CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation proposes to deal with the subject of craft in the novels of Bankim Chandra. Assessment of literary qualities has been the general practice in poetry and drama, as well as in fiction. My emphasis on the study of form as a prerequisite to a fuller understanding of the novel marks to a great extent a departure from convention. But the need for this changed process will be appreciated when it is realised that the novel has, of all types of literature, the most complicated pattern. As a faithful reflection of modern civilization, it could not be otherwise. Its technique has a vital bearing on the content; there exists in fact a sort of organic relationship between the two aspects. Labour is well lost when its inner beauties are sought to be revealed all independent of the form. This very character of the novel calls for a reorientation of the traditional method of critical approach.

The distinctive mark of the novel is best brought out by a couple of verses in Spenser's Hymne in Honour of Beautie:

For the soule the bodie forme doth take;
For soule is forme, and doth the bodie make.

Aristotle's pointer that "plot" is the "soul" of the drama, more directly applies to fictional literature. In its wider context, the term design, rather than the Aristotelean "plot," seems to be more appropriate. Design is the sensuous medium through which the ideas of the novelist shine, his aim is realised. No estimation of the value of a novel can possibly be accurate without a proper study of the design that sustains the value. Craft is the entire apparatus that builds up the design. Hence,
in the evaluation of a novel, the necessity for a study of its craft cannot be too highly stressed.

Craft is a term of wide connotation. Its broad sweep takes into consideration plot and character, strand, tone, style, diction, interaction of characters and interweaving of actions, and unity or harmony of design. All these aspects go into the making of the design which is like a delicate tracery made up of many fine threads of gold. Only "the critical part which describes the value of experience," is outside the scope of craft. In a novel, therefore, proper emphasis should be laid on the design, as in the drama it is laid on the plot.

Critical effort in this direction has been rather meagre in our country. The one and only book on Bengali novels is Bahgo, Sāhitye Unanyāsār Dhārā (1939) by Dr. Sri Kumar Benerjee. It is a brilliant exposition of the tendencies in our fictional literature, and as a comprehensive work, its sidelights on craft are quite illuminating. A more fascinating and stimulating volume of criticism has not yet been published in our time.

There is a considerable mass of literature in English on the technique of fiction. Henry James laid a milestone in this path by writing the genial post-scripts on the composition of his own novels; they were later on published under the title, The Art of the Novel (1907?). He propounded a theory which was elaborated in these essays. Dramatic treatment of the story is accepted by him as a sound ideal for the novel. The story is to be told not from the omniscient angle of the author — the "irresponsible author," he calls him — but from the angle of a character. The author would remain "caged" within that character to "dramatise" it more effectively. Thus James put his characters within the steel frame of a rigid theory. He overlooked the difference between "stage" and "drama," and failed to realise that some subjects did not admit of dramatic treatment.
His rather colourless novels are a commentary upon his own theory. Bankim had a passion for obtruding his personality upon the scene of action, and yet his achievement was startling. The success of his novels is a repudiation of the fundamental principle of Henry James.

The Craft of Fiction (1921) by Percy Lubbock is a work of admitted excellence on the art of the novel. There is broad agreement between him and James on the scenic or dramatic type. Lubbock speaks about a second variety which he calls the "panoramic"; it is a novel usually with a broad expanse, in which the author talks to the reader. This sort of division is unscientific and, therefore, unsatisfactory. First, Bankim's ubiquity would tend to exclude almost all his novels from the category of the "dramatic." Secondly, the continent alone is the homeland for the panoramic spectacles of life: the extent of our novels is limited by the narrowness of our environments. Those that are not dramatic, may not here be panoramic either. How are they, then, to be classified? Thirdly, Lubbock's use of the terms "dramatic" and "panoramic," is different from the normal sense attached to them. He has stretched their ordinary meanings and has turned them into catchwords. His critical yardstick is arbitrary.

E.M. Forster gives in his Aspects of the Novel (1927) a refreshing account of plot, people, story, fantasy, prophecy, pattern and rhythms. The most conspicuous omission in his otherwise useful lectures, is an absence of any reference to design. He takes no note of the unity or harmony of the various aspects that constitute the novel. And this is the most salient technical characteristic in a classic writer like Bankim Chandra.

John Carruthers just refers to "the imperative need for organic pattern," "The lack of it," he continues, "makes all our
technical skill in matters of detail a mere whistling of jigs to a milestone.\textsuperscript{2} No elaboration is made by him of this succinct last page remark; this does not fall within his plan which is a résumé of English novels.

The Structure of the Novel (1928), a handbook by Edwin Muir, is more critical and exhaustive. His view on the dramatic novel carries conviction; it is pleasingly different from that of James and Lubbock. His preference for "chronicle" is more appropriate than Lubbock's use of the term "panoramic." But the theme of Muir is structure; really he writes about types, and not about how the types are thrown up by craft.

The amount of contribution on the technique of the novel vis-à-vis individual authors, has been relatively small even in English literature. We are yet far behind; our effort in the field of literary criticism in particular, has been insignificant. Any specialized work of the type under discussion, is yet to appear. In this respect, this dissertation seeks to break fresh ground. An attempt has been made here, I believe for the first time, at a scientific study of the craft of fiction of a great Bengali author.

General discussion on the formal aspects of the novel in English has not been of material help in the context of a Bengali novelist. Any previous attempt as regards this special subject, is non-existent. I had, therefore, to work out a type of criticism in conformity with my requirement: I had to evolve practically my own scheme and methodology in their entirety. Another most difficult problem for me had been to give expression to the nuances, the delicate shades of meaning, feeling, opinion, colour, etc., of Bengali fiction through the medium of a foreign tongue.
This monograph on Bankim Chandra is a self-contained treatise. It is the first of a series of works which I have planned on the same lines to cover the whole range of our fictional literature.

In the judgement of craft, a division in fiction, it was felt, might be made from the standpoint of design. The fourteen Bengali novels of Bankim Chandra including two shorter tales, may with advantage, from this point of view, be dealt with under five heads. No great alteration of the historical sequence has been necessary while placing them in categories for a systematic discussion. The course of development of his genius was astonishingly logical. It is only in a few instances that the chronology of composition cuts across my arrangement.

The genius of Bankim Chandra flowered with romances. The romantic strain lingered on all through, but it suffered a gradual decay. Other faculties that he possessed, asserted themselves almost simultaneously. They dominated the romantic element and brought about a fundamental change in the design of his novels. The only two pure romances are Durgeshnandini (1865) and Kripālānī (1869). I shall take them together first by skipping over Kamlakundalā (1866) that appeared in between.

It has been found convenient, again from the point of view of design, to tag on Kamlakundalā to Vishavriksha (1873), Chandrasekhar (1875), and Krishnaśānter Will (1878); for these four exhibit, what may be called, an emotion-intensive pattern. While writing them, it seems, the author was enraptured by the heights and depths of human passions. He harnessed the entire technical paraphernalia to build up some designs with these elemental passions as raw materials. Considerations of design have weighed with me to supersede chronological order most in this category.
The Yangadarsan, first issued in April, 1872, marked an epoch in Bengali periodical journalism as much as in Bengali literature. It owed its birth to the spirit of the age. Our literature was gaining new heights, it was simmering with new potentialities. A writer who had established his reputation as a novelist, wanted a fitting vehicle for the expression of his many-sided talents. These factors led to the origin of the historical journal. A splendid body of literature, as diverse in form as in matter, adorned its pages during the four years of his editorship (April, 1872 - March, 1876). For Bankim, these four years perhaps constituted the most complex period in his career as a writer of fiction extending over twenty-nine years (1865-1894). Seven of his fourteen novels, and two critical essays were published in the Yangadarsan; these seven, again, neatly fall under two of the five types of his novels as arranged in this thesis.

From the high romance of Durgeshmandini, his growing powers already found an outlet in the emotional design of Kanalkundal. This technique was carried on in Vishavriksha; it was published serially in the Yangadarsan from its first issue. Then he turned his hand to adopting and introducing form in its many colours, perhaps to make his journal a medium of diversified interest. Specimens of technical virtuosity followed Vishavriksha. In this third period of his eventful life he brought out Indira (1873), Yuddalanguriva (1874), Racharani (1875), and Rajani (1877). Exactly in the middle of this series appeared Chandrasekhar, a work of uncommon artistry belonging to the second group. The paper wound up after offering to the people nine chapters of Krishnakanta Will. It thus came to be associated with the development of Bankim Chandra's versatile genius in so many ways.

A nation in the making becomes conscious of the history and religion of its country. Bankim Chandra took more than
an ordinary interest, like some other great man of his time, in the glorious traditions of this ancient land. The historical side of Bengal was highlighted in Mrinalini and Chandrasekhar in two different ways; it was leavened with religion in three successive novels of a third type: Ananda Math (1882), Devi Chaudhurani (1884), and Sitaram (1887). These three of the fourth category are characterised by a massiveness and grandeur unique in fictional literature. As his maturing mind became more introspective, the theme gained in weight, the form a heightened rigour. Only in the revised version of his own Raisingha (1894), he seemed to have surpassed the magnificent proportions of his own craftsmanship.

The rewritten Raisingha has been considered in this thesis as the last of the novels of Bankim Chandra. It is sui generis, a class by itself. Possessed by a creative urge, the artist in Bankim Chandra was wafted into a wonderland where mighty spectacles of life seemed to converge, vibrate, and pass on as in an endless pageant. Both in conception and execution he perhaps surpassed the massiveness and profundity of the thematic novels of the preceding group. Raisingha is a three-dimensional work attempted on an epic scale. It aptly closed a glorious literary career.

In Chapter II, liberty has been taken in the arrangement of the novels of Bankim’s predecessors. The discussion has been not in the order of historical sequence but in accordance with the nature of design and the progressive development of craft. Forster has adopted a more or less similar method in his analysis of the aspects of the novel. He takes up for consideration a number of books, with a like theme or technique, from different ages, as if the authors wrote them at the same time in a circular room. The logic of this procedure is justified by its convenience.
My prime consideration in this part has been to offer a dispassionate and straightforward analysis of the technique involved in the different novels. I make no apology for the length and frequency of the illustrative extracts scattered throughout this treatise. The method followed is perhaps better than the general practice of quoting from commentators in bewildering profusion almost as a matter of principle. The best clue to the mind and method of a novelist is to be found in his own works. In this connexion, the chapter ( included in Appendices ) on some of Bankim's direct utterances and their bearing on novels, will be found interesting. Chapter VIII relates to conclusions drawn from a study of his use of craft in fiction. The Appendices will include, among other things, the technical implication of the changes effected by the author in different editions of his novels.

Notes and References.


2. Carruthers, op. cit., p. 95.