MADHUSUDAN DUTT : THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

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Chapter - V

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Compromise may be an excellent rule of conduct, but little would have been accomplished in this world were there no errant idealists willing to stake their call on a forlorn hope, or a wild adventure.

Harendra Mohan Dasgupta

The birth, life and work of Michael Madhusudan Dutt form one of the most interesting studies among the poets of nineteenth-century Bengal. Madhusudan is a true representative of the age in the absolute sense of the term -- his birth, his upbringing, his traumas, his aspirations, his inspirations, his works, his entire life are very fundamentally bound to the temper of the age. He reflects truly the psyche of post colonial Bengal. Madhusudan offers "the image of post-Enlightenment man, tethered to, not confronted by his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being. The ambivalent identification of the racist world - moving on two
Madhusudan's childhood was a happy one with all his whims and fancies catered to by his fond parents. But this very happy-go-lucky childhood paved the way for his wild and reckless style of life later. Again, though for all purposes he had not a worry during his early days, the one blight that disturbed him was his mother's plight of having to share "her husband's affection with three other fellow-wives" (R.C.Dutt, 129). This must have proved pretty unsettling for the young boy which later caused him to revolt against his father on the latter's fixing up Madhusudan's marriage with an "appropriate" girl. This incident occurred during the poet's days in Hindu College. He retaliated his father's insistence with a most unexpected and extreme step -- he took to Christianity and became Michael Madhusudan Dutt. The history of social reforms ... illustrate the truth that great abuses lead to reform, senseless coercion leads to reaction (R.C.Dutt, 129).

Madhusudan was in the Hindu College at a period when the Young Bengal Movement was at its most active phase. He was very much drawn to the ideals of Derozio. Already possessing a sound knowledge of his mother-tongue, Bengali, and Persian, his flair for languages saw him pick up English and handle the language with admirable ease. Fanciful ideas of English being far superior to any Indian language lodged in his mind. Even as he was making forays into the English language, with, what appears
to be, save a few, ineffectual verses on the then hot themes of misanthropy and love, he was considered to be the Jupiter among the stars of the Hindu College. All this while, he inwardly aspired to cross the seas, go to Europe, breathe the air and get the feel of the "heaven on this earth", for he nurtured this dream:

I sigh for Albion's distant shore,
Its valleys green, its mountains high;
Tho' friends, relations, I have none
In that far clime, yet, oh! I sigh
To cross the vast Atlantic wave
For glory, or a nameless grave!

As Makarand Paranjape declares in "Michael Madhusudan Dutt: Reclaiming a Kinship", this is nothing less than "nostalgia for a place one has never been to! This I think is the first and best articulation of a pathology that colonialism created and whose symptoms are still evident in us today" (New Perspectives 104).

In reality, the influence of imperialism was making itself felt for Madhusudan, for whom, unknown to himself, his mother-tongue Bengali was "rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power" (Ashcroft, 10). A sense of dislocation had set in which made him believe that English was more superior. An ideological shift developed gradually between the poet's inherent knowledge and understanding of his
thoughts in not the instinctive mother-tongue but the acquired "superior" language. D.E.S. Maxwell suggests that "in the case of invaded societies like those in India or Nigeria, where indigenous people were colonized in their own territories, writers were not forced to adapt to a different landscape and climate but had their own ancient and sophisticated responses to them marginalized by the world-view which was implicated in the acquisition of English" (Ashcroft, 25).

During his period in Bishop's College, following his six years at Hindu College, Madhusudan quickly picked up and grasped more languages like Greek and Latin as well as our root language Sanskrit. The gradually estranging relationship with his father and an association with some students in the college who had hailed from Madras, moved Madhusudan to think seriously in terms of going to Madras. In his letter to his very intimate friend, Gourdas Bysack, Madhusudan himself says:

My life is more busy than that of a school-boy. Here is my routine: 6 to 8 Hebrew, 8 to 12 school, 12 - 2 Greek, 2 - 5 Telugu and Sanskrit, 5 - 7 Latin, 7 - 10 English. Am I not preparing for the great object of embellishing the tongue of my fathers?" (Rachanabali 16).

It was while at Madras that Madhusudan's verses began getting published in some dailies under the pseudonym of Timothy Penpoem. The enthusiasm with which his friends had
received his poems during the Hindu College days was fresh in his
memory and served to be a source of continuing inspiration to the
young poet.

But basically "Dutt's love for English poetry, however,
was not caused so much by external influence as by his inordinate
desire to be a pucca sahib" (Sen, 212). This is one of the main
reasons why, as mentioned earlier, Madhusudan offers one of the
best studies of the nineteenth century results of post colonialism.
"Bilingual and bicultural having Janus-like access to both
metropolitan and local cultures, yet alienated from both", (Boehmer,
115) Madhusudan reveals a persisting fluctuation in his life and
lifestyle. His birth as a Hindu, his conversion to Christianity, his
studies in Calcutta, followed by his sojourn at Madras, his picking
up many languages in rapid succession despite his basic longing of
retaining Bengali all point towards this one fact. "...can't you send
me a copy of the Bengali translation of the Mahabharat by Casidoss
as well as a ditto of the Ramayana - Serampore edition. I am losing
my Bengali faster than I can mention," (Rachanabali 16) writes
Madhusudan frantically to his friend Bysack, all the way from
Madras. This request was sent even as he was versifying in
English and still secretly fostering a dream of going one day to
England, of being recognized as a poet of merit by the people there.
Frantz Fanon, a key theorist of anti-imperial nationalism rightly
observed that the colonized man breathed the "appeal of Europe like
pure air" (Boehmer, 115).
Oft like a sad imprisoned bird I sigh
To leave this land, though mine own land it be;
Its green robed meads, - gay flowers and cloudless sky
Though passing fair, have but few charms for me.
For I have dreamed of climes more bright and free
Where virtue dwells and heaven-born liberty
Makes even the lowest happy; - where the eye
Doth sicken not to see man bend the knee
To sordid interest:- climes where science thrives,
And genius doth receive her guerdon meet;
Where man in all his truest glory lives,
And Nature's face exquisitely sweet:
For those fair climes I heave the impatient sigh,
There let me live and let me die.

Probably at the moment, it was inexplicable even to Madhusudan as to why he could not let go of Bengali even as he charged towards English. Any work of art is nothing short of a reflection of the various influences and forces at work in the life of an artist. Thus, glimpses of his carefree upbringing resulting in his wild, impatient and extravagant nature could be witnessed in Madhusudan's desire of having the cake and eating it too. The temper of the times, blended with his daring attitude, resulted in his oscillating between the old and the new. All this while, the memories of the scenic beauty of the childhood days at Sagardari in Jessore, the rippling of river Kapotaksha lingered in a corner of his heart - the first, basic influences of nature which could never be
erased. His is the tragic case of a man who had his head in India and his heart in England, and who fell between two worlds, the East and the West (Kripalani, 47).

While Derozio had an ethnic problem to battle with and Toru Dutt had to bear the agony resulting from a dual allegiance to France and India, Madhusudan's was the case of a deep inner conflict urging him to crave for the unknown, unexperienced yet "superior" culture of Europe while not completely being able to stake his claims to the rich, native culture of Bengal. 'This fundamental disunity' is perhaps the price that a great pioneer must pay who has to lead his age from one tradition to another (Kripalani, 47).

It was while at Madras that Madhusudan wrote and got published what could be termed his best and largest poem in English, 'The Captive Ladie', the story of the last Hindu king of Delhi, his abduction of his beloved, Sanjukta, from, the palace of Kanauj where her brother, the king, had conducted a Swayamvar for his sister.

A brief examination of 'The Captive Ladie' as well as Madhusudan's other English verses would perhaps give us proof of what Madhusudhan himself later realized, that despite all his dreams he could just not aspire to reach great heights with his English compositions. Most of Madhusudan's poems are more a play of words on the recurrent themes of love and the beauties of
nature. On the latter subject he has written an entire series of poems reminiscent of none other than Kashiprasad Ghose, in the very titles like 'Composed During a Morning Walk', 'Composed During An Evening Walk', 'Evening in Saturn', 'To a Star During A Cloudy Night', 'After A Shower In the Evening', 'A Storm', 'Night', . . . describing effusively these different visions of Nature. In the midst of such an assortment comes a breath of fresh air in the form of 'King Porus' which acquaints us with the poet's latent patriotism.

Like to a lion chain'd,
That, tho' faint - bleeding stands in pride-
With eyes where unsubdued
Yet flash'd the fire-looks that defied-
King Porus boldly went.
. . . He couched not as a slave -
He stooped not - bent not there his knee,-
But stood - as stands an oak,
Unbent - in native majesty!

The following lines appear Derozian:

And where art thou - fair Freedom! thou-
Once goddess of Ind's sunny clime!
When glory's halo 'round her brow
Shone radiant, and she rose sublime-

The glory hath now flitted by!
The crown that once had decked thy brow
Is trampled down - and thou sunk low -

This lament of the lost pride and glory of the pre-colonial days recalls Derozio's opening lines in the poem 'To India - My Native Land':

My country! in thy days of glory past
A beauteous halo circled thy brow
And worshipped as a deity thou wast.
Where is that glory, where that reverence now?

After 'King Porus' written in 1843, the only noteworthy English poem of Madhusudan is 'The Captive Ladie' which contains, while depicting the story of Prithviraj some enchanting vignettes of the Indian gods and goddesses described in the portion titled 'The Feast of Victory'. This 'Feast of Victory' is the **Rajasuya Yagna** which the king of Kanauj is all set to conduct, and for which occasion he has invited all the kings and princes of repute. M.K.Naik states that "the Indian poet may indeed draw his imagery from any source he likes . . . . But since the poet's imagery springs from his own vital experience, the Indian poet's world of imagery will naturally be dominated by his own cultural heritage" (*Studies* 73-74). True to his statement, in 'The Captive Ladie', we observe that preceding the **Yagna**, brief scenes from the various ages of our mythology flit by, enchanting the reader with the
playful pranks of Krishna, the blazing glory of Durga, the valour of Rama, the power of the Pandavas.

In a few masterly strokes, Madhusudan presents us with the vision of Krishna playing on his flute and teasing his maidens:

From his light skiff, that sped along,
His soft reed breath'd the gayest song,
Which swelling on the fitful sweep
of the lone night-wind's sigh - so deep -
Wing'd ravishment where'er it fell -
Love's accents in their aery spell!

An instant picture of Durga is thus similarly brought to us in all her glorious beauty:

For lo! that maiden - erst so fair,
Stood like a tigress in her lair,
And swept th' accursed race away
Far from the smiling realms of Day
And banish'd Peace restor'd again
O'er hill and vale and mount and plain!

Contrasted to the heavenly, benign light in the first canto, the second canto is filled with fearsome pictures of
foreboding, of impending disaster. Sanjukta's dream of Kali in all her terror:

Me thought there came a warrior - maid,
With blood-stain'd brow and sheath-less blade;
Dark was her hue, as darkest cloud,
Which comes the Moon's fair face to shroud, -
And 'round her waist a hideous zone,
Of hands with charnal lightnings shone,
And long the garland which she wore,
Of heads all bath'd in streaming gore,
How fierce the eyes by Death unseal'd
And blasting gleams which they reveal'd! -

evokes a kindred fear in the reader's heart who is, at the same time, amazed at the poet's skill in creating such an ambience. This description of Kali reminds us of the poet's earlier but far more terrifying portrayal of the very same Goddess in the poem 'The Upsori':

. . . - 'twas Kally's - Frightfulness!
Lo! there she stood in martial majesty,
Gorg'd with the blood of Sembo's cursed race,
And garlanded with heads! - Her blood-red eye
Shot lightening; in her hand the gory blade
Shone like a brand of fire - while naked, wild
She trampled on her prostrate husband's head,
And with a fiendish glare upon him smiled!
Her raven locks streem'd wildly bath'd in gore,
And shed dark drops of blood upon the slippery floor.

Doubtless, the poet had etched each feature of this fearful Goddess in faithful detail.

The beauty of 'The Captive Ladie' lies in these portrayals which hold the reader captive even as the reader settles to listen anew to the tale of Sanjukta - Swayamvara. The poet is in his element in picking out a single instance from the pages of history and weaving afresh the spirit of romance of the tale or Prithviraj and Sanjukta, simultaneously offering a moment's glimpse into the timeless ritual of the Rajasuya Yagna in all its awe and splendour and ushering exciting encounters with the reigning deities of the Hindu mythology.

It is little wonder that this poem received rave reviews and it was declared that this poem had certain verses which "neither Scott nor Byron would have been ashamed to own" (R.C.Dutt, 130).

But even as he was receiving such extravagant praise, Drinkwater Bethuene wrote,

"He could render a far greater service to his country and have a better chance of achieving a lasting
reputation for himself if he would employ the taste and talents which he has cultivated by the study of English in improving the standard and adding to the stock of the poems of his own language."

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Despite his command over the language, he experienced its inadequacies and its inabilities which disallowed him from applying the language whole-heartedly and sincerely to the native heritage, theme and spirit. This disadvantage was probably made more acute by his knowledge of his own mother tongue. A study of Sanskrit revealed new vistas of his own native literature, his own culture. He viewed this - the ageless, omnipotent culture and tradition of his own native Bengal - as a virgin area, affording endless possibilities and opportunities to his adventurous spirit and mind. What he sensed in his own culture probably made him realize that if he transmitted this culture, this heritage in the ultimately alien English language, a precious portion would be lost. He assessed that despite one's ability to talk or read or write a language, the medium of poetry, the medium of art was always the mother-tongue, the language one dreamt in, the language one thought in. English was an acquired taste whereas Bengali was an inherent and inborn quality.

In this feature one observes a distinctive quality in Madhusudan when compared to Toru Dutt or Derozio. Derozio, not being a Bengali but a Eurasian by birth, possessed a natural
leaning for only the English language and not for Bengali or Sanskrit though for all other purposes he was a Bengali in a complete sense. Toru Dutt on the other hand, had first learnt English and later on French. Living a greater part of her life abroad, mingling mostly with the French and the English and indulging in reading and studying mostly French and English served to distance her only further from her native tongue. Further, not knowing Sanskrit put her at a greater disadvantage of the inability of experiencing first hand the richness of its literature. Here her mother to a great extent served as a major link with her native language, its stories, mythology and music. It was this bond which created a desire in her to get back to her roots in her own country.

In contrast, Madhusudan had a first-hand, primary experience of both the Eastern and Western languages and its traditions that enabled him to distinguish one from the other and return to Bengali. Ashcroft declares that "in African countries and in India, that is in post-colonial countries where viable alternatives to english continue to exist, an appeal for a return to writing exclusively or mainly in the pre-colonial languages has been a recurring feature of calls for decolonization (Empirè 30). Chinua Achebe, too, has spoken of the imperative need for writers to help change the way the colonized world was seen, to tell their own stories . . . (Boehmer, 189).
Hence Madhusudan's return to Calcutta from Madras in 1856 was a "return" in ways more than one. It was symbolic in the sense of it being the return of the native to his own land. Having got away from Calcutta to Madras in 1848, having experienced the trauma of poverty, having experienced the joys and vicissitudes of married life, which made him marry, divorce and marry again a second time to a different person, - once more, a reflection of his wild spirit, his impulsive and indecisive nature - having written and published poems in English and winning some - though not the ultimate - recognition, realization dawned on him. He ended this phase of his life and re- "turned" to his own Calcutta, to his native tongue and in 1858 he wrote his first play Sarmistha and "became, almost by accident, a Bengali writer" (Kripalani, 53).

It is interesting to observe that the anglicized Madhusudan came back to his own through another channel of aesthetic activity which was itself a result of Western influence, viz. the rise of the Bengali stage (H.M.Dasgupta, 59). Sarmistha is remembered, though not for its quality, as the first Bengali play and the first Bengali work of Madhusudan. He succeeded in introducing the spirit of Western culture to the literature of Bengal. Dasgupta very aptly remarks : By temperament Michael was peculiarly fitted to be the father of what may be called the Sturm and Drang school of Art in Bengali poetry. The struggle for self-expression in every department of life and thought in the country - the main feature of Renaissance - was certainly not to be ineffectual for our poetry" (Western Influence 66).
Sarmistha was followed by a couple of farces "one ridiculing the vices and follies of 'Young Bengal', and the other ridiculing the more dangerous hypocrisy and profligacy of 'Old Bengal" (R.C.Dutt, 131). The four years from 1858 to 1862 were the best years of Madhusudan's literary life. According to Naik "The modern Indian poet in English is truly Indian when he draws his artistic sustenance from his heritage. He may not totally accept it; he may even reject aspects of it which he thinks are undesirable, but he cannot altogether ignore it" (Studies 72). Madhusudan's study and knowledge of the masters of literature like Homer, Virgil, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Dante, Tasso and Milton, among others, fortified by his profound awareness of the great epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata and of the works of the Sanskrit scholars Valmiki and Kalidasa coalesced to form the most potent force of the century, that found the existing Bengali style of rhyme to be rather stifling. Madhusudan is the father of the epic as also of the blank verse in Bengali. In an age when the "stately measure and sonorous cadence of blank verse" was regarded most unsuitable for the Bengali language, Madhusudan proved "that the Bengali is born of the Sanskrit than which a more copious and elaborate language does not exist" (Rachanabali 28).

Tilottama - Sambhava, the first epic in blank verse in Bengali, was the daring result of this challenge, that took the literary world of Bengal by storm. The conception of this new form created shock waves and success among the Bengali society. The language in its newly-conceived form, its rich music, its
stately nature acquired a new dignity in the hands of Madhusudan. Actually it was only natural and inevitable that none but Madhusudan achieve this because Madhusudan's personality and life always evinced instances of breaking fetters, going against tradition, achieving the impossible, discovering and investigating the unknown, untouched aspects, viewing possibilities of development in absolutely unexpected quarters be it in life or in literature.

One could be thus sure that introducing the blank verse was not the end-all of the poet's objective. He was of course complemented by the Bengali nature which very eagerly responded to this pioneering trend in modern Bengali poetry. The Bengali sensibility, though astonished to say the least, acceded agreeably to the Miltonic style brought by Madhusudan. Speaking on *Tilottama-Sambhava*, Raj Narain Basu, one of the critics who lauded the artistry, the melody of the epic, wrote, "If Indra had spoken Bengali, he would have spoken in the style of the poem. The author's extraordinary loftiness and brilliancy of imagination, his minute observation of nature, his delicate sense of beauty, the uncommon splendour of action and the rich music of his versification charm us in every page" (R.C.Dutt, 132).

*Tilottama-Sambhava* depicts an event from the Hindu mythology where two Rakshasa brothers Sunda and Upasunda rise to such terrifying power that the overall strength of Heaven itself is put to test. To overcome this crisis, Brahma creates, out of all the
objects of beauty, Tilottama, the most beautiful lady. She is then sent to enchant both the brothers, who each cherish a desire to possess Tilottama. This leads to a fight between the two brothers leading to the death of both and thus resulting in peace once again on earth. Having achieved this, Tilottama is transformed into a star in the skies. This epic, thus, was the first step towards a rejuvenation of the native theme, of Indian literature. In Madhusudan's own words, "... I have actually done something that ought to give our national poetry a good lift" (Rachanabali 30).

Having successfully broken certain age-old rules of Bengali literature, having revolutionized the verse and rhyme of Bengali poetry, Madhusudan went a step further by giving to Bengal and to India the Meghnadbadh-Kavya in 1861. With this, the poet reached his pinnacle of success. His endless capacity in seeing the apparently invisible aspects, his success in bringing the whole society share his disagreement with certain accepted norms of our scriptures, our religion, our epics, his constantly iconoclastic view of life with its ups and downs was brought to fruition in this epic.

Though this study concentrates on the poet's contribution to Indian poetry in English, in this one instance, there is a digression to concentrate more in this particular Bengali epic composed by Madhusudan rather than on his English verse for obvious reasons. This epic represents the upheavals in the society of nineteenth-century Bengal and the ambivalent attitudes of the
people; it is an image of the poet himself with all his crises and his manner of dealing with them. This one epic could form the mouthpiece of the decisive nineteenth-century period.

The poem is a new interpretation of a mythological theme. The striking difference in the ideology of the poet bears fruit in the change in manner with which the theme of the killing of Meghnad is dealt with. The difference denotes the change that occurred to the poets of the period, a change brought about by colonialism, the rebounding of colonialism as seen in Madhusudan which made him return to India, to Bengal and to his native language.

What does the Meghnadbadh-Kavya represent? It is the ultimate victory of a poet, of his success in shattering certain basic age-old ideals nurtured by our society about our scriptures, our religion, our deities. It is a glimpse into the governing principle of a period which offers the possibility of the positive in the negative, the divine in the demoniac nature of things. It is a reflection of the ambivalence of the era. Madhusudan, in this venture, has been declared "the first Bengali poet who encourageously set aside prevalent limitations and injunctions, thus instilling courage in the minds of the Bengali writers of the future" (N.S.Bose, 284).

In a word, Meghnadbadh-Kavya portrays the trail of events leading to the death of Meghnad, the most valorous son of
Ravana. The set notions which the Hindu or rather the entire Indian society holds about Ramayana, compartmentalising the clan of Ayodhya in the good, positive, merited category and the clan of Lanka in the bad, negative, unmerited category come crumbling down. Just as the set notions of the society of nineteenth-century Bengal in its socio-cultural, political and religious aspects were turned topsy-turvy by the new wave of learning, so also Madhusudan appears to speak to the minds of that society of Bengal, during that particular period. He speaks through his epic and the impact, in one word, is phenomenal. Firstly, he decided to communicate through a new form in Bengali poetry -- the epic. He decided to cull an event from the most oft-read, and hence very familiar epic, the Ramayana. He chose for his subject, not the constantly chosen Rama with the divine halo of goodness round his head but, surprisingly for all, Meghnad, who though minus the halo was the equally or even more, noble and brave son of Ravana, whose picture as the ten-headed demon king instantly comes to one's mind first. Madhusudan then guides his readers towards a fresh appraisal of our venerated epic. Consequently, while the usual, normal introduction of the epic would have been in the kingdom of Ayodhya, Madhusudan's readers directly reach Lanka, at king Ravana's court and the readers then witness the lofty king Ravana mourning the death of his son Birbahu.

From this moment, Madhusudan begins to alter the reader's complacent notions one by one. The "demon-king" is basically a human being, possessing the entire gamut of feelings of
love, pity, faith, trust, envy, anger, jealousy and hatred. The loss of a son is as lamentable to Ravana as it is for any other human being. When Ravana "compares his great city to a festive house in which the lights are one by one extinguished, the flowers faded and the merry sound of harp and flute hushed into silence," (Dae, 177) the "demon king" that precedes the picture of Ravana in our minds is brought to nought and Ravana comes to our level as a man, a human who thinks and feels as we do. With this single incident the poet questions the society's ideas, the peoples' judgement of right and wrong, good and evil. Reluctantly or otherwise, the invariable, undeterred, blackened image of the Lankans, of Ravana's family is replaced by a recognition of the spark of humanity within them, and an albeit grudging respect replaces the existing hatred for these characters.

From another equally important yardstick, the poem is a transparent image of the poet, Madhusudan himself. Having initially cast away his language Bengali, as of little worth and having sought recognition in English, the poet returned to Bengal to a rediscovery of his language. "I had no idea, my dear fellow that our mother-tongue, would place at my disposal such exhaustless materials. . . . The thoughts and images bring out words with themselves, - words that I never thought I knew" (Rachanabali 35).

Yet again, the poet had during his youth given up his religion of Hinduism for Christianity. But for all inspirational purposes, his heart constantly reached out towards Hinduism. The
farther he went away from it, the closer he was brought to its literature. "I must tell you, my dear fellow, that though, as a jolly Christian youth, I don't care a pin's head for Hinduism, I love the grand mythology of our ancestors. It is full of poetry. A fellow with an inventive head can manufacture the most beautiful things out of it" (*Rachanabali* 34). He himself advised that "when you sit down to read poetry, leave aside all religious bias" (*Rachanabali* 38).

Finally in the very characterisation of Ravana and his choice of Meghnad as the hero of his epic, one can very plainly visualize the poet's nature itself. His impulsive nature, his daring attitude, his passionate temperament, his abhorence towards set norms, his instinct to break rules, his constant desire to choose an untrodden path are encountered in the various dimensions of the epic. His very Grecian freedom caused him to "engraft the exquisite graces of the Greek mythology" in his epic (*Rachanabali* 34). He identified himself with Ravana. "I despise Ram and his rabble; but the idea of Ravana elevates and kindles my imagination; he was a great fellow" (*Rachanabali* 35).

Just as Ravana who was "too painfully conscious of the nature of his losing cause" (H.M.Dasgupta, 69) but despite it, defied it by overcoming his grief and going to the battle-field, Madhusudan too had gone after the "English" cause. In fact till the very end of his life, he was never totally reconciled to his lot. The mania to Europeanize lingered till the end. Not surprisingly, during his stay in Europe, he wrote to his friend, Iswar Chandra
Vidyasagar, "come here and you will soon forget that you spring from a degraded and subject race. Here you are the master of your masters!" (Rachanabali 23). . . . "I wish to leave my children behind . . . . and I want them to be thoroughly Europeanised" (Rachanabali 22).

Madhusudan aimed at bringing Rama down a few notches from his divine stature to that of a mortal man, a brother or a husband. He simultaneously raised Ravana and his family from the degraded level they rested within our imagination to a standard of humaneness. It is thus that the Ravana we come across in Meghnadbadh-Kavya possesses features of a loving father, bereaved by the loss of his sons one by one. "Just as one branch after another is lopped off by the woodman in the woods before the tree is finally felled by him, so, behold, oh, God, am I being gradually made to sink in the hands of the terrible foe!" (Western Influence 70-71). Meghnad, viewed so long as a deadly foe, is cast by Madhusudan in a friendly light that bestows on him the qualities of love, courage and faithfulness which he truly possessed but which were marred by our attitude so far.

The death of Meghnad, the unspeakable sorrow of his father who is at a loss for words to comfort the mother, who is in turn made to witness the young daughter-in-law mounting the funeral pyre would move the hardest heart. In a war where God and man conspire to put down a great hero, our sympathy naturally goes out to the weaker side and even his failings, if there be any,
call for pity rather than contempt, for the fall of such a towering figure is as tragic as the fall of the great empire awful in its magnificence and looking all the more colossal in its ruins (H.M. Dasgupta, 86).

Taking note of these different aspects of this epic with relevance to the historical period in which this materialized, the Meghnadbadh-Kavya seems to be a perfect foil for the timbre of the time. The poem's freeing itself from the traditions of literature was just the mirror image of the society itself, as witnessed in the student community, in the Young Bengal movement, breaking away from the chains of orthodoxy. The poet's identification with Ravana, his glorification of Meghnad was nothing short of the reply of society itself to the mediocrity as represented by Rama with his weak nature. To the poet, Rama represented the conventional society tied by his unmanly nature to the orthodox and conservatist principles. Meghnadbadh-Kavya is a reflection of the ideological crisis the society was experiencing at the time. The conflict in the poem strikes a parallel to the conflict in the society between conventional principles and modern thought, the tension resulting out of the desire to break free from the orthodox beliefs and practices and at the same time not wanting to completely sever the bond with tradition. Ravana and Meghnad, Chitrangada and Pramila with their vitality, their "elemental power" represent the new middle-class of the society that emerged strengthened by Western learning to look anew into their own tradition and rediscover and cherish their heritage and their roots.
Madhusudan succeeded in presenting an unexpected dimension of our good old epic, he contributed in making the society rethink its values, to reconsider its sense of the right from the wrong, with relevance to the changing times. A weeping Ravana, an ungenerous Lakshmana and an emasculated Rama are liable to be condemned not because they are cut loose from history, and are therefore calculated to hurt our religious susceptibilities, but only because they are unfit for great actions as demanded by our epic (H.M.Dasgupta, 77-78). Those who cling to the rules and forms that define an epic, those who frantically search for some flaw to enable them to find fault with Madhusudan may find that as far as the definition for an epic hero goes, his epic falls far below the mark of perfection. Similarly the poet's style of writing might appear to be a weak imitation of the West. But the content of the poem reflects the social struggle in the country. The poet's interpretation of the past, of the history and the mythology of the country signifies the revolution, the redefinition of the poet's relation to his heritage. It denotes the change in the poet's mental framework from the earlier derision for the society to a desire for the social upliftment of the society. Eventually, our ideals in religion remain unshaken as ever, our devotion for Rama continues, but our sense of the good and the bad, our ability to view the essence of goodness in things evil too is renewed. Essentially what matters is that the "power of the poet's national heredity is allowed to pass into his work". Therein lies the merit of the work, of the artist.
Madhusudan's poetry is a class by itself in the history of Bengali literature. His poetry represents the dialectic between the Bengali heritage and the Western lyrical form, between a class's sense of inferiority towards indigenous beliefs and superiority for the indigenous culture. His poetry was a reflection of the postcolonial dilemma as seen in the lines of *Meghnadbadh-Kavya*. His experiments in English poetry, followed by his discovery of the essence of true poetry in his own native state, language, theme and thought resulted in "a sort of tortured renaissance in India's poetry," (Awakening 284). His inability to fully merge with the Indian spirit persisted till the end of his life.