed out the fact that it is unnecessary for the detached person to abandon the sensuous pleasures and the act of abandonment is synonymous to dissociation. It means that the person who triumph over his senses yet having been attached to the material world for performing his assigned tasks. As Bankim Chandra puts it,

> ‘এইরূপ “নিরলেপ” বা “অনাসঙ্গ” পরিসুন্ধর করিবার জন্য হিন্দুশাস্ত্রকারেরা
> একটা কৌশল অবলম্বন করিয়া থাকেন— নিরলেপ বা অনাসঙ্গকে
> অধিকাংশায় ইতিহাসবোধ্য বিষয়ের দ্বারা পরিবেষ্টিত করেন। এইজন্য
> মহাভারতের পরবর্তী পুরাণকারেরা শ্রীকৃষ্ণকে অসংখ্য বারাসনাভ্যবহারী
> করিয়াছেন।’

[The authors of the Hindu scriptures play a trick to express the terms such as 'Nirlepa' or 'Anasanga' etc. That is why, the authors of the Puranas or mythologies of the post-*Mahabharata* era, have projected the image of Srikrishna in the midst of the courtesans.]

Again elsewhere in his writings, Bankim Chandra thus expresses his view through the words of Babaji, on the ‘Svarupa’ of the same God worshipped in different ways by different people. In this context Bankim Chandra said about Krishna. It is obvious that, Srikrishna

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42. Ibid, PP. 267-268.
no longer remains as a mere precedent in the essays by Bankim Chandra. Then comes his unforgettable literary achievement titled *Krishnacharitra.*

In *Dharmatattva,* the dream of a perfect ideology of humanism envisaged by Bankim Chandra was reflected through the theory of practice has been embodied in the character of Krishna.

Bankim’s *Dharmatattva* contains the positive manifestation of all the faculties (physical, of the acquisition of wisdom, of the execution of work and of the aesthetic ones.) of human mind through practice (for attaining happiness and the maintenance of harmony increasing the practice of those faculties that will not lead to the perpetual happiness.)

Through an analytical study of the character of the Krishna in the *Mahabharata* Bankim has endeavoured to evince that Srikrishna was the embodiment of exemplary physical strength, while he was an able commander too. The battle with Jarasandha is a proof to this fact. Again, he also had the faculties of acquiring wisdom which were ultimately manifested. He was unparallellly well-versed in the *Vedas* and the *Gita* evinces this fact. He was the best politician; besides he was well-versed too in Ideology, Theology, Medical science, Musicology, Farriery etc. The active faculties in regard to

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the execution of work are also manifested to their best in Krishna. He is brave, swift, active, generous and amiable person. Despite his exemplary strength, he is determined to do the welfare of the people. He is the embodiment of ultimate forgiveness, yet he can kill even his kinsmen, if it is required. He had also practised aesthetic faculties too, since he is an exemplary human being. Hence all these faculties project Krishna as an perfect human being to Bankim Chandra and Bankim’s creative genius views Krishna with a fresh outlook.

It can be mentioned in this context that the lashes of sharp criticism clearly reflect a strong antagonism towards the view of Bankim Chandra- whatever logic is indicated by this view to found the theory of 'Nirlepa" upon the existence of Srikrishna amidst the myriads of courtesans.

Actually in the writings of Bankim Chandra, Krishna has been mirrored as a consummate human being who is enriched by human sentiments blended with the inculcation of human power. Hence, someone among the critics rather has the tendency to reveal the human nature of Srikrishna than to corroborate the Godhead in himself in the writings of Bankim Chandra. Amidst the number of occurrences in the Mahabharata wherever Bankim Chandra notices the corroboration of Godhead in the character of Srikrishna, he takes

45. Sourendramohan Gangopadhyaya, Bangalir Rastreachinta, P. 117.
them as something ascribed. In this context, the point of interpolation appears. Because, it is impossible to cast the image of Srikrishna in the mould of an ideal human being, without ignoring the divine ascription as something interpolated. We can quote a few line by Rabindranath in this context:

[Bankim Chandra has endeavoured to project the image of Krishna as an unblemished and immaculate one before worshipping Krishna and to propagate his worship. He has even abandoned the little supernatural elements or traits existent in the character of Krishna. He has tried to found the image of Krishna on the altar of the loftiest ideals cherished by himself. He has never asserted that the deity can do no wrong or, that every fault of the vigorous should

be forgivable. He has invited a fresh discontent; he has pursued the deity by dint of the best of his efforts before conferring the devotion of the deity and he is not satisfied enough to worship any deity within his reach perfunctorily.]

However, an unscientific and unanalytical mindset can be noticed among the people of our country. In comparison to this, a totally reverse approach can be noticed in the book titled Krishnacharitra penned by Bankim Chandra. In this context, it is mentionable that the main key to Bankim’s discussion on religion and philosophy, is scientific-mentality.\textsuperscript{47} This exceptional approach has been possible under the influence of Western education. Till then, the people of India stressed the importance of the realm of mind excepting the outer world, but it is detrimental to one's interest. One should be given due respect only after being estimated by a touchstone of quality- be that person a Brahmin or a husband or a deity. Bankim Chandra implicates this fact in his book titled Krishnacharitra. In fact, the ideal of the magnanimous human being that was long-cherished in the mind of Bankim Chandra, has attained the acme of perfection through the embodiment of the character of Krishna as it is portrayed in the Mahabharata.

The book titled Krishnacharitra was written in the Nineteenth

Century, i.e., in the year 1892. Yet, this philosophical thought centering on Krishna was germinated in the consciousness of Bankim Chandra in his remote childhood, to be precise, in the year 1848. In his childhood, on the 'Dol Purnima' Day, the uncust omary and unscriptural quest for Krishna arisen in the tender mind of Bankim and this quest was rooted in the auspicious discretion of not yielding to the tendency of surrendering without questioning.\textsuperscript{48} It can be defined instead as the auspicious discretion devoid of stupidity like unquestioning obedience. Such an ardour for a logical answer, such a crying need for questioning has been extended and realized in the portrayal of the character of Krishna in the book titled \textit{Krishnacharitra} when he was at the ripe age. Yet, hailing from a Vaishnavite family hereditarily, Bankim Chandra himself was familiar to the worshipping of Krishna, since his childhood.\textsuperscript{49} Even he had finished the reading of \textit{Srimadbhagavata} during his childhood. But the activities of Krishna in the \textit{Bhagavata}, like stealing the garments of the bathing milkmaids, failed to charm Bankim. Rather the delineation of Srikrishna given by Haladhar Torkachuramoni, i.e., that Srikrishna is an exemplary person as well as an exemplary character, much more fascinated him. And \textit{Krishnacharitra} bears the testimony of the intensity of attraction.

\textsuperscript{49} Sachischandra Chattopadhyay, \textit{Bankim Jibani}, P. 5.
A number of critics remarked against the characterization of Krishna by Bankim. But, it is clear from the description of the *Mahabharata* that, the desire of Bankim Chandra to mould the character of Krishna reflects the modernistic approach of Bankim Chandra. However, the character of Krishna is the fancy of Bankim here and this protagonist is meditated upon by Bankim Chandra himself. In fact, an effort was going on during that era in pursuit of an ideal consisting in the holistic form of life; a synthesized life of thought, work, politics, religion etc. Bankim Chandra stressed the points like nation-society organization etc. He thought that the development of a nation or the people lies dormant in the awakening of the humanity attainable by the inculcation or reformation. After his journey in pursuit of this humanity which is the tradition of India too, Bankim's mind was attracted to the Age of the *Mahabharata* when the resources of the human mind were utilized in the great activities. Not only was he attracted to that age in particular, the extraordinarily active protagonist like Srikrishna in the backdrop of that tremendously active contemporaneous time, had magnetized him to a great extent.

However, despite such discussions, it cannot be forgotten that it is just a principle or a theory and nothing else. A critic declares

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the *Dharmatattva* by Bankim Chandra simply as a theoretical approach or a bookish\(^1\) one. In fact, the era of Bankim Chandra was that of adducing reason and logic instead of emotionalism. Bankim emerged as an able successor to the rationalist trend which had been initiated by Ram Mohan and Vidyasagar. Hence, *Krishnacharitra* is the right answer to the rationalist pursuit of a time-befitting theory through a cogitative viewpoint.\(^2\)

Yet, according to a critic ‘বাঙ্গাল জীবনে বাল্যাবধি সনাতন ধর্মের আবহাওয়াতে বড় হলেও বঙ্কিমের ধর্মানুরাগ মূলত ছিল একজন সুপণ্ডিত বুদ্ধিজীবীর অনুরাগ।’\(^3\)

[In spite of being brought up in the atmosphere of the traditional form of Hinduism since his childhood, Bankim's devotion to religion was mainly the devotion of an intellectual.]

And behind this, there was the contemporaneous backdrop. The *Dharmatattva* was a setting effort to theorize Hinduism in a time-befitting manner by Bankim Chandra. It was one of the trait of the westernized intellectualism in the Nineteenth Century to observe life from a mechanized point of view. At that time, religion was also being observed from a scientific point of view, which was devoid of any supernatural perception. And gradually it turned into a trend

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52. Ibid, P. 162.
to view the life and the world, since the time of authoring the book titled *Bahyobastur Sahit manavprakiritir sambandhabichar* by Akshay Kumar Dutta, to be precise, almost from the year 1850. Such was the backdrop of the Nineteenth Century when Bankim Chandra authored his book titled *Dharmatattva*, his interpretation of the principles of religion, ethics and literature was also naturally moulded by logic. A critic thus puts his view during the discussion of this regimental and stereotypical mindset of the Nineteenth Century people:

‘বক্ষিমের ধর্মতত্ত্ব বইটা এমন কতগুলি স্পষ্ট নীতি-নিয়মের বর্ণনা ছাড়া কিছুই নয়।’

[The book titled *Dharmatattva* by Bankim Chandra is but a transparent account of such a set of stereotyped principles.]

Hence, the character of Srikrishna portrayed by Bankim is also a stereotyped one. Apart from this contemporaneous backdrop, there was also another reason behind the synthetic portrayal of the character of Krishna. In fact, there was also another motive of the creator behind the creation of this character of Krishna. It was conceived by Bankim to castigate the typical notion prevailing in our country which is derogatory to Krishna (that Krishna used to steal and consume cream in his childhood, or that he was an adulterous person cohabiting with another's wife, or that he was a politician as well as a shrewd

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diplomatic person in his middle age etc.) Because, after different considerations, Bankim Chandra arrived at the notion that one could never find such an ideal as well as holy individual endowed with so many virtues like Krishna. Besides, during the predominance of the Theological Movement of Hinduism, Bankim Chandra deemed it necessary to criticize the character of Krishna in detail, Because,

If we have to maintain the ancient and the long standing ones, then we must be conscious of the maintainable things. And, if we have to abolish anything, then also we have to criticise the character of Krishna; since it will be impossible to root out the ancient and the long-standing ones without annulling Krishna.

However, there was also another motive behind the portrayal of this protagonist by Bankim Chandra. According to Bankim Chandra, the mark of an ideal and perfect human being is revealed in the total inculcation, effervescence, gratification and equipoise of the physical and mental strength as well as the human faculties. Yet, it is also true that this distinctive marks is rare in the human beings. Bankim Chandra considers God alone as the one and only example of total

56. Ibid, P. 408.
manifestation and absolute consequence.\footnote{Jogeshchandra Bagal (ed.), \textit{Bankim Rachanavali}, Vol. II, P. 593.} Of course, the God with His endless manifestations cannot be the ideal symbol of adoration for the worshipper at the first stage of worship. Hence, Bankim sought after the desired ideal of the worshipper from amongst the divine incarnate.

Bankim Chandra has observed that the people belonging to every religious sect have the adorable exemplary ideals of their own. As for example, Jesus Christ stands as the ideal for the Christians, Shakya Singha is the iconic ideal for the Buddhists, while all of them emerge as the perfect role-model of religious practice. Yet, the absolute ideal of this practice is found in Hinduism and amongst all the ideals of Hinduism, the best one is Krishna. According to Bankim Chandra,
[The royal ascetics like Janaka, the celestial saints like Narada, the Brahmin saints like Vashistha- each of them stand for the ideal of virtuous practice. In addition to them, the Kshatriyas or the kings such as Sriramachandra, Yudhisthira, Arjuna, Lakshmana, Debabrata Bhishma etc. appear to be more perfect. Christ and Shakya Singha appear to be the merely indifferent ascetics who are pure and well-versed in Theology, while the qualities of the aforementioned other kings are to some extent more than the former. They are endowed with all the virtues and all the human faculties perfectly manifested within themselves. In spite of being mighty rulers they are dispassionate; being archer yet they are well-versed in Theology; ruler yet sagacious, powerful yet kind and loving to everyone. But, above all these exemplary ideals, there is another quintessential ideal for the Hindus, under whose tutelage virtue can be learnt, whose disciple is none other than Arjuna himself, from whom Rama and Lakshmana beget power; and to sum up, such a highly majestic character has never been portrayed in any human language.]

In order to substantiate this theory of realizing the absolute ideal

of religious practice through human beings, Bankim Chandra has interpreted the character of Srikrishna.\textsuperscript{59} It is this historic character of Srikrishna which gratifies Bankim Chandra's pursuit of an exemplary cultured entity. Hence, although in view of the epical dimension of Srikrishna has been recognized by Bankim Chandra,\textsuperscript{60} his power of intelligence and discretion rather approves of the historic image of this protagonist. Hence, the creation of Krishna the protagonist by Bankim Chandra is guided by diverse motives and such a motivated creation is bound to be a synthetic one.

At the moment of drawing the discussion to a close, we thus conclude that, behind every patriotic as well as sociological thought of Bankim Chandra, one can discover the creator wandering in quest of life. Along with analysing the course of civilization and culture, Bankim was goaded by an urge of quest for life at the very dawn of his youth like ‘জীবন লইয়া কি করিব’\textsuperscript{61} [What can be done with this life?]

In pursuit of the gratification of this query, he sought for such an ideal throughout his life that can uplift life without distorting it. All through his life, Bankim Chandra was engaged in the quest of religion as an offering to the worship of his native land. And the thought of

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, P. 507.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, P. 622.
Hinduism as conceived by him was the concentrated form of each and every thought pertaining to society or humanity or patriotism deemed by this genius. Actually, Bankim Chandra was in the search of an ideal man who inspite of being human, possessed divine powers. He found that particular national hero in the character of Krishna of *Mahabharata*. Thus, he was the first person to study the character of Krishna from a humane and historical point of view.

From this angle, the unique speciality of Bankim Chandra and his creative approach can be observed.

2.03 BHISHMA

Some of the characters of the *Mahabharata* have been illuminated in the light of religion and philosophy. Bankim Chandra has noticed an esoteric truth of Hinduism coming true through the continence of Bhishma, i.e., detachment is possible only through attachment. According to this interpretation, the detachment from the material world is an immature or unripe one. On the contrary, the detachment emerging from the continuous experiment in the material world which is synonymous to a laboratory of sensualism, i.e., the success of continence, can be called the ripe or mature renouncement. And the ripe or immature continence collapses at the least touch of cupidity. Bankim Chandra has said,
Continence cannot be achieved through the practice of yoga or meditation. In fact, continence can be achieved through the practice of domestic or mundane life.

Bankim again comments that,

He who daily comes in contact with the elements or niceties of the day to day domestic life that gratify the senses, that person ultimately can triumph over the senses. Vishwamitra or Parashar failed to maintain their abstinence, while Bhishma or Lakshmana succeeded in doing that. I say, this is an esoteric maxim of Hinduism.

Many analyst have explained differently regarding Bhishma’s firm vow of not to marry. The strict vow of never to marry taken by Bhishma may sound to some critic as a part to keep his self-created great image. But to some critic it would have been more ideal and

63. Ibid, P. 260
64. Arundhuti Bandyopadhyaya (tr.), Yuganta (Eravati Karve), P. 10.
practical for Bhishma if he had chosen the life of a devoted hermitage. Then he could have avoided the company of evils.\(^65\)

In the *Mahabharata*, we find that Bhishma was not above the human weakness. It is evident from the incident when Amba, the princess of Kashi opted for leading a devotional life in the forest after getting annoyed with Bhishma and he became quite worried and upset due to this development.\(^66\) This is a sign of feelings of a normal human being. But Bankim Chandra observed the character of Bhishma quite differently. He gave importance to the great sacrifice of Bhishma to overcome the temptation of physical relationship and chose to lead the life as a ‘Brahmachari’, i.e, an abstinent person.

This is one of the main aspects of Hindu religion. From this point we observe Bankim’s analysis on Bhishma’s character as a great creative assessment which is highly appreciable.

### 2.04 YUDHISTHIRA

Yudhisthira, the pious protagonist in the epic named the *Mahabharata*, also stirred Bankim Chandra who used to discourse upon the Hinduism. Against the pristine white backdrop of the character of Yudhisthira, his very presentation of the false information about the death of Asvatthama\(^67\) has made a critic comment that,  

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\(^{66}\) Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), *Mahabharatam, Udyogaparva*, 176.15, P. 1519.

\(^{67}\) Ibid, *Dronaparva*, 164.45, P. 1716.

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[This very incident projects the most disgraceful trait in Yudhisthira's character.]

Nevertheless, Bankim Chandra refused to accept the existence of this point of disgrace in the character of Yudhisthira. Because, Bankim Chandra observed that the revelation of the character of Yudhisthira in the light of this incident is quite irrelevant and totally out of keeping with this character. In his words,

‘পরম ধর্মায়া যুধিষ্ঠিরের চরিত্রের সঙ্গে এই নৃশংস বিশ্বাসঘাতকতা ও মিথ্যা প্রবঞ্চনার দ্বারা গুরুনিপাত যাদৃশ অসঙ্গত, তত অসঙ্গত আর কোন দুই বস্তুই হইতেগারে না।”

[Such a damnation through the heinous betrayal and deceit is so much incongruous with the character of a genuine pious soul like Yudhisthira, that there can be no second to it.]

From this side, Bankim Chandra protested against this imposition of unrighteous trait on the character of Yudhisthira and projected this protagonist as a consummate pious soul. According to Bankim Chandra's viewpoint, this unrighteous behaviour is too unexpected and too incompatible to the character of Yudhisthira.

We say that this act of Yudhisthira is a timely one, so it is just.

But Bankim Chandra is keen to scan Yudhisthira within the range of a pious person. Now, we have to trace out the exact implication of the term 'religion' as it is conceptualized by Bankim Chandra. During the *Dronaparva* in the *Mahabharata*, when Krishna requested Yudhisthira to utter the false information about the death of Asvatthama, then the ever-truthful Yudhisthira was undoubtedly in a tight corner, because, for himself, the reason behind the truthfulness was itself harsh, dull and rigid. But, to the contrary, Krishna pleads here for the pragmatist side of life.\(^{70}\) It was very difficult for Yudhisthira to defy that view. Hence, with a noble view to saving myriad of lives, Yudhisthira had to tell a lie for the sake of the killing of Dronacharya. This untruthful statement comes out neither being merely influenced by the command of Srikrishna, nor being swayed momentarily by time.\(^{71}\) Rather this statement highlights him as a common human being of flesh and blood. Since he is a human being who has to shoulder each and every responsibility of human life. So, when Arjuna was dead against the suggestion of uttering the false information as offered by Krishna in order to kill Drona, it was Yudhisthira who had to swallow the bitter pill by acting upon that suggestion.\(^{72}\) Hence,

\(^{70}\) Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), *Mahabharatam, Dronaparva*, 164.36-38, P. 1714.

\(^{71}\) Amalesh Bhattacharya, *Mahabharater Katha*, P. 293.

\(^{72}\) Haridas Siddhantabagis (tr.), *Mahabharatam, Dronaparva*, 163.9-13, PP. 1695-1696.
‘দ্রোণবধের সময় মিথ্যা উচ্চারণ করে তিনি কোনও অন্যায় করেননি।’

[He did no wrong by uttering that lie on the eve of the killing of Drona]– Since he was a

‘ধর্মাত্মা, কিন্তু কখনোই ধর্মাঙ্গ নন...’

[Profoundly pious soul, but was never a fanatic one]

Towards the end of this discussion, it occurs to us that Bankim Chandra, who enriched himself with both the Oriental as well as Occidental philosophy, must have known the theory of the ‘well-being of the many.’ In his book titled *Krishnacharitra* he said,

‘যদ্ধারা লোকরক্ষা বা লোকহিত সাধিত হয়, তাহাই ধর্ম।’

[Religion means by which the protection or the welfare of the people is accomplished.]

This magnanimous trait of Bankim reflecting the liberalistic and humanitarian aspect of his character is totally incongruous with the narrow-mindedness of Bankim Chandra reflected through his view in regard to the assessment of Yudhisthira's character which is restricted by Bankim within the frame of merely a pious person. It may remind us of that famous fray of pen unleashing the

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communication of thoughts and feelings between Rabindranath and Bankim Chandra, in which Bankim used both the words 'True' and 'False' with a different implication, while determining the proper and exact definition of the 'Satya Dharma', i.e., truthfulness. The way Bankim Chandra tries to explain his view is that, he has used both the words 'Satya' and 'Mithya' with the same implication as has been carried by them since the hoary past. At present, we are habituated to accept the meaning of both these words as they exactly imply in the English language. Accordingly, we use the word 'Satya' to imply 'Truth' and the word 'Mithya' to imply 'Falsehood'. But the indigenous connotation of the word 'Satya' implies something more than the word 'Truth' or something beyond the mere implication of 'Truth'. It also suggests the keeping of one's promise, being true to one's vow etc. Now, there is also a word 'Truth' in the old English language since the hoary past, which is the ancient form of the word 'Troth'. Still, the purport of the word 'Truth' has now been totally different from that of the word ‘Truth’ This purport of truth conveys the refusal of supporting a sin. In this discussion, Bankim also apprises us of the fact that the lie told inwardly is a much more deadly sin that the white lie uttered by someone. This discussion

77. Sailendra Biswas (compiled), Samsad Student's English-Bengali, Dictionary, P. 743.
makes us realize that Bankim Chandra considers the vice of inward dishonesty as a grave sin behind this untruthfulness of Yudhisthira.

It is also true that Dronacharya is the teacher of Yudhisthira and he confides particularly in the words of Yudhisthira the most. The aforementioned behaviour of Yudhisthira lacking in the loyalty or the trait of his character devoid of trustworthiness—makes Bankim Chandra worried. Because, the misdeed of perfidy, i.e. the breach of faith with the trustful Dronacharya can also be called one type of lie. Hence, it cannot be called a righteous act, done either for the good of the many or for the sake of winning a battle.

However, this issue needs a detailed interpretation here. In fact, that righteous and honest image of Yudhisthira, which is much sought after by Bankim Chandra cannot be found here at all—in the battlefield of the Mahabharata. We see Arjuna in the battlefield as an adherent disciple of Dronacharya. Hence, Krishna Says about Dronacharya somewhere in the epic

\[\text{‘ન ચૈનહં સંયુક્ત કશ્ચિৎ સમત્ખં પ્રત્િવ્રિણિતમзор્.}\\
\text{ન ચૈનમાર્જુને જાતું પ્રતીયુહ્યત ધાર્મિકતિ}।\] 79

[Not a single person is able to glance up at him and the righteous Arjuna too will never be desirous of fighting against him]

In the light of above, we may notice Arjuna as the adherent

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79. Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), Mahabharatam, Dronaparva, 163.8, P. 1695.
disciple of Drona. But, in the battlefield, we fail to discover the reflection of a similar attitude in Yudhisthira. Rather, he was offended with Drona to a modest extent for the latter's terrible atrocity of joining other warriors in the heinous slaughter of Abhimanyu. This incited Yudhisthira to utter easily about the killing of Dronacharya as well as the killing of Karna.\(^{80}\) Truly, like others, he also got ashamed of the censure of Dronacharya done by Dhristadyumna,\(^{81}\) yet, Yudhisthira was not an ardent admirer of Drona. With the beginning of the annihilation of the Pandava-army occurred gradually due to the enhancement of the 'Narayanastra' in the battlefield, then the remarks made by a terrified Yudhisthira\(^ {82}\) bespeak his aggrieved state of mind. Although his remarks externally fix himself as instrumental in the destruction of Dronacharya, yet his words rather reflect his intention of censuring Dronacharya. Besides, Yudhisthira can nowhere be noticed in the epic to be repentant of his being untruthful to Dronacharya. Though, in the aforementioned prolonged speech, Yudhisthira once declaims that he will die wilfully along with his other companions in order to exonerate his sin of being instrumental in the killing of Drona. But that was just an expression of mere words devoid of worth. That was nothing but a diplomatic move. In order to resist the destruction of the Pandava army after the

\(^{80}\) Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), Mahabharatam, Dronaparva, 157.34-35, P. 1621.
\(^{81}\) Ibid, 167.101-103, PP. 1770-1771.
\(^{82}\) Ibid, 168.26-36, PP. 1788-1790.
enhancement of the fierce weapon hurled by Asvatthama, Yudhisthira declared a temporary ceasefire and advised all to run away immediately and also commanded the soldiers to retreat. He also declared that he would mount the burning pyre subsequently. In fact, he neither had mounted the burning pyre nor he had sacrificed his life as a means of exoneration for the sake of Dronacharya's death.

Therefore, it can be said that this aspect of the righteousness of Yudhisthira or of his trustworthiness has been devised by Bankim Chandra himself. Here Bankim Chandra is creative. Because, in the battlefield of the Mahabharata, the image of Yudhisthira projected as an avid admirer of Dronacharya can nowhere be found. Rather, we can discover the image of the warrior-king Yudhisthira who is devoted to his duty in the battlefield. In fact, Bankim Chandra wanted to appraise this protagonist, like a few other characters, in the light of life as it is focused in Indian philosophy. The notions of trust, allegiance, honesty etc. play a pivotal role in the Indian way of life. Hence, wherever Bankim Chandra notices the contradiction of Indian way of life to the character of this protagonist of the great epic, he calls it irrelevant.

We may notice that Bankim Chandra has also discussed the other traits of this character, i.e., Yudhisthira. It is mentioned in the Mahabharata that Yudhisthira, who was desirous of 'Rajasuya Yajna',
and in spite of his confidence in his power and greatness,\textsuperscript{83} he inquired Srikrishna in particular about performing this sacrifice.\textsuperscript{84} In view of such actions of Yudhisthira, Bankim Chandra has considered him an alert as well as polite person. In the words of Bankim Chandra himself,

‘পাণ্ডব পাঁচ জনের চরিত্র বুদ্ধিমান সমালোচক সমালোচনা করিলে দেখিতে পাইবেন যে, যুধিষ্ঠিরের প্রধান গুণ, তাহার সাধ্যায়নতা। ভীম দুঃসাহসী, “গৌরাঙ্গ” অঙ্গুলি আপনার বাহ্যিক গৌরব জানিয়া নির্ভয় ও নিশ্চিন্ত, যুধিষ্ঠির সাধ্যায়ন। এ জগতে সাধ্যায়নতাই অনেক স্থানে ধর্ম বলিয়া পরিচিত হয়।’\textsuperscript{85}

[If an intelligent critic reviews the characters of the five Pandava brothers, he will observe that the prime trait of Yudhishthira's character is caution. Bhima is a dare-devil while Arjuna is an obstinate fellow who remains fearless and unworried; and Yudhisthira is cautious. In this world, cautiousness is considered synonymous to virtuousness in many aspects.]

However, according to some other critics, this tendency of Yudhishthira towards having a consultation with others, indicates to the distinctive trait of taking counsel together, since

\textsuperscript{83} Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), \textit{Mahabharatam, Sabhaparva}, 13.20-29, PP. 127-130.

\textsuperscript{84} i. Ibid, 13.31-37, PP. 130-131.

[This trait of Yudhisthira's character defines one of his faculties]

It is not clear why Bankim Chandra indicates the aspect of cautiousness as virtuousness. It seems that Bankim Chandra bespeaks of the humanism which is expressed through the practical mind and a cool brain, at the time of using the term 'virtue'. Besides, history evinces the fact that alertness is a virtue and a part of non-violence that manifested itself in the philosophy of Gautam Buddha, Emperor Ashoka and Gandhiji. Hence, dwelling on the character of Yudhisthira, Bankim Chandra styles the alertness as a virtue, which is indicative of his devotion to history. Through this portrayal, the creative mind of Bankim Chandra has been manifested. Here Bankim Chandra endeavours to characterize Yudhisthira from a modernistic outlook.

Again, this protagonist, i.e., Yudhisthira who is landed by Bankim Chandra to such a great extent, has also been criticised by Bankim Chandra. Following the death of Shalya, when Duryodhana had anchored himself inside the Lake Dwaipayana, Yudhisthira exacted Duryodhana to come out from the Lake and to have a single combat with anyone of the Pandavas to his choice\(^87\) – which reflects him as a

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dullard, as is observed by Bankim Chandra. In his words

‘যুদ্ধীতির চিরকাল স্তূপবদ্ধ, সেই স্তূপবদ্ধির জন্যই পাওবদিগের এত কষ্ট। তিনি এই সময়ে সেই অপূর্ব বুদ্ধির বিকাশ করিলেন।’

[Yudhisthira always remains a dullard and that trait is the main cause of the deep distress of the Pandavas. On this occasion, that 'Wonderful discernment' of himself was manifested.]

A study of the *Mahabharata* makes us aware that even Krishna himself admonished Yudhisthira for such act. But, it seems that Yudhisthira is by no means a dullard, since in the context of slaying Abhimanyu, Yudhisthira tells Duryodhona about the chivalry

‘ক্ষত্রধর্ম্মং ভূষং কূর্ণং নিরপেক্ষং সুনিশ্চিতঃ।
অন্যথা তু কথং হনুরভিমন্যং তথা গতম্।’

[Chivalry or the duty and obligation of a mighty king is very difficult, very cruel and it never bothers about any relationship. If not, why those great warriors would slay the distressed Abhimanyu?]

He also says,

‘যদোক্ষ্য ন হস্তবো বহুধর্ম্ম্যা এষ বঃ।
তদাভিমন্যং বহুবে নিপুণমুত্থমে কথম্।’

[But a cluster of people should never slay a lonely person, if

90. Ibid, 30.55, P. 344.
91. Ibid, 30.57, P. 345.

(148)
this reflects yours virtuousness or religion, then why did a cluster of people slay Abhimanyu at your instance?

In spite of being aware of this fact, Yudhisthira, the virtue personified, insisted on Duryodhana's fight with a person.

Still, Bankim Chandra never bothered about this trait of Yudhisthira. Rather he notices the dullness of Yudhisthira in the latter's intention of exile in the forest when the battle was over. Here, Bankim Chandra comments with bitter sarcasm:

‘যুদ্ধাদির অবশেষে, অগাধবুদ্ধি যুরিত্তির, আবার এক অগাধবুদ্ধির খেলা
খেলিলেন। তিনি আর্জুনকে বলিলেন, এত জ্ঞাতি প্রমুখ বধ করিয়া
আমার মনে কেন সুখ নাই— আমি বনে যাইব, ভিক্ষা করিয়া যাইব।’

[When the battle was over, the highly intellectual Yudhisthira played a trick again. He told Arjuna that he was totally unhappy for slaying a number of relatives and hence he would make an exile to the forest being an almsman himself for his sustenance.]

It is true that, having been pricked by his guilty conscience, Yudhisthira repeatedly intends to make an exile to the forest. His deportment, in no way can be corroborated, since Yudhisthira had never quitted home; instead, he was a real torment to his family as well as himself for his self-repressive activities. The outburst of

emotions like bereavement-waiting-repentance-hesitation etc., as if has become the natural traits of his character. Bankim Chandra touches the right chord here and indicates to the immediate problem of Yudhisthira. Hence, he puts in,

‘যুধিষ্ঠিরের প্রকৃত রোগ অহঙ্কার। ... “ইহা আমার”, “এই আমার সুখ”
“ইহা আমার দুঃখ”, এইরূপ জ্ঞানই অহঙ্কার। এই যুধিষ্ঠিরের দুঃখের কারণ।’

[The real malady of Yudhishthira is his ego-centric approach: 'This is mine,' 'Here lies in my happiness', 'Here lies my sorrow'-such a sense may be defined as egotism which is the root cause of Yudhisthira's grief.]

Our thoughts cannot surpass the interpretation of Bankim Chandra. Since, Yudhisthira's urge of self-imposed exile to the forest does not end off here; during the Shantiparva when he comes to know about the real identity of Karna from Kunti, his lamentation again reveals that very urge of exile. Again, following the death of Bhishma, Yudhisthira craved for an exile to the forest while Srikrishna cured the former of his egotism through the chanting of that maxim of desirelessness. Hence, we agree with Bankim Chandra in regard

94. Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), Mahabharatam, Santiparva, 9.4-23, PP. 63-67.
95. i. Ibid, Asvamedhikapurva, 12.1-16, PP. 72-76.
   iii. Ibid, 14.1-4, PP. 83-84.
to the matter.

Apparently, a contradiction in regard to the assessment of the character of Yudhisthira appears in the words of Bankim Chandra. The same person whom he calls alert at first, but later calls a dullard. But, after a thorough assessment of the character of Yudhisthira done by Bankim Chandra suits well to the typical mindset of Bankim himself. In this context, it may be mentioned that Arjuna was also cured of his illusion with the help of the advice imparted by none other than Srikrishna. And Yudhisthira too was disillusioned by the advice imparted by the same person, i.e., Srikrishna. In both the cases, the ways and modes of disillusionment are diverse. This subject matter or theme is quite a favourite one of Bankim Chandra, who himself was enriched with the wisdom of the *Gita* and that wisdom is reflected here. From this aspect, Bankim Chandra reflect the hallmark of his distinctive creativity.

2.05 ARJUNA

Bankim Chandra studied and discussed the protagonists of the *Mahabharata* from several perspectives. One of them is religion and philosophy. The ideology of the desireless religious practice as mentioned in the *Gita* overwhelmed Bankim Chandra to such a great extent that he made Arjuna, that hero with a lady-killer image, share
the same loftiest seat of religion occupied by Yudhisthira— Whereas
the known image of Arjuna reflects that of a valiant hero as well as
an expert lover.96 Here, the way Bankim Chandra interprets the term
'religion' is this—

‘ধর্ম আত্মসন্ন্যাসীও নহে, পরস্যসন্ন্যাসীও নাহে। সমস্ত যুক্তিগুলির উচিত
অনুশীলন এবং পরিণতিই ধর্ম। তাহার আপনার জন্যঃ কৰিবে না, পরের
জন্যঃ করিবে না। ধর্ম বলিয়াই করিবে। সেই যুক্তিগুলি নিজ সন্ন্যাসী,
ও পর-সন্ন্যাসী; তাহার অনুশীলনে স্বার্থ ও পরার্থ একত্রে সিদ্ধ হয়।
ফলতঃ ধর্ম এই ভাবে বুঝিলে স্বার্থে এবং পরার্থে প্রভূত উঠিয়া দেওয়া
অনুশীলনবাদের একটি উদেশ্য।’’97

[The religion is neither related to one's self, nor even is related
to others. The just and proper practice of all the faculties followed
by its consequence is called religion. Don't practise that for the sake
of yourself or for the sake of others, do that alone in the name of
religion. Those faculties are linked to one's own self; and the practice
of those faculties both the purposes of self-interest and also the
interest of others. In fact, such an interpretation of religion paves the
way for the eradication of the discrimination between self-interest
and the interest of others— which is the object of Practicism.]

Bankim has called Arjuna desireless, though the character of
Ekalavya in particular has been shown to evince the mark of disgrace

in Arjuna’s character. We will say that there was a rivalry between both the archers, Ekalavya and Arjuna. The problem of Ekalavya was based on caste while the problem of Arjuna centred round his career, since human beings become self-centered because of their urge to survive. However, the trait of austerity too is discovered in the character of Arjuna when he practises archery in the darkness of night. Again, only a truly dispassionate person like Arjuna can share the woman with his brothers that very woman won by himself one. Srikrishna told Arjuna about dispassionateness as well as the emancipation from the bondage of mundane illusion, that trait of this illusion can be found in Arjuna in his refusal to accept something from Mayadanava after saving Mayadanava’s life. Since Arjuna remains dispassionate despite living a mundane life, hence Bankim Chandra calls Arjuna desireless. Apart from this the ideologist mind of Bankim Chandra used to scrutinize continuously the characters of the Mahabharata in quest of idealistic traits within themselves. And the outcome of this pursuit is the embodiment of his estimation of Arjuna’s character and the hallmark of his creative genius is found in the discovery of the unique traits of Arjuna’s character.

2.06 KARNA

The conception of greatness was so deep-rooted in the mind of Bankim Chandra that any great aspect of one's character was always
recognized by Bankim who himself was a great admirer of human virtue of greatness. So, when he notices in the *Mahabharata* that despite the knowledge of his real identity through the information obtained from Srikrishna, Karna refuses to join the side of the Pandavas and thus to ascend the throne of the Pandava Kingdom's then Bankim realizes the truth:

‘কণ্ঠচরিত অতি মহৎ ও মনোহর।’

[The character of Karna is a great and captivating one.]

The remark made by Bankim Chandra was recognised by some critic, whereas some other critic was not in favour of this remark.

The character of Karna, as it is depicted in the *Mahabharata*, needs much more interpretation. This protagonist had to ramble about lifelong with the tag of a base-born which went on gnawing his egotism and led to the anger, distraction and foolhardiness of Karna. But, when he came to know about the recognition of his real identity from Srikrishna, that very day he became able to find out his long-cherished identity. Not only that, it can also be clearly understood from the proposal offered by Srikrishna that the act of his joining the

98. Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), *Mahabharatam, Udyogaparva*, 131.6-17, PP. 1162-1170.
100. i. Arundhuti Bandyopadhyay (tr.), *Yuganta* (Iravati Karve) P. 92.
101. Rajsekhar Basu (tr.), *Mahabharata*, (intro) P. 40.
Pandava-side would be rewarded with a social recognition because of his real identity. He will be able to attain Draupadi as his wife who had once refused to accept Karna as her husband. Despite all the opportunities to have the recognition offered to him, he is ready to refuse all these. Here he appears as truly dispassionate.

Hence, it is obviously reasonable that in this context, Bankim Chandra has justifiedly praised the character of Karna as a great and charming one. Imbued with the ideal of desirelessness as stated in the *Gita*, Bankim Chandra sought after his cherished ideal in the solemn atmosphere of the classic epic named the *Mahabharata*. Although the same Karna did not join the side of the Dharmaputra Yudhisthira in the battle, yet it is quite natural for Bankim Chandra to be charmed by the positive trait of the dutifulness and dispassionateness of Karna's character which is reflected through this incident of refusal of the proposal offered by Srikrishna.

We agree to the point of view of Bankim Chandra on the reaction of Karna following a particular incident of the protagonist’s life. But Karna failed to reveal this trait of greatness in every aspect of his life. It is evident from that indecent remark made by him on Draupadi¹⁰² and the incident of ‘जतुगृह दाह’, i.e., lighting up home made of lac.

It is also true that Bankim Chandra did not discuss all the base deportments of Karna from a holistic viewpoint in this aspects of the austeric one practised in India. Since the trait of unselfishness contains a sense of restraint, which is an inseparable part of the traditional austere practice of India. From this point of view, Bankim Chandra is actually creative in analysing the character of Karna.

2.07 BHIMA

In the epic titled Mahabharata, Bhima appears as the idol of strength.

Yet, out of a murderous instinct, this turbulent protagonist makes a show of his feat of valour ever so often in a frenzy of rage to such a great extent that it crosses the mere limit of valour and reaches the heinous state of atrocity. In the Udyogaparva, the dreadful description of the fiendish nature of Bhima given by blind Dhritarastra helps us infer about the intensity of the truculent trait of Bhima's character. However, the spiteful protagonist too, speaks of peace and truce under the influence of detachment and abstraction in consequence of the asceticism practiced by himself during the long period of exile in the forest and also during the period of living incognito.

103. Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), Mahabharatam, Udyogaparva, 51.5-7 P. 566.
104. Ibid, 69.19-20, PP. 725-726.
Buddhadev Basu has remarked in appreciation of the protagonist, Bhima of the *Mahabharata*, while Rabindranath too has estimated the character of Bhima by delving into the origin of literary theory. In *Karnaparva*, Bhima is seen drinking the blood of Duhshasana and Bankim calls him the ‘blood-sucking monster.’ In this regard it will not be out of context to mention many critics have similar views like that of Bankim Chandra on the character of Bhima. A number of critics discussed the character of Bhima. According to a critic, although Bhima was a very naive and plain-spoken person, he had never hesitated to beguile. But, according to Bankim Chandra, the character of Bhima was devoid of any such beguilement. The activities of Bhima described in the narrative of ‘Asvatthama hata iti gaja’, appeared irrelevent to some extent to Bankim Chandra. Because, ‘ভীম বাহবল ভিন্ন আর কিছুই মানেন না— শ্রদ্ধা বিরুদ্ধে আর কিছু প্রয়োগ করেন না; রাজ্যার্থেও নহে, প্রাণরক্ষার্থেও নহে।’[Bhima knows nothing but physical strength and vigour. He never applied any weapon against the enemy— neither for the sake of attaining the kingdom, nor even for the sake of saving life.]

In fact, Bhima is a unmodified kshatriya and his duty is to observe the duty of a kshatriya. And since the only one duty of a kshatriya is war, and all his activities are controlled by that. Hence his character appears to be far from beguilement and from this aspect, we agree to the view of Bankim Chandra.

2.08 DURYODHANA

In contrast to Yudhisthira, being a ‘मनुमय महाजन’, i.e., great tree, Duryodhana stands as the self-centred, mean-minded and jealous son of Dhritarashtra. It is said about Duryodhana, "… the main antagonist in the story of the war between his clan, the Kauravas and his first-cousins, the five Pandava Brothers."¹¹¹ His insolent nature is reflected through his disobedient nature.¹¹² Without uttering a single word, he hanged his face a bit down, also beat his thigh and clawed at the ground with his toe—’चरणोपलिखन महीम।’ During the Sabhaparva, his indecent behaviour with Draupadi¹¹³ is unforgivable.

Bankim Chandra has remarked on this protagonist that, Duryodhana is the accumulation of shrewdness and simplicity.¹¹⁴ Buddhadeb Basu too, while likening the traits of Srikrishna to that

¹¹³. Ibid, Sabhaparva, 68.10-12, PP. 569-570.

(158)
of Duryodhana, denominates Duryodhana as 'Simply an evil-doer' and recognises him as a valiant person himself resembling the prototype of regality.\textsuperscript{115} Because, Duryodhana had never adopted any unfair means during the battle of Kurukshetra and had also become able to ascend to the heaven after a heroic death.\textsuperscript{116} While dwelling on the aspect of Death, the versifier sympathises with this protagonist, i.e., Duryodhana. In the epic \textit{Mahabharata}, we can see that after Duryodhana had become aware of the arrival of Srikrishna at the Kaurava camp and also of the proposal of a treaty to be concluded thereupon by Srikrishna, Duryodhana expressed his desire of tying up the latter.\textsuperscript{117} But the veterans of the Kaurava clan did not approve that. However, Duryodhana was out of control at that time.

This deportment of Duryodhana makes Bankim Chandra mention Duryodhana as a shrewd yet at the same time, a simple-minded person. This remark made by Bankim Chandra is very logical. In fact, the artfulness of Duryodhana can be seen through by everyone and hence, this trait of artfulness in naively simple. Actually, Duryodhana is artful, but the motive for his artfulness is not a virtuous one. On the other hand, virtuousness is the motive for the most astute person, i.e., Srikrishna, That is why, Duryodhana became unable to beguile Srikrishna, who was the emissary of the Pandavas,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115} Buddhadev Basu, \textit{Mahabharater Katha}, PP. 203-204.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), \textit{Mahabharatam Souptikaparva}, 10.56, P. 127.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Ibid, \textit{Udyogaparva}, 81.13, P. 804.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
with the former's slyness. Because, Duryodhana is deceitful yet naively simple. Therefore, the detailed observation and deliberation of the traits of the Duryodhana made by Bankim Chandra, can be corroborated by us.

### 2.09 DHRITARASHTRA

Sometime, Bankim Chandra dwells on the different facets of the epical character as they are depicted in the epic the *Mahabharata* and endows befitting attributes to them in the light of the certain deportments of those epical characters. As for example, the character of Dhritarashtra can be taken. No venerable expression for this character if revealed in the opinion of Bankim Chandra. During the *Udyogaparva*, Bankim Chandra calls this protagonist a crafty fellow, because Dhritarashtra leaves no stones unturned to cajole Srikrishna with plenty of enticements including gifts, honours and means of comfort when he comes to know that Srikrishna himself has arrived at Hastinapur with the proposal of concluding into a treaty.\(^{118}\)

However, not only Bankim Chandra, but also Bidur himself in the *Mahabharata* thinks this effort of Dhritarashtra as an ensnaring and wily one.\(^{119}\)

But, we should say that, the character of Dhritarashtra is not so

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simple to be exposed within the confines of just an attribute in particular, through the hasty observation of his specific behaviour at a specific moment. We may owe these lines to Rabindranath:

‘...জগতে ধৃতরাষ্ট্র অদ্বিতীয়; এই মানুষের একাত্মতা বিশেষ ব্যবহারে নয়, কোনো আংশিক পরিচয়ে নয়, সমগ্রভাবে। কবির সৃষ্টিমুখে প্রকাশিত এই তার অনন্যদৃষ্ট স্বয়ং রূপপ্রতিভার কোন সহজ নেপুণো সম্পূর্ণ হয়ে উঠেছে, কুটুর সমালোচকের বিশেষণী লেখনী তার অন্ত পাবে না।’

[Dhritarashtra is a matchless soul in the world; his seclusion is revealed through its wholeness; neither through a specific deportment, nor through any partial identity. The analytic pen of an insignificant critic cannot delve into the perfection achieved by the peerless individual dexterity of the creative acumen of the poet revealed by his creative composition.]

But, Bankim Chandra comments on this protagonist only after the partial revelation of the character and psychology of a disabled person acting behind this misdeed of Dhritarastra. Bankim Chandra himself tried the least to trace that cause. Dhritarashtra is born blind. During his stay in the mother's womb, his future had been predestined, yet he was an aspirant to the throne. He was distressed severely with his lifelong affliction of his failure to become a king.

Since his eldest nephew, Yudhisthira was born prior to the birth of his eldest son, Duryodhana, the last hope of Dhritarashtra to fulfill his aspiration to the successor of himself was dashed to the ground. Therefore, he could realize the dejection of Duryodhana. Apart from this, his blind faith in his son Duryodhana got the better of his conscientiousness and thus turns him into a self-centred father.\textsuperscript{121} From then onwards, nobody could resist his decline. An excessive obsession with his son had slowly caused his downfall in the vicious world, although he had an eyeful of the light reflecting overhead. The open window over his head was still brightened up with light and without any blockade. Hence, in the \textit{Udyogaparva}, he confesses his innermost feelings to Bidura.\textsuperscript{122}

We may recollect that typical father who is blind overmuch to his son. According to the poetic view of Rabindranath, the character of Dhritarashtra is sketched after delving deep into the literary theory. Although this trait of over-affectionateness of Dhritarashtra is the root cause of his utter ruin, yet it is a quite natural trait of a human being. In the poem titled \textit{Gandharir Abedan} of the poesy \textit{Kahini} also, Rabindrantah discovers that the trait of an overaffectionate father in the protagonist Dhritarashtra who is not only sightless physically, but also inwardly blindfolded by the illusion

\textsuperscript{121} Nrisinghaprasad Bhaduri, \textit{Mahabharater Choi Prabin}, P. 279.
\textsuperscript{122} Haridas Siddhantabagish (tr.), \textit{Mahabharatam, Udyogaparva}, 40.30-31, P. 397.
leading to the path of darkness accompanying his son and without any scruple.\textsuperscript{123} One thing that strikes here is that, despite the poetic sensibilities of Bankim Chandra, he failed to delve into the core of human nature at the time of analyzing the character of Dhritarashtra whereas Rabindranath succeeded to strike the right chord of human nature. Again, in comparison to the powerful yet subtle projection of analysing human character from the viewpoint of a critic, the acumen of unveiling the mystery of human life as a whole was less active in Bankim Chandra.

\section*{2.10 SAVITRI}

Adopting the episode of \textit{Savitri} from the \textit{Vanaparva} in the epic titled \textit{Mahabharata}, Bankim Chandra composed a poem titled \textit{Savitri}. However, the conclusion of the poem is not exactly similar to the Savitri-episode of the epic. In the \textit{Mahabharata}, Savitri was a devoted wife who won back her husband from the clutches of Yama, the God of Death. But, in this poem, although she grapples the corpse of her beloved husband affectionately in the beginning, yet herself being overpowered by the irrefutable argument of Yama, she hands the corpse over to Yama. But at the same time, she willingly invokes her death on the plea of the protection of her chastity.\textsuperscript{124} The poem

\textsuperscript{123} Rabindranath Thakur, \textit{Rabindra Rachanavali}, Vol. V, P. 70.
gives an account of the course of events as to how Savitri, the chaste woman, gets the opportunity and permission to accompany the corpse of her husband to the abode of Gods in heaven. Following the conveyance of the corpses of this couple in an amazing supernal air-chariot, Bankim Chandra describes the consequences

‘জনমিল তথা দিব্য তরবর,
সূগৌড়ি কুসুমে শোভে নির্মুল,
বেড়িল তাহাতে লতা মনোহর,
সে বিজন স্থান।’

[There grew a celestial tree forever adorned with fragrant flowers and creeped up by an enchanting creeper in that forlorn place.]

Here this supernal tree and the creeper encircling it, as if reflecting the sweet amorous memories shared by Satyavana and Savitri. According to some critic, this 'Supernal tree' adorned with fragrant flowers bloomed in place of the 'Sati' and her deceased husband, is the outcome of the virtuous deeds of human life. The critic thus interprets the poetic viewpoint of Bankim Chandra that this distinct imagination of a tree woven out of the texture of the

126. Amitrasudan Bhattacharya, Bankimvidya, PP. 148-149.
birth, death and lifestyle of the human being is very much distinctive of Bankim Chandra.\textsuperscript{127} Because from the definition of the poison-tree given by Bankim Chandra in the twenty ninth chapter of the novel titled \textit{Visha Briksa} penned by Bankim Chandra himself,\textsuperscript{128} it becomes obvious that the consequence of the sin committed in the human life triggered by the inherent vices and propensities of human being finally leads to the germination of the poison-tree, whereas on the other hand, the celestial tree adorned with fragrant flowers is grown in consequence of the virtuous and propitious activities by the human being. Both the contradictory trees called ‘Divyataruvara’ (the celestial tree) and the \textit{Visha Briksa}, i.e., the poison tree, originated from abstinence as well as the lack of abstinence respectively as well. It can be mentioned in this context that many critics contemplated on the episode of the Savitiri.\textsuperscript{129}

Bankim Chandra has concocted a self-composed conclusion without revealing the figurative meaning of the episode of Savitri and Satyavana in the epic titled \textit{Mahabharata}. However neither the original Sanskrit text of the \textit{Mahabharata} nor the translated version

\textsuperscript{127} Jogeshchandra Bagal (ed.), \textit{Bankim Rachanavali}. Vol. II, PP. 221-222.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, Vol. I. PP. 221-222.
\textsuperscript{129} i. Sankar Shil, \textit{Mahabharater Naranari}, P. 35.
   ii. Nalinikanta Gupta (tr.), \textit{Savitri (Sri Aurobindo)}, P. 881.
of the epic in Bengali by Kashiram Das\textsuperscript{130} speaks in favour of this viewpoint of Bankim. Here the thought of Bankim Chandra is creative.

2.11 SUMMARY

Coming towards end of Bankim Chandra’s thoughts and discussions about \textit{Mahabharata}’s characters, it can be said that the boundary and depth of his thoughts surprises us. The definition of truth, which we get from the discussion of Yudhisthira’s character is appropriately right inspite of being old. On the other hand, when Bankim Chandra only describes the characters, his thoughts are not able to surpass those of Rabindranath. However, at the end, it should be noted that the ideologies of ancient Hinduism engulfed Bankim Chandra completely.

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\textsuperscript{130} Kashiram Das (tr.), \textit{Mahabharat}, P. 579.
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