Madhusudan’s reconstruction of European epic tradition consisted in creatively responding to both ancient Greek and Latin legacy as well as secondary epic legacy of the continental Europe. The second kind of legacy may be given the name of neo-Classical legacy in the European context. Out of Madhusudan’s epic poems – the Tilottamaasambhav, the Meghanaadvadh and the Veeraanganaa – the first two try to recapture various epical elements found in the Italian epics of Dante and Tasso. The third poem tries to make a Bengali version of Ovid’s Heroides.

The present chapter tries to assess Madhusudan’s reconstruction of the secondary epic legacy of the continental Europe. For the purpose of systematised analysis, Madhusudan’s first two epic poems would be considered first with Dante’s Divine Comedy and next with Tasso’s Liberation of Jerusalem. Finally, Madhusudan’s Veeraanganaa would be considered together with Ovid’s Heroides.

(a) Dante’s Divine Comedy and Madhusudan:

Allen Mandelbaum, in the Introduction to his English translation of the Inferno, has suggested that Homer sends Odysseus and Virgil his Aeneas to visit the underworld, but it is only Dante who sends or rather takes himself to the said region and becomes a firsthand witness of the horrors and tortures of Hell before (or while) composing his Inferno (xviii). In his Tilottamaasambhav, Madhusudan visits, on the wings of imagination (as Dante himself must have done), various regions of the universe including Chandraloka; Suryaloka; Brahmaloka; the North
Pole, beyond the Sea of Darkness, at the end of the world; etc. During Pavana’s (and, therefore, the poet’s as well) aerial sojourn to Vishwakarma’s palace at the end of the world (Canto III, 390 – 421), the bird’s eye view of the low lying Yamapuree reveals a picture that may have been influenced by the infernal atmosphere found in Dante’s *Inferno*. Particularly the lines

*Kona sthaley himaneete kaanpe tharathari*
*Paapee-pran, Uchchahswarey vilapi durmati; –
Kona sthaley kaalaagneya-prachir-beshtita
Karagarey jwaley keha hahakaar ravey
Niravadhhi; kothao va bheem-moori-dhaari
Yamadoot prahaaraye chanda danda shirey
Aday; kothao shata shakuni-mandalce
Vajranakhaa, vidariya vakshah mahabaley.
Chhinna bhinna karey antra; kothao va keho.
Trishaay aakul, kandey basi nadee-teercy,
Karia shata minati Vaitaranee-padey
Vritha… (Canto III, 392 – 403)

evoke the various Circles, Rings, and Pouches that build up Dante’s *Inferno* and the afflictions meted out therein. The Ninth Circle of Inferno contains ‘Traitors against their Guests’ who ‘jut out from ice, their eyes sealed by frozen tears’ (Third Ring) and also ‘Traitors against their Benefactors’ who are ‘fully covered by ice’ (Fourth Ring) (the *Inferno*, Cantos 33 & 34). The Eighth Circle Eighth Pouch contains ‘Fraudulent Counsellors’ who are ‘clothed in flames that burn them’ (Canto 26). The Eighth Circle Fifth Pouch is populated by ‘Barrators plunged into boiling pitch and guarded by demons armed with prongs’ (Cantos 21 & 22). The Eighth Circle Tenth Pouch imprisons one ‘Master Adams’ who had been a ‘Counterfeiter of Coins’ in his earthy life, who ‘had enough of all … [he] wanted’, but alas, ‘now … long[s] for one drop of water’ (Canto 30).
But the bird’s eye view indicates some degree of offhandedness of Madhusudan the poet and artist. It was not his intention to draw a detailed atmosphere of horror and macabre in the *Tilottamaasambhav*. The view resulted from a passing glimpse. Moreover, it reveals a Yamapuree that sprawls wide but does not go down deep and deeper as Dante’s Inferno does, Circle after Circle, Ring after Ring or Pouch after Pouch. Madhusudan, thus, takes his material from Dante, but then transforms it greatly.

Madhusudan’s discovering of Chandraloka, Suryaloka, Brahmaloka, etc. in the poem may well have been inspired with Dante’s discovery of Sphere of the Moon, Sphere of the Sun, the Empyrean in the third *canzica*, *Paradiso*, of the *Comedy*. We note how Dante chose to name the Empyrean as Celestial Rose which perhaps had to be experienced petal after petal in its celestial fragrant essence. Likewise, Madhusudan called Brahmaloka as ‘kanak utpal’ in Canto 11, 126, meaning a golden lotus, a lotus that perhaps shines in the readers’ imagination with its petaled beauty and splendour. There we feel a curious parallel between the two poets’ imaginative vision.

In Canto IV of the *Tilottamaasambhav*, Madhusudan, in connection with his poetic and imaginative sojourn from place to place and amidst various aerial locales – under the mothering of goddess Saraswatee – mentioned of Yudhishthir’s ascending to Heaven in earthly body. He addresses the goddess thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
Saphal janam mama o pada-prosadey, \\
Dayamoyi! Jathaa Kunti-nandan-pourav, \\
Dheer Yudhishtir, sasharirey mahabalee \\
Dharmabaley proveshila Swarga, tava varey \\
Deen ami dekhinu, manava-aankhi kobhu \\
Nahi dekhiyachhe jaha; shuninu Bharatee, \\
Tava veena-dhwani bina atulaa jagatey! (8 – 14)
\end{align*}
\]
As we can see, the poet mentions of how Yudhishthir, by virtue of his righteousness and calm, ascended to Heaven in his gross body. But the sense of satisfaction or sense of covert pride he feels is an echo of what Dante has spoken in the Purgatorio. Particularly the lines 11 – 13,

... tava varey

Deen ami dekhinu, manava-aankhi kobhu

Nahi dekhiyachhe jaha...

evoke the inspirational factor of Dante. In the second cantica, Purgatorio, of the Comedy, when Dante says

... four stars

not seen before except by the first people.

Heaven appeared to revel in their flames:

o northern hemisphere, because you were
denied that sight, you are a widower! (Canto 1. 23 – 27)

he surely relishes the feeling of becoming the first corporeal human being to have visited the region of the ‘island Mountain of Purgatory’ at such an hour of dawn to see the ‘four stars’ (Adam and Eve saw the stars before their fall only) which ‘northern hemisphere’ – in the sense of people in general, who are far removed from the region of Purgatory both geographically as well as in a matter of fortune and opportunity prized out of divine grace – cannot even dream of.

Madhusudan speaks of goddess Saraswatee mothering him all along his poetical journey across several regions of the cosmos. Dante, too, had been the first epic poet in Europe to have found a guide, ‘the chief protagonist of poetry in the language that had fathered Dante’s own – Virgil, the “light and honour of all other poets”,’ and for this finding, ‘Dante had no epic precedent,’ (Mandelbaum. Notes to Canto 1, Purgatorio, 317). Besides, in his Comedy, Dante views Virgil on
several occasions as a father (or mother). For instance in the Inferno. Canto 23. 37 – 45, he likens Virgil with a mother. In the Purgatorio, Canto 1. 112 – 113, he places in Virgil’s mouth the word “son” for himself. And in the Paradiso, when Virgil is no more present conceptually to father or mother him. Beatrice carries on the task as a surrogate. Thus, he may have been an abiding influence upon Madhusudan’s poetic consciousness in the latter’s poetic sojourn as depicted conducted under goddess Saraswatee’s motherly guidance.

When we look at the Meghnaadvadh we find Dante’s influence most evident in Canto VIII (“Pretapuree”) of the poem. Mayadevee told Rama that he would see in Pretapuree what human eyes had never before beheld. This resembles Dante’s achievement in the Comedy. In the third and final cantica of the poem, Paradiso. Dante writes:

The waves I take were never sailed before;
Minerva breathes, Apollo pilots me.
and the nine Muses show to me the Bears. (Canto 2. 7 – 9)

and again,

And what I now must tell has never been
Reported by a voice, inscribed by ink,
Never conceived by the imagination… (Canto 19. 7 – 9)

As Allen Mandelbaum suggests, there is a sense of pride in Dante’s realisation ‘of the uniqueness of this work [Paradiso] as against any wrought prior to him’ (Introduction, Paradiso. ix). This sense of pride may have operated in Madhusudan as well. What, in Mayadevee’s words, Rama would accomplish by journeying through Pretapuree (he would see there what human eye had never before beheld), is in all probability a reflection of what Madhusudan as a poet of Bengal and India would achieve and manifest in Bengali literature – a feat unmatched by past
writers and poets of India, when he would finish writing the Meghanaadvadh, a poem that would have by then completed amalgamation of Eastern and Western elements of epic poetry to the highest possible degree of excellence and naturalness.

The inscription above the gate of Hell, as Dante describes, reads like this:

THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO THE SUFFERING CITY,
THROUGH ME THE WAY TO THE ETERNAL PAIN.
THROUGH ME THE WAY THAT RUNS AMONG THE LOST.
JUSTICE URGED ON MY HIGH ARTIFICER;
MY MAKER WAS DIVINE AUTHORITY,
THE HIGHEST WISDOM, AND THE PRIMAL LOVE.
BEFORE ME NOTHING BUT ETERNAL THINGS
WERE MADE, AND I ENDURE ETERNALLY.
ABANDON EVERY HOPE, WHO ENTER HERE. (Canto 3. 1 – 9)

Madhusudan, while creating the picture of Pretapuree, restructured some of the lines from the infernal inscription. He wrote:

Aagneya akshare lekha dekhila nrimoni
Bheeshan toran-mukhe; – ‘ei path diya
Jaay paapee duhhadeshe chira duhkh-bhoge –
Hey praveshi, tyaji sprihaa, prabesho e deshe!

(Canto VIII. 217 – 220)

Since “Pretapuree” forms just one canto of the Meghanaadvadh, it was not necessary for Madhusudan to be as expansive and comprehensive as Dante had been in the depiction of Hell. Madhusudan, therefore, chose, we have seen, to recast some lines only. The chosen lines when translated mean: the inscription in fiery letters on the fearsome gate is: through this path sinners pass into the land of
sorrow to suffer eternal affliction – o, abandon hope, who enter here.

Madhusudan’s reconstruction from Dante is evident here.

Following Mayadevee, when Rama has entered Pretapuree, he looks like a contrast to the scenery around; he as though a personification of lush spring, and the surrounding a forest consumed by fire:

Andhakarmoy puree, uthichhe choudike
Aartanaad; bhukampane kaanpichhe saghane
Jal, sthal; meghaavali ugarichhe roshe
Kaalaagni; durgandhamoy sameer bahichhe,
Laksha laksha shav jeno pudichhe shmashaney!
(VIII. 283 – 287)

The place is pitch dark; the air there is fraught with bewailing voices from all around; there land, water, etc. are quaking as though from an earthquake: clouds from above showering hellfire; the air wafting a stench as though from millions of corpses being burnt in a cremation ground. In the Inferno, when Virgil has drawn Dante ‘among the hidden things’, the latter experiences thus:

... sighs and lamentations and loud cries
were echoing across the starless air, (3, 22 – 23)

And then,

Strange utterances, horrible pronouncements,
accents of anger, words of suffering,
and voices shrill and faint, and beating hands –
all went to make a tumult that will whirl
forever through that turbid, timeless air,
like sand that eddies when a whirlwind swirls. (3. 25 – 30)
Besides, in Canto 14,

Above that plain of sand, distended flakes
of fire showered down; … (28 – 29)

Once more we notice Madhusudan’s skillful reconstruction of Dantesque images and word pictures in his own epic. Where he deviates from Dante is the latter’s penchant for details in every possible direction and space of narration. Dante, of course, had his own purpose and aim in this regard. His emphasis was on the veracity and exactitude of his narrative. Madhusudan, on the contrary, blends details of veracity with tinctures of imagination just as Dante’s 16th-century successor Tasso does.

Other than obvious recasting in the poem, there are numerous sporadic and sometimes cumulative restructurings from Dante. Thus, punishments with snakes coiling all around and biting and burning the sinner to ashes (the Inferno, Canto 24); with demons slicing off the perpetually circling sinner’s head with a sword repeatedly after each healing (Canto 28); with scabs forcing the sinner to scratch all over furiously and incessantly (Canto 29); with one sinner digging his teeth into the other’s head (Canto 32); etc. are altered suitably and, on occasions, Indianised a little by Madhusudan. Such punishments probably give rise to various lines from Madhusudan’s poetic pen; lines such as ‘…dangshichhe sarpa. vrishchik kaamadey. / Bheeshandashan keet.’ (541 – 542), ‘…bheeshan-moorati / Yamadoot haney danda mastak-pradeshe; / Katey krimi; vajranakhaa. mansahari pakhee / Udi podi chhyadehe chhinde nadee-bhundi / Huhunkarey.’ (308 – 312), ‘Kono naaree khede / Kudichhe nayan-dway. (nirday shakuni / Mritajeev-aankhi jathaa),’ (407 – 409), etc.

The ‘violent storm’ buffeting the Lustful in 25 – 37, Canto 5, the Inferno, probably contributes a little in Madhusudan’s composing the following lines:
... Sahasaa purilo
Bhairav aarave vann, palaila radey
Bhootkul, shushka patra udi jaay jathaa
Bahiley praval jhad! (VIII, 383 – 386)

The three Furies seen (and the picture of Medusa as evoked in their discussion) in Canto 9, the *Inferno*, become Indianised in *kritaantadootee*-s with snakes instead of locks of hair on their head in Madhusudan’s poem (VIII, 415 – 420). The punishment for ‘the Flatterers’ in Canto 18, the *Inferno*:

... the ditch beneath
held people plunged in excrement that seemed as if it had been poured from human privies. (112 – 114)

probably provided Madhusudan the idea of creating a picture of filth to be associated with Hell in the *Meghanaadvadh*:

Kabhu, dhik! Hav bhav-adi
Vibhramvilasey vama ahvaney kaameerey
Kaamaaturaa! Mal, mutra, na vichari kichhu,
Annasaha makhi, haay, khaay anayase! (VIII, 255 – 258)

Canto VIII, 346 – 360, of the *Meghanaadvadh*, is a sense reconstruction from the *Inferno*. Madhusudan’s lines are as follows:

Laksha laksha laksha prani sahasaa bedilo
Savismaye Raghunathe, madhubhaande jatha
Makshika. Sudhilo keho sakarun swarey,
‘Ke tumi shareeri? Kaho, ki gune aila
E sthaley? Deva ki nara, kaho shighra kori?
Kaho katha; ama sabey tosha, gunanidhi,
Vakyasudha barishaney! Je din horilo
In the quoted lines, innumerable souls, greatly wondering at Rama’s person (not yet disembodied), gather round him. One of them asks Rama as to who he is come to the Pretapuree with his physical body uncast, and what virtue of his has enabled him for that region. The soul also requests him to speak for their listening, long deprived as they are of the “nectar” of human speech. In the Inferno, Dante’s conversations with his guide Virgil in Italian on several occasions attract attention of the cursed souls who had been Italian in their earthly life. The sinners then express mixed feelings of pathos and nostalgia. Such depiction of the departed sinners by Dante points to or rather reveals unawares one aspect of attitude of the poet which is similar to Madhusudan’s: a this-worldly outlook. Despite Dante’s religious and philosophical pursuits through poetry, his sharp sense of the worldly never really wavers or falters, not even in the Paradiso, where he is full of pride for his achievement as a poet. As mentioned earlier, Mandelbaum’s opinion is worth-remembering here. Like Dante, Madhusudan also dreamt of immortality through fame resultant of his writing of the epic Meghnaadvadh and other literary enterprises.

But having discussed this much, one point should be brought to focus. Dante’s influence on Madhusudan, and Madhusudan’s reconstruction from Dante’s Divine Comedy, is profounder on the level of an affect of wholeness – a wholeness which may not be understood by studying the individual segments where influence or reconstruction is operative. It is Hell in its enormity and entirety that Dante perhaps helps Madhusudan to engender in his epic poems, especially in the Meghnaadvadh.
When we move from Dante to Tasso, we are faced with an immensely different poet. Contrary to Dante’s approach of maintaining an air of veracity and exactitude of narrative, Tasso’s poetry tends to colour itself with the poet’s imaginative and artistic embellishments. The Invocation to the Heavenly Muse in his Liberation of Jerusalem amply speaks for the same. There Tasso indicates that he would ‘embroider the truth’, which means that he would mingle history with the non-historical or fictional.

Tasso has been one of the most influential epic poets that the European world has witnessed after Virgil. The impact of his artistry may be seen not only in literature but even in painting and musical compositions. His epic strain influenced even Milton and his Paradise Lost. His poetry was a perennial source of joy for Madhusudan. The latter read his poetry first in translation and then in original. It is, therefore, an engrossing task to assess Madhusudan’s reconstruction of the neo-Classical from Tasso’s epic.

Madhusudan’s response to Tasso and his epic, Liberation of Jerusalem, may be assessed in terms of incidence and situational parallels, poetic and narrative techniques, images and epic similes, use of language and expressions, characterisation, etc.

The divine artisan Vishwakarma’s palace is situated, as Madhusudan describes in his Tilottamaasambhay, Canto III, 424 – 445, at the mountainous region of North Pole (Uttar-meru) at the end of the world (vishwopaanta), on the other side of the Sea of Darkness (Timir-sagar). The region is visited by Pavana to fetch Vishwakarma from there. After his reception by Vishwakarma he informs the lord of the mansion of the adversities the celestial clan of Indra has been going through and the artisan’s urgent necessity for setting out without further delay for Brahmaloka and there abide by what Indra would bid him perform. Since
Vishwakarma’s residence is located at such a remote corner of the world, he says, the artisan has been unaware so far of such grave changes taken place in Heaven:

\[\text{...uttar korila mahamoti}
\text{Shwasan, nishwas veer chhadiya vishadey; –}
\text{‘Aar ki ache goe, dev, se kaal ekhan?}
\text{Vishwopaante Timir-sagar-teerey sadaa}
\text{Baso tumi, nahi jano Swarger durdasha! (471 – 475)}\]

It is interesting to note that Tasso in his \textit{Liberation} gave a similar description of the location of the Sea of Darkness at the end of the World. Therefore, the location, as envisioned by Madhusudan, reflects some influence of Tasso’s \textit{Liberation of Jerusalem}. (Cantos 14 – 16).

Tasso’s luscious poetry played considerable impact on Madhusudan’s poetic language in the \textit{Tilottamaasambhav}. It coalesced with Virgil’s mellifluous expressions to provide for Madhusudan his novel epical language to portray the creation of idolised beauty in the form of Tilottamaa.

Canto 15, Stanza 50, of Tasso’s \textit{Liberation of Jerusalem}, is one probable source of Madhusudan’s \textit{mayasingha} or illusion-lion as found in the \textit{Meghanaadvadh}, Canto V, 230 – 236. In Madhusudan’s poem, Lakshmana visits the temple of Chandi in the last hours of the night before his combat against Meghanaada. Just outside the temple he encounters \textit{maya-singha}:

\[\text{Ghor singhanaad veer shunila chamaki.}
\text{Kaanpilo nivid vann madd madd rabey}
\text{Choudike! Aailo dhai rakta-varna-aankhi}
\text{Harshyaksha, aasphali puchchha, danta kadmadi.}
\text{Jaya Rama naadey rathee ulangilaa asi.}
\text{Palaailo maya-singha, hutaashan-teje}
\text{Tamah jathaa. (230 – 236)}\]
In the Liberation, Hubald and Charles on their way up the hill of Armida’s magic garden encounter the roar of Lion:

A little further up, a lion braves
their path, roaring, his eyes a-glare and grim,
his great mane bristling, and the horrid caves
of his maw agape. Rage shakes his every limb,
his tail lashes his huge bulk as he raves.
But hardly has the wand been shown to him,
When secret fear within his heart makes freeze
his wrath and the native pride, and he too flees. (15. St. 50)

Since the lion was magical, it fled at the sight of the blessed magic wand. Madhusudan, clearly, replaced the wand with Lakshmana’s *asi* (sword) provided by the deities.

In the same canto of Tasso’s epic, the two ‘wanton damsels’ or ‘naked swimmers’ seen in the lake at the foot of the hilly terrain whereon stands Armida’s garden (Stanzas 58 – 66), are one of the sources of Madhusudan’s portrayal of fair naked bathing maidens that try to tempt Lakshmana in the fifth canto of *Meghnaadvadh*. Madhusudan, however, combines the source with traditional Sanskrit literary element of *apsara*-s as a means for temptation to the seeker: in that Menakaa is a glorious example who, according to some legends, tempted Vishwamitra.

Tasso has always been a past master of erotic expressions in poetry. He is a master since he eroticises within the scope and range that his poetry places at his disposal. Madhusudan in his turn very artistically reconstructs from Tasso’s erotic word pictures. Krishnagopal Ray suggests (*Madhusudan Datter Meghnabdadh Kabya* 336), when Pramila, having passed through Rama’s army, is happily on her way to enter the city of Lanka and then meet her dearest husband Meghanaada.
after a brief but agonising separation from him. then Madana or Ratipati (the god of erotic love) in the sky above accompanies her forward march, watching over and all the while showering his floral shafts perfectly targeted at her:

Antareekshe sangey rangey chaley Ratipati
Dharia kusumdhhanuh, muhurmuhu haani
Avyartha kusum sharey. (Canto 11. 388 – 390)

This play of Madana, Ray opines, is for turning Pramila more and more passionate for her love: and that, in this case, the following lines from Tasso’s Liberation may have inspired Madhusudan:

Fast by her side unseen smil’d Venus’ son.
As erst he laughed when Alcides spun.

[Quoted from Krishnagopal Ray]

Pramila’s nocturnal expedition is, in fact, a reconstruction of Clorinda’s night attack into the Crusaders’ camp (Liberation, Canto 12. St. 42 – 69). After Pramila’s entry into Lanka, Rama with Lakshmana and Vibheeshana is particularly alert in ensuring nightly patrol and vigil outside the city wall (Canto III). In Tasso’s epic, Geoffrey, the leader of the crusaders, may be seen to be similarly alert about nightly patrol outside the crusaders’ camp, just before Clorinda’s attack (Canto 11 end & Canto 12 beginning).

Tasso, in Liberation of Jerusalem, Canto 15, gives the reader a world-tour-like voyage that two appointed knights (Hubald and Charles) guided by a series of Jesus’ champions, undertake to rescue Rinaldo from the clutches of Armida and her schemed dullard sloth. And we feel as though Tasso was continuing the Homeric tradition as first seen in the Odyssey. (Evidence of the same may be found in the text itself, particularly Canto 15. St. 25 & 26.) In the former Odysseus was in the snare of Calypso, while in Tasso’s poem Rinaldo is in Armida’s garden
— a sylvan retreat. Hubald and Charles’ voyage ends at the end of the world, beyond the Sea of Darkness. Similarly, Pavana’s voyage through air ends at Vishwakarma’s palace situated at the end of the world, beyond the Sea of Darkness (the Tilottamaasambhay, Canto III).

In the sixteenth canto of the Liberation, Rinaldo’s act of wrenching apart ‘vain gauds’ from his body at the news of the crusaders’ dire need around Jerusalem (St. 32 – 35), may have influenced similar behaviour from Meghanaada at the news of Lanka’s disaster at Veerabahu’s death in battle against Rama (Canto I, 667 – 683). But what Tasso used for one of the besiegers, Madhusudan employed for the hero of the besieged Lanka.

Canto 16, Stanza 57 is one probable source of Seeta’s dialogue to Lakshmana in Meghanaadvadh, Canto IV. Tasso stanza runs like this:

Sophia did not bear you, you were not
sprung from that ancient bloodline. You the crazed
sea-surge and ice of Caucasus begot,
or some Hyrcanian tigress nursed and raised.
Why then should I dissemble more? No jot
of human warmth shows here... etc.

Here Armida derides Rinaldo for his cold and stony heart which has decided that he abandon her in her island and go away for fulfillment of his martial vows and duties. In a somewhat different situation, when Lakshmana, despite Seeta’s repeated pleadings to him for speeding to Rama’s help and rescue, is rather reluctant to leave her alone in probable peril in a hut amidst deep forest, she suddenly flares up:

Sumitra shashudee mor bada dayaavatee;
Ke baley dhariachhila garbhe tini torey,
She scathingly accuses Lakshmana to be a “stony-hearted” man who appears most unlikely to have been born of Sumitra, her mother-in-law, who is a very generous lady; he, therefore, must have been born and suckled of a ferocious tigress in a deep forest.

Lakshmana’s venture of going to the wood near the northern gate of Lanka and overcoming several illusory obstacles before worshipping goddess Chandi. (besides being reshaped from the episode where Rama is seen worshipping Durga Devee with blue lotus in Valmiki’s Ramayana), is also, in its entirety, reconstructed cumulatively from many episodes of Tasso’s Liberation of Jerusalem: the lake at the foot of the hillock whereon Armida had her sylvan retreat and pleasure garden home, the forest at the outskirt of Jerusalem where Rinaldo went for wooden planks to build siege engines and wherein he had to confront illusory dame trying to deter him from accomplishing his needful duty.

Tasso reconstructs Homer’s use of divinities to rouse a languishing hero to the task of the moment; he, however, puts it to varied purposes now making a divine being instill fresh ardour and courage and strength into a wounded knight and warrior, and now making a pagan divinity rejuvenate a saracen’s enfeebled attempts. Following Tasso’s suit, Madhusudan, too, reconstructs the same Homeric employment of divinities for bringing in desired effects in the narrative. In Chapter Four of the present thesis, we have already discussed about it.

Tasso allowed his poetic art to portray both pagans as well as Christians equally capable of acts and thoughts of virtue, honour, valour, courage, and such other lofty qualities of character. His humanity thus is manifest in his epic vision.
Madhusudan, too, endeavoured for achieving such artistic balance in his character portrayal; Meghanaada and Lakshmana together exhibit this artistry and humanity.

Many talk of Virgil, Dante and Milton in a discussion of Madhusudan’s picture of Pretapuree in the Meghanaadvadh, Canto VIII. But, there would be rarely anybody who name Tasso in this connection. Nevertheless, Madhusudan’s description may also have drawn part of its material from Tasso’s Liberation (Canto 4, St. 3 – 8). Some of them may be cited as supportive example:

Now to the dwellers in eternal shade
the piercing trumps of Tartarus resound.
The huge black caverns shake and grow dismayed;
the blind air thunders echoes all around… (St. 3)
Racing, the gods of the abysm go
in myriad troops to seek Hell’s towering gates…
Some mark the ground with bestial tracks, or grow
a mane of twisted snakes on human pates.
or trail in back a monstrous tail whose tip,
curling, uncurling, thrashes like a whip. (St. 4)
See here a thousand unclean Harpies, see
of Centaurs, Sphinxes, Gorgons, thousands here.
of howling Scyllas an infinity,
and spitting Pythons, Hydras hissing fear.
of Chimeras spewing black obscenity.
of Polyphemoi, and of Geryons drear.
See countless uncouth shapes, to form some single
unheard-of shape, confound themselves and mingle. (St. 5)
Some to the left, some to the right, this band
before the cruel king squat on the mound.
Great Pluto sits between them. His right hand
has the immense, rude scepter in its hold.
No cliff at sea, no alpine crag on land,
not Calpe skyward thrust, nor Atlas bold,
but next him seems a puny hill instead,
so loom his giant horns and giant head. (St. 6)
A fearsome grandeur in his savage face
augments his terror, and his pride advances.
Red glow his eyes, infectious venoms race
as from a fateful comet from his glances…
and like a bottomless whirlpool far from shore
his mouth gapes wide, frothing with filthy gore. (St. 7)
Even as the sulphurous and fiery smoke
from Mongibello spurts, with roars and stenches,
so the black fumes from his grim muzzle broke.
with just such stints and sparks. Cerberus blenches
to hear it speak; its very first sounds choke
his barks. Hydra’s uproar it quenches.
The chasms quake. Cocytus stills his shrieks.
and these the words are that the great voice speaks… (St. 8)

As we read Tasso’s ottava rima stanzas, we may have a feeling that the description foreshadows Milton’s description of Hell and Satan in the Paradise Lost. We, however, would do well in remembering that Milton’s Satan is much grander in character and bearings.

In the use of similes also, Madhusudan reconstructed from Tasso in many places of his poems. Shibprasad Battacharjee, in his book titled Madhusudaner Kavyalankar O Kavimanas, traces out (56 – 59) from the translated version of Tasso in English by J. H. Wiffen some instances of Madhusudan’s reconstruction. We may look at the following lines from the Liberation:
As the winged insect to the lamp, so he
Flew to the splendour of her angel face. (Canto 4, St. 34)

and may compare them with the ones extracted from the Meghanaadvadh
underneath:

Keno va aganya prani (agnishikha heri
Patanger kul jathaa) dhaay setu paaney?
(Canto VIII, 184 – 185)

Again, the following lines from the Tilottamaasambhav, trace their steps
back to Tasso:

Tabey sarvadaman Pavana mahavalee
Kohitey lagila, jathaa parvat-gahvarey
Huhunkarey karabaddha bari. bidariya
Achaler karna... (Canto II, 307 – 310)

Tasso’s lines were:

Foaming he toils, he struggles to the last;
As caverned streams, or fires in prison rolled.
Wage fiercer war when loose outbursts the blast.
So raged his power opposed. so forth in splendour passed.
(Canto 7, St. 107)

Another one, from the Meghanaadvadh, is as under:

Garjila jaladhi!
Tunga shringadharakarey taranga-aavalee
Kallolita; vayusangey ranarangey maati!
(Canto II. 565 – 567)
The above lines were reconstructed from the following lines of Tasso:

‘And on the left, where most the battle raves. 
Charge them in flank!’ he heard, and he obeyed: 
Swift as the role of ocean’s mountain waves 
Before the wind was the encounter made…

(Canto 7. St. 109)

In Canto 9 of Tasso’s epic, Madhusudan perhaps found suitable the following lines:

But as an Alpine oak which scorned the strength 
Of Aquilo and Enrus, firm and sound. 
By some unusual wind torn up at the length, 
Down tumbles, widely ravaging around 
The pines and crashing cedars, so to ground 
Latinus fell, and to destruction drew 
More foes than one round whom his arms he wound.

(St. 39)

and made them into his own lines:

Praphulla. haay, kingshuk jemati
Bhupatita vanamajhe prabhanjan-baley,
mandirey dekhinu shoorey. (Canto VII, 135 – 137)

Or

Chaksher nimishey kosha tuli bheemabahu
Niksheapila ghor naadey Lakshamaner shire!
Podilaa bhutaley balee bheem praharaney,
Padey taruraj jatha prabhanjan baley
Madmadey. (Canto VI, 502 – 506)
The next example of epic simile occurs in Canto 12 of Liberation:

On her at smile of morn, for her at frown
Of eve he calls, he murmurs and complains;
Like a lorn nightingale when some rude clown
Has stolen her plumeless brood; in piercing strains
She fills the dying winds, and woods, and plains
With her sweet quarrel; all night long she weeps. (St. 90)

The simile is restructured in the third canto of the Meghanaadvadh:

Kabhu va mandirey poshi, bahiraay punah
Virahinee. shunyaneeedey kapoti jemati
Vivashaa! (7 – 9)

The following simile is an exceptionally evocative one:

Swift as the tiger or voracious pard
Springs through the crashing forest, Otho pressed
To the stout Mussulman, who, on good guard.
Laid his tremendous spear in sudden rest… (Canto 6. St. 30)

And it is reconstructed in the Meghanaadvadh with equal evocative appeal by Madhusudan:

Sahasaa, shardulaakramey aakrami rakshasey,
Nasho tarey! (Canto V. 350 – 351)

The next example of Tasso’s epic simile tries to ideate of dream and waking:

And from his mind the memory of the fight
Passed like a summer cloud, or dream at morning light…

(Canto 6. St. 27)
Madhusudan’s response to the simile is also befitting:

Chali gechhe vamadal swapaney jemati,
Kimva jalavimba jathaa sadyojeevee… (Canto V. 309 – 310)

Mark Davie, in the Introduction to Wickert’s English translation of the Liberation of Jerusalem (Jerusalemme Liberata), observes. ‘Tasso can write memorable one-liners, such as the often-quoted: “For God and country, all things are allowed” (4.23).’ (xx). In his Meghamaadvadh, Madhusudan, in the wake of Tasso, has written commendable one-liners. For example: ‘Kanaka-aasaney bsey Dashanana balee’ (33); ‘Bhootaley atul sabha – sphatikey gathita’ (37); ‘Kaar re vaasanaa vaas korite aandhare’ (113); ‘Kato je morilo ari, ke parey gonitey’ (163); ‘Hey vidhi, e bhavabhoomi tava leelasthalec’ (279); ‘Chamakila Lankapati kanaka aasaney’ (339); ‘Aravana arama va habey bhava aji (Canto I. 416); ‘Swarge-haima-dwarc rath utarila twaraa (117); ‘Parama adharmaacharee nishachar-pati’ (Canto II, 174); etc.

As far as the question of succinctness, both artists’ one-liners serve brilliantly. There is, however, a marked difference between Tasso’s use of one-liners and Madhusudan’s. Madhusudan’s one-liners, in the course of his run-on amitrakshar (blank verse) that sometimes surges upwards and sometimes hurtles downstairs, serve as landings that mark the artistic poise of the rhythm and help to express transitional conclusions of the moving poetic thought.

On the other hand, Tasso’s one-liners are a little more complex. Since Tasso has written his poem in ottava rima, his one-liners serve a different purpose. Going back to Mark Davie, the categorical certainty of the quoted one-liner ‘reflects the moral duplicity of the character who speaks it. Armida’s scheming uncle Hydraoth.’ (xx).

Tasso’s two-liners are no less functional and suggestive:
For in a world so mutable and blind  
it’s often constancy to change one’s mind… (Canto 5. St. 3)

and,

too dark the place and too inscrutable  
where mortal men their deepest thoughts control…  
(Canto 5. St. 41)

Amidst the flow of his soaring _amitrakshar_, Madhusudan too could produce succinct two-liners, but again with a different function than that of Tasso’s. One example would suffice here:

_Saajo hey veerandravrinda, Lankar bhooshan!  
Dekhibo ki gunn dharey Raghukulamoni! (Canto I. 414 - 415)_

‘Tasso has a revealing fondness for phrases like “I know not what” and “I know not how”, which sound like an admission of failure on a poet’s part but which actually recognize how complex and resistant to analysis human emotions are.’ (Mark Davie, _Introduction, Liberation_, xx). When applied to Madhusudan’s poem and his fondness for such phrases as “haay re kemone”, “he vidhaatah”, “titi ashruneere”, etc., Davie’s words ‘human emotions’ would change into ‘human conditions’. They would take us to Madhusudan’s worldview and his outlook toward human existence in the universe. The unpredictability of human condition would be the evolving message in the readers’ realisation then.

It would be interesting to consider Madhusudan’s epical endeavour against the backdrop of this realisation of unpredictability of human life and then to relate it to Tasso’s epical process of composition.

Madhusudan’s declarations at the outset of his _Meghanaadvadh_ were: that he would compose a poem in _veera rasa_ (heroic style and tone) [1. 27 – 28] and
that he would borrow as little as possible from Valmiki. Later on, however, he changes his stance and goes on to write an epic in \textit{karuna rasa} (style and tone of pathos). And, he supplicates Valmiki in the fourth canto of the epic. His Italian predecessor Tasso, too, begins by declaring:

\begin{quote}
I sing of war, of holy war, and him, \\
Captain who freed the Sepulchre of Christ. (1. 1 – 2)
\end{quote}

Immediately it becomes quite clear, especially with the mention of Geoffrey of Bouillon, that the poet would write an epic on the historical events of the First Crusade in which Asia and Lybia (the latter a generic name for Africa) opposed Europe (i.e. the crusaders). But, as Mark Davie shows, in the very second stanza, after the invocation to the Heavenly Muse, Tasso acknowledges that “he may not always follow the Muse’s guidance, but will sometimes “embroider the truth” and embellish it with “pleasures other than your own”.’ (Introduction. \textit{Liberation}, vii).

Tasso and Madhusudan, thus, stand on an almost equal footing as far as their process of composing their epics is concerned. There is one more aspect of the two poets’ creativity that coalesces very well with each other: their creation of a woman character that symbolises both heroism and beauty, courage (fearlessness) and feminine grace at the same time.

Madhusudan may have found the character of Clorinda, among Tasso’s women characters in the \textit{Liberation}, quite inspiring. A lusty maid who has always ‘disprized,’ since ‘her unripest years,’ all ‘womanly observances,’ she prefers to roam in the knight’s armour. Thinking of her we are reminded of Virgil’s Camilla in the \textit{Aenid}. Virgil, too, made his heroine into an exquisite blend of soldierly solidity and maidenly softness. Both Camilla and Clorinda die while fighting, while wielding arms against the opponent.
The character of Madhusudan’s Pramila, interestingly, has some behavioural resemblances with Tasso’s amazon maid Clorinda. In the 12th canto of the Liberation, Clorinda, with Argant, conducts a night attack into the crusaders’ camp. Pramila, too, comes with hundred cavalier amazons, prepared for arms against Rama’s army during night, in order to enter the city of Lanka and meet her husband Meghanaada (Canto III). Both are seen in warriors’ outfits: both look a picture of fierceness and womanly grace simultaneously.

Many among the critics of Madhusudan have talked of his Pramila in relation to Tasso’s Clorinda. Mention may be made of Ujjwal Kumar. But they have not gone far into analysis of the two characters. Some of them have even brought in Armida for comparison with Pramila’s picture as found in the pramod udyan (pleasure garden) with Meghanaada. But, on that line also, the comparison or analysis has not held for long.

In his book titled Aitihyer Punarnirman, Tapodhir Bhattacharjee has opined that Pramila’s indissolubly blended temper of the erotic and the martial is indicative of Madhusudan’s distinctive poetic imagination (translation mine) (142). He has further said that, sweet chiming of dream and love on one hand, and on the other, roaring resolve for challenging the onus of duty – both harmonise into this transformed woman (translation mine) (144). What brings this transformation, Bhattacharjee probably suggests, is the poet’s unique vision – a vision resultant of the poet’s renaissant spirit and his nineteenth-century progressive ethos about woman.

Keeping in mind the aforementioned perspective, when we consider Clorinda, we find that even Tasso makes his heroine a harmonious blend of beauty and duty. The proportion of the two aspects in her, however, is different from what it is in Pramila. Being a character set in the Indian milieu of romanticism and created perhaps for the reading and appreciation of an evolving new-age Indian
mind, Pramila shines, even if by some iota only, more of the beauty, though no less of the duty. For Clorinda, an amazon, on the other hand, the call of the duty in battlefield comes first. What she does is for her clan, her country, and for her knightly pride. What Pramila does by coming as a warrior woman, is for the love of her husband, her life.

Tasso’s amazon Clorinda appears before the readers first, and for a considerable space of the narrative, as a pagan warrior maid. She suddenly arrives at the scene when Sophronia and Olindo, as per Sultan Solyman’s order, are about to be burnt at the stake:

A knight
(for such he seemed) appears, noble in guise,
towering in shape, so armed and strangely dight
that clearly from a distant land he hies.
Atop his crest, a tigress burnished bright
attracts the eyes of all, famous device,
device known as Clorinda’s badge in war.
They think this may be she, and right they are. (2. St. 38)

Her arrival and intervention and parley with the sultan, saves the couple from burning. However, what is interesting of her arrival, the poet introduces her as ‘a knight’ and tells us that ‘such he seemed’ [italics mine]. The poet further tells that, looking at the knight, one would surmise him to be hailing from a ‘distant land’. Only when the poet has mentioned of ‘a tigress burnished bright’ as a ‘famous device’ which is known as ‘Clorinda’s badge in war’, that the readers start guessing and looking at the other way, and then they reach the final line of the stanza and realise that it is really Clorinda, the warrior maid.

Madhusudan introduces his heroine from the opposite pole of possibility. We first see her in Canto I of the Meghanaadvadh, as a lovely and loving wife of
Meghanaada, who pleads for her husband’s loving company when he is about to leave her in the pleasure bower and proceed for his duties as a general:

...Pramila sundaree,
   Dhori pati-kara-jug (haay re jemati
   Hemalata aalingaye taru-kuleshware).
   Kohila kandiya dhanee; ‘Kotha, pransakhe,
   Rakhi e daseerey, kaho, chalila aponi?
   Kemone dhoribe pran tomar virahe
   E abhagee?  (697 – 703)

From first impression, one would hardly find anything comparable between the two heroines. When we, however, go deeper into the two characters, we find surprising points of commonality between them.

In a poem where divine intervention plays a vital role in the lives of the characters involved, we find Pramila as though foredoomed first to be separated from her husband, and then to be united with him in death. In Canto III. Goddess Uma (Parvatee) tells Vijayaa that Pramila was born as an angsha (spark of divine energy) of Uma herself. But that, next morning she would withdraw the power and splendour of her energy from Pramila. only to ensure a weakened defense for Meghanaada. She would, thus, become instrumental to Meghanaada’s death by assassination and thus cooperate with Madhusudan’s scheme of things. Madhusudan has started his epic only to depict and ‘celebrate’ Meghanaada’s death.

But, what is significant here is that, Pramila, though as wife of Meghanaada, belongs to the party of the demons. she, above all, is an inheritor of divine energy by birth and hence in reality is one of them (the deific party). This becomes obvious when we see that after her physical death, she is given a place in
the Shivaloka and her due (promised by Uma) eternal companionship of her divine mother Uma (Canto IX).

When we look at Clorinda, with our memory of her first entry into the scene of Tasso’s poem, we subtly realise that she, too, is an inheritor of knightly energy. Unknowingly she has taken to the manly path of war and courage in the face of disaster. She is an amazon apparently belonging to the Asian or pagan culture and belief. She fights wondrously to set fire to the big siege engine constructed by the crusaders (Canto 11). But on the eve of her death in nocturnal battle against her lover knight Tancred, Arseth, her faithful old eunuch servant, reveals to her the yet unknown account of her birth (how Heavenly angels and figures from gospel used to appear on the wall of her mother’s chamber of confinement), her mother’s wish and entrusting Arseth with the responsibility that the baby be baptized one day. He tells Clorinda of a recurring dream that featured a knight with a bright brand and who always reminded him of the dying wish of Clorinda’s mother and also declared that the maid belonged to him (that is to the Faith). And finally, moments before she breathes her last, she is, as per her own wish, baptized indeed by Tancred – who is a knight – and thus made one of the Christian knights. It is as if Heaven conspired for her conversion or for her accepting her true inheritance and therein find eternal peace.

Tasso’s Clorinda and Madhusudan’s Pramila, thus, undergo changes in the course of their evolution as epic figures in the two poets’ scheme of things. In this, they come very close together in wonderful artistic affinity.

(c) Ovid’s Heroides and Madhusudan’s Veeraanganaa

Madhusudan trans-created Ovid’s Heroides (15 & 2 BC) with much modified and Indianised workmanship into Veeraanganaa. He, in his own unique blend of the European and the Indian, strove to give voice to the “other” in the Sanskrit epical and Puranic tradition, the woman. The female sensibility of nineteenth-century
Bengal, and India at large, that was constantly under the siege of vidhi or destiny – a destiny created and dominated in large measure by the male counterpart. – may be seen trying to break free in self-expression in the Veeraanganaa.

The Heroides is a collection of 21 epistolary poems written from the perspective of heroines and heroes of epic and myth. Written in the first person, each poem is addressed to the writer’s lover. Madhusudan’s epistles, too, are written in the first person and addressed to the heroines’ lover or lord. Ovid was able to give each writer their own unique voice, and displayed a sharp understanding of human nature throughout the poems. Interestingly, he wanted to give these mythological ladies a voice of their own in what was essentially epic tales dominated by men and their heroic deeds. The heroines’ sheer choice for writing about their sensibilities makes them heroic. This is true more in case of Madhusudan’s eleven heroines in the context of nineteenth-century reality of Indian women.

The Veeraanganaa derives its title from Ovid’s “Heroic Epistles” written by mythological women (on eighteen occasions) and their lovers (on three occasions). “Heroides” implies something of heroic import. Since epic or heroic poetry is most concerned with heroism, and since Madhusudan made his heroines heroic to the best possible degree which was germane to his own nineteenth-century milieu of awakening of Bengal in general and of women in particular, the Veeraanganaa transcends the level of being a mere collection of seemingly disjoined epistles and attains an organic wholeness.

Harold Isbell, in the Introduction to his English translation of the Heroides, points out that throughout “these letters” there are “recurring patterns of imagery” which have the effect of “uniting the letters into a whole” (Ovid xii). Similarly, in the Veeraanganaa, there are recurring patterns of imagery which to a great extent produce a kind of unification among the eleven epistles. One of the recurring
images is of flower or leaves – fresh at first and then wilted and dried in course of
time. This at once gives rise to the idea of mutability. Another important pattern of
imagery recurrent in Madhusudan’s work is the opposition between longed for
prosperity in union with the addressee and forlorn and barren plight of the
addresser in her separation from her lover or husband. Barring two epistles – that
of Jahnavee to Shantanu and of Jana to Neeladhwa, – almost all of the remaining
nine ones exhibit this pattern. Jahnavee’s epistle to Shantanu rather pleads to seal a
permanent separation between the two. There is, however, an undercurrent of
sadness at the wished for separation. Krishnagopal Ray has tried to explore this.
Jana’s epistle to Neeladhwa, on the contrary, announces Jana’s determination to
commit suicide and thereby give to her husband that agonising experience of
permanent separation which she herself has undergone at her son’s death.

Both in the Heroides and the Veeraanganaa, love is a strong motif for the
writers of the epistles. What they thirst for, though, is not always pertaining of one
kind of love. In this Madhusudan departed from Ovid quite clearly. Most of
Ovid’s heroines are concerned with the erotic in love. Though Madhusudan’s
Soorpanakha and Urvashee in the main, and Tara and Kekayee to a great extent,
pine for the erotic, others exhibit varied emotional layers in their thirst for love.

In the Heroides ‘waiting’ itself becomes a metaphor for captivity for most
of the heroines. Many of the eleven “Veeraanganaa”-s of Madhusudan’s poem,
too, become (within the timeframe of epistle-writing) captives of ceaseless and
lonesome waiting. But, more than that, it is uncertainty associated with such
captivity that the heroines find most torturing. The point may be supported by
quoting what Isbell comments of Briseis and other heroines of the Heroides: ‘She
[Briseis] does not object so much to captivity as to the uncertainty and instability
that it has brought into her life. In this, Briseis echoes a theme that permeates the
Heroides: the lover and the beloved both seek to bring into their lives a degree of
permanence and changelessness that in reality is nearly impossible to attainment.’
Madhusudan’s work does not have heroes writing letters to their heroines. However, the beloved (heroine) does seek to bring into her life (conjugal or love life) permanence and stability. Shakuntala, for instance, has become a captive as though of limitless waiting; and she craves for permanent stability in a socially accepted conjugal life with Dushmantra. Just as Briseis’ ‘only salvation lies in her ability to be loved by Achilles’ (19), so Shakuntala’s in her ability to communicate and plead for acceptance as wife by Dushmanta. Both Ovid’s Briseis and Madhusudan’s Shakuntala find it increasingly difficult to accomplish their task in a world not conducive to the said purpose. For Briseis, literally a captive Trojan woman (a non-Greek), it is a Greek men’s world (19); for Shakuntala, a forest ashram dweller (a non-urban woman unschooled in the sophistications of palace life), too, it is an aristocratic urban men’s world.

While recognising Madhusudan’s remarkable ability for transforming influence into creativity, it may still be said that in composing the first canto of his Veeraanganaa, “Dushmanter prati Shakuntala”, he was influenced not only by the third epistle in Ovid’s Heroides, “Briseis to Achilles”, but even, perhaps, by the second, “Phyllis to Demophoon”.

One of the points of comparison between Phyllis’ epistle to Demophoon and Shakuntala’s to Dushmanta is the theme sequence of love, trust, nuptial bed, separation, vain waiting, delay in return and no-return of the man, betrayal in abandonment, etc. In both cases the non-returning man is a royal personage. Both Phyllis and Shakuntala open their hospitality to an outsider, welcome them with aid and support, and comfort them in warm company and eventually in bed. After the guests’ departure, and after the lapse of time when there had been no communication from the departed men, Phyllis may still be harbouring the faintest of hopes of Demophoon’s return just as Shakuntala of Dushmanta’s.
Both Phyllis and Shakuntala see hallucinations. Shakuntala confesses that she is maddened with vain hope:

Haay, aashaamade matta aami paagalince!  
Heri jodi dholaaaraashi. hey naath, aakaashe: 
pavan-swanan jodi shuni door vaney; 
amni chamoki bhaabi. -- madkal koree, 
bindha ratan ange, poshichhe aasrame, 
padaatik, baajiraaji surath, saarlohi, 
kinkar, kinkaree saha! Aashaar chhalone, 
Priyambadaa. Anasoooyaa, daaki sokhidwaye; 
kohi – ‘hadey dakh, soi, ato dine aaji 
smorilaa lo praaneshwar e taar daaseere! 
Oi dakh dhoolaaraashi uthichhe gagone! 
Oi shon kolaahal! Purobaasee jato 
aasichhe loite morey naather aadeshe!’  (4 – 16)

And in the Heroides:

How often when the wind was good have I tried  
to see the sails of your ship coming;  
(“Phyllis to Demophoon”, p. 11)

And again

With prayer and incense I have beseeched our gods  
that you might be hurried on to me.  
When the wind blows and the sky is good, I think  
if he is well he is coming now.  (p. 12)
Shakuntala’s act of hallucinating has some very poignant expressions in the epistle:

Bishaade nishwash chhadi, podi bhoomitalcy
Harai satata gyan: chetan paiya
Mili jabey aankhi, dekhi tomay sammukhe!
Omni posari bahu dhaai dhoribarey
Padajug; na paiya kaandi haharabey! (103 – 107)

The above lines may well be compared with the following from Phyllis’ epistle:

I survey the straits: whenever sails appear from far away I pray that they be gods bringing an answer to my prayers. I run to the beach and stand there. As the sails come nearer, I grow weaker and soon I fall backward fainting in my servant’s arms. (pp. 15 – 16)

Shakuntala’s epistle contains some lines which may well have been influenced by some in Briseis’ epistle to Achilles. For instance,

Atul jagatey
Kul, maan, dhaney tumi, rajkulapati!
Kintu naahi lobhe dassi vibhav! Sebibe Dassebhavci paa dukhanci – ei lobh mone – Ei chiro-asha, nath, e poda hridaye! (130 – 134)
If we compare the quoted lines with the following from Briseis’ epistle, then we would, perhaps, feel a mild breath of influence:

But I beg you, ...
... be my lord, command that I go to you. (p. 25)

Shakuntala’s agonising condition has rendered her colourless as she finds no joy in or inclination to beautification of her person, or even to food:

--- Naahi saadh baandhite kaboree
Phularatne aar. dev! Moleen baakale
aabori mollen deho; naahi anne ruchi: (99 – 101)

Briseis in her turn appeals to Achilles for acceptance in love and also tells him of her dimmed physical look in separation from him:

--- if love has turned to weariness, kill me rather than make me live without you.
But your deeds have already done that to me:
my skin is old, my colour is gone;
my trust in you is the one hope I retain. (p. 25)

To mention here, even Laodamia, the heroine of the thirteenth Heroic Epistle, lost interest in adornment and in wearing ‘garments of finest gold’ due to her pangs of love in separation from her husband Protesilaus (Ovid 118). However, there remains a gulf of difference between the circumstances Shakuntala and Briseis were in and that of Laodamia.

It may be fairly conjectured that Madhusudan must have thought of partially modelling Draupadee’s epistle to Arjun on Penelope’s letter to Ulysses. Both these epistles tell the words of a wife who is by turns ‘angry. fearful. and
anxious’ (Ovid, Introductory note on “Penelope to Ulysses”, 2). Draupadee ends her epistle by wishing that Arjun, instead of writing a reply, would come back home with the letter bearer (221 – 223). Penelope, on the other hand, begins her epistle by telling Ulysses ‘do not answer these lines, but come’. She tells Ulysses that when he left for Troy she was almost a young girl, but – cruelly enough – when he finally, (if ever), returns to Ithaca and his wife, after such long delays, she would be aged and decayed. Draupadee asks Arjun as to who in the world travels through foreign lands while leaving behind his young lustrous wife alone at home (206 – 207).

One point of comparison between Penelope’s epistle and Draupadee’s is both start off with depicting the writer’s inner state of mind, her mental turmoil: both then go on to tell the addressee how the addresser, along with others in the household (in Draupadee’s epistle it is a forest-dwelling), is faring in his absence.

Penelope, having stated her personal grief and longing, engages further arguments for Ulysses’ speedy return. She draws her husband’s attention toward his duties to his son Telemachus and to his father Laertes, both of whom are tottering bereft of his company. Draupadee, in a similar manner, tries to evoke brotherly love and concern in Arjun by telling him how his brothers feel the unbearable agony of separation from him and how they pass their time with frequent vent to shedding tears (185 – 187 & 209 – 210). She, however, does not bring up Kunti, her mother-in-law. Penelope, as we have seen, pleads for the cause of Laertes’ old age and infirmity and asks for Ulysses’ dutiful support in this regard.

In the long absence of Ulysses, Penelope has to deal with a rowdy band of suitors who are perpetually harrowing her from all around, gnawing on her scantily remaining integrity and peace of mind, slaughtering his stocks of flocks for their repasts. In a similar vein. Draupadee, in the absence of her dearest
husband Arjun, has to entertain her remaining four husbands, fulfill their wishes, and at the same time perform her household chores. Just as Penelope suspects her Husband Ulysses – who is stranded somewhere far away – to be locked with some other woman, Draupadee picturises Arjun seated in the celestial court amidst apsara-s and enjoying their care and caresses. Penelope writes that she is pretty sure (how ironic!) that during Ulysses’ night attack at the Thracian camp he always must have thought of her before taking every step of action or slaughter. Draupadee, however, does not use any irony when she asks Arjun if he, residing as he is now in the celestial abode, sometimes remembers her; and she concludes that it seems unlikely for him, reveling all the time amidst apsara-s in Swargapurce, to remember his lonely wife on earth.

Penelope suspects that Ulysses is kept away from Ithaca and his wife by “love”: ‘while I worry alone at home, perhaps / it is only love that detains you: / be sure that I know how fickle men can be’. Fickle men can harbour only one kind of love: physical; and they are inconsistent in that love even. (In the Heroides, we find Oenone and Deianira, too, suspecting in similar vein their husbands Paris and Hercules respectively.) But in complete contrast to that is a woman’s constancy and wait in the face of adversities. Against the wishes of her father Icarius for her to cease waiting and look forward to new relationships, she has so far stood her ground for constancy to husband. and she is sure Icarius has been ‘moved ... [by her] faith and chastity’; and she declares: ‘I have been your wife and yours shall I remain’. She pines for her husband only. In a similar vein Draupadee bares her lovelorn heart and declares her desire quite boldly:

aandhaar bishwa e podaa nayone.
haay re, aandhaar naath, tomaar birahi – ...
Paanchaaleer chiro-baanchhaa, Paanchaaleer poti
Dhananjoy! Ei jaani, ei maani mone. (60 – 65)
The world, which is devoid of Arjun, is a darkened place before Draupadee’s eyes which pine for the fair sight of her husband who is her eternal desire. He is the one enshrined forever in her heart. This is what she knows and remembers.

The last point of Draupadee’s declaration lends her an even bolder stature in our eyes especially when we consider her polyandry. And this at once renders her into an original creation coming to life from Madhusudan’s poetic art. This at once individualises her and makes her distinct from Ovid’s Penelope.

The much discussed second epistle and canto of Madhusudan’s Veeraanganaa, “Somer prati Tara”, deserves special attention. In her book titled Madhusudaner Rachanay Bharatiya Upadan, Gargi Datta has shown us how an obscure hint latent in the Brahmavaivarta Purana itself may have inspired Madhusudan to create anew its character named Tara (pp 215 – 220). But, along with that, it should be remembered that Madhusudan also had before him the example of Ovid’s Phaedra. Therefore, on the whole, Madhusudan must have composed the canto “Somer prati Tara” by blending the Puranic clue with his own Indianised version of Phaedra’s epistle to Hippolytus as found in Ovid’s Heroides.

Both Phaedra and Tara are elder by sanctity of familial or social relation to Hippolytus and Som respectively: Phaedra step-mother to Hippolytus and Tara mother-like wife of Som’s guru Vrihaspati. Yet, both find herself inescapably drawn and locked in erotic desires for the younger male. In Gargi Datta’s opinion, the love of Tara, wife of the celestial guru Vrihaspati, for Som, Vrihaspati’s disciple, is censurable or reprehensible as per social ethics, and the reason why contemporary critics were reproachful to Madhusudan (215). Translator Isbell has mentioned something similar about the Heroides. According to him, the ‘ethical vision’ revealed in the letters of Ovid’s heroines is ‘at odds’ with any ‘usual understanding of ethics and ethical norms’; in almost ‘every imaginable way’ Ovid set his characters ‘against the accepted standards of public morality’ (Ovid
ix). But, in all this, what matters to the heroines is their following their heart, remaining true to their heartfelt desires. Madhusudan’s success or otherwise in the Veeraanganaa should be viewed from this very point of his accomplishing his heroines as bold and strong enough to remain true to the dictates of their pulsing human heart. Herein Ovid’s influence and inspirational shadow must have enlivened Madhusudan’s creative zeal.

In her letter, Phaedra writes that before feeling love at heart for Hippolytus she had been quite inexperienced in amorous matters (Ovid 31). That means, so far she has passionately desired none – not her husband Theseus, nor any other male. Isbell opines, ‘Phaedra appears to suggest that her failure to experience love prior to this has left her with a kind of virginity, or perhaps purity, which she can now offer to Hippolytus’ (Ovid 28). Phaedra herself declares, ‘I offer you a purity long preserved.’ Madhusudan’s Tara writes in her epistle, ‘Je din. ... / ...hey gunamoni, je din herilo / Aankhi tar chandramukh, – atul jagatey! – /...sahasaa phutilo / Nabakumudinisama e paraan mama / Ullaase, – bhasila jeno anandasaliley!’ (35 – 41). Here, the term “nabakumudinisama” refers to Tara’s youthful maidenly heart (though of a married woman), a heart brimming with un-tasted nectar of love for Som. She desires nothing but to give to Som, the lord of her heart, this sweet beauty of her love and youth. Therefore, she says, ‘E naba jouban, bidhu, arpibo gopaney / ‘fomaay’ (155 – 156) and ‘Bikaaibo kaay manah tabo raangaa paaye!’ (143).

Tara is passionate at heart. But, along with love, her heart also features womanly modesty and hesitancy resulting from backward pulls of social or familial sanctity. This mental conflict of the heroine has been beautifully depicted in the epistle 10. Phaedra, too, had felt at heart the duel influence of love and modesty. But, finally, love has won, because ‘Modesty is shy but Love is bold’ (Ovid 30). Bold love has overcome all shyness and produced her writing: ‘it is Love that commands me to write to you because modesty made me silent’ (30).
In both Tara’s as well as Phaedra’s epistle, heartfelt emotion is indispensably associated with “the erotic” or physical urge for union. Tara pleads Som. – ‘Eso, hey Tara-r banchha! Podey birahini. / Podey jathaa banasthali ghor daabaanaley!’ (147 – 148). Phaedra writes to Hippolytus. ‘I am on fire with love within me; / my breast is burned by an invisible wound’ (Ovid 31). ‘Love will aid me: while warming my bones / with fire may he turn your heart to heed my prayers’ (30). Since she has experienced love almost past her youth, her passion thereof is fiercer. – ‘love that comes after youth / always burns with a harsher passion’ (31).

Like Phaedra, Tara belongs to a noble family. Moreover, she is wife to a learned hermit. Still, she is ready to forsake her sanctity and family status for consummation of her love:

Eso tabey. praansakhe; dinu jalaanjali
Kulamaaney taba janye. – dharma, lajjaa. bhaye!
Kuler pinjar bhaangi. kula-bihangini
Udilo paban-pathey. dhara aasi taarey
Taranath! (16 – 20)

Again.

Deho padaashray aasi. – prem-udaasini
Ami! Jathaa jao jabo: koribo jaa karo: –
Bikaaiibo kaay manah tabo raangaa paaye! (141 – 143)

For fulfillment of her heart’s love, she is even prepared to stake her personal honour and receive calumny on her name.

Karo aasi kalankini kinkori Tara-re.
Taranath! Nahi kaaj britha kulamaaney (145 – 146)
We see here that Madhusudan’s creation, Tara, has, perhaps, transcended Ovid’s Phaedra. In her loving dedication of herself Tara is almost unmatched. And, in bold utterance of her dedication she is a true veeraanganaa or heroic woman. Whereas Phaedra tells her man of love

    Let us both be equal in our guilt, (Ovid 31)

such utterance of Tara as

    Kalanki Shashaanka. toma baley sarbojaney.
    Karo aasi kalankini kinkori Tara-re (144 – 145)

places her, while equating her with Phaedra, in a true Indian milieu.

Madhusudan has utilised suitably the initial dramatic suspense of Phaedra’s epistle in the fifth canto of his poetic work, “Lakshmaner prati Soorpanakhaa”. Phaedra conceals her identity quite skillfully for the three fourth of her letter. It is only when she confides, ‘If I seem a stepmother who would / lie with her husband’s son, ignore such silly / words’ (Ovid 34), and then the mystery seems to lift a little. Her confiding, however, hardly appears sufficient enough for convincing the addressee (especially, if we, going a little out of context, remember Hippolytus’ relation with goddess Diana) 11.

In Soorpanakhaa’s letter, interestingly, mystery is twofold. As she starts writing her epistle, she herself does not know the identity of the supposed addressee. In the hundred-and-fourth line of her poetic letter, she asks permission of her hero for introducing herself. But, though she introduces herself as younger sister to Ravana, demon king of Lanka, she cannot resist the temptation of keeping her unknown hero in continued suspense and thereby of attempting to rouse his curiosity about herself. Hence, she invites him to come and see for himself how old she is and how she looks like:
Kato je bayes tar; ki roop vidhata
Diyachhen, aashu aasi dekho naramoni! (109 – 110)

Again, she does not stop here. Instead, she tries further alluring words:

Aaiso malay-roopey; gandhaheen jadi
E kusum, phirey tabey jaaio takhani!
Aaiso bhramar-roopey; na jogaay jadi
Madhu e jouban-phul, jaaio udiyaa
Gunjari viraag-raagey! (111 – 115)

Besides mysteriousness, there is a build-up of thoroughly intoxicating eroticism through her love-letter that at times perhaps outstrips sexual innuendo. Such sensual suggestiveness (along with a little quibbling) may also be noticed in Phaedra’s epistle:

I wish my breast which has injured you
so greatly, fairest man, had been torn open.
Go now, pay your respects to the bed
which your father denies by his wicked deeds. (Ovid 34)

Both Soorpanakhaa’s and Phaedra’s monologues touch upon material wealth and equality of social status; evoke dreams of bliss and enjoyment in union with the hero; and mention dowry in the form of huge estate and kingdom to follow the union. We may look up in this context. “Lakshmaner prati Soorpanakhaa”. 130 – 137, and Heroides, pp. 34 – 35.

But, despite similarity in bold utterance of heartfelt desire, Soorpanakhaa’s difference from Phaedra is also noteworthy. The difference arises mostly of the difference in circumstances of their heroes. Besides, they reside in diverse contexts as given to them by Madhusudan and Ovid respectively.
The passion of love in Soorpanakhaa, sister of demon king Ravana, is very much pertaining to the desire for worldly enjoyment characteristic of the demon race as depicted in the Meghnaadvadh. Such passion seeks to gratify the senses at the foremost. But, though it seeks gratification through physical union, it has its origin much deeper than the mere physical. Soorpanakhaa has been stirred at heart by such queries as why her man of exquisite physical charm roams all alone in the forest; why his handsome body is smeared all over with ash, and his hair on the head is matted like that of a renunciate. Having observed him, from behind the big tree that he frequently rests underneath, to be asleep on the ground, she finds it difficult to enjoy a good sleep on her couch of gold at home. She does not know the addressee’s identity. But, readers would perhaps admit, the love she had felt for him at the sight of his charming person, the tide of love that now tends to flood her entirety, does not contain insincerity. Quite indispensably with love, she feels sympathetic to her heart’s lord in his distress. Compassionately she asks in her letter the reason for his indifTcrent air; tries to imagine several probable reasons thereof; and, with that, expresses some ready remedial measures for that.

Ovid’s Phaedra is well aware of the actual identity of the man she loves; knows his socio-economic and familial status: Hippolytus is the son of the rich Athenian Theseus by his first (unmarried) wife Ariadne. Being the second wife of Theseus, Phaedra understands that she and Hippolytus share close kinship, and that ‘The same roof will always shelter us’ (Ovid 34). But, not as stepmother but as beloved would she like to embrace him. Even before writing her letter, therefore, she knows that she wishes to satiate her carnal desires and love for her stepson – who is a handsome and wealthy youth – behind the ‘mantle of kinship’ (34). Madhusudan’s Soorpanakhaa, too, is desirous of sensual gratification in some silent secluded spot: her letter bears testimony to that in lines 95 – 103. But, as we have already seen, she is unaware, in the beginning of her letter, of the addressee’s identity to be Lakshmana, the son of the Ayodhyian king Dasharatha.
She looks upon him as a well-built handsome youth, though ash-smoared, engaged in austerities while living in the forest. This means that her love for Lakshmana is not bound by matters of wealth or worldly prosperity. On the contrary, her letter contains her proposal of lending him financial help or military equipage (See 22 – 30 & 34 – 39). Learning of Lakshmana’s real identity from her familiar’s mouth, when she is about to conclude her writing, makes her additionally happy. She sheds tears of joy because equality in social standing would make things easier for their union to be granted by her elder brother Ravana.

Nevertheless, Phaedra’s epistle subtly influenced Madhusudan’s composing of Soorpanakhaapatrika. It provided him the idea, on the first place, to transform the ugly Soorpanakhaa of Valmiki’s creation into a romantic heroine. But it was, perhaps, not the only influence. According to Krishnagopal Ray, Dido’s epistle to Aeneas or Queen Phyllis’s to Demophoon may also have regulated Madhusudan’s creative imagination (Birangana Kabya 110). There is a similarity between Dido’s and Phyllis’ epistles. Each epistle depicts the heroine as abandoned by the hero. Soorpanakhaa, too, in her source-story of the Ramayana, was not accepted as beloved. But, such parallels are a little far-fetched. More vibrantly operative in Madhusudan’s imagination is the sphere of subtle internal influence. The sensually charged atmosphere that is built up in Soorpanakhaa’s epistle has its clear signs in Phyllis’ letter as well:

You swore fidelity by the raging sea
over which you freely come and go.
... by Venus and those weapons that wound me now.
the one the bow, the other the torch (Ovid 12)

The reference to goddess Venus and mention of Cupid’s weapons etc. only suggest Phyllis’ unquenched carnal thirst. Queen Dido’s letter, too. rings with the pang of unsatisfied desires:
could you find
a wife who will love you as I have loved you?
Like devout incense thrown on smoking altars.
like wax torches tipped with sulphur, I
am burning with love: all day long and all night.
I desire nothing but Aeneas. (Ovid 58)

In the above stanza, Dido’s voice quivers with lament for unreciprocated passion and profundity of dedication in love. In both Tara’s as well as Soorpanakhaa’s epistle, we find similar emotion and passionate longing.

The letters of Dido and Phyllis resound, with accusation with breaking of promise, and with the tone of revenge. Madhusudan captured their echo in the fourth canto. “Dasharather prati Kekayee”, of his Veeraanganaa. Phyllis threatens Demophoon with suicide and with the blame thereof:

In choosing death I will not delay.
You will be the cause of my dying; my tomb
Will have the following inscription:
‘Demophoon killed Phyllis: a guest, he stole love
by his theft caused the death that came from her hand.’ (Ovid 16)

Similarly, Dido writes to Aeneas:

a Trojan knife nestles in my lap;
tears fall from my cheeks on its hammered steel blade
and soon it will be stained with my blood.
How fitting that this knife was your gift to me … (Ovid 64)

She lets Aeneas know through the letter how, in order to ensure full realisation of her decision, she has instructed her sister Anna. This is what she has told the sister:
in the marble of my tomb, carve:
‘From Aeneas came a knife and the cause of death.
from Dido herself came the blow that left her dead.’ (Ovid 65)

The parallels in accounts of disregarding promises that Madhusudan set between Ovid’s Heroides and his own Veeraanganaa (particularly through letters of Kekayee and Jana) deserve our attention. In her letter, Kekayee has accused Dasharatha of acting contrary to his promise. The reader learns, Dasharatha, having been pleased with Kekayee’s services (especially with her satisfying services in bed), once gave her assurance that the son born of her (Bharata) in due time would be anointed crown prince. But, Kekayee has learnt from Manthara, her waiting woman, of King Dasharatha’s recent decision of favouring his eldest son Rama with the prospect. The news has made her furious. Her epistle bears testimony to her grievances:

Gurujan tumi!
Notuba Kekayee, dev, muktakanthe aaji
Kohito, – ‘Asatya-vadi Raghukulapati!
Nirlajja! Pratigya tini bhangen sahaje!
Dharma-shabda mukhe. – gati adharmer pathe (34 – 38)

Kekayee’s angry and offensive remarks spring out of her twofold injured self. First, the news of the promise of Dasharatha to make her son Bharata crown prince remaining unfulfilled, has hurt the mother in her. Second, her once source of pride, her voluptuous youthful charm – which, she thinks, endeared her to Dasharatha and from him easily earned for Bharata the promise of being made crown-prince – has lost its lustre (see lines 46 – 54); it can no longer excite and subjugate her husband. On the contrary, she imagines Kaushalya, Dasharatha’s eldest wife, to be like an enchantress, to have succeeded in making the King agree to Rama’s becoming the crown prince (see lines 81 – 82).
Kekayee’s twofold wounded self seeks twofold revenge. If the King, like an excessively libidinous man, enjoyed her and uttered, under the lingering sense of enjoyment, the false promise of making Bharata crown prince, then he deserves retribution. Exposing Dasharatha’s falsity and unrighteous conduct before everyone would, therefore, be the first step of Kekayee’s revenge. She declares her intention of leaving Dasharatha’s palace and roaming from place to place to accomplish her task:

Chalilo tyajiyaa aaji taba paap-puree
Bhikharini-beshe dasi! Deshe deshantare
Phiribo; jekhane jabo, kahibo sekhane
‘Param adharmaachaari Raghukulapati!’
... e mor duhkher kathaa, kabo sarbajane!
Pathike, grihasthe, raaje, kangale, taapase, –
Jekhane jahare pabo, kabo taar kachhe –
‘Param adharmaachaari Raghukulapati!’ (89 – 97)

If divine justice still exists, Dasharatha would have to suffer punishment for unrighteousness – this is what Kekayee hopes within (111 – 114).

Kekayee decides to inflict the second and most conclusive blow of her revenge through filial estrangement of Bharata with Dasharatha.

Pitri-matri-heen putre paliben pita –
Matamahalaye pabe ashray bachhani.
Dibya diya mana tare karibo khaite
Taba Anna; prabeshite taba paap-purey. (121 – 124)

By instructing son Bharata to live without ever entering his father Dasharatha’s palace or consuming food there, she intends to pay back Dasharatha with similar feeling of being an unwanted (or undesirable) person. But, there seems to be a
third dimension of her assault inherent in her words. She mentions in the letter of Bharata’s living henceforward in his maternal grandfather’s house as a fatherless and motherless (‘pitri-matri-heen’) child. Bharata to become fatherless is understandable: he would live a life of such extreme estrangement with his father that he would at heart become fatherless. But, how and why should he also be motherless? Does Kekayee, his mother, mean to remain absent in his life? If so, would that absence be due to geographical distance between the two (if she indeed remains busy moving from place to place exposing Dasharatha’s unrighteousness)? Or would it be a permanent absence on the earthly plane? The second idea sounds more logical, especially if we consider the ambiguity of a line that occurs in the epistle:

Karo ghar. narabar. jai chali aami (121)

When we connect to the above line the following declaration from Kekayee.

Likhibo gachher chhaley, nibid kanane,
‘Param adharmachari Raghukulapati!’
Khodibo e katha aami tunga shringadehe ... (106 – 108).

then we are reminded of the concluding lines of Dido’s epistle, where she instructs her sister Anna regarding her (Dido’s) epitaph (Ovid 64 – 65).

The spite that Madhusudan has shown in Kekayee may be traced back to Ovid’s Medea in the *Heroides*. Kekayee’s letter, in conformity to proper Indian context, however, lacks the intensity and range of vengefulness as depicted by Ovid in the thirteenth heroic epistle “Medea to Jason”

The last canto of *Veeraanganaa*, “Neeladhwajer prati lana”, as well ends in the heroine’s determination for suicide. Jana convicts her husband, Neeladhwaj, of relinquishing the conduct becoming a *Kshatriya* or warrior king like him.
Sajichho ki. narahaj, jujhite sadale –
Prabeer putrer mrityu pratibidhitsite. –
Nibaite e shokagni Phalgunir lohey?
Ei to sajey tomare, kshatramoni tumi, …
Haay, pagalini Jana! Taba sabhamajhe …
… taba singhasanc
Basichhe putrahaa ripu – mitrottam ebe! …
E pashanda pandurathce Partha taba purey
Atithi? Kemone tumi. haay, mitrabhave
Parasho se kar, jaha Prabeerer lohey
Lohit? Kshatriyadharma ei ki nrimoni? (5 – 35)

Partha or Phalguni (two other names for Arjun) – killer of Prabeer, the recently deceased son of NeeladhwaJ and Jana – is being given a grand hospitality due to the best of friends in NeeladhwaJ’s royal court. whereas. Jana opines, he should have been met in the battlefield and killed. Being a kshatriya lady, she is unable to accept this humiliation for themselves. As a way of protest, she, therefore, has chosen to commit suicide. Having lost her son, she hoped initially for an understanding company and sympathetic assurance of her husband. But, both as husband and king, he has let her down by acting contrary to his supposed duties in the dual role. As an Indian wife she cannot oppose NiladhwaJ on the face. Yet. her protest has produced her epistle; it has informed NeeladhwaJ of a kshatriya lady’s decision to end her life and a wife’s leave-taking forever from her husband (See 100 – 104 and 126 – 132.).

Like Madhusudan’s Kekayee, his Jana, too, has revolved round the dual role of mother and wife. just as Jana. Kekayee as well has not received sympathy from husband in her agony. Both the heroines (heroic ladies), therefore, tries as though to make their respective husbands feel a void after their departure. Kekayee has written to Dasharatha ‘Karo ghar. narabar. jai chali aami’ (121): and. 212
Jana has informed, ‘Jachi chiro bidaay o padey! / Phiri jabey rajpurey prabeshibe aashi, / Nareshwar. “kotha Jana” boli dako jadi. / Uttaribe pratidhwani “kotha Jana” boli’ (132 – 135).

Looking from the aforementioned viewpoint, we are reminded, again, of Dido in Ovid’s *Heroides*. Dido asked Aeneas

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could you find

a wife who will love as I have loved you?       (Ovid 58)
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Not only that, in her letter she told Aeneas of her being pregnant with his child and of the child’s imminent misfortune:

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But perhaps it is Dido, swollen with child.
whom you abandon with part of you.
To the mother’s fate must be added the child’s.
you will cause your unborn child to die.
lulus’ brother will soon die with his mother.
one fate will take us both together.     (Ovid 62)
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Dido, through the above stanza, tries to evoke the void Aeneas would probably feel at the death of his wife (though formally not wedded) and unborn child.

The shortest canto (ninth one) of the *Veeraanganaa*. “Shantanur prati Jahnabee”, is unique in one sense. It, perhaps, is the only epistle which shows almost no direct influence of Ovid. Whatever Ovidian influences there are may be felt in the inherent sphere of liberation of woman. But then. the third canto. “Dwarakanather prati Rukmini”, as well is almost free from Ovid’s influence. Rukmini’s epistle – in its proposing for love and marriage and in keeping the hero’s identity apparently hidden from the hero – however. is comparable to Soorpanakhaa’s and Phaedra’s. The difference, nevertheless, is that both Phaedra and Soorpanakhaa keep their identity concealed (initially) in the letter: but.
Rukmini tries to conceal from her beloved lord himself his identity. Another difference. Rukmini is a maiden and hence is inexperienced in the male; whereas Phaedra is married (second wife to Theseus), and Soorpanakhaa is a young widow (though her epistle does not mention that) 12. But, as far as establishing woman’s freedom of speech is concerned. Madhusudan, in composing Rukmini’s letter also. is indebted to his Italian predecessor of epistolary poetry.

Madhusudan could set an exceptional example of freedom and elastic flow of woman’s speech in the tenth canto of Veeraanganaa. “Pururabar prati Urvashhee”. The quibble ringing through Urvashee’s epistle. the urban sophistication of speech entwining its flow, is something he found largely in Kalidasa’s play. Vikramorvashee. wherefrom he chiefly drew the character of his tenth heroine. But, in all probability, he gave its final rendition after the speech styles of Ovid’s Phaedra. Penelope and, to some extent, Sappho. But. the inflow of sorrow found in the letters of these heroines of Ovid, is remarkably absent from Urvashee’s epistle. On the other hand, Urvashee equals Phaedra in bold and candid utterance of her physical desires.

Moritechhinu, nrimoni, jwali kaamavishe
Tei shaapvish bujhi diyachhen rishi,
Kripa kori! Bigga tumi, dekho he bhabiya! (87 – 89)

Phaedra is elder to her hero – in relation and, perhaps. in age. Urvashee is a heavenly apsara and therefore is not bound by human arithmetic of age. As a truly delightful young lady she proposes her love.

According to Krishnagopal Ray. the epistles of Soorpanakhaa and Urvashee are letters proposing for love (Birangana Kabya 79). He further points out. one of the heroines is a widow [Soorpanakhaa], and another a courtesan [celestial nymph] who has been enjoyed by many [many heavenly denizens]; and yet. there is no feeling of inferiority or wretchedness in their mind regarding their widowhood or
past promiscuous living. It is here that they effortlessly go against the attitude of contemporary age [translation mine] (79 – 80). Ovid’s heroines, too, have gone against contemporary codes of morality. But their voices have never been entirely devoid of hesitation or of feelings of mortification. Madhusudan, as a creator of characters, is extraordinary here and perhaps unique as well.

Bhanumatee and Duhshalaa are respectively the seventh and eighth heroines of Veeraanganaa. Their epistles are considerably different in mood and rendition from the rest of the epistles in the work. Madhusudan most probably composed the seventh and eighth cantos of his work with inspiration from the thirteenth heroic epistle in Ovid’s epistolary work, “Laodamia to Protesilaus”. Both Bhanumatee and Duhshalaa have written to rescue their husbands enmeshed in danger. They are panic-stricken as their husbands, Duryodhan and Jayadrath respectively, are inescapably entangled in the war at Kurukshetra. They know that they have nothing to gain from this war: loss of life and defeat would be its inevitable bitter outcome. Laodamia, who has not been married long, tries through her letter, to warn her husband, Protesilaus, from becoming the first warrior to land from the Greek war-vessels on to the Trojan shore. The reason for such a warning is that Laodamia has learnt of an unhappy prophecy:

I have heard of a prophecy that foretells
an unjust death for the Danaan
whose foot is the first to touch the soil of Troy. (Ovid 120)

Laodamia, separated as she is from husband, does not find peace of mind at the thought of him becoming a victim of prophecy or war:

Unhappy the woman who is first
to weep for a husband slain. May the gods keep
you from being too eager. (Ovid 120)
She therefore prays to the gods to restrain her husband from indulging in any rash show of courage. Madhusudan’s Bhanumatee, too, knows that Duryodhan has been foolhardy in deciding for a war against the Pandavas. Among the five Pandava brothers, Bheem and Arjun especially are irresistible in the battlefield. She even reminds Duryodhana of several of the feats of prowess achieved by the two. In this connection we may look up the lines 32 – 34, 46 – 49, 61 – 65 and 68 – 75 of Bhanumatee’s epistle. Laodamia as well has warned Protesilaus about Hector. She as though visualized Hector in every Trojan warrior. Hence her pleadings to her husband:

Beware the man they call ‘Hector’, whoever he might be, if you have care for me.

Keep his name in your heart. As you avoid him avoid every Trojan. Imagine many Hectors. As you put on arms, whisper.

‘Laodamia bids caution for her.’ (Ovid 119)

Again, whenever Bhanumatee closes her eyes for sleep, she dreams of Arjun driving in his chariot:

Nidra-ashe mudi jodi kobhu
E poda nayan duti; dekhi mahabhaye
Shweta-ashwa Kapidhwaja syandan sammukhe!
Rathamadhye kaalroopee Partha! Vaama karey
gandeev. – kodandottama. irammada-teja.
Marmabhedi deva-astra shobhe he dakshine! (78 – 83)

She fears, as if Destiny has created Arjun for the destruction of her family happiness.
Srijila ki, tumi.
Dabagnir roope. Vidhi, jishnu Phalgunire
E dasir asha-bon nashite akaale? (75 – 77)

She warns her husband even about Bheem:

Madkal-karce-
Sadrisha unmade dushta nidhan-saadhan!
Jabaajug-sama aankhi – raktavarna sadaa.
Mar, mar shabda mukhe! Bheem gadaa haatey.
Dandadhar-haatey, haay. kaaldanda jathaa! (95 – 99)

Ovid used “prophecy” in Laodamia’s epistle; Madhusudan employed “dream-vision” to the same effect in Bhanumatee’s. Both poets skilfully utilised the clues from the source stories of their creation, and effected subtle (but intense) irony in the circumstances of their respective heroines. As per Homer’s Iliad, Protesilaus lost his life to the Trojan warrior Hector. In her epistle, Laodamia warns Protesilaus of Hector only. Again, in the Mahabharata, it is Bheem who with his “gadaa”, broke the thighs of Duryodhan, thus mortally wounding him, and caused his painful helpless death. In the seventh canto of Veeraanganaa, Bhanumatee mentions of her dream vision almost immediately after her word of caution about Bheem. The broken-thigh royal warrior, who is seen lying groaning beside a lake in the final scene of her dream, is – we understand from our reading of the Mahabharata – none other than Duryodhan. In Homer’s story, Protesilaus, too, died fighting with Hector on the sea shore.

The differences between the epistles of Bhanumatee and Laodamia as well are noteworthy. Bhanumatee not only warns her husband through her letter, she even points out his grievous faults. Laodamia’s hero has not committed any mistake personally; she, therefore, has not mentioned of any fault of his. Protesilaus has not joined the Trojan War for any personal reasons. On the two
sides of the Spartan Helen, for whose sake the Trojan War was fought, are Menelaus and Paris. Thus, according to Laodamia’s epistolary hints. Protesilaus is not even a third party to the war. He would gain nothing from it, nor would his wife. But Duryodhan is none other than the first party in the battle of Kurukshetra. It is to fulfill his wishes that the battle is being fought. But, Bhanumatee clearly understands how it would be impossible for Duryodhan to achieve governance over the entire state. On the contrary, she gives Duryodhan the sage counsel of awarding governance of five villages to the Pandavas, and thus bringing an end to this devastating warfare.

Madhusudan’s Bhanumatee resembles Ovid’s Laodamia in one respect. Both plead their respective husbands for a quick closure to the raging battle and a safe return to them. However, Duhshala as well has to be named in this regard. Duhshala, the heroine of the eighth canto of Veeraanganaa, writes to her husband Jayadrath pleading him to hastily quit the battlefield:

Eso shighra, praansakhe, ranabhoomi tyaji! (125)

In circumstantial similarity, she is closer to Ovid’s Laodamia. Like Protesilaus, Jayadrath, too, is only distantly connected (for being the brother-in-law to Duryodhan) to the battle of Kurukshetra. Duhshala wonders, at what ominous hour and for what sin of his destiny brought her husband to such an annihilating battle:

Hey vidhaatah, ki kukshane, kon paapdoshe
Aanile nathere hetha, e kaal samare
Tumi? (84 – 86)

She is not aware of any sin committed by her husband lately. But, she has come to know of Arjun’s announcement of his promise of killing her husband in battle next day before sunset. She, therefore, suspects that Arjun must have vowed to kill Jayadrath for some past misdeed of his. (That, however, is another story with a
completely different context in the Mahabharata.) She pleadingly writes her husband,

Ke kaho, rakshibe toma, Phalgunee rushile? (83)

She can think of none who is capable of protecting Jayadrath if Arjun has indeed decided for his blood. The reader may be reminded here, of Laodamia’s request to Protesilaus:

Beware the man they call “Hector”, whoever he might be, (Ovid 119)

Regarding the seduction of Menelaus’ wife Helen, Laodamia in her epistle writes,

Menelaus, you grieve too much for one stolen:
how many must grieve for your revenge? (Ovid 119)

She questions as to how many Greek warriors should die for Menelaus’ personal grief, and, consequently, how many wives of Greek warriors should weep. Again, to her husband, she says.

If Troy must fall to the Argolic forces,
let its fall find you still unwounded.
Let Menelaus hurry to meet his foe,
let the husband seek his captured wife.
But it is not the same for you. (Ovid 119)

It is for Menelaus to fight fiercely against his opponent in order to rescue his wife. But that in no way necessitates Protesilaus’ leap into peril, especially when Laodamia with loving arms outstretched, awaits him at home. She as though requests even Trojan warriors to spare her husband:
Sons of Dardanus, spare just this one; …
This man should not enter battle with bare steel,
giving his body to enemies. (Ovid 120)

Such anxiety for the husband’s life is also seen in Madhusudan’s Duhshala. She also tells her husband to forsake battlefield.

The last quoted request of Laodamia goes on further:

Let other men march forward into battle;
let Protesilaus enjoy love. (Ovid 120)

After her aforesaid request, she implores her husband for a speedy return to his own land. She also expresses her desire for moments of love and a happy family life with him:

When you are here, do not wait. If Phoebus hides
behind the earth or rises above,
Rush to me by day, hurry to me by night.
All the better if you come at night
for we women are happier if an arm
embraces our necks in night’s darkness. (Ovid 120)

Likewise, Madhusudan’s Duhshala has said.

Eso tumi, eso Nath, rann parihori!
Pheli durey barma, charma, asi, tun, dhanu.
Tyaji rath, padavraje eso mor paashe. (100 – 102)

And she has continued thus,

Eso, nishajoge dohey jaibo gopane
Jathaay sundari puree Sindhunadateerey

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Herey nija pratimurthy vimala saliley,
Herey haasi suvadana suvadan jatha
Darpaney! Ki kaaj raney tomaar? (103 – 107)

At the end of her letter, she writes,

Chhadmaveshe rajdwarey thakibo dandaye
Nishithe; thakibe sangey Nipunikaa sakhee,
Loye koley Monibhadre. Eso chhadmaveshe.
Na koye kaahaare kichhu! …
Kapotmithunsama jaabo udi needey! (157 – 162)

Duhshala. in her epistle, has expressed her desire for a happy family life with husband and son far away from the battle. Nothing is more important in her life than her husband’s safety and life. Hence, she does not care about the outcome of the battle of Kurukshetra. And she ends her letter in the same vein:

Ghatuk ja thakey bhagye Kuru Pandu kuley!

Ovid’s heroine Laodamia. too, has finished her epistle thus:

Let one brief request be the close of my letter:
if you have any care for me, care for yourself. (Ovid 122)

In his discussion about the thirteenth epistle “Laodamia to Protesilaus”. Isbell has said, “The reader knows that her [Laodamia’s] deepest fear will be justified – Protesilaus must die... As she warns Protesilaus about Hector, who is the very paragon of Trojan courage and military prowess, we know that it is Hector who will kill Protesilaus” (Ovid 116). Isbell here hints at the tragic irony we as readers feel through a natural psychological connection established to the source text of the story. We notice, Laodamia in her letter, warns her husband Protesilaus against Hector. But. we know. from our reading of Homer’s Iliad, that it is Hector who
killed Protesilaus. Likewise, Duhshala in her letter, warns her husband Jayadrath against Arjun. But, according to the *Mahabharata*, Jayadrath died in the hands of Arjun.

Thus, both Ovid and Madhusudan, through their epistolary creations (especially through epistles of Laodamia and Duhshala), provide us a reading that makes us feel an inevitable magnetism of our past reading memories. We must, however, remember that Ovid and Madhusudan endeavoured to make their heroines / letter-writers “heroic” in their respective contemporary context of age and society. They must have in all probability, also wished to establish their heroic epistles in independent glory and success. To put it differently, Ovid’s Laodamia and Madhusudan’s Duhshala have tried in the midst of hopeless situations, as though to achieve the desirable of their heart. Their husbands have become targets of the indomitable enemy. But, despite being afraid, they have broken their usual womanly reticence and taken up the weapon of words in their own respective husbands’ interest. In spite of giving their husbands the advice of showing so-called cowardice in fleeing the battlefield, they have probably raised themselves, through their efforts for fulfilling their hearts’ desire, from helpless speechlessness to a heroic stature (in a broad sense of the term).