FOURTH CHAPTER
HIS FICTIONS

RATNAVATĪ

Ratnavatī, the maiden book of Meer Musarraf Hussain, was published in 1869. The author claimed it to be an original work based on a farcical story.

Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay in his Meer Musarraf Hussain (Sāhitya-Sādhak-Caritmālā) categorised (Vol. II) Ratnavatī as a novel. Sukumar Sen also accepted it as a novel. But Dr. Anisuzzaman did not take it as a novel, rather he placed it in the category of fairy tales or legend. We will take up the matter later for elaborate discussion.

The story:

Ratnavatī is a small book. It centers on a medieval theme emphasising a moral dictum. The book seeks to answer a basic question: between wealth and learning which one is greater?

Sukumar was the prince of the principality of Gujarat and Sumanta was the son of the minister. The debate over the question, between wealth and learning which one is greater? The prince stood for wealth, the minister’s son for learning. To prove their respective points, they took up extensive journey concerning different countries. The prince at last reached on the bank of a pond where a monkey was engaged in
deep meditation. The prince washed his hands and feet but in the process a drop of water fell on the body of the monkey. Instantly the monkey assumed the form of a human being bursting in rage. The prince was alarmed and he apologised profusely to the ascetic and with much endeavour ultimately pacified him. The holy man was endowed with supernatural power of mind-reading and he saw the purpose of the prince’s travels. He gave him a magic ring and told him that he would get from the ring whatever he wanted. But the holy man forbade him to go to the west. But the prince defied the instruction and proceeded towards west. At last he reached the Kingdom of Ratnapur where he learnt that Ratnavati, the princess of Ratnapur made a vow that the man who could fulfill all her desire continuously for a week would be entitled to marry her. The prince met all her demands for first five days with the aid of his magic ring. The bewildered princes engaged her maid to find out the secret of the prince’s success and came to know of the magical ring. On the sixth day, the princess sought the ring from the prince and the latter was compelled to part with the ring. As a result, on the seventh day, the prince failed to satisfy the desire of the princess and was imprisoned.

On the other hand, Sumanta, the son of the minister, at the end of his extensive journey, reached the bank of the same pond. He found the same holy man engaged in his meditation in the guise of a monkey. The latter was again enraged when a drop of water fell on his body but Sumanta pacified him with suitable apologetical words. Satisfied with his pleasant behaviour, Sumanta was granted a boon by the holy man. This boon empowered him to take any form whatever he desired. Of course, he was also forbidden to go towards west. The minister’s son was an intelligent youth and he noticed that water of one part of the pond could convert a monkey into a human being
and water of the other part could convert a man into a monkey. In two separate pots, he took water from both the part. He also ignored the advice of the saint and proceeded towards west to reach Ratnapur. While relaxing on the bank of palace pond, he saw some maids collecting water from the pond. He started conversation with them and gradually came to know of the vow of the princess. He also learnt that some unsuccessful princes were thrown to prison and one of them was named Sukumar. Sumanta could well imagine the fate of his beloved friend and to get him out of trouble, managed to mix some water from one of the pots with the water to be taken to the palace. Under the magical spell of this mixed water, the king, the queen and the princess assumed the form of monkey when they finished their bath. Sumanta, in the guise of an astrologer, met the king and told him that this misfortune fell upon them because of sins committed by the princess. However, he assured that next day a sannyasi would come to retrieve them from this misfortune. Next day, Sumanta, in the guise of a Sannyasi met them and using the water of another pot brought them back to their human form. The king in his gratitude, married the princess with the prince and daughter of his minister with Sumanta. Also both the friends were given rich presents and gifts. The prince, when came to know of Sumanta’s wisdom in dealing with the problem, agreed that learning is greater than material wealth.

Characters:

The story resembles fairy tale with a moral. The regal characters mentioned in the text are imaginary, none of them are from history:
For this reason, all characters are devoid of any conflict. There are two categories of characters in the tale. On the one hand there are ordinary characters of flesh and blood those are totally controlled by forces of Nature. On the other hand, there is the holy man on the bank of pond who may be considered as a man endowed with supernatural power. In medieval age, such characters were visualised to regulate the structure of the story. It is to be remembered that medieval authors were not acquainted with modern aspects of the science of psychology and hence they did not have the scope to use conflicts and contradictions of human mind for adding novelty or regulating the course of the story. Thus such characters had some relevance in the context of the literary convention of that age.

In this book, only in two characters we may find some semblance of tension in the literary sense. One is Sumanta, the minister’s son, another is king Ratnadhvaj. There is no novelty in the depiction of tension in the mind of Sumanta; he took on the journey to prove a point but his sincere love for his friend brought him to the centre stage of the story. Of course it is preferable to regard his services as a pleasant example of one’s love for his friend.

Comparatively, conflict depicted in the character of King Ratnadhvaj is more realistic. He was pressed between two opposite kinds of attitudes. On the one hand, he could not control his only daughter who was involved in a cruel game devoid of rhyme, reason and humanity. His passionate love for daughter desisted him from restraining her knowing full well that her desire, aspiration and activities were
unreasonable, unreal and inhuman. On the other hand, he was quite sympathetic towards the princes who fell prey to her daughter's design. That is why he at first desisted Sukumar from meeting his daughter. Moreover, his mental reaction at the sight of the prince is also to be noted. The queen is the weakest character of the tale. Normally, a mother plays an important role in a tale of this kind. The point will be clear if we recall the depiction of the character of Vidyā's mother by Bharatchandra in *Vidyāsundara*. Her passionate reaction at the sight of Sundar and agony from which she suffered because of Vida's fate are depicted by Bhaitchandra with a majestic skill. In *Ratnavati*, the mother (the queen) did not have a role to play. Even when she was transformed into a monkey as a result of her bid to get hold of her daughter by jumping into the pond does not create an impression because the episode is narrated in a casual fashion.

Language:

*Ratnavati* is appreciated mainly for its linguistic merit. We could trace three reviews of the book published in journals. The three journals are, *Calcutta Review*, *Dhaka Prakāś* and *Rahasya Sandarbha*. It is mentioned that 'his style is simple, expressive and pure'. In *Rahasya Sandarbha*, edited by Rajendralal Mitra, references are made to the correct spelling, grammatical accuracy, style of writing and other qualities of the book and it was accepted with pleasant surprise that 'there is not a single instance where Sanskrit words are used incorrectly'. That the book stands quite apart from the ordinary run of so called 'Muslim Bengali' literature (like 'Iblisnama'), the review stresses on the high quality of language by Müssarraf Hussain. *Rahasya Sandarbha* does not hesitate to opine that the book could easily pass on as one written by a scholar of Sanskrit College and had there be the mention
of the author's name in front page, the reviewer would have taken it to be a book written by an educated Bengali Hindu. Whereas *Rahasya Sandarbha* compared the literary quality of the book with any other book written by qualified Hindu writer, the *Calcutta Review* thought the book was written by a Hindu author under a Muslim pseudonym.9

It is not a mean achievement to be praised that way for one's first publication. Not only contemporary critics, but also later-day critics also praised the language of the book.

Again,

Judged by modern standard, the language of the book may be considered weak, but in the light of the environment of the concerned period the merit of the book cannot be denied.

Though in the title page, the book was mentioned as a farcical novel, *Ratnavati* cannot be put under novel category whatever parameter one uses.
The tale has been developed centering on Ratnavati, but it is devoid of conflict of any kind—an essential pre-condition for a novel.

The book does not try to analyse the mental horizon of the hero and the heroine. The story proceeds in a straight line as in folk tales, the author failed to create any conflict of characters in the episode. The environment of the tale also is conditioned by the author's limitation of experience. While describing a distant land like Gujarat he harped on his basic knowledge of Bengali environment. The royal court, the palace garden, the pond, the conversation of maids and the marriage scene of the prince and princess all these are depicted after the model of Bengal. The picture thus emerges has similarity with the narrative poems of medieval Bengali literature. Any work of the medieval period, whether written by a Hindu or a Muslim, contains similar descriptions and the symptoms may be taken as an influence of medieval literature on the later works. One can find a number of such tales in the Muslim literature written in mixed language of that period. Anyone can discern that in those tales also there is no conflict or tension. Almost all such tales reach an inevitable end in an easygoing way and such narration runs quite contrary to the art of novel writing as practiced in the West. In the present case the entire theme has been developed around supernatural contents. With the touch of water, monkey transforms into human being and vice versa. The wish fulfillment through a magic ring, transformation of the holy man at his will—all these are supernatural occurrences having no foundation in reality and absurd to the extreme. The fact is that such tales cannot be disentangled without supernaturalism of the kind mentioned. Though medieval Bengali literature is full of such allusions, they are more visible in the Muslim literature of mixed language.
Actually, besides a story of some interest, nothing else is traceable in this book. Story telling in a narrative form was quite popular at that period, *Ratna*vāti can easily by categorised in this type of writing.


desho rātaৃবৃত্তাদি বিশেষ চালুক্য কিছু প্রকাশ পায় নাই। 13

Again,

১৮৬৯ সালে এই মুসলিম রাজধানী উপাখ্যাত রচনায় উপাখ্যাত রচনা। 14

The author mentioned the story as an imaginative one:

তবে মনে হয় লেখকের প্রচলিত কোন লোককাহিনী থেকে এর উপাদান সঙ্গে করেছেন। 15

There is reason to believe that the author was somehow influenced by some varieties of folktales of Bengal. There is a common folk motif in Bengal where the prince undertakes adventurous journey in search of a suitable princess and at the end he is blessed with a princess along with half of a kingdom:

বাল্যকালের গল্পের অন্যান্য জর্জর অনুরাগ ও তৃষ্ণা জেনে তাহার প্রতিকূল সহকারী প্রতিকূলে সহিরূপ ঘটে। 16

Again,

এই রোমাঞ্চিক রাজধানী ধরনের আখ্যায়নটি সক্ষর ও ফারসি কাহিনীগুলো অনুপ্রাপ্ত, তবে বোধহয় সক্ষর 
গল্প আখ্যায়নের চেয়ে অধিকতর সম্পর্কিত। 17

The theme resembles a traditional fairy tale. In earlier writings also we find instances where the princess imposes some pre-conditions for her marriage. In *Vidyāsundara* and Muslim tale *Hālemtār* we find imposition of such pre-conditions. Of course in none of these two, the conditions were as gross as *Ratna*vāti. In
Vidyāsundara of Bharatchandra, Vidya imposed the condition that she was to be defeated in a contest of learning. She was proud of her academic attainments and hence she was keen to demonstrate it. The heroine in Ḥātemtāī was eager to know right answers to her seven questions, which was a bid on her part to accomplish herself. On the other, Ratnavatī’s demand on the first day was twenty thousand of gold coins. On the second day she sought twenty thousand silver coins. Next she desired a pearl from elephant’s head (Gajamukta). Ultimately when she came to know of the magical ring that had fulfilled her all demands, she wanted the ring for herself. These desires of Ratnavatī are devoid of any direction and essentially whimsical. Musarraf Hussain could not display the creative imagination of the kind shown by his predecessors.

Though the theme of Ratnavatī was essentially adapted from fairy tales, it was narrated in a prose of modern style. Before Musarraf, no other Muslim writer attempted to write a complete story in a prose of this standard.

**BISADSINDHU**

Bisādsindhu is the most popular work of Meer Musarraf Hussain. There may be some difference of opinion as to the best literary work of the author, but that his fame sprang mostly from Bisādsindhu is a fact contested by none. Of course there are about 42 works of different sizes have been authorised by Meer Musarraf, but readers of Bengali literature primarily know him as the author of Bisādsindhu. For a prolonged period, it was the only book that kept his name alive amongst the Bengali
readers. In fact, he was known after *Bisādsindhu* and *Bisādsindhu* was known after him. Amongst the Muslim readers of Bengal, two books surpass all others in popularity; one is *Ānawārā*, another *Bisādsindhu*. Meer Musarraf is made immortal as an author because of *Bisādsindhu*.

Meer Musarraf was quite matured in age when he wrote *Bisādsindhu*. He started writing the book when he was thirty-six, and completed it when he was forty-two. A precious period of his life secured for him a precious harvest that is *Bisādsindhu*. The book is divided in three segments, and was published in three installments. Respective date of publication is 1885 (Maharamparba), 1887 (Uddhārparba) and 1891 (Ezidbadhparba). In ‘Maharamparba’ there are 27 chapters including introduction, in ‘Uddhārparba’ 30 chapters and in ‘Ezidbadhparba’ 5 chapters. The author designated Chapters as ‘Pravāha’. In 1891, a combined volume was published incorporating all three segments. He spent long seven years for writing the book, which differs significantly in style and structure from his earlier works. Before that Meer Musarraf had written one novel, two dramas, one farce, and one small narrative poem. Though some of these writings were appreciated by some contemporary learned critics, there is no record to show that his works were known to or appreciated by greater public. The publication of *Bisādsindhu* thus struck a difference— not only the book was warmly hailed by all segments of the society, but overnight it made him a public figure drawing immense public interest.

The first edition of the book was dedicated to Karimunnesa Khatun, the lady zamindar of Delduar. In between first and eight edition, the author effected a number of changes and expansion of the text.
In the first volume (Maharamparba), the author mentioned that in translating from original text he was much helped by Hafez Khalilur Rahman of Pairaband, Rangpur. But in later editions we do not find mention of his name.

The Story:

Ezid, the only son of Mabia, the ruler of Damascus, was attracted towards a married woman named Joynab. By turn of circumstances, Joynab was divorced and was subsequently married to Hassan, the eldest grandson of Hazarat Muhammad through his daughter. Ezid became furious when came to know of the second marriage of Joynab and resorted to heinous conspiracy to kill her. After the death of Mabia, Ezid occupied the throne of Damascus and proclaimed himself to be the Khalipha of Arabia. On the other hand, the Arab elders of Medina nominated Hasan to the Khilafat and there was a major encounter between the army of Hasan and that of Ezid in which the latter was defeated. But Ezid did not give up. He continued his efforts to destroy Hasan.

On the other hand, an inevitable quarrel cropped up between Joynab and Zayeda, first wife of Hasan. Taking advantage of this situation, Ezid deployed a woman of Medina named Maymuna to kill Hasan. Incited by that woman, Zayeda poisoned and killed her husband Hasan. Zayeda acted on the false belief that she would be rewarded by Ezid but when she approached Ezid for promised reward, Ezid punished her with capital punishment. In the mean time, the Arab leaders nominated Hussain, the younger brother of Hasan, to be the Khalipha. Ezid again initiated plots to kill Hussain. The latter was staying at the sacred burial ground of Hazarat Muhammad and Ezid found it impossible to kill Hussain at that coveted site. Marwan, the minister of Ezid, drew a plan to bring out Hussain from his sacred shelter. He fraudulently convinced Hussain that Ezid would soon attack the burial...
ground and it would be wise for Hussain to opt for a safer place. By this time, the ruler of Kufa invited him and he proceeds towards Kufa. But he along with his men lost track in the desert and they started to proceed towards Karbala. It was the month of Moharam and according to Arabic tradition any kind of armed encounter was forbidden in this month. But Ezid’s army defied that injunction and attacked Hussain and his entourage. Hussain and his companies were almost unarmed, but they fought in self-defence valiantly, but in vain. Simmer, an agent of Ezid, killed Hussain and marched towards Damascus displaying Hussain’s head as a trophy.

‘Moharam parba’ of the novel ends with the murder of Hussain. The second part of the novel (Uddharparba) deals with the story of the escape of other members of Hussain family and how Hanifa succeeded in retaliating the inhuman murder of Hussain. Ultimately Hanifa attacked Damascus and Ezid had to flee to save his life.

In the third part (Ezidbadhparba), it has been shown that when Hanifa attacked Damascus, Ezid took shelter in an underground shelter. In the mean time, through an oracle, Hanifa came to know that Ezid could not be killed by her. Also she, for her crime of killing too many innocent people, had to suffer a life of a prisoner between the two hills till her death. On the other hand, Ezid was condemned for eternity to the underground hole surrounded by flames on all sides.

Character:

The popularity of Bişādsindhu amongst common readers may be attributed to a number of reasons, but the specific artistic merit of Meer Musarraf lies elsewhere.
Bisadindhu is a novel in which human characters are of supreme importance. These characters can broadly be classified in two categories. In one side, there are descendants of Hazrat Muhammad, on the other, the rest. The special features of Hazrat Muhammad's descendents are—they were all honest and noble. They believe in destiny and supreme God without any qualm or grain of doubt. These characters are unilateral and without any inner contradiction. On the other side, we find characters like Sarwan, Abdullah Zeyad, Simar and others—they are heartless, ugly and heinous. These characters are totally immoral and almost totally devoid of any humane qualities. There is only one character amongst them, on whom all human feeling and emotions have bestowed; it is the character of Ezid. To a moralist, the role played by Ezid may be condemned and assailed, but from a literary point of view, there is no other character in the book that is livelier, full of human passion and emotion. Ezid is a sinner, heretic and sensual, but still:

For this reason, reader is completely carried away by the final fate of this character. The author took much care for construction of this character. This preference of the author for humane consideration backed by artistic skill may have caused some damage to the religious pretension of the novel, but it enhanced considerably the literary quality of the novel. Ezid is the character that contributes most to the aesthetic credence of the novel. The novel begins with the agonies of Ezid and ends with his tragic end.
As Havana is the hero of *Meghanādbadh Kābya*, so Ezid is the hero of *Bīṣādsindhu*— not Hussain. The story evolves around the character of Ezid. It can be said that *Bīṣādsindhu* is planned to depict the life of Ezid, all efforts of the author are directed to that end— the role of Hussain here is only secondary. Hussain’s role in the narrative comes to an end in ‘Maharamparba’, i.e. the first segment of the book. After that the entire course of the story with multiple ups and downs centers on the greed and senility, whims and passions, success and failure of Ezid. As a general, Ezid is capable and resourceful, but he does have the self-restraint to rise above the temptation of physical passion and pleasure. In the eye of the commoner, he is a sinner, but the essence of this sin is exceptional.

Ezid’s indomitable lust for female beauty occupies a central position in the story. The author in his artistic imagination created a hero who is fully of manly qualities, emotionally surcharged but subjected to sensuality. Not the material desert of history, but the love stricken dried up heart of Ezid has been converted into Karbala in the novel. The uncontrollable waves of pathos are generated from sea-like vast expanse of Ezid’s heart. His burnt heart— dejected, depressed and mortified bring about a tragically and epic like dimension in the book.

His passion for sensual beauty is one of the most important ingredients of *Bīṣādsindhu*— his deceit, heartlessness and aggressive war-mongering-everything originate from this passion. In the eyes of Musarraf same passionate attraction for physical beauty can be discerned— a beauty which is capable of destroying hundreds of innocent lives including the life of Ezid. In the ‘Uddhārparba’, we can discover the understanding of life and sense of beauty with which Meer Musarraf depicted the character of Ezid. Joynab was brought captive in his camp and she again refused Ezid. A shocked Ezid thought:
Here Ezid is expressing his love as a genuine lover, but here he is free from any licentiousness. In his utterances, there are agonies and accusation, but no cowardice. At times, he is ruthless but never heinous. He is a lover and attached to and attracted by physical beauty. He is a human being and he can take both happiness and sorrow in the same casual spirit. Not only that, Ezid is an efficient administrator and hence he is determined to provide justice to all his subjects. He always takes advice from his officials and in the battlefield, he is totally fearless. It was almost impossible for any other Muslim author of earlier generation to create a character with such humane attributes. Here lies his difference with the contemporary Muslim writers of ‘Puthi’ and ‘Kicchās’. Ezid with his vices and virtues is an unparallel character in Bengali literature.

There are some similarities between visualisation of the character of Ezid and that of Ravana of Meghnād Badh Kābya. Both the characters are full of vigor and
extremely adventurous. The destiny is firmly in command of their inevitable destiny.

In this regard, comments of a critic may be relevant:

Even after accepting the similarities between these two characters, it should be mentioned that Musarraf Hussain was not in a position to endow on Ezid all magnificent virtues of a hero as Madhusudan did in case of Ravana. In the last sequence of *Bīṣadsindhu*, Ezid is shown as fleeing to save his life, which manifests cowardice. This flight does not conform to the earlier depictions of Ezid’s character. The brave hero of earlier scenes has been reduced to ignominy in the fourth section of this chapter. So the glory which is often available even in defeat in a character of a tragedy is not to be found here. It needs to be mentioned that in depicting the character of Ravana, Madhusudan made a perfect synthesis of his personal fascination and artistic creativity. This perfection was somewhat missing in the depiction of Ezid; Musarraf was a bit confused in effecting a perfect blending between his feeling and artistic expression. Musarraf has a personal sense of sorrow for Hussain but as an artist he was sympathetic toward Ezid.

Musarraf depicted two other characters with humane attachment. One is Haman, another is Jayeda. Besides sensual love, another important ingredient of this novel is polygamy (‘sapatnivad’). We find the germ of artistic use of polygamous situation in *Basantakumarī*. It reached its perfection in the character of Jayeda. The
character actually emerged out of the domestic experience of the author himself. Through this character the author expressed his distaste for polygamy. Jayeda is the second wife of Hasan, first being Hasney Banu and the third, Jaynab. Musarrat also had two wives, Azizunnesa and Bibi Kulsum. Bitter quarrel between his two wives made his life horrible. The author made fullest use of his experience drawn from his own life while creating the character of Jayeda. He knew from his own experience that one heart cannot accommodate two beloved. His clear feeling was.

Azizunnesa was not ready to share her husband with Kulsum. Hence:

The plot hatched for killing Kulsum either by drowning or poisoning did not materialise. It can be assumed that this hard experience played a crucial role in exposition of the mystery of Joynab’s character. This experience was again used in depicting the private domain of Jayeda. Maimuna saw seeds of jealousy in the mind of Jayeda, gradually these seeds fructify. However, though Jayeda responded favourably at first to the suggestion of Maimuna, she hesitated a lot in consenting to the murder of Hasan. However, under the pressure of circumstances she ultimately consented. After two successive failure when success came at third attempt, she told weeping Joynab:

তোকে কাজ করিয়াছি। যদি স্বামীকে তালবাসিয়া থাকিসে, তবে আজ কেন,—চিরকালই

কাব্যমিতি! চন্দ্র, পূর্ণ, তারা, দিবা, নিশি সকলই তোর কায়া পূরিয়ে। তাহা হইলেই কি তোর সূর্য শেখ হই-
Here, her dejection resulting out of her husband’s indifference and bitter jealousy towards Joynab manifest normal human attitude. Like Azizunnessa, Jayeda was also not ready to share her husband. As long as she was alive, her husband could never be shared. So, in a peculiar reaction, Jayeda opted for murdering her husband. She was deprived from love and affection of her husband and her anger fell on Joynab who was roof of her misfortune. But this anger on youthful Joynab, by a wish of psychological paranoid, was resulted in hatching a conspiracy to kill Hasan. Musarraf in skillful hand drew the movements of Jayeda on the eve of execution of her fatal decision,

She succeeded in execution of her plot and thought of leaving the house forever. But she could not, because she failed to think of a place where she could hide. Here her position may be compared with that of Lady Macbeth:
Here is the smell of blood:
All the perfume of Arabia
Will not sweeten this little hand.  

(Macbeth, Act V, Sr. I)

Jayeda’s character represents both the sin and the sinner. The author, so also Jayeda, drew Hasan sympathetically. So, in spite of her deplorable crime, some amount of our sympathy goes to her as well. The unique depiction of beauty & beast by the author actually force us to think that way. We are simply carried away by him. Her tragic fate thus moved us. So lively, so real character of flesh and blood is rarely found in any literature.

Another character with human appeal is Haman. Though Haman was a court member of Ezid, he was not cunning and selfish like his other colleagues. That is why often he openly differed with Ezid and had to suffer imprisonment for that. His soliloquy in the prison brings out his patriotism

Haman’s perception of difference between the ruler and the ruled was crystal clear. He knows that:

That a modern mind is working thoroughly behind these utterances is evident.

That is why though tortured by Ezid, he felt worry for Ezid when he learnt the fate of Ezid:

(�জিবাবপুর্বে, প্রথম প্রবাহ)
This character actually manifests the advanced thinking and patriotism of Musarraf.

Now we will take up other characters. Marawan was the right hand of Ezid even when Mabia was alive. From the very beginning we have the glimpse of diplomatic shrewdness of Marawan. Marawan was the man who through his cunning and machination organized the divorce of Jabbar and Joynab. He through out helped Ezid in his bid to win over Joynab. It also goes to his credit that he searched out Maimuna to punish Hasan. Though a ruthless scoundrel, at times there are glimpses of his virtues noticeable on some occasions. After the death of Hasan, the bereaved members of his family were treated with requisite politeness by him. Also he had some kind of astute commonsense— he resisted Ezid a number of times from his bid to kill Joynal Abedin. There are occasions when Marawan resented some of Ezid’s activities, but his allegiance to Ezid was beyond all doubts. At the end, he sacrificed his life for saving the honour of his master. He was killed by Hanifa though he was instrumental in arranging peace between Hanifa and Hasan. Before death, Marawan repented for his misdeeds.

Maimuna is an evil female character. She was a sheer opportunist and the character was created to serve a particular purpose of the story. When that was achieved, the character also vanished in the blue. These kinds of characters are common in medieval Bengali literature and the Durbala of Chandimangala Kābya is the typical example of such characters. She could fully realise the magnitude of her sin shortly before her death.

Another similar character is Simmer. No doubt he was a fearless warrior, but at the same time, he was extremely greedy. Lust for money was the basic guiding
force of his life, and for acquiring wealth he could abandon principle, ideal and everything. For money, he not only killed Hussain but also took the life of Azhar. Hanifa killed him, but even before death, he did not have any repentance. The author did not or could not venture to show gradual development of this character and similar other characters.

The characters representing progenies of Hazrat Muhammad were depicted as faultless, honest and religious. They were widely respected by common people. Both Hasan and Hussain were direct descendants of Hazarat Muhammad, grandsons by his daughter. Hence they had a special seat of honour in Muslim mind. Hasan actually pardoned Jayeda before his death and also asked Hussain to forgive her. This reflects the broadness and greatness of his character. Hussain was the worthy son of Hazrat Ali, a fearless warrior. He succeeded first time to expel the army of Ezid from Medina. He fought a courageous fight in the battleground of Karbala though he believed firmly in inevitable destiny regulated by the supreme God. He faced death boldly without hesitation because he knew it to be his ordained destiny. Like Hussain, he also forgave Simmer which spoke of his greatness and openness of character.

Muhammad Hanifa was also a son of Hazrat Ali and a courageous man. He was determined to take revenge of the death of Hussain. Both Ezid and Marawan were alarmed at his stance but he was also a puppet in the hand of destiny. It was his sheer bad luck that he could not kill Ezid though he got him where he wanted. His speciality lies in the fact that where all his associates were reluctant to continue the fight, he, in spite of the premonition of an adverse outcome, he did not give. Even when he heard the oracle that Ezid could be killed, he continued with his attack to avenge for the loss of his brother. Though conditioned by oracular utterances, there was a scope for further development of Hanifa’s character. In Greek tragedies, human
virtues were best manifested when character stood firmly to fight the destiny. However, Musarraf, perhaps due to his attachment to fatalism, did not develop Hanifa in that fashion.

Generally speaking the author could not display much literary ability in developing these characters, rather his failure can be traced without much effort. The characters those represented morality and religiousness remains listless in his novel, in them one cannot discern the vibration of human feelings and emotions. They were perhaps perfectly accomplished from religious and idealistic perspective, but in a novel we demand from an ideal character vitality of a living being and if that vitality is absent, the characterisation becomes artificial. These characters of Bisādsindhu made enough movements and uttered enough noble sentences, but could not present a real life human character with virtues and vices.

In fine we will mention the character of Joynab who actually occupied the centre stage of the novel— all actions and events actually rotated in the novel keeping Joynab in the focal point. Basic reason for the conflict between Ezid and Hasan Hussain was Joynab. She was divorced by her first husband and then married to Hasan and thenceforth she remained absolutely faithful to Hasan. By a stroke of misfortune she became a captive by Ezid after Hasan’s death, here her fate may be compared with the fate of Sita as depicted by Madhusudan Datta in his Meghnādbadh kāhyā. It is more or less paradoxical that like Sita of Meghnādbadh, Joynab also remained behind the curtain in the novel— but fact remains she was the most significant character of the story— all bloodshed, all conspiracy that shaped the fate of so many people— all happened because of Joynab— but she was kept behind the limelight most of the time. The author laboured hard to depict Ezid, but did not do justice while creating Joynab. It can be said that often Musarraf Hussain was carried
away by his emotion and abandoned his objectivity, so important for a creative artist, in the process. His unrestricted utterances of wild feelings often caused harm to the aesthetic quality of his novel. Hence in some cases, as a creator of characters his limitations became evident.

It can be said if he could restrain his emotional outbursts he would have been able to create some more credible characters like Jayeda and Ezid.

Language:

*Bisādsindhu* was one of the most popular novels of the contemporary period. This popularity was earned not by its contents alone. Spectacular inspiring capacity, magnificently musical quality and effortless clarity of its language have an unusual attraction to both its readers and listeners. Skillful use of language by Musarraf Hussain even before publication of this novel had drew attention of learned readers— in *Bisādsindhu* this skill reached its point of culmination and readers were struck afresh by its magical spell. In fact, from the historical as well as aesthetic point of view, the greatest asset of *Bisādsindhu* is its language.

*Bisādsindhu* is written in chaste (Sadhu) language and all its verb-forms are in chaste format. Also noteworthy is his skill in using Sanskrit or ‘Tatsama’ words. For some reasons, he also used some ‘ethnic’ words. He was somewhat apologetic for this kind of usage and actually he asked for reader’s forgiveness for infusing ethnic words in the text. We think he had no reason to be apologetic for rightful use of such word. For realistic depiction of Muslim life, he had to use some Arabic and Persian words. But numbers of such words are negligible. There are about 1,27,000 words in *Bisādsindhu* and number of ethnic words among them are about 200 (excluding
repetition). Thus comparatively the instances are insignificant. Moreover, even while depicting even Muslim life, he tried his best to avoid Arabic or Persia words deliberately and used Bengali or Sanskrit instead. For example, often in place of ‘Allah’ he used ‘Iswar’.

While making an appraisal of the language of *Bisādsindhu*, we take a look into the contemporary background of Bengali prose. Modern Bengali prose by this time had already travelled a course of hundred years to reach a stage of formidable excellence.. Iswarchandra Vidyasagar was still alive as the grand old man of the Bengali prose. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay was shining bright in the middle of the galaxy of other prose writers. Most of his major works had already been published. This phase of Bengali prose was totally dominated by the majestic presence of Bankimchandra— his prose-style was regarded as the model to be followed by all others. It is to be noted that Musarraf started as a prose writer in the age dominated by Bankim and he reached the zenith of his success in the same age. Naturally, his prose was enlivened by style and structure followed by Bankim. In 1882, just three years before the publication of Musarraf’s first volume of *Bisādsindhu* (Maharamparba), Bankim’s *Rājsingha* was published. *Durgeshnandinī* was the prelude (1865) of Bankim’s prose, and *Rājsingha* was the culmination. The restraint, speed and flow of the language of *Rājsingha* were not there in *Bisādsindhu*. But still the prose of Musarraf was obviously influenced by Bankim to a considerable extent. The credit of Musarraf lies in the fact that though influenced by Bankim, Musarraf could develop a style of his own which was quite distinctive. In this respect, it is relevant to quote Abdul Odud’s observation:

मधुबन ओ बिहिएर युगे गीर बिशंकर भोसलेर जाय। तांगेवले सदेव तां तां बोहाबोह खड़े दिनित नाना

दिक दिये ता बिचार करे देखा देषवे पारे। तां बांकेर गते बिकिमबंडेर अवैधीय अविन्य किंतु बेली
Rabindranath observed about the prose of *Rajsingha*:

Speedy development of sequences has endowed *Rajsingha* with a significant beauty, the same can be said about *Bisādsindhu* as well. The prose writing can also have a sparkling continuity have been immensely manifested in *Bisādsindhu*. His prose has a rhythm and this rhythm works throughout his writing to give it a poetic flavour. *Bisādsindhu* is full of such instances.

One of the special beauty of *Bisādsindhu’s* prose is its musical quality, the motion of words proceed in harmony like a musical composition of a master artist. As already told this musical rhythm endows the prose of the book with a poetic flavour:

The ingrained melody of *Bisādsindhu’s* prose owe much to the judicious use punctuation. The author knew where and how to break a sentence and to what
proportion. This skill makes the prose of the novel so graceful and enjoyable. Throughout the prose of the novel such examples are available. We take this one from ‘Moharam parba’:


Another praiseworthy feature of this prose is proper blending of imagination and suitable words. Rare beauty and clarity is the outcome of this blending and at the same time we find formation of a literary structure that can be compared with making of a sculpture. For example,


At times, the effortless flow of the language is manifested through dramatic soliloquy. As given below:


While weaving the narrative theme of the novel Musarraf has shown his genius in selection of right words in right place. The episodes of Bisādsindhu are
painful and full of pathos. Indigenous Bengali vocabulary is not enough for expressing those heart breaking and fast moving course of happenings. So, as a true prose artist, Musarraf relied more on chaste (Sadhu) vocabulary based on Sanskrit. In this respect he may be considered as a successor of Vidyasagar and Bankimchandra.

Following passage shows the way Musarraf used Sanskrit (Tatsama) words in his text:

In construction of sentences also Musarraf showed his skill in producing varieties in conformity with situations. He used short sentences when there was necessity to create speed. He also showed remarkable ability in using interrogative sentences for creating special effect:

While weaving sentence, it can be discerned that sentences are set in a pattern
from shorter to longer to manifest gradual development of thought process or
depicting lingering feeling. For example:

अंशा मिट्टियार नही। मानुषें के अंशे शुरू ही भार नही। घटनाओं सकुंभानी ही होते शेष पर्यावरण अनेकों
मने अनेक प्रकारे के अंशार साधर है। अंशार कूच्छा मात्र भार, अनेकप शेष अंशार तुटिया बैठता।

(एजिनदरपर्व, चर्चुर्व प्रवाह)

To make the prose more suggestive, weighty and serious he used conjoint as
well as condensed words. Also there were ample instances of suitable use of
alliteration. In such usage, he infused enchanting musical quality:

কামেরের শোকায় আজ সত্রশালিতে পরিপূর্ণ হওয়া। (মহ্রমপর্ব, পদবিশে প্রবাহ)

বে দিন রমণী-মুখচত্রিসার সামান্যা আবার ধরণীপতির মত খুরায়াহে। (এজিনদর পর্ব, পাকিম প্রবাহ)

Not only that, in Bisādsindhu Musarraf displayed his artistic ability in use of
simile, allegory, metaphor and imagery. Use of such aesthetic features actually an
adaptation from Sanskrit literature. But Musarraf shows originality in utilising them:

যেদিন এজিনের নয়া চকরের জয়নাকের মুখচত্রিসার পরিমলরূপ সৃষ্ট ধার করিয়াহে, সেই দিন
এজিন, জয়নাকের মননায় সমাধ্য করিয়া জয়নার-রূপ সাপের আত্মবিশ্বাস করিয়াছে।

(মহ্রমপর্ব চর্চুর্ব প্রবাহ)

প্রত্যক্ষের ব্যক্ত বজ্রায় সৃষ্ট প্রতার মহীম্বুর হইল। (মহ্রমপর্ব প্রক্তীয় প্রবাহ)

যদি জায়েদা সম্প্রতি সর্বোপরি সর্বোপরি না হইতেন, তবে কি আজ জায়েদা বিনোনা-কুলায়নের প্রতি নির্ভর
করিয়া সমস্ত সৃষ্ট সৌন্দর্য এক দিকে, আর অস্ত্রী প্রথম, প্রাগৃ- ভিক্ষা দিকে কুলাষা পরিমান করিতে বসিতেন?

(মহ্রমপর্ব প্রয়োগ প্রবাহ)

We have already said that the greatest asset of Bisādsindhu both from historical
and aesthetic point of view is its language. This linguistic distinction makes the novel
immortal. In this context, the comment of Abdul Odud is worth mentioning:
After the publication of the first volume (Moharam parba) of *Bisadsindhu* its language was condemned by general Muslim readers Musarraf was shocked by the unaesthetic attitude of his co-religionists and lamented:

Musarraf expressed his anguish over the blunt reaction of Bengali Muslims from the viewpoint of a conscious artist. In fact he showed tremendous courage by standing against this ignorance prevalent in his own community and thereby he proved how genuine was his devotion to the cause of Bengali literature.

However, though language was the major wealth of his work some shortcomings in this respect also deserves to be mentioned. The most salient defect of his prose was his lack of restraint. Here the precision and discipline of Bankim’s prose may be remembered. Musarraf’s prose lacks in this precision and restraint. High imagination is a quality for a romantic poet, the same quality in the case of Musarraf was both source of his strength and weakness. For this reckless imagination, his characterizations, in spite of spectacular variations, failed to bring about a totality of vision. Perhaps Musarraf was not quite aware of the special effect that could be created by showing some self-imposed discipline for restraining his reckless imagination. His artistic acumen was often subordinated to his emotion and hence, at
times, he added sentences after sentences, which actually overburdened the text with bulk of quantity without showing any consideration for artistic quality. Much effort has been wasted in collecting flowers no attempt was made to weave these flowers into a wreath. Besides ‘Maharamparba’, in subsequent two parts the tidiness and solidarity of the earlier position was not discernible. Thus all three parts of the book do not manifest same quality of structural and textual perfection.

We have already mentioned that Musarraf used simile, epigram, imagery etc. to add ornamental beauty to his text but in doing so he sometimes resorted to artificiality and superimposition thereby seriously jeopardising the artistic beauty of the text:

हताशने दाहन आशा, धरणी जलशोभन आशा, अर्धलोपत आशा, कबुर मर्म आशा, गाँवी तृणभण्ड आशा, धनी धनबृज आशा, प्रेमिक के प्रेम की आशा, समझौते राजाबिज्ञार आशाय योगन निृत्ति नाइ, हिंसापूर्ण पापहदरे दुराशार ओ तेजस्वी निृत्ति नाई—इति नाई। यति कामसिंहि, ततो दुराशार श्रीरुपि। (उद्धरणपर्क, एकविषे प्रबह)

Here as many as eight similes are used to stretch on a single word ‘Durāsha’ (hopelessness). In many other cases, over ornamentation actually has marred the very purpose of creating literary beauty. For example,

वार्षिकाबिंडी गर्भवती आशा तत्ताैन संतान प्रसव ना करे, तत्ताैन आशाजीवी लोक के प्रशंसित मानसाकाश इंद्रदेव उदय है ना। (महरसपर्क, घरोबिषे प्रबह)

It makes the imagery more complex though at times such similes helped developing a better understanding of the author’s attitude to life. But always such emotional outbursts distract a reader from the central theme of the novel.

No doubt there is a melodious quality in the narrative of Bīṣādsmdhu but this attribute could not reach perfection in some places. Lack of precision is one of his
major weaknesses and often he was apparently totally unaware of this limitation. At times, continuous flow of unrestraint cumbersome narrative exercises affected the rhythm of his prose adversely. It is often said about Nazurul that spontaneity is his fort as well his foe; the same can be said about Musarraf. Of course, in spite of all these defects and limitation, Bisãdsindhu is the magnum opus of Musarraf Hussain and its language is its major asset. His literary genius was best demonstrated in the vibrating waves of his narrative style.

All said and done, the success of Bisãdsindhu stands on four pillars, first, its language, secondly, its characterizations, thirdly, patriotism of the author and fourthly the advanced thinking of the author. In addition to that rich imagination is another distinctive feature of his novel. The author himself acknowledged this imagination that enriched the novel with a new contour:

কবিকল্পনার সীমামুক্ত যাইতে হঠাৎ কোন কারণে বাধা পড়লে মনে ভালো কোণের কারণ হয়। সমাজের এমনি কঠিন বাধায়, এমনি দূর্বল শাসন যে কোনো কৃত্তিমায় আজ মনোমর্দি হার বাধিয়া পাঠক পাঠকাগণের পরিবর্ত গলায় দোলাইতে পারিলাম না। শাসনের কারণে নানানিক লক্ষ্য রাখিতে ইচ্ছে হইতেছে।

(উদ্ভাবনপথ, ডুবুর্ধ প্রবাহ)

We do not know how much satisfied the author himself was with his effort to weave a garland with flowers of imagination, but that his poetical imagination endowed his book with a remarkable glory is to be accepted:

আবদুল জবুরের কুটির থেকে এজিদের রাজ প্রাপ্ত শব্দ, কারখানার ঘুরে প্রাপ্ত থেকে এজিদের জন্ম-পীড়িত অন্তর এই কথার আশিতে জীবন হয়ে উঠিয়েছে। 27

That an episode significant only for a religious sect can be dealt with such a proficiency to make it a literary work of high quality to be enjoyed by all is proved by Bisãdsindhu.
In spite of its success some limitations of *Bisādsindhu* is to be mentioned here. His imagination at times failed to keep conformity with the historical sequence of the developments. In the last sentence of introduction and in the first section of ‘Moharam parba’ we find a youthful Ezid who differed completely with Ezid depicted in the seventh section. In this section the author wrote:

> এজিদের সহিত (হাসানের) বালকালে বালকীড়ায় অপর্যাপ্ত বিবাদ হইত, এজিদ তাহাদের দুই হাতাকেই

According to this description Hasan, Hussain and Ezid were more or less contemporary. But in the beginning of the novel Ezid was depicted as a very young man whereas Hasan and Hussain were parents of sons and daughters. This discrepancy was lost sight of Musarraf otherwise whereas in every subsequent edition he improved and expanded the text of the novel, this defect would have been rectified.

In *Bisādsindhu* there are number of sub-plots that ran parallel to the mainstream story. The murder of his own son and wife by Hares or sacrifice of life by all members of idol worshipper Azhar to save the head of Hussain from cruel design of Simmer and such other episodes are narrated by the author in details. But these sub-plots do not play any significant role in the developments of the main theme. Rather these extraneous interpolations act as negative intrusion hindering the consolidation of the central theme.

At times, Musarraf, like the composers of Islamic mixed narratives, opted for creating unnecessary complications and solved them with magical and miraculous means. But he lacked the expertise to make those supernatural incidents credible.

Undoubtedly, though Musarraf Hussain had 25 books to his credit, he was made immortal because of his *Bisādsindhu*. Different critics attributed different
qualities in *Biṣādsindhu*. Since his narration was based on the religious tradition centering Karbala, in the eye of common men the book was primarily treated as a religious text. To lakhs of Muslims of rural Bengal this religious significance had been of prime importance. To them the book helps one to get rid of sins normally one commits by reading other non-religious novels. Reading of this book normally feels their heart with religious purity. Again, since the battle of Karbala was a historical fact, hence some are inclined to accept *Biṣādsindhu* as a historical novel. We will now try to categories the novel by analysing relevant factors.

Though less educated or non-literate Muslims are keen to treat *Biṣādsindhu* as religious text the book does not contain any element to treat it at par with the religious texts like *Koransharif* or *Hadish*. In fact besides some names and episodes, the novel does not bear any other features to justify its categorization as a religious text. No reader of the novel would be inclined to believe that Musarraf had any religious project when he took up his pen to write this novel. Here he did not try to explain the essence of Islam and the presence of Rasul’s grandsons and Abu Hanifa also does not give any additional religious flavor to the novel. The author did not attempt to preach any religious message through these characters. Rather at times his sympathies went with Ezid who was actually a sinner and heretic. The structure of the novel was arranged just to suit the depiction of Ezid. Where the author used Arabic or Persian words, these were made under compulsion, not out of any religious conviction. So, *Biṣādsindhu* cannot be placed in the category of religious texts. Even the book cannot be taken as a supplementary to any religious scripture. There are mentions of some historical incidents in the novel, but episodes that depicts flow of blood from Hussains chopped head converting into Arabic letters or flight of that head by the attraction of heavenly light from the sky are absurd supernatural incidents
devoid of any material basis. We do not know how far conversant, Musarraf was with
the historical background of Karbala, but he did not follow the course of
developments from a historical perspective, rather he allowed his imagination to have
a free flay. Thus Bisādsindhu does not fulfill any criteria of a historical novel and
hence it is not a historical novel.

In selection of background and perspective of Bisādsindhu artistic genius of
Musarraf was fully in evidence. The author selected a background with an expanse
that endowed the novel with an oceanic greatness. Besides the Rāmāyaṇa and the
Mahābhārata, it is only Meghnādbadh Kābya where this greatness is available. There
is an epic-like dimension in Bisādsindhu— it is not a tale of conflict between two
ordinary individuals, it is struggle for power between two monarchs. Lives and
fortunes of a number of people were involved in this power struggle. There are near
about a hundred characters in the novel that moulds the theme that is divided in
segments and branches. Aspirations and dreams, greed and lust for power, cruelty,
bloody encounters all these ingredients of a human drama has been enacted and in the
centre, there is a woman. In the epic of Madhusudan, human love and passion plays
an indirect role, in Bisādsindhu its role is direct. In this respect it can be compared
with the Greek epic Iliad where the central figure was a woman.

In the light of expanse of background, volume and content Bisādsindhu can be
classified as an epic novel. However, this classification is also not free from
complications. A critic has stressed the mixed and multiple attributes of the novel.

‘বিষালসিরঝ’ খোঁট ঐতিহাসিক নয়, জীবনচরিত্রও নয়, তেমনি আঁটাটাই বিভিন্ন organic plot এর
উপন্যাস নয়। এ ইতিহাস, উপন্যাস, সৃষ্টির রচনা ও নাটক ইত্যাদি সাহিত্যের সর্বব্যাপী সমৌহলে রোমান্টিক
আবেগমাখা এক সংকেত সৃষ্টি। 28
However, in spite of variety and variation of ingredients, ultimately it is justified to accept *Bīṣādsindhu* as novel.

It is for the first time a Muslim writer ventured into depicting a story that freed itself from the medieval smokescreen of mysticism and relied on a human tale where sorrow and happiness, friend and foe act and interact in the mundane world of material existence. Before that no Muslim author could transcend the limitations of Islamic ‘Puthi’ literature and focus on the real life with its bright and dark sides. With regard to Muslim contribution in Bengali literature, the novel by Musarraf may be regarded truly as a landmark. From that point, taking cue from Musarraf, actually Bengali Muslim writers changed their approach and boldly came forward to contribute to mainstream Bengali literature.

According to author, *Bīṣādsindhu* was written on the basis of materials collected from Arabic and Persian literature. However, what cited by Musarraf as influence of Arabic and Persian literature, in fact came to him through ‘Puthi’ literature written in mixed language. *Jaṅgaṅmaṇā* of poet Heyat Mamud and *Jaṅgaṅmaṇā* of Garibulla were also supposed to be written after Arabic and Persian model, but actually these were also written after the tradition of mixed literature. Musarraf while accommodating the Prophet’s forecast, lamentation heard at Karbala with magical sound ‘Hai Hussain’, blood flown from the true, restoration of chopped head to the beheaded body of Hasan, end of Ezid and Hanifa— was influenced by ‘Puthi’ literature. However, since Musarraf was brought up in the milieu of that literature, it was only natural that some influence would be there in his writings.

To invoke veneration and trust in the mind of the readers, the composers of *Mungal-kāhya* in medieval Bengal, used to refer to gods and goddesses at the
beginning of their composition. In the ‘Puthi’ literature also such tactics were used.

Musarraf also used the same mechanism in the beginning of his text:

It is not a major question whether Musarraf had actually collected his materials from Arabic or Persian literature, also it is not that much relevant whether he was true to the historical facts. What is really significant and important is that the author has been successful in presenting a world-view depicted with consciousness of a genuine creative artist. Here lies the originality and capability of Musarraf Hussain.

We may quote a critic in this respect:

The fact is that the core-structure of the novel is totally free from any influence form ‘Puthi’ literature. Rather Musarraf intended to infuse in the spirit of the theme some ingredients from Meghānabadh Kāhya of Madhusudan Datta,

As Madhusudan used a popular traditional theme of Hindu legend as the core-content of his work, so also Musarraf used a theme from the known Islamic tradition. We have already mentioned the similarities between depiction of Ravana by Madhusudan and that of Ezid by Musarraf. Also passionate love plays vital roles in
both works, in *Meghaṇaṭhbadh* it is indirect, in *Bīṣāḍsindhu* it is direct. Both Ravana and Ezid were heroes with exceptional velour and courage and Musarraf infused human qualities on characters known for their evil traits.

The tale centering Moharam is as widely circulated amongst Muslims as the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* amongst the Hindus. A large number of books have been written in Bengali using different stories of those two epics; similarly Muslim writers of Bengal wrote a number of books using the theme of Moharam. Noteworthy amongst those are Muhammad Khan’s *Maktul Hussain*, Muhammad Yakub’s *Jangnāmā*, Munsi Janab Ali’s *Ṣahīde-Kārbālā*, Islam Hussain Siraji’s *Mahāṣīkṣā-Kābya* etc. Subsequently, comparatively modern writers like Kazi Nazrul Islam, Golam Mustafa, Farrukh Ahmed and others have ventured to add some new dimension to the story of Moharam. In every Muslim household of Bengal, a version of Macadam’s story is normally available. Amongst those books *Bīṣāḍsindhu* stands apart both qualitatively and quantitatively.

This popularity is attained because of a number of assorted reasons.

First reason is language of *Bīṣāḍsindhu*. As already told, before Musarraf Muslim writers of Bengal used to write a Bengali of peculiar kind using ill-chosen Arabic and Persian words in their bid to make the language more Islamic. This attitude compelled Bankimchandra to lament:

बाङ्गाली हिन्दु मुसलमानों के देश—एका हिन्दु देश नहे।...बाङ्गालियों द्वारा प्रकृत उच्चति का जन्म निर्भर ग्रामोजनीय ने हिन्दु मुसलमान ऐसे जन्म करे। जिनके उच्च श्रेणीय मुसलमानों द्वारा में एक दर्शन धारक हो से, ताहारा भिन्न भिन्न भिन्न, बाङ्गालु हादसे के बाल नहे, ताहारा बांग्ला लिखित ना बांग्ला लिखित ना, केला उच्चर हिन्दी खगोलीय चालना करिबन, जिनके उच्च हिन्दी ना। केला जातीय ऐसे सूर भाषा एका।
Musarraf was the first Muslim writer of Bengal to stand against that deplorable attitude. His theme was Islamic but language he used was free from any Islamic bias, it was in contemporary literary language by mainstream writers. This historical step earned for Musarraf praise from Hindu literary circle. Even Bankimchandra came forward to praise his language and prose style. Thus *Bisādsindhu* earned unique position amongst the educated middle class.

Secondly, after the fall of the political domination of Muslim aristocracy, the members of this class though inhabitant of the same land, developed a tendency of browbeating all indigenous local tradition and at the same time shunned association with any kind of western intellectual pursuits in an ostrich-like fashion. They ignored Bengali, spoke Urdu and used to learn Arabic and Persian. However, the failure of the Wahabi Movement and other attempts of reconstructing an imaginary Badshahi regime at last made some of them to look back to the realities around them. Thus a new endeavour was made to adapt and adjust and in the process the advanced educated section did not find ‘Puthi’ literature and other varieties of so-called Islamic literature enough attractive to fascinate them. A change of taste developed and the urge for the fulfillment of this new taste was perfectly met by *Bisādsindhu* of Musarraf Hussain. In this book the educated Muslim Bengali found their medium of self expression.

The thematic content of *Bisādsindhu* also contributed to the popularity of *Bisādsindhu* amongst Bengali Muslim. It is quite natural that the tragic end of grandsons of the prophet would have a special appeal to the Muslims. That is why poetic narrative like *Jangnāma* used to enjoy great popularity amongst a section of Muslim. This popularity continued till nineteenth century. The tragic appeal of the story was further enhanced by the religious dimension attached to it. In *Bisādsindhu,*
this general popularity of story was retold by an artist of great ability and the outcome
was bound to be remarkable.

In Muslim tradition, there is no significant myth is available. Hindus used to
combine their rituals with performance of recital of Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, etc to
add literary fervour to their religious functions. On the other hand, at least to the
newly converted Muslims of lower strata, the religious functions centering on an
imageless God with no myth attached to it. Ordinary Muslims did not have the
sophisticated sensibility to appreciate the theological aspect of Islam. Hence the
mixed literature stepped in to fill up the vacuum with supernatural ‘kiccha’ tales.
They tried to portray heroes and heroines capable of furnishing parallel to the heroics
of Hindu gods and goddesses. These Islamic heroic characters were also created to
provide social models for propagation of Islamic value system. Thus from Persian or
Urdu literature, text were selected for translations to show that there were Islamic
heroes and heroines who could effectively compete with the glamorous Hindu Gods
and Goddesses. These writing did not care much for historical accuracy and at times
indigenous ingredients were freely used to attract their consumers. These works to a
considerable extent succeeded in inspiring the Muslims of Bengal, mostly converted
form Hindus of lower strata, with a sense of pride and emotional involvement. Lakhs
of Muslims appreciated those writings because these helped them to assert their
separateness in the domain of culture as well. But aesthetic limitations of those
writings restricted their reception to a particular plane. Bisādsindhu provided with a
new artistic model which satisfied high aesthetic standard and at the same time
religious needs of the common Muslims. Thus the book became instantly popular
amongst Muslim readers low and high alike.

One distinctive quality of *Bisālsindhu* needs special mention. At the very
outset the author is eager to establish an intimate relationship with the reader. This
intimacy allows a reader to identify himself as a part and parcel of the theme of the
story. Since then all incidents, ups and downs, conflicts of characters, crisis and
complexities, victories and defeats absorb the reader’s mind in such a way that he no
longer remains a passive observer, but an active participant in the proceedings. We
are inclined to think the happenings of the tale as real life story of our own and we are
also participants in the courses of developments. That is not a mean achievement.
Thus Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay rightly observes:

ঠাহার (মীর মশারফ হোসেনের) সাহিত্য প্রতিভা এমনই উচ্চ শেষীয় ছিল যে, সুমধুর অজ্ঞাতের কার্যকলা
প্রাপ্তরের ট্রায়াজেডিকে তিনি সমগ্র বাংলা ভাষাভাষীর ট্র্যায়াজেডিকরিয়া দূর্লভতে পারিয়াছেন। 33
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