FIRST CHAPTER
INTRODUCTION

When Meer Musarraf Hussain registered his entry in the arena of Bengali literature, the Bengal Renaissance was then in full blossom. The contact with the western education brought new ideas and new vision to inspire the emerging middle class of Bengal who amongst other things also desired to renovate the trend of Bengali literature and liberate it from the medieval fold. The outcome was Madhusadan and Bankimchandra along with a galaxy of other talents. Thus, in a sense, Musarraf was in enviable company as a litterateur.

But unfortunately, Musarraf was not free to take advantage of the situation that offered so much. The Muslim elites of Bengal, as well as other parts of India, decided not to participate in the new intellectual movement and preferred to remain insulated. Thus Musarraf had to fight his way, through the hurdles created by his social situation as well as his innerself, to write in Bengali of the variety used by his Hindu contemporaries. The decision itself was a momentous one and not that Musarraf was allowed to enter the main stream of Bengali literature without any hitch or difficulty. Rather he faced two-fold difficulties. To the Muslim elites he was considered a renegade who opted to write in the language of the Hindus instead of Persian or Urdu. To Muslim masses, his language was unintellegible since they were accustomed to Islamic Bengali which was nothing but a patois with abundance of Arabic and Persian words. To the Hindus, he was an author no doubt, but a Muslim author. That could not have been otherwise. Bankimchandra hailed his emergence with the comment that even an educated Hindu would find it difficult to complete Musarraf the way he wrote Bengali prose. No doubt it is a praise but to a modern
observer would feel that this reference to his religion was all together redundant. He should have been assessed and appreciated as an author, not as a Muslim author. But it would be unjust to blame Bankim for this approach. Because the situation was such that any discussion on him could not be done at that period of time without any reference to his religion. Thus the situation was unfortunate, not the approach of Bankimchandra.

The present study has been undertaken because of this special dimension associated with the emergence of Musarraf Hussain as a litterateur. The tenure of Musarraf's literary life was forty years. We can locate twentyfive of his published book and number of other minor writings, which does not have much literary worth. He wrote novels, dramas, satires, poems, religious treatises, essays and autobiography. Not that he was equally equipped to traverse all these varieties of literary field. But he had a reason to venture those multiple branches of literature. His mission was a pioneering mission amongst Bengali Muslims. His intention was to inspire his co-religionists to follow his track with the confidence that all branches of Bengali literature was open to a Bengali Muslim as to a Bengali Hindu. Religion did not stand in the way of a Muslim to devote oneself to the services of Bengali literature. The chapterisation of this study is made with a view to bringing out not only the literary merit of the text, but also the social realities behind those efforts.

At the same time, it should also be remembered that though in a way he represented the most forward looking and liberal section of the Bengali Muslims of his time, as an individual he was quite distinctive and he can not be equated with any stereo-type. His life was a complex one with experience of varied nature. He saw the lowest depth of the society and did not hesitate to be a party to such life for the time-being. He experienced deprivations and disillusionments, fought them and ultimately
got rid of them, but all these hazards and hassles left behind a deep imprint in his mind. At the same time he was endowed with love and affection, in his domestic life as well as outer spheres and those had a balancing impact on him. The litterateur in Musarraf tried to incorporate all his experiences, agonies and gains in his writings and hence he had to try all available means of literary activities to manifest his multiple experiences. This desire to express himself did not allow Musarraf to be a cautious artist always mindful of aesthetic aspect of his creation.

Thus in dealing with literature of Meer Musarraf, it is necessary to know his personal life in some details and identify his mindset. The present work is bent upon to take up this aspect somewhat elaborately. Musarraf the man is presented in this work in the backdrop of the society in which he was born and brought up, at the same time the work does not ignore where his individuality is distinctly identifiable distancing him from the social milieu.

The present work lays more emphasis on his fiction since fiction is the genre where his genius has been blossomed. His Bīṣādsindhu is amongst the all time greats of Bengali novels and his other novels are also not devoid of glimpses of artistic acumen though these were not uniformly present as in Bīṣādsindhu. His ability to portray a character through some fine touches and describe a situation without much fuss is present almost in all his novels. The fact is that the novel was his real forte and it is unfortunate that he did not devote his energy more seriously in writing novels.

The dramas and farces, written by Musarraf, are important for appreciating Musarraf as an aggressive fighter against evils and oppressions. The commitment to social cause inspired him to opt for this variety of literary work. His success and failure in this particular field is to be judged taking into consideration the objectives he had behind these creations. In fact Musarraf allowed his artistic talent to take a
backseat in comparison to the social mission he wanted to serve through dramas and farces. However as a work of literature, his dramas may not compared with that of Madhusudan or Dinabandhu, but he ranked higher than any other second ranked Bengali dramatist of his time. The present work intends to place his dramas in specific social contexts and judge them accordingly.

His autobiographical writings are quite complex, varied in nature and most informative if one takes care to discern their inner message. Actually Musarraf was guided by his moods and emotions while writing these pieces and he offered a number of openings to understand and appreciate him properly from these works. His depiction of his service-life while he was employed with a Muslim female zamindar was vivid, ruthless and full of satirical attack. He could not restrain his bitterness towards his employer and exposed her and he associates to the fullest length. Here we find a different Musarraf who was not as compassionate as one except of the author of Bisadsimlhu. Rather we find him to be somewhat vindictive and lacking in sense of prudence while dealing with a female character. However, the names used in the text are not real names of the persons involved and that mechanism was deployed perhaps as a defence from social complexities as well as litigation. However, this work gives us a glimpse of the sufferings he had to endure and his disgust for the environment he was forced to negotiate. Again, it is in this kind of writing that he found his solace where he devoted his all passion in depicting his love for his dear wife Kulsum. In between, in other autobiographical writings, we find a normal man deeply involved in portraying the society in its diverse totality. Musarraf as a man can best be reconstructed with the help of his autobiographies and this reconstruction is essential for appreciating his literature.
In conclusion, thus we are to discover that Musarrat was as much a product of his society as of his distinctive individuality and blending of these two makes him a unique literary personality.