Chapter 7

Bankim’s Eminence: Summing Up
Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is a great creative artist, in the sense that his novels introduce the readers to a unique and living imaginative world. Like all other writers he also liked to paint a picture of real life as he saw it. He had his vision of life and wished to convey it through his novels. Bankim watched his own practice as narrowly as any other; he endeavoured to make the novels conform to his own theory, so that they might become a fit and proper medium, for the expression of his view of life. They are the most concrete and tangible reflection of his creative effort.

The foundation of art is order and discipline, which results from a process of careful selection and elimination. There is order and selection in Bankim's novels. Form and pattern is imposed by his vision of life on the chaotic world of experience. The pattern of Bankim's novels was governed by the deepest compulsion of his personality, which dictated both the nature of his works and the conclusions about life he expressed through them. What he sees around him creates an inner urge, a compelling need to express him and so his novels are born out of the conflict of modernity and tradition which the Indian society was facing with the introduction English education in India. He did not miss a single opportunity of observing incidents, happenings where he can gain something for the writer in him. "Writing a novel, for Bankim Chandra, was in the social and cultural context, a most difficult job. In a letter (27 March 1872) to Sambhu Mukhopadhyay he wrote: The novel is to me the most difficult work of all, as it requires a good deal of time and undivided attention to elaborate the
conception and to subordinate the incidents and characters to the central idea. (Bengal: Past and Present, April-June 1914.)

As a writer of fiction, he describes the inequities and eccentricities in the human situation with openness as well as precision. Of Bankim's novels, it can be said that they come fresh from contact with the flesh and blood of everyday existence. He has no laborious psychological or ideological preoccupations, and he is content to let his characters live and speak. Some of his characters, no doubt, have a very limited scope and action, but then majority of their words ring true and actions seem natural. While writing the novels, it seems, the heights and depths of human emotions enraptured the author. He harnessed the entire technical paraphernalia to build up novels with the elemental passions as raw materials. He is one of the few writers in India who take their craft seriously, constantly striving to improve the instrument, pursuing with a sense of dedication what may often seem to be the mirage of technical perfection. His creations of vitality, variegated richness of his total comprehension, and the positive energy of his narratives carry his stature as a novelist par excellence.

Bankim was an aesthete, a great lover of the beauty, and it is this love of beauty which influences his selection and ordering of reality. Emphasis on the aesthetic aspects of life makes his novels contemplative. The result of emphasis on aesthetic experience is that his characters as presented to us are essentially lonely figures. Even in company they seem to be alone, absorbed in
private thoughts. His delight in beauty makes him acutely conscious of the frailty and transience of life. The vision which infuses his novels is that of a life so beautiful yet so sad, and as elusive as a shred of mist. He can enjoy spontaneously the common things of life, which are dear to all and which have always been considered beautiful. But he is greater than any other aesthete as he suggests the chain of exquisite associations which a beautiful object evokes. He opens the eyes of the reader to new sources of aesthetic delight. Bankim reveals the aesthetic quality in the contemporary scene, more successfully than any other novelist. His delineations of beauty have the vividness of a painting of the scene before the mind’s eyes. As a true artist he observes his surroundings and records his observation for the delight and wonder of his readers. Bankim is gifted with an extra measure of sense and keen power of observation.

In 1860, Bankim was transferred from Jessore to Khulna. Khulna which was then in the grip of utter lawlessness. Robbery, looting and plunder were the order of the day. It being a riverside area, dacoities were a common occurrence on the far-flung waterways. Bankim was charged with the responsibility of re-establishing law and order in a situation of near anarchy. Bankim measured up to his challenging task very well. By grappling firmly with the dacoity problem, he made the waterways safe for traffic. The repercussions of dacoities moved Bankim when he was in his service. The robberies exercised great influence on him and hence he employed the theme of Robberies.
The robberies that take place in the novels Rajmohan's Wife, Kapalkundala and Indira discussed, is only for material possession. However, they turn out to be more than just material graft. They get integrated into the theme of the novels, twist, and turn the course of the events. In all the three novels Rajmohan's Wife, Kapalkundala and Indira, the victims are women. The bravery and boldness of these women to continue life even after the drastic change, which appears in their life, is appreciable. They have the power to change the unfavourable situations. The bold and beautiful female protagonists carry the whole novel on their shoulders.

"Bankim is much more influenced by themes, than by characters. And he addresses himself to subjects dear to his readers." Human life as it really is was his theme, and nothing else was of interest to him. He reveals the springs of action, the hidden motives which impel men and women to act in a particular way. The reading of his novels is always a fresh and original experience, as one comes out of it with an altered perspective. Few novelists have such power of influencing the soul. He believed in the power of the mind making his reader think. His novels are great stimulants to thought. He is not only interested in the relations of men and women, or of men with men, but also of women with women. He is more fascinated with the life of the nature. His novels need some pains taking on the part of the reader, but if followed imaginatively, they have the power to illuminate and transform. Like a Sociologist, Bankim identifies and analyses the issues and problems of the society. As a committed artist he identifies himself with the society and has an inner urge to express the
contemporary issues to create awareness in the people. In Bankim's hands the novel ceased to be a mere didactic story, and became a work of art with an aesthetic appeal. His language has the stamp of his genius and possesses a rare charm.

Besides being a fictional representation of the human condition, Bankim Chandra's novels are at the same time a memorandum to rejuvenate the society, infested with falsity of socio-religious fanaticism and the social echelon. His novels represent a piercing analysis of human love, faith and frailties, which enable the readers to form an idea about the then social picture. Many of the Bankim's novels have widows as major characters. According to prevailing social custom, some times girls were married at a very tender age to old men. Very soon many of these young girls would become widows and live a life of difficulty, insult, disownment, loneliness and agony till their death. The life of this type of widows has been employed by Bankim in many of his novels. Bankim's novels usually have love triangles constituting widows, married men and women. He does not close his eyes to the possibility of love relationship between men and women irrespective of their social or marital status; but does not contrive an idealistic or unrealistic conclusion.

Kapalkundala, Bishabriksha and Krishnakanta’s Will, the novels with a passions-oriented pattern belong to the genre of psycho-social totality. They reflect a social milieu as well as a social ethos. The scale of emotional intensification varies, of course, from novel to novel, but the theme in each is
treated with psychological realism. While many of Bankim's characters (male and female) suffer through emotional dilemmas, the female characters seem to experience especially harsh or condemning circumstances as a result of the social expectations placed upon them. These unpleasant events earn readers' sympathy and work to break down the traditional and limiting views on women. Bankim's women retain their essential femininity, but they are also vibrant individuals, part of — and not served from — their social roots, while rebelling against blind conformism and social tyranny. "Protest has always been essential feature of literature. It has reflected the writer's concern, works social reality and the human predicament and almost all writers' have at the sometime or other in their lives used literature as weapon as medium to project against the established order of things, to express their disapproval of prevalent literary tradition or social norms." 

Whether the narrative comes from the pages of history or has been gathered from the household of Bengali gentlefolk, all of Bankim's novels are romances. That is why they deal primarily with love conflicts between men and women. Bankim's heroes and heroines generally have little time for courtship. Most of the time the principal focus is on attractions, repulsions and strives between married couples. In cases where elaborate prologues of courtship are devised, heroes and heroines belong to distant history, or, if the story concerns a modern Bengali family, the heroine is a widow. In Rajani the heroine is blind; hence, Bankim did not have to account for courtship. The whole of Durgershandini is a picture of courtship. In Kapalkundala, the courtship is
brief. Here the hero's love after marriage pursues the heroine with the intensity of courtship to propel her toward her destiny.

Bankim's novels may be divided into three categories depending on the nature of their subjects and the degree of romanticism. Durgeshnandini, Kaplakundala, Mrinalini and Indira are succulent and pure romances. In them, the love between the hero and the heroine is free from conflict. External obstacles to their union, turn of events and fate conspire to take the story forward. Bishabrikhsa, Krishnakanta's Will and Rajani are moral and domestic romances. The inner struggle of heroes and heroines because of suspicious concerning their loves is a speciality of these novels. Devichaudurani, Anandamath and Sitaram are moral and spiritual romances. Patriotism and people's welfare are at the heart of these novels. His male and female creations are engrossed in their dream of love, live in the forests of their hearts and keep away from day-to-day domestic chores. Hence, they cannot be seen in that vast area of work and though that lie outside the conflict of hearts and the yearning for love.

Bankim created a trend in introducing the element of romance to the historical subjects. He thought it essential because, in his opinion, a historical novel contrary to history has to be interesting, attractive and colourful. He wanted to give a colouring of imagination to the realistic depiction of history but the novels vary from each other in gradation of the combination of romance and history. "Romantic idealism in literature is very often a power factor for patriotic
or political upsurge or struggle for freedom."

Bankim can be paid tribute as the great initiator of historical romances in his culture and literature. The novelist is made immortal by his novels. He occupies, forever, a unique place in the literature of the nation for his great contribution in originating and developing the art of the historical and romantic novels.

In fact there are two waves of events in Bankim's historical novels: one wave is that of historical events and the other is that of romantic events. They do not go side by side but are merged into each other. In this way the coherence and correlation is maintained between them and many romantic events are created out of historical events. Durgeshnandini, Kapalkundala and Mrinalini can serve as illuminating examples of this technique. After fixing the historical period, Bankim starts creating the romantic events in such a manner that they are merged into each other. At some places, the historical events are separated from the romantic ones but only where it is inevitable to do so.

Bankim's characters like Matangini, Mathur, Madhav Surjamukhi, Bhramar, Rohini, Hira, Govindalal, Kundanandini and Nagendra take birth from real life of the then Bengal society. These characters have shaped themselves from real earth. Their behaviour in the daily life situations is realistic. The human nature is same everywhere, people has, the same human instincts, the same joys and sorrows. The various characters in the novel stand for various aspects of the contemporary Bengal society. "The aim of Bankim is to create awareness in the
people about the real life situations and shows the ways for the social restructuring of life results in the simultaneous presence of two strains in his novels. We find primarily a commitment of social restructuring.\(^5\)

Like a psychologist Bankim deals with a variety of characters in his novels and analyses their behaviour in day to day situations. He peeps into the minds of the characters and portrays them in a realistic manner. All these characters behave in a natural way, as others would behave in those situations. Bankim Chandra was the maker of a tradition as his characters and worlds were his own. Symbolism is a device used by Bankim to convey a meaning by associating the symbol with its underlying meaning. The use of symbolism and irony, an unfailing sense of humour and sincerity of purpose further enhance the appeal of his fiction, which though dealing with contemporary Indian life, has a wider and universal significance. The characters in the novel are symbols of contemporary real life personalities. The Characters in his novels symbolise the good and evil of Indian society. They are a mixture of good and evil, virtue and vice. In almost all his novels, the appeal of Bankim is universal. Though the characters are Indian, they are the symbols of the universe. In *Bishabriksha* and *Krishnakanta's Will* Bankim refined and clarified his creativity, but he also invested his characters and situations with the distinctive qualities of the Bengali character and Bengali society, while giving them a universal significance. "It is against hunger, superstition, ignorance, injustice forces, tradition, base desires of man, matter with its various manifestations, corruption,
sin etc. But in the totality of the situation it emerges as a conflict between good or evil.*

In Surjamukhi, Kundanandini, Saibalini, Bhr'amar and Rohini the common feature of the universal woman is seen and discovered in what forms universal womanhood is lent particular definition by the soil of Bengal, its climate, its paths, field and natural beauty, and its family and social life. Bishabriksha, Indira, Rajani and Krishnakanta’s Will enhance the value of social and family life for the educated Bengali.

Bankim’s novels are cherished and discussed as models of creative sensibility. Rajmohan’s Wife is a dazzling showpiece; it is richly ornamented fabric of love and adventure. Its lyric insets and intrigue-motive lend it an additional super stratum of romantic colouring. Durgeshnandini, Kapalkundala and Mrinalini are termed as historical romances. Men and women everywhere have certain natural inclinations. It is from the interplay of these universal propensities that romance arises. In Durgeshnandini there is basically no sharp racial or cultural difference between native and foreign, eastern or western types. Tilottama, Ayesha, Bimala, Jagat Singh, Osman reveal themselves in the grab of this country, in the language of this country, and in the manner and style of this country, but their play of passions could have appeared equally well in other apparel and other forms. The same holds true for Kapalkundala and Mrinalini. Mrinalini indicates amateurishness and a definite falling off from the standard. It is a love romance against a historical
background sadly neglected and confused. After this Bankim was not content to continue only as a writer of prose romances, but appeared also as a writer with the definite mission of simulating the intellect of the Bengali speaking people through literary campaign and of bringing about a cultural revival thereby. These three novels are founded upon universal human feelings. Here we find no particular assertion of Bengali or Indian characteristics. But a powerful impulse toward personal freedom and common humanity is sensed. "The craft that he applied to give characters and worlds a concrete form, was determined by his purpose or vision."

It is amazed and delighted here to see the degree to which a Bengali woman enjoys freedom even within social barriers and succeeds in gaining autonomy to realize her own potential or her natural inclinations. Bankim showed in his novels that it was possible even on the canvas of this country to paint images comparable to these in European literature. The modernity of Bankim is most pronounced in his female characters. In many of his novels women are property owners. It may seem that the writer has made Rajani, Labangalatha and Bhramar wealthy because of the necessities of the plot. However, a deeper analysis would reveal an inherent intention. Of course, the direction of his plots is toward romance. But even while walking down the golden path of romance, he never forgets the truth that economic independence is the first step to emancipation. The Will of Krishnakanta was at least one reason why Bhramar could move ahead of Surjamukhi. Rajani had to speak for herself, in order to draw the line between love and gratitude. She was able to do
This because she was standing on firm ground and possessed money of her own. In the novel Indira, the question of money is also raised, but in a different way. Indira tried to unravel with her own hand the knot tied by fate. She did not consider it demeaning to take a job as a cook. She is perhaps, the only heroine of Bankim who earned her living with her own labour. "Bankim is dramatic in the striking and impressive way of presentation of the story, and in the perfect balancing of the characters with the plots of his novels."\(^8\)

Bankim's most innovative concept arises out of narrative perspective. Apart from using all the narrative techniques like, Dialogue, Dream Sequence, Narrative Hook, epistolary, he uses a creative narrative technique in the novel Rajani for the first time that was perhaps ever used. It is the first Indian novel where protagonists take their turn to start the narration of their stories in the first person from their point of view. The characters introduce themselves when their part comes and speak out how they are related to the chief protagonist Rajani. The first person narration in the novel Rajani strike a note of intimacy with the reader and contribute to the stories' realism. The effect of having the protagonist as narrator allows a more penetrating view of the situation. The reader benefits more from a deep insight not only into what happens during the story but also what or how much it means to the protagonist. The audacity with which Bankim attempts to use this device as technique intensifies the telling effect.
The narrative technique of Rajani is new to Indian Fiction. The characters are tied up in a complicated relationship and they speak for themselves, expressing their own point of view. The speakers, as if authorised by the writer, unfold the whole story part by part. The involvement of the characters gives the narrative a touch of sincerity and openness. The story cannot progress unless the characters speak out a particular part; this offers a key to the psychological study of characters and situations.

The design in the novels of Bankim is characterized by symmetry. All the constituent elements of a Bankim novel find their concrete shape and fulfillment in their mutual actions and reactions. Each detail is explained in exact proportion to its bearing on the fundamental unity. He brings synthesis of the different strands and sub-strands where they exist. Like a magician he would raise up structure for the representation of a theme in hand. It became simple or complex according to the nature of the subject. He was quite at home in both the varieties. The plot structure of Kapalkundala, Krishnakanta's Will and Sitaram is to be called complex, although a subtle use of craft has tended to round off their corners. The plot of Krishnakanta's Will is simpler, but its sparseness of narrative and leanness of structure are more than compensated by the dexterous twists and turns of technique. The sub-plot in Kapalkundala gives it a real curve: it is harmonized with the main plot and passion movement is generated by their interaction.
Bankim’s novels are projections of the self – a hedonist, and at the same time troubled by a sense of guilt. A feeling of guilt mars the relationship, for example, love between Kundanadini and Nagendra. Bankim subjects his characters to a sort of curative treatment by means of some psychoanalytic free-association or by exposing them to preternatural scenes. He mercilessly batters the characters like, Rohini, Govindalal. He ordains either death or renunciation. Even so it will be wrong to say that Bankim’s characters – both men and women – are hamstrung by their author’s predisposition. Actually, in his work uninhabited human nature expresses itself even under the severest social rigours. That is why Rohini though a widow, begs refuge of Haralal or Govindalal and jealousy torments Bhramar.

One of the striking features of Bankim’s novels is his sense of life, in all its complications. He concerns himself with the old myths and the new myths, in their contrasts. He shows the values held dear by the Hindu feudal lords and narrates their achievements with circumstantial details with an almost personal pride in the fact that he belongs to the same tribe. He interprets the ideas which gave the mental support and for which they lived and died. And, here and there, he castigates them for departing from the old ‘dhrama’, which enjoyed consideration of the interests of each individual of the upper castes of the Hindus. But though he prefers the old values, he does not write in the manner of the old recitalists whose tales had a moral tag. His medium – the novel – was an open form and he had to show life in all its colours. He interprets many old symbols which were held dear by the orthodox, and he shows his bias.
against the symbols of the people below the upper hierarchy, the townspeople. He was a romancer, but he believed firmly in the Hindu ‘dhrama’, and the characters of his novels tend to become types symbolic of good and evil; however, the truth like morning light, some times steals through the shutters that there are human beings among the oppressed, even there are unethical people among the privileged ones. Symbolically speaking Bankim’s novels portray the changing conditions in India in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Bankim was influenced by several writers of west. His novels have plenty of proofs to this effect. As Debesh Roy, one of the most original thinkers in Bengal speaks about novel reminds that there were at least two modernities in nineteenth century Bengal literature. The modernity of Bankim and Madhusudan, based largely on European models (more specifically, Romantic models) in fiction and poetry won out over a more convalesce, self-parodying version started by Ishwar Gupta. In Krishnakanita’s Will, Bankim added some amount of feeling to imagination, and as a result it approaches nearest to the western novel. The plot is somewhat akin to that of Bishabriksha. Kapalkundala is one of the best romances written by Bankim. The theme is lyrical and gripping and, in spite of the melodrama and the dual story, the execution is skilful. The heroine, named after the mendicant woman in Bhavabhuti’s Malatimadhava, is modelled partly after Kalidasa’s ‘Shakuntala’ and partly after Shakespeare’s ‘Miranda’. “The sad plight and disturbing influence of the widow in Hindu joint families and, generally, in Hindu society is
to prove a recurrent motif in Indian fiction. In writing historical novels, Bankim was, obviously, inspired by Todd's *Annals of Rajasthan* and Scott's historical romances.  

Walter Scott and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee are the pioneers of historical novel. Their novels reflect the age they lived in. Both tried to present the man's struggle to break away from the tyranny of the existing oppressor. Although they lived in almost two different countries, the political conditions both in Britain and India were similar to a great extent. Scott created his historical novels at a time when the traumatic events of the French Revolution had scattered his generation and had produced a new awareness of the past. In 1603 Scotland was united with Britain. The Scottish people felt dejected and suffered from an inferiority complex. In this situation of frustration Scott consider of the historical novel as the most effective tool for arousing a new zeal in the Scottish nation. He delighted in writing Scottish history, legends and its culture. His novels are remarkable for Scottish heroism and patriotism. He endeavoured to build up the morale of his country men and tried to bring them out of the state of hopelessness and uncertainty. Bankim wrote at a time when India was colonized by England and the tragic consequences of the 1857 War of Independence were still impinging upon the lives of the people.

A critical analysis of the themes in the novels of Scott and Bankim reveals that there are both similarities and dissimilarities in the subjects that they select for artistic representation. Their greatness as historical novelists is
obvious from their way of dealing with the popular periods of history by imparting to them a tinge of romance. With the publication of Scott's *Waverly Series*, historical romances became popular in English Literature making historical novel a permanent form of literature. Enveloping actions of history with romance generally form a part of Bankim's technical paraphernalia, like scenes of striking engagements, had a large share in building up the massiveness of the design of his novels. Nine out of fifteen novels have been set in a historical frame or fringe.

Patriotism was one of the common themes between them. Romantic idealism in Literature is very often a powerful factor for patriotic or political upsurge or struggle for freedom. Scott wanted his people to realise the positive side of Scottish alliance with the English. His novel *The Fortunes of Nigel* states a whole series of themes, the historical novelty of life in the seventeenth century London and the hostility between the English and the Scots. He has nostalgia for the independent past of Scotland but, at the same time, he also realises the importance and inevitability of Scotland's allegiance to England.

On the contrary, Bankim's historical and semi-historical novels are packed with most fervent patriotic sentiments having an electrifying effect on the readers. He preached vigorous patriotism at a time when Indian Nationalism had just got going with a pace neither too bold nor too assertive. His novels like *Durgeshnandini*, *Mrinalini*, *Rajasinha*, *Anandamath* and *Sitaram*, are all pitched to the same key-struggle for freedom or self-defence: in
other words, people’s patriotic obligation of defending their country or society against external attacks or oppression under an unrighteous regime. “He knew that nothing appealed to the Indian mind more than religion. Hence, he raised Nationalism to the level of religion by identifying the Motherland with the Mother – Goddess. The tremendous impact Anandamath and Vandemataram produced on the Indian National Movement is a fact of history.”

The two novelists, Bankim and Scott, also appear to be similar in introducing the element of romance to the historical subjects. They think it essential because, in their opinion, a historical novel contrary to history has to be interesting, attractive and colourful. Both of them want to give a colouring of imagination to the realistic depiction of history but they vary from each other in gradation of the combination of romance and history. Ian Jack comments that “Scott has found Scotland’s past and its events as romantic as anything he has discovered in imaginative literature, his aim in the Scotch novels was to communicate his imaginative excitement to the readers.” Scott has tried to wed the two cultures by creating love affairs between Scottish heroines and British heroes.

Scott does not give much importance to romance; the romantic relationship between the hero and the heroine exists as an important part of the novel, but never dominates the realism. His involvement of romance in history that bears most of the characteristics of romanticism and romance in his novels is associated with past and pessimism. Even though romance is an important
aspect of his novels, he does not indulge in making it a dominant element in them.

Bankim was essentially a romanticist—even his social novels have not escaped the romantic touch. A romance deals with life no doubt but, at the same time, seeks to transfigure it, emphasising its beauty and passion, its heroic and imaginative aspects. In a novel, art tends towards the actual condition of life; in a romance, it lifts life itself to a higher plane. From this point of view, his novels like Durgeshnandini, Mrinalini, Anandamath, Kapalkundala, Chandrasekhar, Devichaudhurani and Sitaram—all are romantic.

What needs to be stressed, however, is that before the Western novel made its impact in the nineteenth century, either in the original or through translation, India already had a rich tradition of storytelling. What were missing was some features of formal equivalence, a certain conception of character and a worldview. Whenever a new genre is introduced to supplant or supplement an old one, a consensus has to be negotiated between the writers and the reading public. “The vicissitudes of the Bengali Novel foreshadow more or less the vicissitudes of the Novel in India. The Western breeze blows, sometimes directly, and sometimes—and more significantly—indirectly, its velocity chastened in the ample spaces of Bengal. Before 1947 (the year of the withdrawal of Britain’s political connection), the English models were the major outside influence on the Indian novel.”12
Bankim laid the roots of modern Bengali Literature and the nationalistic spirit by gradually liberating young Bengal's common psyche from the spell of foreign literature and alien ideas. Nevertheless, the western influence is clearly evident in his writings and literary ideas. But even though the influence was considerable, he wanted to integrate into Hindu culture only what he considered valid in western thought. This is the individuality of Bankim's genius. It is because of his distinctive approach that western education did not prove an obstacle but, it contributed to the well-being of Indian society and people, and to the revival of Indian culture. Creativity consists in the absorption of the universal in the particular. The more definite the great novelists's personality is, the more does the impersonal element show through it. This power is miraculous, and this power is found in Bankim's genius.

Bankim was beyond question the greatest novelist of India during the 19th century, whether judged by the amount and quality of his writings, or by the influence which they have continued to exercise. "What is it for which we worship the name of Bankim today? What was his message to us or what the vision which he saw and has helped us to see? He was a great poet, a master of beautiful language and a creator of fair and gracious dream-figures in the world of imagination; but it is not as a poet, stylist or novelist that Bengal does honour to him today. It is probable that the literary critic of the future will reckon Kapalkundala, Bishabriksha and Krishnakanta's Will as his artistic masterpieces, and speak with qualified praise of Devichaudhurani, Anandamath, Krishnacharita or Dharmatattwa. Yet it is the Bankim of these
latter works and not the Bankim of the great creative masterpieces who will rank among the Makers of Modern India. The earlier Bankim was only a poet and stylist—the later Bankim was a seer and nation-builder.¹³

At the outset of his career as a novelist, Bankim displays gifts of a high order; the narrative flows steadily, his heroes, villains and heroines are vividly presented. He could devise plot adroitly enough to carry conviction. His novels are realistic, about the events of his own day, and he is able to interpret life with its ironies with an intimate description of small things. The viewpoints in Bankim’s novels can be subjects of debate, but there is no doubt that his literary work gave a new impetus to the novelists and the demand for novels in Bengal increased considerably. Even while his feet were deeply rooted in his own times, he became the guiding spirit of the coming age because he had the foresight to visualize its character. “Bankim’s novels are, by and large, fine works of art, and as novelist he occupies a position of pre-eminence.”¹⁴

Soon after his death in 1894 Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was hailed as a classicist. His works were marked by lucidity of thought, clarity of vision and judgment and sense of proportion. The best tribute to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee will perhaps be to write and think as creatively as is possible like Bankim. There are instances in history of personalities who dominate their age so completely that their history becomes the history of their time. Bankim is the personality of that kind and his history is virtually the cultural history of Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century.

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REFERENCES


5. ibid, P.11.


