The craft of Bankim Chandra’s fiction was conditioned by the personality of the man. His very physiognomy bore the stamp of dignity, determination, and of greatness. His sinewy body, broad forehead, the massive cast of his chiselled face indicated a remarkable combination of mental powers and physical strength. Intellect seemed to radiate from his eyes that were peculiarly sparkling. He moved about with a feeling of self-assurance, bordering on pride and arrogance. Such a man naturally left the impress of his distinctive personal character on all the activities of his life. His novels are informed with that spirit.

Something like a process of biological evolution is observed in the development of Bankim’s faculties. Rabindranath’s review of Kāśinātha from which a passage has been quoted in chapter vii, underlines this tendency. His career as a novelist began with the publication of Durgesnandini in 1868. The last work that he saw through the press was the enlarged edition of Kāśinātha; it came out in August, 1893, seven months before his death in April, 1894. During this long period of twenty-nine years, his genius passed through some definite stages. His early ventures were mainly romances in which there was some mark of difference. But the man who is supposed to be a writer of romances, was really at his weakest in that field. Durgesnandini and Kripālinī, the only two pure specimens of this type, are rather
tentative and inchoate. At the same time his latent powers were manifesting themselves in other directions. Kanalkundal that came in between the two, indicated a shift from the pattern of the pure romance.

The birth of the Vaishnavasana was in itself a significant event in Bankim's career. Of his fourteen novels, the seven published in this periodical were Vishavriksha, Indira, Vasalansuria, Chandrasokhar, Reani, Racharani, and part of Krishnakantor Will. And the post-Vaishnavasana period might be appropriately described as marking the third and final stage in the process of this development. Through these three stages, the growth of the author's technical potential was both towards range and extent as well as depth and volume. His later works came to be distinguished by a concentrated radiance rare in fictional literature. The increasing massiveness and profundity of design reached a point of perfection in the most imposing last work, Naisingha.

Bankim Chandra was specially conscious of the design of his novels as he was conscious of his individual self. That age itself was characterised by two things: clearness of vision, and awareness of one's own identity. The spirit of the age was conducive to concreteness in thinking, and a definite contour may be found in the plan and purpose of the stalwarts like Vidyasagar and Madhusudan. As a novelist, Bankim Chandra profited immensely from the favourable Zeitgeist. He discarded the structures of his predecessors as shapeless and unorganised. For the real design of the novel he went over to the West, but in the great task of reconstructing the Bengali novel, he imitated no masters. He had the strength and the judgement to give to a foreign model a thoroughly indigenous form. Madhusudan, his
worthy contemporary, gave a masterly exhibition of the same
powers in the field of poetry. The eulogy of one on the other
may be applicable to both:

To Homer and Milton, as well as to Valmiki,
he (Madhusudan) is largely indebted in many ways,
but he has assimilated and made his own most of the
ideas which he has taken.

This design is almost always characterised by
symmetry. All the constituent elements of a Bankim novel find
their concrete shape and fulfilment in their mutual actions and
reactions. Each detail is expanded in exact proportion to its
bearing on the fundamental unity; the mass of one story is made
to counterpoise that of another. The novelist seems to be
guided by the primary motive of bringing about a synthesis of
the different strands and sub-strands where they exist.

Bankim Chandra was perhaps one of our first
litterateurs to assimilate the newly developed laws of science and
apply its principles of balance and harmony to the design of fiction.
The direct influence of nineteenth century scientific thought might
be noticed in the organic character of his novels, the rhythmic
flow of the narrative, the overall symmetry of their design. Only
Mrinalini, a romance, and Devi Chaudhurani, a thematic novel,
seem not to have felt the balancing effect of science. Occasional
wavering in the other two thematic novels are eclipsed by the
brilliance of the total effect. In Kanalkundala symmetry has
been achieved within a very small compass. In Raisingha, on
the other hand, it spreads itself over an extensive canvas. This
last is a work of magnificent proportions, and yet the beauty and
harmony of its titanic dimension, like those of a rock-cut temple
of South India, stand out in bold relief.
Plot is the essence of the design. Like a magician, Bankim would raise up a structure for the representation of a theme in hand. It became simple or complex according to the nature of the subject. He was quite at home in both the varieties, but his novels show that his inclination was towards complicated patterns. A rough generalization about plots has been made in the discussion on Ananda Math. The little vignettes like Yugalamburina, Racharinl, as well as Indira stand at one end of the scale. They move for a while in a straight line and then end in a blaze. Complication as such is absent also in Ananda Math and Devi Chandurani, as the story in them moves almost in a straight line. There is a sub-plot, and consequently a curved course of action both in Durgeswarnini and Mrinalini; apparently the complex pattern in the former is better managed.

The plot-structure of Kanalkundal, Krishnakantar Will, and Sitaram is to be called complex, although a subtle use of craft has tended to round off their corners. Of these three, the plot of Krishnakantar Will is simpler, but its sparseness of narrative and leanness of structure are more than compensated by the dexterous twists and turns of technique. The sub-plot in Kanalkundal gives it a real curve: it is harmonised with the main plot and passion movement is generated by their interaction. Sitaram has more threads in its pattern. There are repeated juxtapositions of complicating agencies in it, that make the story wind continually about almost all through.

But the wizardry of Bankim Chandra's craftsmanship is best revealed in the plot management of Chandrasekhar, Vishavriksha,
Raianî, and Râisingha. The pattern is most complicated in all of them. Vishavriksha and Raianî form a sub-section among them as their structures are relatively close-knit. In each there are four main characters that are interconnected. In both, again, one character appears to be comparatively passive: the wife of Nagendra in Vishavriksha, and the husband of Labanga in Rajani. There is difference in their passivity, but their contribution to the development of plot is insignificant.

In Chandrasekhar and Râisingha, however, the compactness of Vishavriksha and Raianî is substituted for a more elaborate deployment of incidents and characters. They seem to possess the most amazing accumulation of events and episodes, and even the sub-actions have almost gained the stature of separate plots. A bigger and a smaller plot coalesce in each into an organic whole. Chandrasekhar, Saibalini, Lawrence Foster, Proto, and Sundari form the main part which is supplemented by the other part formed by Mir Kasem, Dalani, and Gurgan. Rajsingha, Chanchal, Aurangzeb, Nirmal, and Maniklal on the one hand, and Zabunnesa, Mobarak, and Daria on the other constitute the corresponding elements in Râisingha. The arrangement in Vishavriksha and Raianî is a triangle on a triangle that in Chandrasekhar and Râisingha is a plot within a plot. In the main plot, again, a double triangular complication occurs. For example, the two triangles in Chandrasekhar, in the primary strand, are Chandrasekhar-Saibalini-Proto, and Chandrasekhar-Saibalini-Baduk. It seems as the pattern becomes progressively intricate, the novelist’s grip over the technique tightens, the design becomes more symmetrical.

Bankim is dramatic in the striking and impressive way of presentation of the story of his novels. In most of them marked stages like Acts, as well as rising and falling actions, are
observed. The events that make up the plot, have the unity and progression of a play. This point has been emphasized specially in the consideration of the titles with an emotion-intensive pattern. It seems Bankim had the proper drama psychosis, the refined sensibility necessary for the portrayal of the higher emotions. He displayed that faculty in the treatment of the novels which came to be instinct with energy, passion, and movement. Perhaps in the last analysis these qualities permeated the very atmosphere of the age in which he was nurtured.

Vidyasagar, his eminent contemporary, exhibited dramatic qualities in his life and character.

The opening lines of the first novel, Durgesnandini, are symptomatic of Bankim's general technique. Historical facts are sifted and arranged with the object of producing a telling effect. Even in the professedly historical novel of Harisingha, the narrative is started with human materials to spotlight the emotional content. In Vishavriksha, Raioni, and Krishnakant Ter Will, the striking turns come from the subtle use of craft. In Chandrasekhar and Sitaram, dramatic elements occur in an increasing proportion. And in Durgesnandini, Kanalkundal, and Mrinalin, impressiveness has been sought to be achieved through the technique of suspense and concidence. These are devices, but they seldom make, as they do in Ramesh Chandra, dramatic verisimilitude a casualty.

Economy of narrative and movement of story are marked features of the novels of Bankim Chandra. These are, again, concomitants of the dramatic art. He rarely gave way to details that were superfluous and detrimental to the unity of design. The artist in him was always alert, awake, and even domineering. His intellectualism chastened and subdued the romantic leanings of his early years. That accounts for the
comparative absence of the lyrical strain in his novels. *Indirā, Yungalāś вариya, and Radhārāṇī* are rather exceptions in an essentially objective temperament; his sense of economy and movement served as a counterblast to his imaginative flight. The passages cited from *Durgesnandini* (Chap. III), *Vishavriķeshā* (Chap. IV), *Ām Hand Math* (Chap. VI), etc. seem to possess classical moderation and equipoise. He revised most of his novels time and again with the dual objective of affecting economy and coherence. Even in *Indirā* and *Rāṣingha*, the two novels rewritten on a bigger scale, there is scarcely one chapter too many or irrelevant. The then Victorian tradition of a voluminous, slow-moving novel was not consistent with his genius.

A passion for beauty and proportion made him punctuate his narratives with pause and paragraphs. These technical devices increased the vigour of the story and at the same time accelerated its movement. One of the innumerable examples in this line, one of the earliest is the passage on time in *Durgesnandini* (Chap. III). Bankim had a subtle ear for the formal embellishments of pause and repose, which he found wanting in Radhusudan. He would not naturally appreciate Scott's occasional weakness for chewing the cud of old historical memories with epicurean delight. Conciseness and austerity best suited his genius, and he was almost constitutionally unfit for prolixity and longwindedness. Hence it is that longueurs are conspicuous by their absence in his narratives. He was in his best form when presenting rapid and brilliant dioramas of the picturesque aspects of history and arresting moments of life.

Forster remarks that "it is on her massive-ness that George Eliot depends — she has no nicety of style." But Bankim had a more comprehensive grasp of craft; he could wield the broadsword and the rapier with equal ease. *Kanálkundalā* and *Krishnākānta Will* have patterns of delicate chiaroscuro and yet there is dimension and weight in their structures. Massiveness
is a quality which is peculiar to the novels of Bankim Chandra. It is blazoned on the early romances, and is more and more pronounced in the succeeding titles. In the latest ones, there is a broad sweep which we generally associate with some Russian novels. The accumulating grandeur and sonority of his fictional work attain culmination in the epic fragment of Rājinīgha. But it is significant that these solid and heavy designs are often inwrought with fine threads of gold. Sometimes in the same novel, sometimes in novels of different genres, Bankim harmonised massiveness with nicety of style. Modern authors in this field prefer spinning delicate cobwebs of psychological analysis. Massiveness has been lost inscuto facto. The difference between the structure of Bankim's first venture, Durgesnandini and Mrs Woolf's perfect specimen, Mrs Dalloway, is one of kind.

Scenes of war in Bankim Chandra contribute to the massiveness of his design. They recur in some form or other in seven of his eleven major novels. It seems he was eager to have them, and whenever the opportunity came, he jumped into the arena with the zest of his own heroes. The scenes are in subdued colours in Mrinālini, Chandrasekhar, and Devi Chaudhuri. They are surcharged with the din and bustle of the actual field of battle in Durgesnandini, Ananda Math, Sitārān, and Rājinīgha. Ramesh Chandra's art is generally too weak to infuse life and vitality into his war scenes. The Scott of Marmion and Ivanhoe comes nearer; he has Bankim's gusto, but perhaps not the gathered radiance of his pictures. It is apparent the Indian author had a flair in this direction. His pictures attained a solidity and a magnitude by their comprehensiveness. They are rich with all the details of varieties of engagements, and the stratagems and manoeuvres associated with them. We hear the dint of steel, the volleys of cannon, the very reverberation of war. The novelist presents graphic spectacles of engagements on bridges, in forests.
and mountain passes, in front of mounted guns battering soldiers drawn up in a needle-column array. The impression is that the novelist himself has turned a commander: he is in charge of the superintendence, direction, and control of the whole situation.

Enveloping actions of history generally form a part of Bankim’s technical paraphernalia. Like scenes of striking engagements, these had no small share in building up the massiveness of the design of his novels. In those stirring days, people felt a resurgent urge for doing mighty things; this desire might have prompted Bankim to connect the personages of his novels with events of history. An attraction for the recorded facts of the great world is very nearly a constant factor in these works. Nine out of fourteen of them have been set in a historical frame or fringe. The five outside the pale, are three of the technically important ones, Indirā, Rādhārāṇī, and Rājānī, and two of the emotion-intensive patterns, Viśvevidyā and Kṛishnākānta Will.

History is used in different proportions in the plot structures of the nine novels with related enveloping actions. Characters placed within the framework of the events of our country, to a great extent come to acquire concreteness, dramatic verisimilitude, as well as dimensional attributes. It is interesting to note that Bankim’s first novel, Durgāśamandini, and his last, Rājāsinha, have both the enveloping action of history; in the latter, history has been utilised as a factor in correlating incidents and characters. Even a veneering of it in Yugalōṅgurīva has had its effect in elevating the tone of the design. It is similarly more than a mere colourful border in Kapālakundalā and Devi Chaudhurānī. The most resplendent example of the enveloping action of history is furnished by Chandraśākhar, Sītārāṇī, and, of course, by Rājāsinha.
Bankim's attitude of mind was essentially objective and scientific. But there was a strong undercurrent of traditionalism within him, which often broke through the upper crust of intellectualism and left its mark upon the design of his novels. This dual personality of the man was responsible for a rather liberal use of supermen, dreams, omens, astrology, etc. within the rigorously framed plots. Generally these were absorbed into the system, but sometimes they appeared by the force of will of the author and caused imbalance to the pattern.

Except in *Indira*, *Redhârâni*, and *Râjalîngha*, the superman is a constant factor in some form or another. His character is changed in some of the novels, but the reader is at no pains to discover his identity. The most effective use of him is perhaps made as a Kapalik in *Kapâlkundâla*, and the next best is Chandrachur Tarkalâsîkar in *Sitaram*. In *Vishavrîksha*, the role of the Brahmachari is insignificant but happy in the context of the plot. Another pleasant specimen is the hero converted into a Sannyasi at the end of *Krishnakânter Will*. The brief role of the Acharya as priest in *Yugalângurîva* is good, but not big enough for a comment.

But elsewhere his presence has not been exactly conducive to the beauty and proportion of the structure. The Acharyas in *Purânsmanândini* and *Mrînâlînî* are scarcely indispensable elements. Ramananda Swami in *Chandrâsâkhar* is evidently imported for a special purpose, to deliver a funeral oration after the death of Pratap. The Sannyasi in *Râjînî* is but a thinly-disguised magician; he works miracles, and miracles do not obey the laws of probability. And not very much different is the activity of Bhawani Pathak in *Devî Chandhurâni* and the physician in *Ananda Math*. The bearing of herbal medicine ( *Râjînî* ) and psychic powers
(Chandrasekhar) on the harmony of the plot, has been noted in Chap. V and Chap. IV respectively.

Omens and dreams, however, have been managed with great skill. The tragic emotion in Kapalkundala has been intensified by omens and forebodings; detailed reference to this aspect of the novel has been made in Chap. IV. Kunda's vision in Vishvakrshna is an excellent piece of dramatic foreshadowing. Saibalini's dreams in Chandrasekhar have had their effect upon the passion movement of the narrative. Ramesh Chandra's attempts in this direction lack strength and originality, and are a study in contrast. Bimala's dream in Yuvaguraha, for example, seems to be a pale imitation of Calphurnia's in Julius Caesar.

Astrology has been harnessed still to better advantage. In Yugalangurita, it supplies as element of complication. The marriage of the hero and the heroine is postponed on account of it, the story develops on new lines, the comedy scintillates with the play of hide and seek of two youthful lovers. The complication created by astrological calculations in Sitaram, has greater dramatic potency. It has tended to deepen the tragic sentiment of the whole novel. By its power the heroine, Sri, is separated from her husband, Sitaram, until she reaches the prime of her youth and beauty. Her aloofness, rendered necessary by astrological prognostications, causes a series of spiralling and curved movements of the story. Bankim plays the conjurer with astrology in Sitaram.

Notes and References

2. Ibid, p. 35.
3. Forster, E. M., op. cit., chap. vii, p. 120