PREFACE

Research work primarily is a quest for new knowledge or a new understanding of existing knowledge. Researchers start their project from the existing body of literature on the topic they are interested in, and then move on toward unchartered ways; or they traverse with new standards or ideals of comprehension and judgement, already trodden ways.

Researches in the field of creative literature draw substantially from previous understanding and researches on the topic chosen, and yet such researches strive toward excellence of original contribution. The present PhD research project, too, stands no exception in this regard.

Chapter Three of the thesis, “The Epic Continuum and Beyond”, draws its material mainly from Gargi Datta’s Madhusudaner Rachanay Bharatiya Upadan and Tapodhir Battacharjee’s Aitihyer Punamirman which have been adopted as authoritative sources. The chapter functions as a sort of review of literature before the succeeding chapters (fourth, fifth and sixth) enter into the thrust area of the thesis.

All references of letters of Madhusudan used in the thesis are to be made to their texts as available in “Patravali”, Madhusudan Rachanabali, edited by Ajit Kr. Ghosh et al (Kolkata: Haraph Prakashani, 1998), 275 – 375.

For quotations not set off in separate paragraphs, and for extracted textual phrases and sentences, single inverted commas have been used. Double inverted commas have been employed for titles of articles or cantos or any section of a book, and also for making single words distinct. Non-English words, such as
cantica (Latin), payaar (Bengali), etc. have been italicised. Italics have also been employed, at times, for emphasis in a word, or a phrase, or an expression.

As far as practicable, words in the thesis appear as per British English (and not American English) spellings. Accordingly, there are words like “centre”, “colour”, etc. and no such words as “center”, “color”, etc. For words where more than one kind of spelling is available, such as “civilisation” and “civilization”, those with “s” have been preferred.

For documentation and bibliographic details in the thesis, Joseph Gibaldi’s MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers 6th Edition, (New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd, 2004), has been followed. Accordingly, except in quotations, titles of published works have been underlined; parenthetical documentation and works cited list have been incorporated.

To talk of comparative literary studies has become quite commonplace these days among critics and scholars of literature. The approach and methodology employed, however, vary considerably. In the present PhD research project, the methodology followed is primarily analytical with both close textual reading of the school of New Criticism and consideration of biographical history of Madhusudan – especially in terms of his letters, prolific in number and interests – taken as twain approaches to operate suitably. Data analysed are of a secondary kind.

There are eight units in the thesis proper. Unit 1 is an introduction to the thesis. It elucidates upon the concept of creative reconstruction in creative literature; the theory of creative influence; and frontiers of contemporary literary studies. It is followed by six chapters. Chapter One gives an outline of nineteenth-century Bengal awakening with particular reference to: rediscovery of tradition in general and of epic legacy in particular; conception of new ethos in the beginning of modernity in Bengal; and, crosscurrents of Indian and Western traditions.
Chapter Two considers Madhusudan at the backdrop of Bengal awakening in the nineteenth century. It pays heed to Madhusudan as a symbol of awakening and of rediscovery of “self” in the British colonial yoke. It also charts details of his literary works. It ends with ascertaining the salient features of his worldview. Chapter Three considers Madhusudan’s epic poems in the light of rediscovery of Indian epic tradition. It endeavours to survey and assess his response to the great epics – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata – and also to the secondary epics in Sanskrit – those of Ashwaghosha, Kalidasa, Bharavi, Magha, Kumardas, Bhatti, Shreeharsha, etc. The chapter ends with an assessment of the occurrence of a crystallisation of new poetic legacy in nineteenth-century Bengal (both in the heroic as well as lyric mode) as a result of Madhusudan’s prolific literary career.

Chapter Four initiates the thrust area of the research project. It analyses Madhusudan’s poems of epic tone and / or dimension – the Tilottamaasambhav, the Meghanaadvadh, and the Veeraanganaa – in the context of Greek and Latin epic legacy of Europe. Chapter Five assesses his epic poems in the context of the secondary epic legacy of Continental Europe. Chapter Six considers Madhusudan and his epic poems in relation to Milton and his epic Paradise Lost. The chapter pays particular attention to his affinity and indebtedness to Milton not only in terms of poetic style and verse form but even in creation of Ravana as antagonist with inspiration from Milton’s Satan. Unit 8 is a conclusion to the thesis.