There can be no history of modern Indian literature without an account of the life and works of MICHAEL MADHUSUDAN DUTT (1824-1873). In Madhusudan, Bengali poetry has its outstanding creative energy between Bharatchandra Roy and Rabindranath Tagore. There can be no understanding of our nation's cultural and intellectual Renaissance in the nineteenth century without a keen appreciation of Michael's mind and art so characteristic of the Indian response to the Western impact. Michael's supremacy as a writer is at once historical and timeless; his creative genius is at once tradition-based and rebellious, classical and explorative, rooted to the soil and far-ranging.

Dr Amalendu Bose, formerly Sir Goorudas Professor of English at the University of Calcutta, has very ably brought out the essence of this genius in this brief monograph.

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Michael Madhusudan Dutt

Amalendu Bose

Makers of Indian

MICHAEL MADHUSUDAN DUTT

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodhana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

MICHAEL MADHUSUDAN DUTT

AMALENDU BOSE

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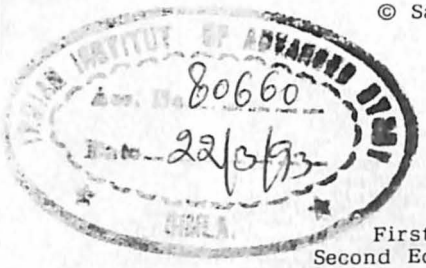

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

In this monograph, *Works* refers to the edition of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's works edited by Dr Kshetra Gupta, and published by Sahitya Samsad.

When another edition (such as the one edited by Brajendra Nath Bandyopadhyay and Sajani Kanta Das, published by the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad) has been used, the identity of this edition has been shown.

Nagendra Nath Shome's biography has been used quite often. A new edition of this book is being brought out by Vidyodaya Library of Calcutta. Since this edition is a vast improvement on the earlier one, I have referred to this forthcoming edition although this edition has not yet been formally published and is yet in the press.

The author is grateful to Sri Nikhil Kumar Nandy for drawing his attention to several printing inadequacies.

September 1, 1980 Amalendu Bose

PRELIMINARIES

OF the many remarkable personalities thrown up by the Renaissance of Bengal in the nineteenth century, Michael Madhusudan Dutt's was unquestionably one of the richest. This complex and many-faceted Renaissance ushered in modern values and progressive and creative movements in every area of Bengali life and presently spread over to other regions of India; the values and movements related especially to social and religious regeneration and reform, a fervent sense of Indian nationlism, and a passionate belief in the constructive power of education. We should, in these connections, remember the names of Rammohun Roy, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Raja Radhakanta Dev Bahadur, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa Deva, Dr Rajendralal Mitra and Swami Vivekananda. The Renaissance had its inevitable impact on literature too. In Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), Bengali poetry has its outstanding creative energy between Bharatchandra Roy (1712-1760) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and modern Bengali drama has its first major exponent, while in Michael's younger contemporary, the great novelist Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), Bengali literature has its all-time keenest and most disciplined intellect. With these two writers—Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Bankimchandra Chatterjee—follwed by a host of gifted though lesser writers, we enter the phase of the modernist sensibility and style of Bengali literature, a phase that in no time affected in a variety of ways the other languages and literatures of the country. There can be no history of modern Indian literature without an accout of the life and works of Michael Madhusudhan Dutt.

But history alone cannot unfold for us the whole truth about a major writer. Beyond the historical estimate, as Matthew Arnold told us in the last century, there has to be the real estimate. The sense of tradition as we are reminded by T.S. Eliot, must be correlated to the appraisal of the individual talent. Michael's supremacy as a writer is at one historical and timeless; his creative genius is at once tradition-based and rebellious, classical and explorative, rooted to the soil and far-ranging; it is a genius lit up by a balance of opposites that has to be brought out in even so brief a monorgraph as this.

There has to be another angle too to our estimate of Michael Madhusudan Dutt—the personal angle. I do not allude here to the

aesthetico-metaphysical concept of the ultimate subjectivity of creative art and critical evaluation, subjectivity that may be direct or oblique, latent or manifest. I have a much simpler matter in mind, I think of the flaming, tameless, rebellious man that Michael was; the man who defied all restrictive convention and authority; the man whom adventures lured across the seven seas, whose 'hydroptique thirst for knowledge' (borrowing an immortal phrase from Donne's Sermons) was matchless even in that glorious century of Paracelsus-like quest for knowledge; the man who sedulously sought to Europeanize himself and yet remained in thought and spirit an Indian aiming at reinterpreting Indian values in the context of a changed milieu. Michael was among the earliest of modern India's internationalists; one who ha studied (in addition to the classics of Sanskrit and Tamil), in the original, Homer and Virgil and Horace; Dante, Petrarch, Tasso and Ariosto; one who had written letters to Wordsworth, Victor Hugo and Tennyson, and even to King Victor Emmanuel of Italy. True, the biography of Michael Madhusudan derives its fascination from the fact that it is the biography of a great poet, but the outer lineaments of the life of a poet are not necessarily always as striking as the achievements of his art, nor are the documentary evidences of such lineaments always available to the public.There are several facets of his life—especially his two marriages—which are still obscure and which, it seems, will remain always obscure in spite of the strenuous hawk-like efforts of several researchers of the present generation to discover the necessary documents. In spite of the disconcertingly inadequate and superficial nature of the existing biographies, especially those which were published some decades ago, we have at our disposal some evidences relating to the life of Michael, and although the present monograph has to limit itself to moderate length, it proposes to draw a firm sketch of the man and writer that Michael Madhusudan Dutt was.

For one who seeks knowledge about Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the primary sources of information are his own writings, creative and otherwise; poetry, prose, drama; writings in Bengali as well as in English; essays, journalistic writings, letters (mostly) in English (only two of his letters written in Bengali have been discovered so far), several official and institutional documents. The secondary sources cover writings about and references to Michael of which the authors were the poet's contemporaries; under these sources are also to be classified critical estimates, essays, epistolary and oral allusions (afterwards written down), documents, and more or less dependable hearsay statements. Curiously, there is a good deal of astonishing vagueness and undependability about

certain matters relating to Madhusudan's life. Thus, we do not know for certain in which school Madhusudan's education in Calcutta began; the reason or reasons for his conversion to Christianity continue to be hazy and disputable. He was married twice, both times in Madras and to non-Indian Christian women; the legal and sacramental validity of these two marriages and the legal validity of his separation from his first wife are vague as vague can be. We do not know why during his short sea-trip from Madras to Calcutta in 1856, he travelled under cover of a false name, Mr Holt. There is also the questionable though widely prevalent notion that it was Madhusudan who had, in the course of a single night, translated into English the distinguished contemporary drama by Deenabandhu Mitra, *Nil-darpan*. There are other elements too of uncertainty, guess work, hearsay about the life of Madhusudan.

In the earlier biographies, especially in *Madhu-Smriti* (Memories of Madhu) by Nagendranath Some, the authors often failed to dip below the surface, to collect all available first-hand materials at a time when such materials had not succumbed to the ravages of time. Far too often, these earlier biograpahers have rested content with glib phrases like 'It seems', 'We may guess' 'We believe', 'We have heard' 'We have been told' and so forth without enquiring into the authority of what they had heard. These early biographers wrote at a time when some of Madhusudan's contemporaries were still living. In our own days, several scholars, familiar with the strict discipline of research have explored various areas in Calcutta, in Madras, in France, in England and even in Rome, and looked for source-materials without, unhappily, achieveing much positive success although their labours have dusted off a good deal of false notions.[1]

In regard to aesthetic responses to and critical assesments of Michael's literary works, one meets divergent opinions. Even Rabindranath Tagore wrote, while a teen-aged lad, a saucy essay denigrating Madhusudan. Rabindranath outgrew this adolescent defiance of the prevailing judgement and in later years wrote some highly perceptive criticism of Madhusudan. Many years later, another powerful Bengali writer, Buddhadeva Bose, wrote a very hostile essay on Michael but, unlike Tagore, did not eventually retract his verdict. The ultimately relevent facts that emerge from the various critical attitudes are the follwing:

a. the position of Michael Madhusudan Dutt is exceptionally high in any record of Indian literature of the nineteenth century and, indeed, in the entire history of Indian literature;

b. there can be no understanding of our nation's cultural and intellectual Renaissance in the nineteenth century without a keen appreciation of Michael's mind and art so characteristic of the Indian response to the Western impact;
c. even the varying attitudes, opinions, estimates of Michael-critics agree on the basic judgment that Michael was an outstanding figure of the nineteenth century.

As for the broad lineaments of Michael Madhusudan's personality, there do not seem to be marked variations in critical estimates; it is impossible not to admire Michael Madhusudan the man.

1

Michael's Life : 1824—1843

MADHUSUDAN, the only son of Rajnarain Dutt and Jahnavi, was born on Saturday, Junuary 25, 1824, in the home of the Dutts in the village of Sagardanri, in the district of Jessore which is now one of the districts of Bangladesh. The Dutts were a solvent family. Madhusudan's father, Rajnarain, was a lawyer in Calcutta (several members of the clan were in the legal profession) and rose to the top level of his profession. Madhusudan's mother came of a prosperous zamindar family. In his early life Madhusudan never experienced poverty. In fact, when two of his brothers, both younger than him, died in childhood and Madhu happened to be Rajnarain's only living descendant, he enjoyed parental affection and tolerance to an unusual degree. The boy received his early education in the village school where he was taught Arithmetic, Bengali, some Sanskrit and Persian. Some knowledge of Persian ran in the family. It has to be borne in mind that the impact of Muslim culture on various segments of Indian life, particularly on Law and Justice, was dominant in those days and even after the establishment of British rule, the language of law-courts, especially in matters of terminology, was based on Persian. Madhu's father and uncles knew Persian. Madhu too, at the age of seven, had to walk over a mile from his village home to the school of a Moulavi (a Muslim scholar and teacher) to learn Persian ; he learnt to read and write Persian with some facility. When a student of the Hindu College in Calcutta, Madhu sang Persian ghazals for the benefit of his friends and, later on, when he was in the Bishop's College, he translated several poems from Persian into English.

Madhu's early education was not limited to the village school and the Moulavi's school. His education was richly supplemented by his mother's memorable readings, in the evinings, from the two greatest and most popular Indian classics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (in their Bengali versions). Jahnavi Devi also used to read out the popular medieval classics of Bengal, especially the narratives of *Chandi Mangal* (by Mukunda) and *Annada Mangal* (by Bharatchandra). To the great delight of his mother, the boy could recite large portions from these narratives. The impact of the epics and the narratives on Madhusudan's creative

imagination was fundamental : his poems and dramas are charged with the millenial tradition that he found in these epics and narratives. Besides, we ought to be able to appreciate the relationship between the metrical revolution that Madhusudan wrought in later life through his blank verse and his early initiation in the basic tune of the traditional rhymed pentameter of the language. In this connection, we may remember what Jyotirindranath Tagore, Rabindranath's elder brother, a person of high artistic sensibility, wrote in his Memoirs about Michael's friendship with Sarada Ganguli (Jyotirindranath's brother-in-law) and his recitation in his hoarse voice, of lines from *Meghanad Badh Kavya*, his great blank verse epic. Michael, we are told, recited with pauses after every word.

This is the text as generally recited today :

Sanmukh samare parhi Vir Churamani
Virbahu chali yabe gela Yampure
Akale, kaha he devi Amritabhasini...

Below we have the word-clusters as Michael read them :

Sanmukhā — samare — parhi — Veera — Churhamani
Veera — Bāhu — Chali — yabe — gela — Yamapure
Akale — kaha — hey — devi — Amritabhāsini ...

Michael split up the words in their shortest possible sonal units and ended each sound unit with a vowel stress whereas the modern reader tends to end the unit with a consonantal and trochaic stress. The rhythmic pattern that Michael adopted in his recitation (and which he had in mind while writing)—the unhurried, stately, deep-breathing, sonally graduated rhythm was indeed the pattern that used to be followed by Bengali readers of the Krittivasa-Ramayana and the Kashirama Das-Mahabharata till some decades ago. If the boyhood memories of Bengal's traditional epics and narrative poems left their enduring impact on Madhusudan's mind and art, the natural environments of his ancestral village too entered deep into his sensibilities. The river Kabataksha that meandered by the skirts of the village ; the trees and flowers and birds characteristic of Southern Bengal (and therefore of the village : Sagardanri), the storms, sunrises, sunsets, the midday glare and the midnight sky; the breezes that seemed to caress one and the rustling of the leaves of the trees and the swaying leaves of the arecanut trees, cocoanut trees and palm trees ; indeed unending aspects of the village life of flora and fauna sank deeply and permanently into the

memory of Madhusudan and inspite of his later experiences of Calcutta, Madras and Europe, some of those rural scenes infiltrated through his writings. Lines such as the following can only be written by one whose imagination is rich enough to pictorialise a concrete experience :

> Like a giant tree in mighty war
> With storm, on whirlwind car and fierce array,
> Blasted—and crush'd (*Visions of the Past, V*)

> Clouds covered Lanka, belching forth fire
> Heaps upon heaps ; trees were uprooted in the forest
> Uproariously ; a tremendous tornado shot across the sky
> And it rained like the deluge of the end of the world
> Swamping the universe while hails shot upon the earth.
>
> (*Meghanad Badh Kavya*. canto II,
> my translation from the Bengali)

Towards the close of the first canto of *Tilottamasambhava Kavya*, there is a long passage which mentions numerous trees each of which is native to Southern Bengal, trees that Madhusudan had seen and watched while a village boy : deodars, *plum* trees, kadamba plant, the huge simul, the sal, the palm, the lack palm, the cocoanut tree and the arecanut tree, the tamarind tree, the jackfruit tree, date-palms, bamboo plants, the *tamal* and the *shami* and the *gambhari, amalaki*—to mention only some of the trees the poet has collected in his verse-orchard. That Madhusudan vividly remembered his village and that the remembrance of things past, as the cases of Wordsworth and Marcel Proust, proved to be an unceasing and deep source of creative energy for him is a basic and unforgettable feature of his poetry.

When her two sons, both younger than Madhu, died, the mother Jahnavi was so upset as almost to lose the balance of her mind. Rajnarain decided to shift his household from the village to Calcutta where he had risen to be one among the three best-known and highest-paid lawyers and where, in Kidderpore, he owned a house. From now on, Madhu lived as a member of a small family—father, mother and an only child. He was the cynosure of the family and the road was clear for him to follow his father in the legal profession, inherit his father's considerable properties, both urban and rural, and settle down to a highly prosperous and respectable career in the fast-expanding capital city of India, Calcutta.

Two dates in Madhu's life are interesting. He was born in 1824, the year of Byron's death. He moved on to Calcutta in 1832, the year of Sir Walter Scott's death and Goethe's death.

In Calcutta, Madhu was admitted to a school. As in several other matters concerning Madhusudan's life, there is some vagueness about the school to which the boy was sent. The earliest biographer [2] vaguely states that Madhu was admitted into an English-teaching school in Kidderpore. Recent scholars have arrived at the conclusion after researches that there was no school in Kidderpore. Recent scholars have arrived at the conclusion after researches that there was no school in Kidderpore until the eighteen forties. There is strong probability in their suggestion that Madhu went to a Grammar School (an offshoot of the Parental Academic Institution, afterwards the Doveton College), established in 1823, housed at first close to Wellington Square and afterwards shifted to Park Street (1836-1842). We cannot be dogmatic but, rummage as much as you like through the documents of those days, have to conclude that Madhu was admitted to a Grammar School in Lal Bazar rather Garammar School in Wellington Square and that his father dropped the boy at the school before turning to the Law Courts near by and picked the boy up while returning home. The term 'Grammar School' was a remnant of the British educational system of earlier centuries (Shakespeare was a student of the Grammar School of Stratford-on-Avon) ; Grammar Schools followed punctilious courses of study and were strong in the Humanities. Madhu learnt Latin and Hebrew in this school. After five years in this Grammar School, Madhu joined the Hindu College in 1837.

At this point of our narrative it is necessary to refer to the significance of the Hindu College in the nineteenth century renaissance of Bengal of which, as it has been said in the first sentence of this monograph, Madhusudan was one of the richest products. In the history of that renaissance, the Hindu College played a highly significant role, from the time of its foundation in January 1817. The English language was already being taught in some private institutions : among these teachers of English in Calcutta were Archer, Farrell, Browne, Drummond, Sherbourne, Arratoon Petrus (these three were the best-known among the Anglo-Indian teachers of the times), Cunningham, Halifax, Yates and others. "Every Englishman", it has been said, "in straitened cirucumstances—the broken-down slodier, bankrupt merchant and the ruined spend-thrift—set up a day school".[3] Presently, there began to grow an opinion among the thoughtful section of the Hindu middleclass that systematic education of Indian boys in the arts and sciences of Europe, received through the medium of the

English language, would be of immense value. Eventually, the Hindu College, the archetype of all later governemnt colleges during the British regime, was founded. The impact of the foundation of the Hindu College on the intellectual life of the Bengalees of the time was at once deep and wide and this impact has been discussed in a number of works[4] on aspects of British Indian history. The first phase in the history of the Hindu College is associated chiefly, almost wholly, with the name of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31), the son of a Portuguese father, a poet in English of high promise, an extraordinary teacher whose influence (even though he died at the early age of only twenty-two) on his pupils spread far beyond the students themselves and spear-headed a many-sided and far-reaching intellectual and ethical rebellion against age-old beliefs and customs of the land ; Derozio was a poet (writing in English) of considerable promise and his poetry was praised by Max Muller, Kipling, Saintsbury, William Michael Rossetti, D.L. Richardson and Toru Dutt. Derozio joined the Hindu College as a teacher in 1826 and in no time collected around him a band of intellectually adventurous and bright young Bengalees who came to be known in the city as the Derozians and also as Young Bengal. Derozio was steeped in the rationalistic philosophy of the age of Enlightenment and his arguments and assertions produced a mighty stir in the minds of his teen-aged pupils who used to have debates on such topics as idolatry, the caste-system, Deism, Atheism, Predestination, Literature and Patriotism (Derozio was the first Indian to address his country as 'Mother'.) In consequence of this stir, some youngmen lost faith in religion, some turned against the Hindu religion and social traditions, many took to alcohol and beef-eating (the latter a shocking matter for pious Hindus). The College authorities were perturbed by numerous complaints from respectable citizens and Dr Horace Hayman Wilson, the Visitor of the College, demanded an explanation from Derozio ; in spite of the explanation, Derozio had to submit resignation and within a few months, in December 1831, he died of cholera. The intellectual and ethical whirl that started in Derozio's class-room and his house, spread out very rapidly leading to creative writing[5], nationalist thinking, educational activities, religious and social reforms, conversions to Christianity. Though Madhusudan joined the Hindu College several years after Derozio's death, he was like those scholars who yearned for a visit to England, their Earthly Paradise, and continued to be inspired by the free-thinking style initiated by Derozio. The spirit of rebellion that so distinguished the early life of Madhusudan was in the very air of the Hindu College, the air that was breathed by educated Bengalees of Calcutta from the third decade of the nineteenth

century on. The deep admiration for things European—manners, social life, literature, food and drink, philosophy, religion and so forth—that one notices in Madhusudan, was rooted in the contrast that the Hindu College boys perceived between their own country and Western Europe. This sense of contrast is manifest even in an essay that earned Madhusudan a Gold Medal awarded by C.H. Cameron, at the time a Member of the Governor-General's Council. The essay is on the importance of educating Hindu Females, with reference to the improvement which it may be expected to produce on the education of children, in their early, and the happiness it would generally confer on domestic life. A few sentences from this brief essay of 574 words are quoted below :

> Extensive dissemination of knowledge amongst women is the surest way that leads a nation to civilisation and refinement, for it is woman who first gives ideas to the future philosopher and the would-be poet. The happiness of a man who has an enlightened partner is complete...In India, I may say in all the oriental countries, women are looked upon as created merely to contribute to the gratification of the animal appetites of man. This brutal misconception of the design of the Almighty is the source of much misery to the fair sex, because it not only makes them appear as of inferior mental endowments, but no better than a sort of speaking brutes.

(B.P. Majumdar, *First Fruits of English Education*, pp. 221-222)

As a student in the Hindu College, Madhusudan proved his brightness equally in English and Mathematics. The story goes that once he had an argument with his class-mate, Bhudev Mukherjee (who afterwards distinguished himself as a powerful writer of Bengali prose and a person of high intellectual abilities) ; the bone of contention was : Who was the greater genius — Shakespeare or Newton ? Madhu asserted that Shakespeare, if he wished to be so, could be as great as Newton but the mathematician had not in him the genius of the poet. Soon after this argument, one day in the Mathematics class of V. L. Rees, when no one was able to solve a problem, Madhu walked up to the black-board, solved the problem and then proudly announced to his class-mates, 'And so Shakespeare could be Newton, if he tried.'

In those days, the chief luminary of the teaching staff of the Hindu College was Captain David Lester Richardson (1801-1865), a friend of James Silk Buckingham, the wellknown social worker and journalist of England of the Georgian and the early Victorian periods and a prominent

Benthamist. Richardson made a great name and exercised a powerful influence on the youth of Bengal among whom are to be counted such distinguished men as Rajnarain Bose, Digambar Mitra, Peari Chand Mitra, Dakshina Ranjan Mukherjee, Bhudev Mukherjee and, of couuse, Madhusudan Dutt. Richardson used to write poetry and though his name is not metioned in histories of nineteenth century literature (and in 1945, I found the pages of the copies of his works in the Bodleian Library still uncut), some of his poetical volumes were printed and published and many of his verses were published in some of the contemporary 'Annuals' and in so well-known a journal as the *Athenaeum*. He must have been an exceptionally stimulating lecturer. Macaulay's praise of him testifies to his impact on his audience. With the powerful encouragement of Richardson to support him, Madhusudan came in touch with several literary journals of India—*The Bengal Spectator, Literary Gleaner, Calcutta Literary Gazette, Literary Blossom, Comet,* and had the pleasure of seeing a number of his verses published. The following verses, imitative and artificial, nevertheless testify to his facile use of the medium :

Song

I loved a maid, a blue-eyed maid
As fair a maid can e'er be, O !
But she, oft with disdain, repaid
My fondness and affection, O !
For her I sighed, and e'er shall sigh,
Tho' she shall ne'er be mine, O !
For this sad heart's starless sky
None but herself can light O !

(*Works*, p. 444)

To Another Lady

Oh ! deign to give a thought on me,
When these sad lines do meet thine eye,
Think then on him who oft for thee,
Sweet one ! doth unregarded sigh !

(*Works*, p. 440)

Song

I

I am like the Earth, revolving
Ever round the self-same Sun, Boy.

Seasons, both of Joy and Sorrow,
I have, like her, as I run, Boy.

II

O! her eyes soft, tender beamings,
And her sweet bewitching smile, Boy,
Like Enchantment's potent spell, do
Call for the gayer, brighter Springs, Boy.

III

But when frowns, like lowering clouds, do
Over-cast her sunny brow, Boy
Then, oh ! then, the freezing Winter
Of dark sorrow chills my breast, Boy.

(The last two stanzas left out ;
Works, p. 442)

These are but a few specimens of the kind of English verses that Madhusudan wrote while a sutdent in the Hindu College. There is no freshness and depth in the content of these verses while the formal part of the verses merely indicates a growing facility in the use of a language which was not the author's own. One of Madhu's sonnets goes thus :

Sonnet
[Written at the Hindu College]

Oh ! how my heart exulteth while I see
Those future flow'rs, to deck my country's brow,
Thus kindly nurtured in this nursery !—
Perchance, unmark'd some here are budding now,
Whose temples shall with laureate-wreaths be crown'd,
Twined by the Sisters Nine : whose angel-tongues
Shall charm the world with their enchanting songs.
And time shall waft the echo of each sound
To distant ages : —some, perchance, here are,
Who, with a Newton's glance, shall nobly trace
The course mysterious of each wandering star ;
And, like a God, unveil the hidden face
Of many a planet to man's wondering eye,
And give their names to immortality.

(*Works*, p. 448)

This sonnet reminds one of Derozio's sonnet on the same subject, published after his death in 1831 :

> Expanding like the petals of young flowers,
> I watch the gentle opening of your minds
> And sweet loosening of the spell that binds
> Your intellectual energies and powers, that stretch
> (Like young birds in soft summer hour)
> Their wings to try their strength, O how the winds
> of circumstance, and freshening April showers
> of new perceptions shed their influence,
> And how you worship Truth's Omnipotence !
> What joyance rains upon me, when I see
> Fame in the mirror of futurity
> Weaving the chaplets your are yet to gain
> And then I feel I have not lived in vain.

Incidentally, Derozio was the first and Madhusudan the second Indian writer to compose sonnets ; these early sonnets were, of course, composed in English.

A number of English verses written by Madhusudan, written during the Hindu College period, were published in contemporary English periodicals (some of which have been mentioned above), and we may do well to note that, as in India today since independence, so in India for several decades from the eighteen thirties onwards, snobbish prestige was attached to writings (mostly verses) by Indians in English. Then, as now, the publication of a few verses abroad, some back-patting by some English reviewer (today it may also be an American) or by a Western journal would earn the author some publicity.[6] Madhu and his contemporaries, judging by their letters and other statements, were self-conscious about literary ventures in the medium of English.

Madhusudan's poems of the Hindu College period (and they were poems in English) were composed between 1841 and 1842 when the poet was seventeen. By this time, he had read some Shakespeare (I do not find any reference yet to Milton), Pope, the poets of the later eighteenth century and some Romantic poets. He admired Wordsworth and in 1842 sent a bunch of poems to the *Blackwood Magazine*, dedicating the poems in the following words :

> These pieces are most respectfully dedicated to
> William Wordsworth Esq., the Poet, by a foreign
> admirer of his genius—the author.

This is, as far as evidences go, the earliest record of an Indian reader's admiration for a European writer, preceding by almost a year Dwarkanath Tagore's (Rabindranath's grandfather) admiring contact with Charles Dickens.[7] The influence of Wordsworth is noticeable in a few sonnets of the young Indian writer in respect of both theme and style. Madhusudan admires other English poets too (Burns, Crabbe, Campbell, Southey, Coleridge and Shelley, judging from internal evidence) but he admires most Tom Moore and Byron. On November 25, 1842, he wrote to Gour Dass Bysack, a friend to whom he always unburdened his thoughts and feelings : "I am reading Tom Moore's life of my favourite Byron —a splendid book, upon my word ; Oh ! how I should like to see you write my 'Life' if I happen to be a great poet..." Madhusudan Dutt indeed grew to be 'a great poet', one of the greatest poets of India of all times, but none of his friends, neither Gour Dass Bysack nor any one else, wrote his biography.

Madhu's early poems show a wide variety. There are short lyrical pieces (often imitating romantic *weltschmerz*), there are several sonnets (one, a daring experiment in a sonnet in blank verse), a few epigrammatic efforts, a longer poem on King Porus, divided into six sections of about twenty lines each, testifying to the young poet's patriotism. Stylistically, these poems belong to the backwash of English romanticism, employing the kind of feeble and sentiment-drenched diction and tone adopted in the verses of contemporary 'Annuals'. Madhusudan used to read the most popular 'Annual' of the thirties, the *Forget Me Not.*

I find nothing in these verses to enthuse over. The most that a teen-aged writer inditing such verses can expect from his readers is an avuncular pat on the back and a comment such as "Clever for a seventeen year old, eh !" There is nothing to show that the young Madhusudan has the capacity to break out of his cocoon. We have merely to note that (a) Madhusudan has made his *debut* as a poet in the medium of English, not in his own language ; (b) he can already handle the sonnet form, the second Indian poet after Henry Vivian Derozio to do so.

We learn from his contemporaries in the college that Madhusudan was dark of complexion (his friends, not unoften have mentioned Othello while speaking of him), with flowing curly hair, his bright eyes corresponding to his bright talk. He dressed as a dandy, changing dress four or five times in the day, keeping a large and varied wardrobe. He went from his Kidderpore home to the Hindu College in a gaily-dressed palanquin (the usual transport for affluent townsmen in those days), followed by two valets on foot. Altogether, Madhusudan was a reckless

spendthrift, tipping sovereigns to Anglo-Indian hairdressers. A friend once saw him enjoying the hookah in the company of his father—an exceptional gesture (judged by the standard of Indian middle-class manners) of daring unconventionality for both father and son. In later life, Madhusudan earned the distinction of being the first Indian to smoke cigarettes, rolling them himself. He certainly became an adept at drinking while in the Hindu College, following in the footsteps of the College students of earlier years. Devotion to alcohol was the *sine qua non* of the 'educated' young gentlemen of Gol Dighi (the modern College Square of Calcutta) of those days ; Madhusudan frequently joined drink parties and himself threw many such parties. In later life, he wrote a play in Bengali prose—*Ekei Ki Baley Sabhyata ?* (Call This Civilization ?) —incisively satirising the drinking fashion of the day. While in the Hindu College, Madhusudan used to sing and would sometimes regale his friends with Persian ghazals. In later life, he developed a hoarse voice on account of chronic pharyngitis and his taste in music too took a somewhat different turn. In later life, once in 1869, moved deeply by the songs sung by his wife Henrietta and their daughter Sarmishtha, he said, "I am Europeanized, as regards music, but of course I like Bengali songs, if not so well, at least well enough to bear to hear them sung for hours at a stretch."

This love of music, this ability to sing, stood Madhusudan in very good stead in his career as a poet. 'All Art', Walter Pater has told us, 'constantly aspires to the condition of music'. The Art of poetry certainly does so aspire. A poet has to possess a sense of music and in all unsophisticated and not-too-sophisticated poetry, in respect of both form and content, there always is a rhythmic grace and variability that approaches the variability and grace of pure music. Indeed, the extremely complex structure of much highly sophisticated modern poetry owes its beauty and richness in no small measure to its approximation to the structure of music. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and several poems of Eugenio Montale are musically patterned. One can find parallels in countless other Western poets of the last two centuries. A whole school of poetry in Bengal that flourished in early nineteenth century Calcutta and its neighbourhood—the Kavigan, musical poetry—sought to bring into sharp focus the age-long identity between poetry and music. Madhusudan's musical sensibility is manifest in the beautiful lyrics of *Brajangana Kavya*, but in *Meghanad Badh Kavya* the triumphant emergence of the *Amitrakshar Chhanda* (the Bengali sonal form of the English blank verse) is an uncontestable testimony to the poet's simultaneous response to Bengali and European music.

The over-all impression that one derives from the accounts given by Madhusudan's contemporaries in the College is that of a young man of ebullient nature, fond of the good things of life (let us not forget that thanks to his father, this College boy never experienced any monetary inconvenience), almost a Cyrenaic, fond of wit and jest and all manner of verbal dalliance in the goodly company of like-minded, like-conditioned friends. His wit and humour he retained till nearly the end of his life, in adversity as much as in times of comfort and plenitude, but curiously (and to me, inexplicably) there is little expression of this vivacious jollity in his writings, except in some personal letters. Here is a dichotomy between the man and his imaginative works which has not been considered by Michael critics but which cries for consideration and assessment.

2

Michael's Life : 1843-1847

IN the first week of February, 1843, Madhusudan disappeared after college hours. For a couple of days, he was in hiding in Fort William, beyond the reach of his father and friends. On February 9, he embraced Christianity in the Old Mission Church. The Christian name bestowed on the convert was Michael, the name by which he has been since then universally called. At the conversion ceremony, conducted by Archdeacon Dealtry of the Church of England, the hymn sung by the congregation was the convert's composition.

The news of this conversion produced quite a sensation in Calcutta, among both Hindus and Christians, and overwhelmed Madhusudan's parents whose only surviving son he was. There was some stir in the city on this occasion; breach of peace was apprehended and armed guards were posted at the gate of the Old Mission Church. One Rev. Morton even produced a printed pamphlet justifying the conversion. Why did Madhusudan embrace Christianity ?

One facile and pseudo-romantic reason suggested by the biographer N. Shome is that Madhusudan wanted to marry Debaki, the second daughter of the Rev. K. M. Banerjea, a well-known Indian Christian of the period whose own conversion over a decade earlier had aroused sensational bitterness in the city. The suggestion linking the names of Madhusudan and Daibaki (the name was mispronounced by the glib earlier biographers as Debaki) has to be brushed aside straightaway. As modern scholars have plausibly argued, the girl Daibaki was no more than a child of three or four at the time. Romantic love indeed![8]

It is possible to say that Madhusudan's motive for conversion was a straight one as asserted by an anglo-Indian periodical of the times : "The willingness to embrace the religion which reason, conscience, experience, all conspired to tell him, was the true one".[9] The diagnosis of this anonymous writer agrees with some assertive statements that Michael himself made in an essay entitled *The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu*, initially delivered as a lecture and afterwards published as a booklet in Madras in 1854 :

> The Hindu, as he stands before you, is a fallen being; once a green, a beautiful, a tall, a majestical, a flowering tree; now—blasted by lightning. Who can recall him to life ? ... The Hindu is an aged, a decayed race... The Hindu, I say, is an aged race—tottering on a moral grave. It must die. It is the mission, of the Anglo-Saxon to regenerate, to renovate the Hindu race. (*Works, pp. 525-531*)

True, this essay was written years after Michael's conversion but there is no reason to think that the ideas he had imbibed as a student of the Hindu College had undergone any serious changes in course of the next decade or so. Let us consider a sentence picked up from the essay that he had written, entitled the "Importance of Educating Hindu Females".

> The people of this country do not know the pleasure of domestic life, and indeed they cannot know, *until civilization shows them the way to attain to it.* (Italics mine)

Madhu, as a student of the Hindu College, breathed the air of free-thinking initiated by Derozio and continued by D.L. Richardson. Like many of the 'Young Bengal' products of the Hindu College, Madhusudan must have been repelled by the caste-ridden, convention-bound, polytheistic practices (described by the Christian Missionaries of those days as idolatrous, superstitious, error-infested, and so forth) of Hindu society of contemporary Bengal. Such repulsion, elevated to a quest for a religious experience, would be understandable as a sufficient motive for Madhusudan's apostasy, but there is not a scrap of evidence of such intoxication in any of his letters of the period, or in fact in his letters, writings, conversations of any period. In his letters written before conversion or even after, there is no sense of alienation from his ancenstral faith, nor did he, after conversion, behave as a zealot at all. Madhusudan was no Gerard Manley Hopkins, no Sadhu Sundar Singh, no Sister Nivedita, persons who had turned from the faith into which they were born to another faith because of irresistible compulsion and call from within, persons for whom religious conversion was no mere shift from one temple to another but a total transmutation of personality and re-identification. Madhusudan was not like even the Rev. Lal Behari Dey, born in the same year as he, who too embraced Christianity and became an enthusiastic propagandist of his new faith. After rejecting the pseudo-romantic explanation of Madhusudan's conversion, we may now consider some meaningful extracts from his letters to his friend Gour Dass Bysack.

> I am come nearer that sea which will perhaps see me at a period (which I hope is not far off) ploughing its bosom for "England's

glorious shore". The sea from this place is not very far : what a number of ships have I seen going to England. (In October 1842, Madhusudan accompanied his lawyer-father to Tamluk ; from there he wrote the letter to his friend.)

When I go to England—which period, I hope, is not very far—(next cold season)—I intend to take a picture of yours. (Kidderpore, November 25, 1842)

I am now plotting against my own parents. (I won't explain this, understand it yourself.) By the bye, last evening you had the impudence to tell me ... that you will inform my father about my intention of running away to E-d and thereby prevent me from doing so ! If these are what really you think, you are *no friend of mine*, I can assure you. If these are your sentiments, you be d-d ! Perhaps you think I am very cruel, because I want to leave parents. Ah ! my dear ! I know that, and I feel for it. But 'to follow Poetry', (says A. Pope) 'one must leave both father and mother'. (Kidderpore, November 26, 1842)

You don't know the weight of my afflictions. I wish (Oh! I really wish) that somebody would hang me ! At the expiration of three months from hence I am to be married ! dreadful thoughts !...You know my desire for leaving this country is too firmly rooted to be removed. The sun may forget to rise, but I cannot remove it from my heart. Depend upon it —in the course of a year or two more, I must either be in England or cease "to be" at all ; —one of these must be done. (Kidderpore, November 27, 1842)

Here we have a convincing reason—particularly convincing because it is so totally *in* character—for Madhusudan's conversion. For a young man who breathed deeply in the tradition-defying atmosphere of the Hindu College, who believed (belief that he categorically expressed some years after conversion while he was in Madras in the essay entitled *The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu*) that the Hindu could progress only through Christianity and the Englishman's mission in India was to Christianize the Hindu; who believed that an experience of European life, especially of English life, was the only path of life to be chosen by an aspiring poet; who was determined to escape the net of conventional life sought to be closed upon him by an early marriage. For such a youngman, the way to salvation lay through the acceptance of Christianity with England for his destination. This inter-relation between conversion to Christianity and going to England is explicit in some observations of the Rev. K. M. Banerjea to whom Madhusudan paid a few visits :

He [Madhusudan] called one day and introduced himself to me as a religious inquirer, almost persuaded to be a Christian. After two or three interviews and a great deal of conversation, I was impressed with the belief that his desire of becoming a Christian was scarcely greater than his desire of a voyage to England. I was unwilling to mix up the two questions. (*N. Shome, Madhu-Smriti, P. 22.* Italics mine.)

The reason then for Madhusudan's embracement of Christianity was his firm conviction that, for India and Indians of his day, the road to civilization lay through Christianization and Europeanization, that it was primarily through Christianity that an Indian could hope to be liberated from the stifling stranglehold of a thousand and one superstitions. A sure corollary to this fundamental belief was Madhu's resolve to make a trip to Europe to acquire first-hand knowledge of that El Dorado of modern civilization. At this point, it has to be remembered that orthodox Hindus of those days believed that whoever crossed the seas (*Kala-pani*—Black waters, as the seas were called in those days), lost his purity and the right to perform any religious ceremony. When Madhusudan's parents heard of their son's (only child's) resolve to go to England, they became alarmed by the thought that he would be debarred by society from performing their sraddh ceremonies, and in that event their souls must remain eternally damned. Agonized by this apprehension, the parents planned to divert the son's mind by arranging his marriage with a beautiful girl, but Madhusudan stuck resolutely to his plans as a letter to Gour Dass Bysack shows.

The question for Madhusudan now was, how to escape the proposed matrimonial net that was closing on him, how to keep himself free for a journey to Europe. He found the answer in immediate baptism. After conversion, Michael could no longer live with his family and therefore he lived for a while with Archdeacon Dealtry and for sometime with the Rev. Vaughan of the Old Mission Church, and afterwards with the Rev. Thomas Smith with whom, moreover, he read the works of Shakespeare. In spite of the shock of their son's conversion, Michael's parents did not cease to love him and they helped him as best they could. The father continued to hand over to the son munificent monthly allowances. But a difficulty arose concerning the college. Madhu had no intention of leaving the college; he paid his fees upto July and perhaps for a month or two thereafter, but soon he learnt that under the rules of the Hindu College, a renegade was not permitted to be either a teacher or a student of the institution. This must have caused pain to Michael, but undeterred, he moved on to and entered another college, also a well-known academy. This was the Bishop's

College housed in Sibpur near Howrah, on the western bank of the Ganga. Michael Madhusudan was a student of this residential college from November 1844 till December 1847 as a Lay Student ; the other students, all Indian Christians, were trained for the vocations of clergymen or teachers in missionary schools.

Michael's position in this college initially was not exactly comfortable. We learn from the Rev. K. M. Banerjea that this spirited youngman revolted against the sartorial discrimination made by the authorities between Europeans and Indians ; eventually, he was permitted to put on the same dress as the Europeans did. There is another legend about Michael's revolt against another discrimination between Indians and Europeans when at the dinner-table, pegs of wine were handed over to the European diners but not to the Indians ; Michael's protest produced salutary results.

All in all, the years in the Bishop's College were quiet, preparatory and self exploratory years for Michael, years that may remind us of Milton's years at Horton and Tennyson's at Somersby. Biographical records show that because of the physical distance between Sibpur and the Hindu College, his contact with his friends began to be infrequent. He continued his visits to Kidderpore to meet his parents. In 1847, however, a crisis threatened Michael. His father Rajnarain was a highly competent speaker in Persian which was the language of law-courts. In the 1840s, a demand for the replacement of Persian by English began to be clamorous until in 1847. English was accepted as a court-language and with that acceptance, with the growing importance of English, the income-fetching power of Persian began to dwindle fast. Rajnarain, no longer able to provide his son with a handsome allowance, expected him to be economical in habits ; Michael, never used to such habits, argued with his father and in no time the father altogether stopped allowances. There was a further reason for this stoppage. Since there was no possibility whatever of Madhusudan's abjuring Christianity and returning to the ancestral fold (as several neo-Christians of that time had done), Rajnarain decided to marry a second time, hoping to get a boy-child from this wife, a hope which was never fulfilled.

Michael realised that it was high time for him to stand on his own legs. He received no assistance from any source and eventually plunged into an adventure. With some of the South Indian students of the Bishop's College, Michael decided to travel to Madras and try his luck there.

3

Michael's Life : 1847—1856

AFTER a four-day voyage as a deck-passenger across the Bay of Bengal, Michael arrived in Madras on December 24, 1847. Through the good offices of the clergymen of Black Town (a part of Madras city where 'native' converts used to live, a part which in after-times was re-named as George Town), Michael found a place to stay in but, unfortunately, he fell ill with chicken-pox. Two months after recovery, he obtained a job as an Usher in the free Day School for boys attached to the Madras Male and Female Orphan Asylum run by the Church of England. An Usher, in the British tradition, was an assistant teacher in Boys' School. Michael's pay initially was Rs 46 a month. Later on, in 1851, when he was appointed as the Second Tutor in the reorganised institution, he drew a monthly salary of Rs 150. Like the Boys' School a Girls' School too was attached to the Asylum; a student of that school and inmate of the hostel was Rebecca McTavish.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Rebecca McTavish were married in 1848. They had four children and they seemed to be a happy couple, inspite of their limited income. During the early days of their association, Michael wrote some verses addressed to or referring to Rebecca ; one of those verses contains the follwing lines :

'Tis sweet to gaze upon those eyes where love
Has treasur'd all his rays of softest beam;
'Tis sweet to see the smile as from above
Some child of light,—such as we often dream.
Both dwell on planet pale,—or star of golden gleam.

Not a memorable specimen of love-poetry this. Till the end of the Madras period, Michael concentrated on creative writings in English, writings to which no reference would have been justified today but for the fact that they were in earliest compositions of Madhusudan Dutt, who, in course of time, grew to be one of the greatest among poets writing in an Indian Language. While in Madras, Michael became closely associated with a paper, *The Madras Circulator*, which welcomed this vivacious, promising, Christian poet from Calcutta. Several poems of Michael were published in this organ. With characteristic exhibitionism, this young poet

adopted the half comic pen-name of 'Timothy Penpoem' and selected a showily learned title for the series of his poems, DISJECTA MEMBRA POETAE, a phrase borrowed from one of the satires of Horace, meaning in literal translation, the scattered limbs of a poet ; meaning, as a phrase, the scattered fragments of a poet's writings. As for the penname, Timothy Penpoem, perhaps the young poet wanted to achieve some not-too-subtle word-play ; Timothy, meaning a kind of grass, and therefore a humble plant amidst the massive trees in the world of English poetry ; these particular poems being the products of this concealed poet's pen. There is little to be said about Timothy's verses except that they are as colourless as those perpetrated by countless poetasters of England of the Early Victorian period, not unoften reminiscent of the lilting rhythm of Byron. Thus Michael imitates the pattern of Byron's alternating tetrameters and trimeters ;

> Ah ; fly false hope ; why soothe to dream
> Of things that may not be,
> And dazzle but a while, to leave
> In gloom and misery ... (*Works*, p. 469)

A fragment (23 lines only), entitled 'A Vision' (afterwards elaborated and published as *Visions of the Past* along with the *Captive Ladie*) came out in the *Madras Circulator* and began thus :

> Methought I stood within a blushing bow'r
> Bosom'd upon a mount ; it was the hour
> Of Eve ; the sun in flaming majesty,
> Like a proud dream glory, had now sunk
> Beneath the western wave ...

This was Michael's (and for that matter, India's) earliest manipulation of blank verse. In his early years up to the Madras period Michael had written verses exclusively in English and although the volume of this verse was not large, we notice its variety. Apart from the lyrical verses, written mostly in tetrameters and trimeters and occasionally even in pentameters, Michael had experimented in a variety of forms ; Epistles in verse ; and Acrostics, Odes, a sonnet in blank verse, the first few lines of a verse-tale ; a poem to illustrate a picture. In respect of technique, the most remarkable experiments are in the sonnet-form. We find the Shakespearean form : ab ab cd cd ef ef gg ; and in addition several admixtures of the English and Italian rhyme-structures :

Structure I	ab ab/	cd dc/	ef fe/	fe
Structure II	ab ba/	cd cd/	ef ef/	gg
Structure III	ab ba/	ab ba/	cd cd/	cd
Structure IV	ab ba/	cd cd/	ef ef/	gg

Our poet was fast growing into a skilful manipulator of the sonnet-form, and in the years to follow, this skill manifested itself in another language-medium, Bengali. Michael's achievements as a poet in English were a prelude to his imperishable later glory as a poet in Bengali.

King Porus, an unfinished verse-tale, consisting of six sections totalling 133 lines, follows Scott and Byron in using iambic tetrameter lines with occasional employment of alternate tetrameters and trimeters. Written in Calcutta in 1843, *King Porus* remained an uncompleted poem. The theme, in spite of Michael's admiration for things European, reveals his deep identification with Indian values. Another fragment in English, *Visions of the Past,* composed in 1848 in Madras but never completed, is a remarkable work of the visual imagination. Consider the following lines :

> I look'd—the sun had veil'd his dazzling brow—
> As when he saw upon thee, Calvarie ;
> The Pilgrim from His Father's bosom—He—
> His God—with blood-stain'd brow and crown of thorn
> Die on th' accursed tree—yea—die to save—
> And dying pray for those who shed His blood ...

This brief portrait of Christ on the Cross, a crown of thorns on his head, shows that though Michael does not seem to have spoken much of his religious faith, the concept of Jesus, undergoing the ultimate suffering on behalf of all mankind, was a matter of deep-seated conviction with him. Michael's Christianity was no mere garment for him; it became the shaping power of his soul.

Some other lines of his uncompleted poem demand our attention :

> —As when, Bengala ; on thy sultry plains
> Beneath the pillar'd and high arched shade
> Of some proud Banyan—slumberous haunt and cool—
> Echo in mimic accents 'mong the flocks,
> Couch'd there in noon-tide rest and soft repose.
> Repeats the deafening and deep-thunder'd roar
> Of him—the royal wanderer of the woods ...

'Bengala', her villages, especially the village where our poet was born and where he lived in his early boyhood ; the villages of Bengala with their tall, hefty, majestic trees, remained an archetypal image for Michael Madhusudan Dutt wherever he lived, in whatever environments of nature he found himself. 'Scratch a Russian, you find a Tartar'—they say. 'Scratch Michael Dutt, you find a Bengali poet', we may confidently say, inspite of his admiration for European culture.

While in the Hindu College, Madhusudan had started composing a verse-tale, *The Upsori*, an uncompleted poem of 20 Spenserian stanzas. We have no records showing the date of the composition of this poem but seeing that this was one of the early poems that had been carefully preserved by the poet's friend, Gour Dass Bysack, and that all these poems were composed after 1841 (when Madhusudan was seventeen and had only recently commenced writing verses) and also on the basis of internal evidence, we may fix 1842 as the date of its composition. The poem was never published. It is a poem very characteristic of a teen-aged writer. Whether Madhu had read Spenser at the time (or ever) is doubtful though the characteristically languorous flow of verbal rhythm manifests itself in the stanzas of T*he Upsori* at times ; it is however plausible to suggest that Madhusudan recollected Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes* while composing his poem. Consider the following lines :

Like the bright rose beneath noon's scorching gale ...
(stanza XIV)

As if his heart's deep fount were burst and overflown ;
(ibid)

She trembled as the lily on the lake (stanza XVII)

She wandered like a rill meanderingly
That glides thro' wood and valet[11], embraced the boundless sea.
(stanza XX)

That there are more similes than metaphors and that the imagery are mostly visual indicate the novitiate quality of the writing. The immaturity of the poem manifests itself in other ways, ways mostly related to diction. There are numerous elisions which are not necessary but which testify to the poet's hesitation about the sonal value of weak syllables. Thus, we have : bow'r, flow'r, cull'd, charm'd, wish'd, walk'd, 'companied etc. There are two stunning adverbs—palely (cf. Keats : 'palely loitering'), *lovelily*. There is a rare though valid word, 'imparadise'. There is a stanza describing the Hindu goddess Kali, a description that deserves immortality ;

The fane was won,—'twas Kally's—Frightfulness ;
Lo ! there she stood in martial majesty,
Gorg'd with the blood of Sembo's cursed race,
And garlanded with heads !—Her blood-red eye
Shot lightning ; in her hand the gory blade
Shone like a brand of fire—while naked, wild
She trampled on her prostrate husband's head,
And with a fiendish glare upon him smiled ;
Her raven locks stream'd wildly bath'd in gore,
And shed dark drops of blood upon the slippery floor.
(stanza XI)

It is a stanza that arouses fear and we must remember that in Sanskrit rhetoric fear is a valid aesthetic emotion and that the emotion of fear reaches its almost unbearable climax in the Alexandrine at the end of this stanza.

The Captive Ladie, Michael's most sustained poem in English, consists of an Introduction of eleven five-lined stanzas plus the first canto running to 615 rhyming iambic tetrameter lines (characteristic metre for verse-tales of the English Romantic Revival) plus the second canto ending with 572 lines ; at the top of the first canto two lines from Byron's *Giaour* have been quoted and at the top of the second canto four lines from Tom Moore's *Lalla Rookh.* Introductory five-lined stanzas of Michael's poem that are addressed to Rebecca (without mentioning her name) have some lines bearing some personal significance. Stanzas VII and VIII offer unmistakable internal evidence of autobiographical experience, experience woven around the woman he loved, his first wife, Rebecca.

Oh ! beautiful as Inspiration, when
She fills the Poet's breast,—her fairy shrine !
Woo'd by melodious worship ;—welcome then !—
Tho' ours the home of want,—I ne'er repine,
Art thou not there—e'er thou—a priceless gem and mine ?

Tho' ours the home of want'—the monthly salary of Rs 46 that Michael earned as a teacher of the Male Orphan Asylum could by no stretch of imagination be regarded as an income for anything but 'a home of want'. His income, however, presently increased when he became the editor of the *Hindu Chronicle* and engaged in journalism in general.

The Captive Ladie is a romantic verse-tale (Michael's first ambitious poem) which is an admixture of English poems of that species. In this

poem, our poet is very self-consciously presenting the tale from the European point of view. There is no justification for the spelling of several names : Judasteer ; Raj Shooio Jugum ; Tchandi ; Brim ; Lutchmee ; Indraput ; Mussulmen (an ignorant plural form of Mussulman) ; such spellings as Vindabonum and Trisulum were obviously influenced by Tamil pronunciation. He projects his Christianity when he writes of "the popular belief, common amongst all heathens"[12] and yet he does not fail to bring out the chivalry and death-defying adherence to honour that distinguished medieval heroes. Inspite of the poet's attempt to follow the pattern of English and Scottish poets building up verse-tales on the bases of historic events and legends, *The Captive Ladie* cannot be called a historical poem. Dr Sukumar Sen's judgment in this context is entirely acceptable : "The poem cannot be called a historical poem as there is little of history. But it was the first poem by an Indian writer dealing though indirectly, with the Muslim conquest of India".

All in all, *The Captive Ladie* is not a very meritorious poem unless, of course, an Indian's writing verses in English (not a language he was born to) be regarded as a meritorious performance. But we have to note that since the publication of Kashiprasad Ghosh's *The Shair and Other Poems* (1830) writing verses in English had become a prestigious activity in the nineteenth century for many Indians, not excluding Michael Madhusudan.

Besides *The Captive Ladie*, a verse-tale based on history, Michael also wrote a verse-drama (during the Madras period), entitled *Rizia, the Empress of Ind*, published in *The Eurasian* (a Madras journal) in seven consecutive issues during 1849-50 ; this work sank into oblivion until the admirable researches of Sureshprasad Niyogi[13] recovered the work for the reading public and brought all bibliographical facts to light. We do not now possess the work in its complete form, and for reasons not clear today, this "Dramatic Fragment" (as Michael called it in the title) was published in *The Eurasian* without the author's name. Some years later, after his return to Calcutta, Michael wrote a Bengali version of *Rizia* hoping that it would be staged ; however, it failed to impress the influential men of Calcutta.

The Madras period of Michael's life was now fast coming to a close. He lived in Madras for eight years, having arrived there on December 24, 1847, returning to Calcutta on February 2, 1856. During this eight-year long interregnum, much had happened to Michael. Three years after Michael had left Calcutta, his mother died, perhaps towards the end of 1850. To his mother, Michael's attachment was boundless and all through his great Bengali poetry (the product of his Calcutta period after his return from Madras), the mother-child relationship[14] bobs up in numberless

forms of poetic imagery. We do not know when precisely Michael paid a visit to Calcutta, and why. We do not know the duration of this visit and where he stayed. We are simply told that he met Rajnarain Dutt, his father, and *no one else*. The mysterious cause and details of the visit remain yet unexplained ; four years later, on January 16, 1855, Michael's father, Rajnarain died. The news was conveyed in a letter by Gour Dass :

> Your parents are dead and your cousins are fighting over the property left intestate by them...If you come in time, you will yet save it from a ruinous litigation and receive unreserved possession of your own estate.

There is no clear biographical record to show what the full amount was of Michael's expected inheritance ; we know this much that after a series of litigations, Michael did receive one of the properties in Jessore district which was sold out by him presently ; the new owner used to draw an annual income of Rs 8,000 from the property.

First his mother's death and next his father's led Michael to a quick decision to return to Calcutta. But this decision became linked up with another decision, as major a decision as the one made twelve years earlier to embrace Christianity. This new decision was (in January 1856) to return to Calcutta leaving his wife Rebecca and the four children behind. He nevermore met them nor is there any extant evidence of his further contact or communication with them. He made no monetary provision for them. There is no evidence that the marriage was annulled in a church or even by solemn vows in the presence of friends. Nevertheless, we must note two matters in this context : (a) this separation between an Indian husband and a western wife was accepted by the Madras Christian society of those days ; (b) Rebecca and her sons, calling themselves by the British-seeming name, Dutton, did not at all think ill of the poet.

Michael's second wife was Henrietta, but surely the marriage could not have been solemnised simultaneously with the separation (at least social, since not sacramental). Surely some considerable time had to elapse before the second marriage could take place. We find that Henrietta arrived in Calcutta more than a year after Michael's arrival on 2nd February, 1856, probably sometime towards the end of 1857, or early in 1858, and they bagan to live in Chitpore Road ; their first child Sarmista (named after the heroine of his verse-drama, *Sharmistha*) was born in 1859.

The Madras period brought Michael into close grips with the problems of life. He came to know a far wider range of men and women than he had known earlier in Calcutta ; he became well read in South Indian languages and literature. He had wholly to stand on his own legs and he

found himself doings so with competence and dignity. He enjoyed a happy family life and, further, he enjoyed the esteem and affection of George Norton (Advocate-General of Madras Presidency) and Joseph Richard Nailer (a fellow-teacher). The Madras period saw the full efflorescence of his abilities as an English writer and also as an English journalist. Yet it was during this same period that Michael, the true artist that he was, must have realised the futility of writing in English. Finally, the Madras writings cover the main varieties of poetic composition with which he had become concerned : verse-tales, sonnets, short lyrical poems, poems of self-analysis, poetic drama.

When Michael returned to Calcutta, he was fully prepared for creative writing in his own language.

4

Michael's Life : 1856-1862 (Dramatic Works)

On February 2, 1856, Michael returned to Calcutta, never again to visit Madras. For some time, he had to depend on the hospitality of the Rev. K. M. Banerjea who, in those days, lived in the college quarters of the Bishop's College in Sibpur. For months Michael was deeply engaged in conducting litigations against those kinsmen who had grabbed his ancestral properties. Michael never forgot his village or his home ; from Calcutta he made two trips to Sagardanri, the village, once accompanied by his second wife. A Calcutta man, a Christian, an internationalist, Michael Madhusudan Dutt's relations with his village home remained spiritually inalienable till the end of his life.

Micheal renewed contacts with his old friends in Calcutta and he was assisted in this respect by the parties thrown by his best friend Gour Dass Bysack. Kissory Chand Mitra, an old friend, at the time a Police Magistrate, helped Michael in securing an appointment as Head Clerk in his office, presently Michael had a lift as an Interpreter in the court. In his official life, Michael made a powerful impression by his capacity for quick yet accurate translation from Bengali to English.

Almost immediately after joining the Police Court, Michael shifted from the Bishop's College to Kissory Chand Mitra's garden-house residence on No. 1, Dum Dum Road. We find in a diary of Kissory Chand (dated 20.7.1856) an eight-line stanza composed by Michael :

When I was a young and gay recruit
Just landed at Madras :
I thought to lead a sober life
With a superfine black shining lass.
I roved about from place to place
Until I found my Mathonia
Oh : What a charming girl she was
With her "Than a-na-nia !"

Michael's irrepressible jollity found congenial welcome in the garden-house of Kissory Chand which became the rendezvous of a number of bright young men ; the discussions, arguments, witticisms, characteristic of the Bengali intellectual *addasoiree*, must have been a source of inspiration for the great creative phase of Michael's life. There are evidences that Michael was thinking of devoting himself to creative writing in his own language. He had been informed by Gour Dass that John Drinkwater Bethune,[15] a universally respected Englishman of Calcutta of those days had advised Michael through Gour (who had sent him a copy of *The Captive Ladie*) to write in his own language, Bengali. To write in English, when in Madras he had betaken himself to journalistic work, was all right but, living in Calcutta, producing literature in English would be a snobbery, an unnatural exercise that would not enable the poet to leave any impress on his own society.

In the Dum Dum days, Michael came to know the Raja of Paikpara and his brother, both of whom were interested in Bengali drama. Under the patronage of his wealthy family, the Sanskrit play in four Acts, *Ratnavoli* by Shri Harsha, had been translated into Bengali by Pandit Ram Narain Tarkaratna. Before staging the play, it had to be translated into English for the benefit of those, especially the British citizens of Calcutta, who had no Bengali. This work was done by Michael. This experience of a theatrical performance stimulated Michael to write dramas himself. Recent scholarship has discovered[16] that while in Madras Michael had written a dramatic fragment in English—*Rizia—Empress of Ind*. Now in Calcutta, Michael wrote his first original play in Bengali, *Sharmistha* (1859). The play was afterwards done in English by the poet.

When some learned men of the conservative school insisted that Bengali language, as a literary medium, must remain an underling of Sanskrit, in diction as well as in syntax, and did not approve of Michael's linguistic realism, Michael strongly protested :

> I am aware, my dear fellow, that there will be in all likelihood, something of a foreign air about my drama ; but if the language be not ungrammatical, the characters well maintained, what care you if there be a foreign air about the thing ? ...I am writing for that portion of my countrymen who think as I think, whose minds have been more or less imbued with Western ideas and modes of thinking ; and it is my intention to throw off the fetters forged for us by a servile admiration for everything Sanskrit. ...In *matters literary, I am too proud to stand before the world in borrowed clothes*... (To Gour Dass Bysack, January 1859 ; italics mine.)

Michael felt pleased with his performance. '*Sharmishtha*', he wrote, 'has turned out to be a most delightful girl.' Michael expected, correctly, that since Bengali was fast growing as a subject of academic instructions, it would soon qualify itself as a language of intellectuals. At the same time, as a true artist in words, he also realised that a literary language must have its firm basis in the common man's speech. The great French novelist Marcel Proust used to read out his manuscripts to the charwoman who worked in his house. Michael too read out from his manuscripts to persons 'totally ignorant of English' to ascertain how far the common man followed his writings. It has to be remembered however that Michael's appreciation of the common man's linguistic range did not exclude Sanskrit—just as no significant English writer has ever abjured Latin—and it is reported that he once mocked at Pyari Chand Mitra's wholly colloquial style in *Alaler Gharer Dulal* with the retort, "It is the language of fishermen, unless you import largely from Sanskrit."

Under the patronage of the Raj family of Paikpara, *Sharmishtha* was staged in the Belgachhia Natyasala on September 3, 1859, one of the earliest of plays staged in the modern Bengali theatre. There were no female actors in those days ; therefore the two important roles of Devyani and Sharmishtha were played by two youngmen. There is hardly any European element in the play. As Michael stated in the Advertisment, the story occurs in the First Book of the *Mahabharata*, shortly after the Shakuntala episode. In Michael's treatment, the story bears no link with the *Mahabharata* episodes but far too many things happen in the drama, leading to an overall impression of diffuseness ; the multitude of the incidents also seriously damages the cause and effect relationship among the various parts of the story and thus prevents the building up of an impression of integration between character and action. There is no discernible impact of Greek and Latin drama on this play ; there are a few dim touches of Elizabethan drama especially in such matters as a triangle of love between two women and one man, as a poniard-like jealousy and vindictiveness with which one woman-lover pursues the rival. The king is a singularly unimpressive person, passive rather than active. Yet, the play is not without promise. The dialogues have been skilfully organised ; such stage movements as entrances and exits have been naturally manipulated.

With *Sharmishtha* marking the point of commencement of his creative period, Michael Madhusudan Dutt proceeded from one work to another, poetry as well as drama (different varieties in both forms) till his departure for England on June 9, 1862. His personal life too bacame enriched in many ways. He was now a clerk no more but a Court

Interpreter. He had a number of friends most of whom were much better off than he but his creative powers, his wit and geniality of temper, his utter absence of any sense of inferiority to any one whether for social position or riches or authority, his constant and vaulting ambition, all spontaneously secured for him a social position in which it was the others who looked up to him. Yet there was no arrogance in him, no supercilious disposition towards others. His letters—nearly all the extant letters are in English—to Gour Dass Bysack, Rajnarain Bose, Keshab Chandra Ganguli, Manmohan Ghosh and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar testify to his many-facted personality.

His second wife, Henrietta, seems to have arrived in Calcutta some time early in 1858 and from that time on, Michael lived in a first floor flat on Chitpore Road, close to the High Court. It was here that the couple's first child was born. The second child, a boy, his father's favourite, Frederik Michael Milton Dutt, was born in 1861 ; the boy died at the age of thirteen, two years after his father's death. The boy Milton was nick-named Meghanad since he was born the year that *Meghanad Badh Kavya* was under composition. The youngest offspring, Albert Napoleon Dutt, who was brought up by his father's friends, Manmohan Ghosh and W.C. Bonnerjee (both distinguished Barristers-at-law), found employment in a Government Office but died at the early age of forty.

Michael's next play, *Padmavati*, was begun in March, 1859 and published in May of the next year. The story is the poet's own invention but the central situation of the story reminds the reader of a story from Greek mythology, Tennyson's *Oenone* and a much inferior work, the eighteenth century writer James Beattie's *Judgement of Paris*. Raja Indranil of Michael's drama may be regarded as an echo of the Greek Paris, Padmavati is the equivalent of Oenone, and the three Parnassian goddesses find their counterparts in Sachidevi, Murajadevi and Ratidevi. The Bidushak (the clown of the Sanskrit theatre) at times may very remotely remind us of Sir John Falstaff's bragging. *Padmavati* is important in Michael-literature chiefly on account of the fact that it contains the author's earliest experiments in blank verse. Secondly, the idea of Indianizing a Greek story is brave though not wise ; the story of the *Judgement of Paris* is essentially episodic and epical in character ; it lacks dramatic tension and there is no conflict either of ideology or of character and action. Till the point of the composition of *Padmavati*, it would seem as if the Michael-drama is nothing more than a succession of dialogues. This drama was first staged by an amateur company in Pathuriaghata on December 11, 1865.

Michael was now briskly producing one play after another. Almost immediately on the heels of *Padmavati* two plays of a very novel kind were composed : *Ekei Ki Baley Sabhyata* ? (Call This Civilization ?), *Bura Shaliker Ghare-Rowh* (The Old Lecher).

These are satirical low comedies, very effectively constructed ; the diction all through is contemporary and realistic ; the themes are such as would inevitably appeal to the mid-nineteenth century Bengali theatre-goer. If anywhere in Michael's writings there is some emergence of the vivacity, jollity and ready wit which manifested themselves in his social manners, it is in these two satirical comedies.

Sharmishtha was first staged in September 1859 ; the two satirical comedies must then have been composed not later than June or July. It is not clear why Michael should have composed *two* comedies—*one* would have satisfied the Raja's plan—but the two comedies, one with urban setting and the other with rural setting, testify to the mounting creative energy of the writer. During these four years (1858-1862), Michael's creative energy knew no rest, solicited no rest, and progressed without pause from one composition to another, never repeating itself.

Curiously, however, the two plays were not staged in the Belgachhia Theatre. It seems that the plan of staging the plays was dropped because some gentlemen who frequented the Paikpara Raja's drawing-room had disliked the satirical slashes the author had conveyed through the plays at the alcoholic habits of contemporary Young Bengal society and at the hypocrisy and licentiousness of people in the higher rungs of rural society. Michael himself wrote thus to his friend Rajnarain Bose :

> As a scribbler, I am of course proud to think that you like my Farces but to tell you the candid truth, I half regret having published those two things...we ought not to have farces.

Michael's conclusion that Calcutta "ought not to have farces" testifies more to his emotional sensitiveness than to his aesthetic judgment. While, it is true, that Calcutta had not at the time attained the maturity of judgment that Ben Jonson (writing *Volpone*) and Moliere (writing L' *Avare*) found among the theatre-goers of London and Paris of their times and while also, it is true, that the satire in *Buro Shaliker Ghare Rown* is prickly and offensive to the orthodox section of society, the fact remains that the powerful admixture of satire and comic humour was at that time unknown in Bengali literature. But it is precisely this sharpness, this hurtfulness which makes satire effective. Neither Aristophanes nor Juvenal nor Swift nor Thackeray had any intention of mollifying the pungency of their satire. The Raja of Paikpara himself invited Michael to write farces so as to prove

to the world that his company could "act the sublime and the ridiculous at the same time and with the same actors" but his subsequent recession provides us with the reason for Michael's eventual abandonment of the theatre-medium.

The two plays were actually staged sometime after the days of the Belgachhia Theatre. *Ekei Ki Baley Sabhyata* ? was put up on the boards on July 18, 1865 by the Shovabazar Theatrical Society and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Rown* was performed by the Arpuli Natyasamaj in 1866. Both the plays pleased the theatre-going public.

Ekei Ki Baley Sabhyata ? (Call This Civilisation ?) is a satire on contemporary manners. Nabakumar, married, son of a well-to-do but pious citizen, belongs to a group of young men whose education has taught them to intersperse their spoken Bengali with as many English words and phrases as they can manage, who live a dual life—one the conformist life of a conventional Bengali householder and the other the wild profligate life of (what used to be called) 'English-educated young people', who drink a good deal of wine in the company of prostitutes. Among themselves, these youngmen talk bravely against social norms, scornful of the orthodoxies of the elder generation. The scenes in which Nabakumar and Kalicharan, in the company of some class-mates, ridicule the prevalent manners of society, or the scene in which a European police sergeant forces a simple-minded Vishnu-worshipping pious man to part with his few rupee-coins, or the scene in which the drunken Nabakumar returns home at night only to be (as it were) caught red-handed by the old father, are indeed highly effective scenes exposing some black spots of contemporary society. Neither a Ben Jonson nor a Congreve would have disdained the composition of these scenes. In a comedy of manners such as this play, the focus of importance is necessarily on characters.

In the other play, *Buro Shaliker Ghare Rown* (The Old Lecher) the story element is much more substantitial than in *Ekei Ki Baley Sabhyata* ? Here we have a pious-seeming rural landlord, Bhakta Prasad, a name that is a misnomer because his piety turns out to be an ineffectual cloak for his licentious and money-grabbing hypocritical personality. The object of his lust is a Muslim peasant woman; the woman's husband (who is under harassment from the landlord for failure to pay up his revenue in full) makes a plot with Vachaspati, a Brahmin who too is under harassment from Bhakta Prasad. With the assistance of a woman go-between, Punti, Bhakta Prasad meets the Muslim woman Fatima in a dilapidated Shiva Temple. In his causistic view there is no theological offence involved in indulging in sex act in a temple, if the temple happens to be in ruins.

Michael shows Bhakta Prasad not only as a money-grabbing and licentious fellow but, further, as a casuist who turns every argument in his own favour.

At the dramatic point in the action of the story, Hanif the husband, makes demoniac noises from a place of hiding and thus thoroughly frightens Bhakta Prasad and the others present in the ruined temple; Vachaspati (who has conspired with Hanif to bring the licentious old man to book), enters the stage with seeming naturalness only to catch Bhakta Prasad, as it were, red-handed. The action of the story now moves fast to an end. Bhakta Prasad has to pay Hanif heavily to buy his silence, he has also to pay Vachaspati and to swear that in future, he will not indulge in wrong-doing any more; Punti the procuress and Gada the go-between vow to give up their heinous professions.

Had Michael continued to write satirical drama, he could have attained to lofty heights of achievement.

The speed and frequency of Michael's literary creation during the four years around 1860 are amazingly rich, variable, and progressive. Hardly had the two satirical comedies been composed around July 1859 (they were printed in the beginning of 1860), when Michael engaged himself in composing *Tilottama Sambhava Kavya* in July 1859 (the earliest among his great long poems) and almost at the same time he planned to write a play on Queen Rizia. As a result of Suresh Prasad Niyogi's researches we now possess the text of this play in English, the play that had been composed in Madras. The play remained incomplete but the imagination of Michael must have nursed the scheme of the play for quite some time when he was in Calcutta. By now, he had outgrown the puerile exhibitionism of learning which taints the artistic quality of the play in its early versions. But once again his financier-patron, the Raja of Paikpara, registered disapproval on the following grounds :

> Mahomedan names will not perhaps hear [*sic*] well in a Bengali drama, and they [the Raja and J.M.Tagore] doubt whether an experiment of doubtful success is worth being hazarded by the author of *Sharmishtha* and *Tilottama*. They also anticipate impediments in the way of success from the too numerous characters in the play, and believe that the female parts, at least a mojority of them, cannot be expected to be well represented.
>
> (*Life*. p. 442, quoted from Yogindra Nath Basu)

The grounds on which the disapproval was based were altogether vacuous. In the first place the characters were not at all numerous ; in the draft plan that Michael had sent to his patrons, there were only seven male

characters and only four female characters. Secondly, their objection to Mahomedan names simply indicated their communal prejudices. The impact of this disapproval on Michael's ambitions as a dramatist was decisive ; he presently abandoned these ambitions although in 1860 he produced another drama, *Krishna Kumari*, the composition of which took him just four weeks. For the source of his drama, Michael went to Rajput history—the authority being Tod's famous *Annals of Rajasthan*. The central action of this five-act tragedy goes thus :

A political tension arises from the question of the wedding of Princess Krishna Kumari, daughter of King Bheem Singh of Udaipur ; two kings—Jagat Singh of Jaipur and Man Singh of Maru Desh (the Desert country)—register their claims to the hands of the princess. Man Singh's candidature is supported by the pillager-king of Maharashtra. The situation is such that whichever claimant succeeds, the other will attack the kingdom of Udaipur. In this predicament threatening her country either way, the Princess Krishna Kumari prevents a war by removing the source of conflict, i. e. herself, by taking poison. With this main plot is involved a sub-plot worked out by one Dhanadas (literally meaning the slave of wealth) and a woman Madanika. In this sub-plot we have a lot of falsehood, cheating, pretensions. While writing this play, Michael was deeply pondering over Shakespearean drama as several of his letters indicate :

> Some of my friends, as soon as they see a drama of mine, begin to apply the canons of criticism that have been given forth by the masterpieces of William Shakespeare. They perhaps forget that I write under very different circumstances. Our social and moral developments are of a different character. We Asiatics are of a more romantic turn of mind than our European neighbours. (*Works*, pp. 58-60)

What is important for the Michael-reader of today is the fact that he had enthusiasm for the dramatic form. Within the limits of that form, he had made several experiments with such competence that each one of the plays assumes uniqueness, each one points towards some new direction. There is a wide variety of characters, variety in both function and quality ; there are intriguing knots in several situations heightening our sense of dramatic tension ; the substratum of ideology that one can find in *Sharmishtha, Padmavati, and Krishna Kumari* is emotively and intellectually high enough for good drama ; the diction, generally speaking, is appropriate. If, even with these qualifications, the Michaelesque drama does not impress the modern reader very much, the

reason for that failure should be sought outside Michael. We have to remember the fact that, of all forms of literary art, drama is the most multi-dimensional and complex. In drama, we hear as well as we see. In drama, we have multiple points of view; the same events mean differently but simultaneously to different people. In drama, the temporal and the ideologically eternal may and often do coexist. In drama, the flow of time can go forward as well as backward. Now, these and other subtleties can manifest themselves effectively not only when the playwright writes competently, but when the playwright enjoys the cooperation of the actors, stage-workers as well as the playgoers.

We do not know well which of these factors were available to Michael the playwright (and available to what degree). One point however seems clear, viz., that the success of a play on the Belgachhia stage very largely depended on the attitudes of the big bosses of that theatre, the brothers Pratap Chandra and Iswar Chandra of the Paikpara Raj family. If Michael was prevented from writing a play on Rizia, if his two satirical comedies were not allowed to be staged, if *Padmavati* failed to appear on the stage for five years and if even *Krishna Kumari* too had to suffer an enforced hibernation for full seven years before it could be staged—and that not in the Paikpara theatre but in the Shovabazar theatre—our criticism of Michael-drama must be substantially linked up with our regret for the entire set-up within which this highly gifted pioneer of a playwright had to work.

Michael's career as a playwright virtually came to an end with *Krishna Kumari*. That *Krishna Kumari* was not the last play he wrote, that he wrote another play entitled *Mayakanan* after more than a decade, has come to our knowledge only during recent years through the admirably fruitful researches of Sureshprasad Niyogi.[17] About the middle of 1872, Michael found himself in great distress, financial as well as physical. His wife fell ill, he himself fell ill—and for both, the illness proved to be fatal. Impoverished to the breaking point, Michael accepted the invitation of the proprietors of the recently organised Bengal Theatre to write a serious play, *Mayakanan* (The Enchanted Garden) and a light play, *Bish Na Dhanurgun* (Poison or Arrow). He sold the copyright in advance. Evidences show that *Mayakanan* was composed between October 1872 and August 1873. The other play he could just set his hand to. The manuscript which was handed over to Bengal Theatre was tampered by the company (who had full legal right to do so). The play could not be staged, as planned, in August 1873, because of Michael's death ; it was actually staged on August 30, 1873.

In its present form, the text is a seriously tampered one; the tampering was done under the instructions of the owner of the Theatre, by one Bhuban Chandra Mukherjee who was a professional amanuensis. Against the tampered text vigorous protests were made by one Kailash Chandra Bose, once Michael's Secretary. The succession of suicidal deaths is reminiscent of the blood and thunder tragedies of the European Renaissance. There are echoes in this play of the appearance of the ghost of Hamlet's father and of Lear's belated understanding of the miseries of the common people (cf. King Ajoy's soliloquy in IV, ii). The theme of Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes* is recalled in the idea of this play that on a particular night, a maiden may see a vision of her husband-to-be. The appearance in Act III, sc.i. of a mystical figure forewarning the minister of oncoming perils, along with the repeated idea of the enchantment pervading the temple justifies the title and firmly establishes the theme of the play as enunciated by King Ajoy : 'This world is a magic spell, and life is a dream; the glory of kingship, royal splendour are all insubstantial" (IV, ii). Michael must have recollected the famous words of Prospero in the *Tempest* :

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

While considering Michael's dramatic career, it should not be inappropriate to refer to his alleged translation of Deenabandhu Mitra's play *Nil Darpan*. A legend has grown that Michael translated the powerful play of socio-economic criticism in a single night over several bottles of whisky; even Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is said to have believed that the translation was indeed Michael's. There is no dependable external evidence in support of the myth. The internal evidence is uncompromisingly against this ascription. The atrocious English of the translation has not the dimmest relation to the graceful, easeful and idiomatic English that we read in Michael's English essays and his letters. The French wit Georges-Louis Buffon said : *le style est i' homme même* (Style is the man himself). The man who wrote the letters and essays could by no stretch of fancy be the man who composed the ugly translation. If any reader asks for some legalistic agruments in preference to simple stylistic sensibility, he should go to a valuable essay on the subject by Tapobijoy Ghosh.[18]

5

Michael's Life : 1856-1862 (Poetical Works)

MICHAEL Madhusudan returned to Calcutta in 1856 and left for Europe by boat towards the end of July 1862 with the intention of qualifying himself as a barrister-at-law. During the six years and a half of his residence in Calcutta, Michael settled down to a happy family life a second time; came to know and be known to the cream of Calcutta's intellectual bourgeoisie, especially those who took interest in literary activity ; produced within the narrow period of barely four years—1859 to the middle of 1862—a series of dramatic and poetical works by which his stature in any account of Indian literature must be regarded as lofty and permanent. He also carried on litigations against those of his kinsmen who had sought to deprive him of his substantial ancestral property. During all this time, he continued nursing his ambition of going to Europe. The Michael-student cannot fail to notice the fact that this ambition of going to Europe functions as the motive force behind Michael's various actions. During this period of six years and a half, his writings kept him occupied for barely four years, from the play *Sharmishtha* (1859) to the poem *Veerangana Kavya* (1862). The history of literature cannot furnish us with any parallel example of so concentrated a creative activity, incomparable in both quantity and quality. Let us note the book-titles of this period and their dates of publication.

Sharmishtha (D)—1859 ; *Ekei Ki Baley Sabhyata* (D)—1860 ; *Buro Shaliker Ghare Rown* (D)—1860 ; *Padmavati* (D)—1860 ; *Tilottama Sambhava Kavya* (P)—1860 ; *Meghanad Badh Kavya* (P), Part One—1861 ; *Meghanad Badh Kavya* (P), Part Two—1861 ; *Brajangana Kavya* (P)—1861 ; *Krishna Kumari* (D)—1861 ; *Veerangana Kavya* (P)—1862.*

Tilottma Sambhava Kavya marks Michael Madhusudan's debut in Bengali poetry. This four-canto narrative poem in blank verse has for its subject-matter the myth (derived from the *Mahabharata*) telling us how the two brothers of the demon race, Sunda and Upasunda, had grown too powerful and dangerous for the race of the gods. When the gods

* D Stands for Drama, P for Poetry.

approached Prajapati-Brahma, he told them that nothing but a quarrel between the brothers could destroy the power of the demons. The gods discussed the matter among themselves and then sought the cooperation of Viswakarma, the supreme artist-cum-technician of the universe. Viswakarma created a female figure, bit by bit, limb by limb, a figure of impeccable and ensnaring beauty who was given the name of Tilottama. As Tilottama sat in a garden amidst flowers, the two demons came and quarrelled over the woman. In a trice, they struck each other deadly blows and presently both were killed. Indra, the lord of the heavens, recovered his position and Tilottama found residence in the land of eternal sunshine. The outstanding quality of this poem is its verse-structure. Here for the first time in the history of Indian literature we have the employment of blank verse. True, Michael had once before this, in the drama *Padmavati*, used blank verse and used it competently, but in so extensive a poem such as *Tilottama Sambhava Kavya*, the unimpeded course of the blank verse lines produces a richness and variety of word-music the like of which, till then, was unknown and unimagined in Indian poetry. There is every justification in the verdict of the great scholar, Sivanath Shastri : "We shall say that the nativity of new Indian Literature began with the publication of *Tilottama Sambhava Kavya*." Michael's daring experiment in the blank verse served as an electrifying rejuvenation of Indian poetic rhythm and opened up a vista of almost endless further possibilities. Michael had many discussions with his friends about the nature of blank verse :

> I see I have done something that ought to give our national poetry a life...Is not blank verse in our language quite as grand as in any other ? (To Rajnarain Bose, 24.4.1860)

> I am afraid you think my style hard, but, believe me, I never study to be grandiloquent...The words come unsought, floating in the stream of (I suppose I must call it) Inspiration! Good Blank Verse should be sonorous and the best writer of blank verse in English is the toughest of poets—I mean old John Milton ...!
>
> (To the same, 24.4.1860)

> ...the prevalence of Blank Verse in this country is simply a question of time. ...My advice is Read, Read, Read. Teach your ears the new tune and then you will find out what it is. (Ibid)

The most valuable assertion that Michael has made in all his letters on the Blank Verse is "Read, Read, Read". Verbal music is more a matter of practice of tonal adjustment than of theoretical (and in most cases,

derivative) comprehension. The problem of Blank Verse is intimately linked up with the question of poetic diction, the second notable feature of this poem. While Michael had justification for relegating the language of *Alaler Gharer Dulal* to the category of fishermen's language, a language which can be intensely vigorous and meaningful, in his own endeavour to import the vigorous musical variety and meaning of Sanskrit diction into Bangali, he has far too often strayed into a preternatural rarity of diction for the sake of association of ideas and suggestiveness without which poetry cannot subsist. Had Michael written all along in the extremely bookish diction of *Tilottama*, his poetry would have failed to endear itself, as much as it now does, to Bengali readers.

The third important feature of *Tilottama* is its use of myths. We have Indian myths as well as Greek myths ; we have classical myths as well as folk-lore. It would seem that Michael aimed at coalescing Greek myths and Indian myths. But unfortunately he made his efforts years in advance of Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough* or of Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual To Romance*, and he also lacked the philosophical ability to interpret ancient myths as symbolical transfigurations of recurring human experience.

All in all , *Tilottama* is a rich contribution to Bengali poetry. Michael, it seems, had a soft corner for this work. While in Europe, he set about revising it but did not proceed far. He also started translating it into English but the project did not progress. The opening lines of *Tilottama*, in their English version, were printed in 1874 in *Mookerjee's Magazine*, edited by Sambhu Chandra Mukherjee.

The next publication, in two instalments, was *Meghanad Badh Kavya*, Michael's greatest work and one of the greatest works of modern Indian literature. The first instalment published in January, 1861, consisted of the first five cantos of the poem; the last four cantos came out in the second instalment in July 1861.

The poem was dedicated to Deegumber Mitra with whom Michael's relations in course of time became unhappy, who bore the expenses of the publication. On *Meghanad Badh Kavya* and Blank Verse, there are some informative statements in Michael's letters to his friend Rajnarain Bose :

> I am smit with the love of 'sacred song'. There never was a fellow more madly after the Muses than your poor friend! Night and day I am at them.
>
> ... ...
>
> It is my ambition to engraft the exquisite devices of the Greek mythology on our own...Do not let this startle you. You shan't have to complain again of the un-Hindu character of the Poem. I shall not

borrow Greek stories but write, rather try to write, as a Greek would have done.

... ...

Some say it (*Meghanad Badh Kavya*) is better than Milton—but that is all bosh—nothing can be better than Milton.....I don't think it impossible to equal Virgil, Kalidasa and Tasso. Though glorious, still they are mortal poets : Milton is divine.

... ...

I have finished the sixth and seventh Books of *Meghanad* and am working at the eighth. Mr Ram is to be conducted through Hell to his father, Dasaratha, like another Aeneas.

... ...

I had no idea, my dear fellow, that our mother tongue would place at my disposal such exhaustless materials...The thoughts and images bring out words with themselves—words that I never throught I knew.

... ...

I suppose I must bid adieu to Heroic Poetry after *Meghanad*. A fresh attempt would be something like a repetition. But there is the wide field of Romantic and lyric poetry before me, and I think I have a tendency in the lyrical way. (From the Sahitya Parishad edition)

The publication of the poem created a sensation in the elite world of Calcutta. On February 12, 1861, the Vidyotsahini Sabha of Kaliprasanna Sinha of Jorasanko organised a reception—the first of its kind in India—in honour of Michael: present at the reception were important persons such as Raja Pratap Chandra Sinha, Raja Iswar Chandra Sinha, J. M. Tagore, Deegumber Mitra, Ramaprasad Roy, Kissory Chand Mitra, Rev. K. M. Banerjee. Michael made a speech in Bengali ; he wrote to a friend, "Fancy ! I was expected to speechify in Bengalee! If there were admirers of the poem, there were detractors as well. The Rev. Lal Bihari Dey wrote maliciously and foolishly on the poem in a newspaper. To this diatribe a part of the reply of the *Hindu Patriot* went thus :

> The fact is the Poetry of each nation has distinctive natural features and the writer who can retain those distinctive features in his poetry, is sure to be the darling of his nation and may exultingly say *non omnis moriar*...We fancy the Reformer has not read Mr. Dutt's poetry with the attention it has a right to expect from educated Bengalees.
>
> (From N. Shome, *Life*, p. 89)

That the *Meghanad Badh Kavya* had deeply impressed the common people besides the *elite* comes out in an anecdote narrated in N. Shome's

biography. Once moving about in China Bazar for some purchases, Michael noticed that a shopkeeper was reading *Meghanad Badh Kavya* : his curiosity aroused, Michael entered the shop and a short dialogue followed :

Michael	What is the book you are reading ?
Shopkeeper	It's a recently-published poetical volume.
M.	Poem ! You don't have any mentionable poetical volume in your language, do you ?
S.	What do you mean, Sir ? This volume alone can give distinction to the language of any nation.

Presently, Michael asked the shopkeeper, "Do you think the Bengali language will take to blank verse?" "Doubtless it will, it is a new creation in Bengali."

The biographer, N.Shome tells us another anecdote. In the Bar Library one day an advocate asked Michael, "Sir, you have borrowed your description of Hell in your poem from Milton, haven't you ?" Michael smiled, quoted from Dante, next quoted from Milton and then remarked : "I have borrowed from the same source as Milton."

The source of Michael's *Meghanad Badh Kavya* (Poem on the Slaying of Meghanad) is, as any Indian reader should realise, the *Ramayana*, the grand old epic that for countless generations has been an inalienable part of the Indian consciousness. While a small boy in his village-home, Michael often heard his mother read out from traditional Bengali verse-narratives including Krittivasa's popular version of the epic. The story as well as the basic rhythmic pattern of the narrative became integral parts of Michael's creative personality and as soon as he felt sure of his ability to compose an epic poem, he chose the theme of Meghanad's death in battle. It was an impeccable choice, the subject-matter forming a crucial stage in the climax of the epic action of the orginal Valmiki story. If the choice was impeccable, can we say the same about the artistic treatment imposed upon it by Michael ? We note that (i) the metre, although it is the traditional 8+6 *payar* metre of Bengali, achieves the unprecedented presentation (in any Indian language) of the metre in blank verse, and (ii) the interpretations of the characters and the events are creatively novel.

Since Michael had set about composing an epic (he once called it an epicling), how does his performance fare when viewed from the Aristotelian angle ? The question arises because Michael and his contemporaries were familiar with European Poetics.

In this monograph, we cannot elaborately consider the applicability of Aristotle's norms to *Meghanad Badh Kavya* ; here we may only refer to such Greco-Latin features of the poem as the "single action" feature and "the beginning, middle and end" structure, that are redolent of Homer but we must not overlook the primal significance of Valmiki for Michael's epic. Valmiki and Michael's mother stand at the nativity of *Meghanad Badh Kavya*. The *Ramayana* in the original is a vast conglomeration of episodic stories. Michael's flawless creative judgement is evident in his choice for the purpose of his limited epic of a particular episode that is an immediate prelude to the final event and which also enables him to galvanize the story with interpretations that are deviant from the traditional and orthodox interpretations of the *Ramayana* story. The central event of Michael's poem is the fight between Lakshmana (representing his brother Rama, the leader of the invaders) and Meghanad (representing his father Ravana, the king of Lanka, a city invaded and besieged by Rama). We might even call Lakshmana the deputy protagonist and Meghanad the deputy antagonist.

The essential action of the story, canto by canto, goes thus :

CANTO I : Begins with an invocation, after the traditional opening of the Greek epic follwed in the later European languages. The invocation is followed by a description of how Ravana and his royal court have been deeply overwhelmed by the grievous news of the death in the battle-field of Prince Veerabahu. On hearing of Ravana's resolve to fight against Rama, Prince Meghanad seeks his father's permission to lead the Rakshasa army ; the permission is secured.

At this point of the narration, Michael has laid the foundation of the central event of his epic.

CANTO II : The locale of the story is shifted to paradise. Indra, the King of the gods and his consort, Queen Sachidevi, approach Umadevi (the consort of the great god Shiva) for help to Rama. Umadevi, obtaining the consent of Shiva and enrolling the assistance of Mayadevi[19], the goddess of Enchantment, assures Indra of her support.

CANTO III : Presents Pramila, Meghanad's wife, fit consort to the greatest hero of Lanka. She is in a garden house, along with her husband, outside the capital city. Meghanad, on hearing of the death of his brother Veerabahu, has entered the city, leaving Pramila behind.

The Pramila episode of this Canto is totally Michael's invention. When Meghanad does not return even after a long time, Pramila, accompanied by her women, decides to enter the city. But Rama's

battalions has encircled the city in the meantime ; Pramila hurls a challenge at Rama and his reply is :

> Lady, I do not quarrel without reason. My foe is the King of the Rakshasas. You are ladies of the harem and there is no reason why I should deal antagonistically with you. I praise you as the brave wife of a brave prince. I wish you happiness.

So saying, Rama orders his soldiers to make a passage for Pramila and her followers. Pramila enters her residence in Lanka, changes her military garments for her usual dress.

CANTO IV : presents a festive evening in Lanka, the evening preceding the day on which Meghanad has planned to fight against Rama. The citizens are hopeful that in the next day's battle, Meghanad will destroy Rama, take a prisoner of Bibhishan, and drive away the enemy army beyond the seas.

The scene shifts and we are in the Ashoka garden where Sita sits melancholy and silent in her lonely cottage ; there comes to Sita, Sarama, the wife of Bhibhishan ; Sarama is eager to hear in what circumstances Ravana had kidnapped Sita.

Here follows a flash-back narration of an event of the past, the event of the circumstances leading to the kidnapping of Sita. This flash-back is not in Valmiki where the chronological sequence does not need any flash-back. Michael, having picked up the peak-point of the whole story, introduces here and there some retrospective views that clear up the reader's sense of chronology. Within the continued course of the flash-back, there is a prevision (11.452-580). [This prevision, like the flash-back, is a highly original invention of Michael, an invention illustrating his masterly use of the Art of Anticipation, a rare artistic device in Indian literature.] In the prevision, there are Rama and his lieutenants besieging Lanka across the ocean. At this point of the progress of the story the poet interrelates the incident of Bibhishana's advice to Ravana to adopt the way of virtue, an advice that leads to his banishment from Lanka and his joining the army of Rama.

It is time for the war to commence.

Sita sits alone, the most unforgettable figure (in literature or in history) of a lonesome lady.

CANTO V : takes us back to paradise. Indra, the lord of the gods, is worried about the next day's battle. There arrives Mayadevi the gooddess of illusions, who declares that she will ensnare Meghanad, with a variety of enchantments so that he must fall a prey to Lakshmana's deadly arrow.

Here follows a brief episode representing a series of enchanting visions seen by Lakshmana : there is no mention of these visions in Valmiki or Krittivas.

The action proceeds.

As Lakshmana approaches the park, he encounters several illusory figures but, undeterred, he enters the temple of the goddess Chandi (Durga) who advises him to proceed towards the temple in Nikumbhila where Meghanad is engaged in worshipping Vaishwanar, the god of Fire.

CANTO VI : marks the apex of the epic action, Lakshmana goes to Rama to obtain his permission to proceed to the fight with Meghanad. At this point, Michael describes a fight in the sky between a snake and a peacock, a fight that ends in the victory of the snake ; this allegorical omen in favour of Lakshmana, is entirely Michael's fabrication.

There is another invention of Michael when he shows how through the persuasion of Mayadevi, Kamala (i.e., Lakshmi, the goddess of Good Fortune) deserts the Ravana party and leaves Lanka. Presently, accompanied by Bibhishana, Lakshmana enters the worship hall of Nikumbhila where Meghanad is engaged in worshipping.

There is a dialogue between Meghanad and Lakshmana ; the latter, giving Meghanad no chance to put on military dress, kills him.

CANTO VII : opens with Pramila, Meghanad's wife who, early in the morning, has heard some lamentations yonder ; she quickly visits her mother-in-law to know what the matter is. When Ravana learns of Meghanad's death, in boundless grief and anger, he prepares to slay the slayer of his great son.

While Ravana is in his court along with his fighters, all ready for the confrontation, Queen Mandodari, battered by the grief of Meghanad's death, arrives, followed by her attendant maids. Ravana addresses the court, pouring scorn on the mean, thief-like manner in which Lakshmana had entered the temple and killed the unarmed Meghanad engaged in worship. But, says Ravana, what gain is there in lamentations ? Will he come back to me, he my incomparable son ? Can tears ever soften the hard heart of death ? I must now enter the battle-field to destroy the dishonest impudent warrior, Lakshmana. The scene now shifts to the Rama-camp trembling in the reverberations of Ravana's bold assertions. The poet describes the congregation of fighters in the battle-field. Meeting Lakshmana, Ravana speaks thus : "At long last, I have met you, thou Lakshmana, thou the meanest among men. Where now is the Divine Wielder of Thunders [Indra], where is Kartikeya, the warrior-god, and where thy brother, the master of the Raghu dynasty [Rama], and where is

the Ape-Monarch, Sugriva ? At this hour of crisis, think of thy mother Sumitra and thy wife Urmila ".

A terrific battle ensues ending in a blow from Ravana which leaves Lakshmana unconscious.

CANTO VIII : shows Rama in a state of boundless grief, lying beside the senseless body of Lakshmana ; all around are his friends and assistants. Regaining senses, Rama laments, recalling the incomparable love and fidelity with which Lakshmana had served his elder brother and his wife during their Panchabati days. At this point of the narrative, up there in heaven, the goddess Uma, sympathising with Rama, entreats Lord Shiva to relieve Rama's distress. Shiva says that shortly Rama will visit the land of the dead where the soul of Dasaratha will instruct him about the way in which Lakshmana's spirit may return to the body. And thus the Spirit of Enchantment visits the earth, whispers to Rama and the two commence a journey of discovery in the land of death. On the way they see a number of distinguished persons of olden times but at last (lines 712-788) they approach the Spirit of Dasaratha. Dasaratha consolingly asserts that Lakshmana will not die, his consciousness will return in response to the application of a herbal medicine (called *Vishalya Karani*). The description of this visit to the Land of Death runs almost all through this Canto (especially 11. 149-788) and is the lengthiest episode of *Meghanad Badh Kavya,* an episode, however, which is by no means digressional in character ; the question of re-instillation of consciousness and vigour in Lakshmana and the related question of effecting this re-instillation are fundamental ingredients of European epic-action and mark a substantial variation from Valmiki and a close imitation of the *Aeneid* and Dante's *Commedia.*

CANTO IX : is the last canto. Ravana wakes up, to hear joyous sounds in the camp of Rama. He learns that—wonder of wonders !—Mount Gandhamadan, home of medicinal herbs has been carried to the battle-field by Hanuman, the proper medicine has been administered and it has revived and cured Lakshmana. Ravana sends Saran (one of his ministers) to Rama, to convey a request. "O mighty One !", says Saran, "my master entreats for an interval of a week in the course of this war, an interval during which he may fittingly perform the last rites for his dead son." Rama agrees, and the messenger returns to his master.

The scene shifts ; we are now in the Asoka garden. Sita has a visitor in Sarama. To appease Sita's curiosity, Sarama tells her of the death of Meghanad and of Pramila's decision to immolate herself on her husband's pyre.

Again the scene shifts and we are enabled to witness the last rites. Thousands of Rakshasas advance with flags and golden rods in hand. Funeral music is played ; the attendant maidens of Pramila advance ; Pramila herself, attired as a warrior, is seated speechless beside the dead body of her husband ; holy priests start the various rites while they utter the mantras ; various musical organs are played on and ladies blow through conch-shells. All gods and goddesses, all dwellers of paradise, reach the spot to witness the last rites. There is profound nobility in Pramila's last words to her maidens. Ravana approaches the pyre, his heart-breaking words disturb even the Lord Shiva up there in the mountains.

The pyre burns ; when it burns out, the Rakshasas have a dip in the sea-water. For seven days and nights the city of Lanka mourns the death of its incomparable prince Meghanad.

And that is the end of this poem, Poem on the Slaying of Prince Meghanad.

6

Creative Writings

EVEN the brief foregoing outline of the nine cantos (running in the text to 6,307 lines) ought to draw our attention to such outstanding features of Michael Madhusudan's *magnum opus* as the following :

1. Blank Verse

Michael was the first Indian (for the matter of that, the first Asian) poet to write in the English pattern of the Blank Verse. Michael's pioneering and triumphant application of this verse-form has served as a revolutionary force in modernising Bengali verse-forms and has also encouraged Indian poets in other languages to adopt the form.

2. The Diction of *Meghanad Badh Kavya*

By the time Michael came to write his epic, he had already some knowledge of several languages in addition to his mother-tongue, Bengali : Persian, English, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Tamil and Telugu. Michael possibly felt that the prevalent poetic style was jejune and needed a diction in consonance with the new verse-form. He could not accept the Wordsworthian dictum ("There neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition") ; he would rather accept the view of Thomas Gray who declared that 'The language of the age is never the language of poetry', and on one occasion, he is said to have retorted against an advocate, about the use in poetry of the common Bengali speaker's everyday diction. "It is the language of fishermen unless you import largely from Sanskrit", he asserted. No wonder then that this experimenter in poetry would explore Sanskrit literature for polysyllabic, sonorous, sinuous vocabulary. Michael did not borrow words from any European language, nor from Persian and the other Indian languages or dialects that he knew except the dialect of Jessore (his home district) and Calcutta cockney speech. His striking utilisation of Sanskritic words provoked a parody entitled *Chhuchchundari Badh Kavya* (the Epic of the Slaying of the She-Mouse). Michael's diction has been vigorously criticised by Rabindranath Tagore in his youth and by Buddhadeva Bose even in his mature period. Michael's Sanskritism has not unoften led him to some wayward directions, such as : an extremely prodigal use of punctuation marks impeding and distorting the flow of the

rhythm ; harsh alliteration ; use of Denominative Verbs ; use of rare words : use of several words meaning the same ; play on similar-sounding words ; disruption of the syntactical order, and so forth.

3. Treatment of the Story

Michael has proved his intense individualism as much in the treatment of the story as in stylistic and metrical matters. The epical nature of the story demanded adherence to at least the central events of the original epic of Valmiki, i.e., the conflict between Rama and Ravana, Ravana's defeat and annihilation, Rama's return to Ayodhya along with Sita and Lakshmana. Michael has not disturbed these facts but he has deviated from the source in several respects that testify to his originality. Modern criticism draws a line of demarcation between 'oral' and 'written' epics. Deviating from Valmiki (as well as the popular secondary epic in Bengali of Krittibas), Michael imposes upon his narration several interpretations of events and personalities, of causes and effects, in so daring a manner, so differently from the established traditional pattern, that he has been either applauded for his progressive boldness or disapproved, for instance, by Rabindranath Tagore himself for his deviations.

In Michael, Ravana is the anti-hero, the function of Ravana, is that of the anti-hero. Ravana is dignified, eloquent, fearless, every inch a hero. Michael does not quite underrate Rama : but he certainly underrates Rama's followers, such as Lakshmana, Bibhishana, Sugriva. He wrote thus in a letter :

> People here grumble and say that the heart of the poet in *Meghanad* is with the Rakshasas. And that is the real truth. *I despise Ram and his rabble ; but the idea of Ravana elevates and kindles my imagination; he was a grand fellow.* (Italics mine)

This frank utterance is fundamental to our understanding of Michael's concept of his subject. Except for Ravana's kidnapping of Sita there is nothing mean, cruel and unheroic in the Rakshasa king. Both Ravana and Meghanad, and even Meghanad's wife Pramila (who, though a character in passing in Valmiki, acquires an unforgettable stature in Michael's hands) are painted so deftly that they, by dint of their character and manners, emerge into the halo of Spoudaiotes (as the Greek word goes), Magnyfycence (as Spenser translates the Greek term) or High Seriousness (as Matthew Arnold calls it) leaving Rama and Lakshmana far behind. Indeed, Lakshmana, as Michael paints him, is a sly, unchivalrous opportunist of a fighter who experiences no compunction in killing the unarmed Meghanad engaged in worshipping his goddess. The other prominent members of Rama's rabble are Bibhishana (a traitor against his

own people and his motherland), Hanuman and Sugriva (who run away in canto VII from Ravana's arrows). In fair fight the rabble has no chance against Ravana. Therefore (in Michael's version) assistance has to be received from divine and supernatural forces. The pro-Rama, anti-Ravana group of the gods and goddesses (mostly they are goddesses) eventually succeed in persuading the great Lord Shiva (whose devoted and beloved worshipper Ravana always has been) to remain inactive. To aggravate the reader's sense of the extremely unfair intervention of the denizens of paradise, Michael invents the personality of Maya Devi[19] (not to be found in Valmiki and Krittibas) whose supernatural influence contributes substantially to the defeat of the Rakshasas.

If in detesting Rama and his rabble and in calling Ravana a grand fellow, Michael has deviated from Valmiki, there is (in spite of Rabindranath Tagore's strong-worded disapproval of it) nothing objectionable in the poet's variation. Nothing is immutable in aesthetic presentation. The story of Troilus and Cressida, merely mentioned in the *Iliad*, receives different treatments in the hands of Boccaccio, Chaucer, Henryson, Shakespeare and Dryden. Geothe's Faust is not Marlowe's Faustus ; Shelley's Prometheus is not quite the Titan of Hellenic myth. In the present century, Greek myths have been variously utilised and interpreted by Eugene O'Neill and T.S. Eliot, Jean Cocteau and Giradoux and Anouilh and Jean-Paul Sartre. A myth is not an immutable affair. Every age has the right to interpret myth from the angle of its specific vision. And that is precisely what Michael Madhusudan has done. His Meghanad too dies but he dies the death of a gallant hero while his killer is a sneak in a temple.

In re-interpreting Meghanad and Ravana as noble-souled heroic patriots fighting against foreign marauders, Michael Madhusudan was representing the spirit of rebellion, the nonconformist dissentient spirit that shook the Young Bengal generation of the Nineteenth Century Renaissance.

There is another angle to Michael's reinterpretative version of the story of the Fall of Lanka. Michael, the present writer feels, during the period of his residence in Madras, had come to admire many aspects of life and culture in South India. One may speculate that he had no sympathy for the use of such derogatory and abusive terms as Apes and Monsters for the fighters of South India, with which regions the ancient North Indian poet was probably unfamiliar. Michael who was far above the gravitational pulls of regionalism and casteism and ethnocentrism, wanted to modify the injustice done by Valmiki, without deviating from the main line of the action of the story. Michael's sympathy for Ravana and the Lanka men and

women testifies to his profound sense of human justice and the nature of true heroism, a sense which, it is a pity, Tagore failed to note. Michael's sympathy transcended race-based millennial superiority-complex, sympathy which was the product of the spitit of the cultural resurgence of the nineteenth century.

A further feature of Michael's revaluation of several characters of the Ramayana story is the elevation of Ravana and Meghanad and the almost total re-creation of Pramila. Michael does not demean Sita even ever so slightly ; he obviously entertains a deep respect for Sita's personality, yet his treatment of the character of Sarama is distinctive and his concept and treatment of the character of Pramila are strikingly original. Michael's attitude towards women was chivalrous, not the traditional Indian attitude nor the Greco-Roman, usually portraying man as woman's superior, but the Christian, Western European medieval attitude of chivalry.

4. Foreign Parallels

It was inevitable that there should be a number of passages in Michael's epic reminiscent of foreign parallels. For a product of the Nineteenth Century Renaissance which ensued from a meeting between the East and the West, for one who was exceptionally well-read in Western literatures as well as in Persian, the creative energy would naturally bring the different literatures in unison. By virtue of his multi-faceted creative energy that moved, without any hiatus, from one linguistic culture to another, Michael is an outstanding poet in world-history. Scholarly modern Western critics who have propounded the concept of the Secondary Epic, had they know Michael's poem, would have been struck by this imcomparable example of that variety of epic. Michael's mind, treading freely over a number of epical poems, naturally introduced foreign parallels in *Meghanad Bahd Kavya.*

5. Aristotelion Angle

In the last chapter, we had raised the question : how does Michael's performance fare when viewed from the Aristotelian angle ? The question becomes valid for the reason that in writing his epic, Michael, although he derived his story from an Indian source (Valmiki's *Ramayana*), was keenly conscious of the European tradition of the epic, and that tradition has the roots of its theory in Aristotle. Aristotle had Homer for his archetype ; Michael knew his Homer and, in addition, knew the later epic writers, Virgil, Dante, Tasso and Milton. Michael's epic-construction fulfils the Aristotelian conditions of structure. The construction of its stories, says Aristotle, "should clearly be like that in a drama." Michael's construction too is dramatic. It is based on a single action (unlike the

multiplicity of actions in the original *Ramayana and* the *Mahabharata),* "one that is a complete whole in itself, with a beginning, a middle, and an end" (Aristotle, *Poetics*, p. 25).

Michael leaves out scores of incidents and characters that occur in Valmiki. He concentrates on one event, the slaying of Meghanad and although in canto after canto, he alludes to numerous other characters and numerous incidents linked to the past or the future, he has nevertheless moved sternly along the straight path of the chosen action. And this action follows the well-established pattern of the dramatic plot. He begins with the Exposition (the two hostile sides) ; proceeds on to the Initial Incident (the slaying of Veerbahu) ; then to the Rising Action (Ravana decides to avenge Veerbahu's death by himself going to the battle-field) ; then the climax (the highest point of dramatic tension) is reached when Lakshmana slays Meghanad in unfair manner ; and at last the Falling Action or Denouement in which is worked out the final Catastrophe or Conclusion (Ravana arranges the funeral of his heroic son) holding forth the promise of another phase in this struggle, a phase in which Ravana himself will be killed.

Michael has followed the Aristotelian dicta as faithfully as Milton and more faithfully and flawlessly than Tasso. The result is a neat work of art.

6. Descriptions

Though full of action, *Meghanad Badh Kavya* is perhaps most remarkable, as sheer poetry, for its descriptions : description of persons (e.g., Sita alone in the Ashoka Park), places (e.g., the temple where Meghanad worships), action (e.g., the fight between Lakshmana and Meghanad ; the fight between Lakshmana and Ravana) ; descriptions of the sea, of parks, of the city of Lanka, of the court of Ravana, of crowds, of battles. His Sanskritism assists Michael in creating a noble correspondence between sound and sense in his descriptions.

7. Ethical Element

And finally, even in a short monograph such as this, we must touch upon the question of the Ethical Element in Michael's epic.

We have seen that Michael presents a view of Ravana, and a view also of 'Ram and his rabble' which are radically different from the traditional views. The justification of these views has to be sought in the ethics projected in the poem. According to tradition, Rama and Ravana stand at the opposite poles of Good and Evil, and the action of the epic testifies to the triumph of Virtue and the defeat of Wickedness. Michael does not distort the essential event, viz. Rama'a triumph and Ravana's destruction, but his treatment of the action invests the personality of Ravana with

heroism, grandeur profundity of emotions ; Ravana fails and falls through the arbitrary prejudices and conspiracies of the divinities and demi-divinities. Even such divinities as Indra (the king of the gods) and Uma (the consort of Lord Shiva) interfere in the course of action ; Mayadevi, a concocted divinity who can cast spell, interferes in the course of action so as to destroy Ravana. Again and again we come across references to 'Anyaya Samar' i.e., unjust fight, references to Fate, to *Praktan*, i.e., Predestination. Possibly, Michael did not find any plausible ethical justification for the defeat and death of Meghanad and Ravana ; he repeatedly refers to the wide-flung web of injustice in which supra-human, supra-natural forces have conspired together to bring about the downfall of Ravana and his companions. The only fault of Ravana that the poet refers to is the kidnapping of Sita through falsehood and deception. Thus his defeat and destruction have their sources in that aberration, the aberration itself being a Deterministic fact, the result of *Praktan*, Pre-Destination.

Thus around Michael's chosen episode of the Rama-versus-Ravana struggle, there has been woven the sad story of fatalistic web of misfortunes ; predeterministic supernatural intervention in the course of human action ; unchivalrous aggression (Lakshmana killing Meghanad who is engaged in worshiping in a temple) and a brother's heinous treachery represented in Bibhishana's partisan support to his brother's enemy who invades his own motherland.

In Michael's treatment of the story, for the injustice of the events, it is the conspiring events and supernatural forces rather than 'Ram and his rabble' who are responsible. This is a daringly original view of the matter, characteristically rebelling against the traditional view. Michael's re-presentation of the story arises from a rejection of the age-long, submissive acceptance of Fate and the assertion of an ethical attitude which lays stress on the rebellious modern human spirit.

II

Michael's *Brajangana Kavya*, though actually composed earlier, was published after Part I of *Meghanad Badh Kavya* had come out. In *Brajangana* (described by Michael as Odes) the poet deals with the old popular theme of the love between Srimati Radha and Srikrishna, the love that goes through a series of emotive states that may be compared with the tradition-bound amatory states described by the medieval troubadours and minnesingers of medieval French and Spanish love poetry. Michael uses his metrical forms, his diction, rhyme, imagery, all very deftly and

musically ; the turns of phrase and emotion sometimes recall the eminent Maithili poet, Vidyapati. Only the first canto of this love-poem, entitled *Viraha*, presenting various states of un-united love, was composed and published.

While *Meghanad* represents the bold, masculine, heroic aspect of Michael's creative imagination, *Brajangana* represents a wholly lyrical, love-dominated, poetical temper which quietly chooses a traditionalist (rather then any protesting rebellious) view of the love of Krishna and Radhika, the immortal archetypes of Love in Indian literature and thought.

The next volume of poems, *Veerangana Kavya* (Poems Telling of Heroic Ladies) was published in 1862. The scheme of the poem has been explained in his Memo, dated February 4, 1862 :

> It is my intention to finish this poem in XXI Books.
> But I must print the XI already finished.

The poems have been largely modelled somewhat on the Roman poet Ovid's *Heroides* ; the structure however is less epistolary and closer to dramatic utterances. The poems are comparable to the Dramatic Monologues of Victorian English poetry, linked up with the name of Robert Browning. It is the multiple variations of Love that Michael presents in the speech-like epistles composed in blank verse.

About the same time as Michael was writing these poems, he was engaged in composing a number of sonnets, the earliest sonnets in any Indian language. All the sonnets are *vers d' occasion*, another new type in the Indian literary tradition. The sonnets are written on the occasion of some religious festival ("Sri Panchami", "Vijaya Dashami" etc.), to commemorate a visit to some place (e.g., the palace and park in Versailles), in honour of individuals (Dante, Tennyson, Hugo, three sonnets to Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar) ; on his country, Bharat ; on his language, Bengali ; on the Sanskrit language, and so on. A sonnet entitled "Amara" (We) is a bold utterance of desire for national freedom, one of the earliest in any modern Indian language :

> Conquering sky-kissing mountains intrepidly,
> Those who built beautiful temples in Bharat,
> Are we indeed their Descendants,
> We who are ill-famed the world over
> As a weak, lanky, slave nation, chain-bound ...
>
> (my translation)

We may consider two other sonnets, both revealing his love of the mother-tongue.

O Banga : I neglected - foolish me !
The rich jewels of your treasury —
And greedy of others' wealth, wandered
—A wretched beggar—in alien lands.
Days passed, miserable days—
Comfortless, sleepless, famished—
When invoking the unreputable,
Playing with algae, forgetting the lotus,
Wasting time in misleading worship :
The goddes of my tribe said in my dream,
"Lo, my child, why a beggar when your mother's treasury
Is rich ? Go back, thou fool, go back home ;"
I obeyed Mother's behest and found in time
The jewel-studded Mother tongue of mine :

(*Banga Bhasha*, my translation)

The other sonnet goes thus—

Studded with invaluable gems
Is my own home, yet discarding them
I roamed from land to land, greedy of wealth,
Like a merchant ship from port to port ;
For long thus spending hapless days
In this devotional quest, like a hermit
Worshipping his deity, foodless, sleepless ;
I heard in dream the goddess of Banga's language :
"My child, your devotion pleases the deity,
But there's plenty of treasure at home, why then
A beggar today, O man of wealth,
Why unhapy in the abode of happiness ?"

(*Kavi-Matribhasa*, my translation)

These short poems testify to the poet's lyrical gifts, to his moral and emotive values, to his love of the motherland, love of his language, to his admiration for outstandiang personalities, especially Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar.

This virtually brings us to the close of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's creative life.

7

In Europe

ON June 9, 1862, Michael left for Europe by the ship S.S. Candia. Since boyhood, he had been cherishing the ambition of going to Europe, for him a dream-land. But for his conversion (which itself, from his point of view, was a step towards achieving a synthesis between the East and the West), Michael could have counted on his father's financial support of the ambition, but the alienation, on account of his apostasy, that intervened between him and his family and the society (to which he belonged) and, further, his father's financial difficulties, forced him to postpone the realisation of his ambition. Nor, it must not be forgotten, did Michael receive any assistance whatsoever from the missionaries. But along the tortuous path of life that he was obliged to follow since conversion—days in Calcutta living with missionaries, living in the Bishop's College, years in Madras, years in Calcutta again, passing through unrelieved financial stress and strain—Michael had never, like the Dantesque visitor to the other world, abandoned all hope. The main hurdle against the fulfilment of the aspiration was monetary, and for several years, Michael patiently wended his way, in order to recover his ancestral property, through tortuous legalistic procedures. At last, he found himself reinstated as the master of his ancestral properties, and with this turn of the tide, the first decision that he took was to go to England and return as a Barrister-at-law. Michael was now in his thirty-eighth year. He arrived in London towards the end of July in 1862 and entered Gray's Inn.

Before leaving for England, Michael made financial arrangements for the defrayal of his own expenses in England as well as the expenses of his wife and children who were to stay back in Calcutta. The persons he had entrusted with these arrangements betrayed the trust within a few months and he, at his end in London, and the family at their end in Calcutta, found themselves almost penniless. The situation became so bad that, unable to struggle all by herself, Mrs Henrietta Dutt collected some funds and with her children voyaged to London.

In England Michael's distress grew severe. With his family, he moved on to Paris which he found a cheaper place than London. This shifting lost him some terms in Gray's Inn and the budgetary problems continued. He

sold his personal belongings from time to time and ran into debts and consequent difficulties. Unable to find any way out of this mounting distress, Michael sought help from Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar whose name, on account of his deep learning, incomparable humanism, absolute integrity and courage, had become a by-word in our country. The details of Michael's distrees and Vidyasagar's generosity have to be left out of this brief monograph. Suffice it to say that Vidyasagar initially despatched Rs 1500 to the poet, continued to remit money as and when necessary, and succeeded in coming to some sort of terms with those who had not kept their word to provide Michael with funds. A number of letters written by Michael to Vidyasagar are available and an extract quoted below may shed some light on the personalities of these two great sons of Bengal.

> If we perish, I hope, our blood will cry out to God for vengeance against our murderers. If I had not my little helpless children and my wife with me, I would kill myself...God has given me a brave and proud heart, or it would have broken long ago;...I hope you will write to me in France and I shall live to go back to India and tell my countrymen that you are not only Vidyasagar, but *Karunasagar*.

While abroad, Michael addressed a sonnet to Vidyasagar ; the octave goes thus :

> Known all over India, you are the ocean of learning;
> The ocean too of compassion, known everywhere
> As the friend of the humble, and an effulgent
> Golden ray illuming the world : And he
> Who is lucky to approach the mountain
> Finds protection at your golden feet,
> He knows, O Lord of mountains, boundless joy,
> No need for him of a pleasure palace ...
>
> (my translation)

Michael had not ceased writing while in Europe. He wrote a number of sonnets which he sometimes called 'Chaturdash-padi,' or fourteeneers i.e., fourteen-line poems, pentametric in English, *payar* metre in Bengali. One of the sonnets, entitled 'Banga Bhasa' (The Bengali Language) tells of a dream in which a goddess tells the poet ; 'You have, my child, a mass of jewels in your mother's lap; why then should you be in a beggar's

garment ? Go back home, you foolish child'.—I obeyed this maternal command and presently found in my mother-tongue, a mine of gems."—This is the person who had boasted in his letters to Vidyasagar, Gour Dass Bysack and Manmohan Ghosh of his mastery of several European languages besides English—French, German, Italian, Latin and Greek—and his further plans to learn Spanish and Portuguese! But in the deepest depth of Michael's being there reigned his mother-tongue. In most of these poems written abroad, we cannot fail to note a haunting nostalgia for his national heritage ; his language, village temples, trees, plants, the Sanskrit language, the Ramayana, the Mahabhrata, traditional oral tales, Valmiki. Even as the Latin poet Catullus yearned for his own island-home Sirmione on the Lake Garda, our Poet Michael too, during his European sojourn, heard the sound of the flowing water of the Kapotaksha, the river, on the bank of which his village stands.

Constantly, O River, you come to my remembrance,
Constantly I think of you when I am alone:
As men in slumber dream of magical music
So I hear spell-bound the rippling sound of your flow.

(my translation)

Evening reminds him of the Vijaya-Dashami, the most important religious festival of Bengal. He writes a sonnet on 'Bharat Bhumi', the Land of Bharat and remembers Sanskrit, *Kiratarjuniyam*, Urvashi, Sita in exile, the Bengali fable of Srimanta, the Shyama bird, and even the rural varieties of cobras. His flowers are not daisies, tulips, daffodils, cowslips, primroses, but the flowers of Bengal—jaba, karabi, malati, mallika, bela, Juthika, the white champak and so on.

While in Europe, Michael wrote sonnets on certain personalities : Dante, Tennyson, Victor Hugo, Professor Goldstucker. The Dante-sonnet written on the occasion of the sixth centennial celebrations of the birth of Dante, was sent by the poet to king Victor Emmanuel II ; he received a polite acknowledgement. He wrote also several poems (such as the Lion and the Mosquito, the Sick Lion and Other Animals; the Crow and the Vixen, and so on) which are witty pieces containing typical class-room morals. Of the other pieces, one entitled *Atma-Bilap* (A Bewailing Soliloquy) and the other *Bangabhumir Prati* (To Bengal) are expressions of moments of gloomy self-assessment. At times, he toyed with the idea of again writing poetry; the idea is manifest in such pieces as Usha to Aniruddha, a few lines of the planned first canto of a poem concerning Subhadra, but he never more really experienced any uncontrollable energy

and desire for writing *in extenso*.

In a letter to Gour Dass Bysack, dated Versailles the 26th October, 1864, Michael makes a priceless statement :

> I have not been doing much in the poetical line of late, beyond imitating a few Italian and French things. *The fit has passed away*, and I do not know if it will ever come back again. You know I write by fits and starts.

Michael has used the word fit twice in these few lines. No word could be more apt than *fit* to characterize Michael Madhusudan Dutt's particular variety of creative energy. The creative process in many cases is a slow-moving, long-drawn activity. The English poet Langland wrote just one poem all through his life and so did the Awadhi poet Tulsi Das. Other poets (Rabindranath Tagore for example) have composed several poems or several hundreds of lines on the same day. And yet, there is a third variety of the creative energy, a variety that blazes like a shooting star and then ceases to function. Arthur Rimbaud, the French poet, was a flash, a blaze of the kind. And so was Michael. Michael's three years in Calcutta, between his departure from Madras and his departure for England, saw the composition of two prose comedies (*Ekei Ki Baley Sabhyata*, and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Rown*), the drama *Padmavati*, the *Tilottama Sambhav Kavya*, the *Meghanad Badh Kavya* in two parts, *Brajangana Kavya*, *Virangana Kavya*, the drama of *Krishna Kumari*. Michael was not only composing but working as a path-finder. The production of these works was, for Michael, indeed a "fit," a paroxysmal outburst. And the outburst ceased after less than four years in the manner that a paroxysm ceases. Michael occasionally wrote after this meteoric period but nevermore with a comparable degree of speed, variety and plentitude. Aware of this profound change in his creative energy, Michael rightly said, "The fit has passed away."

The poet himself is his most discerning critic.

8

Back in Bengal : Michael's Death

EARLY in February 1867 Michael Madhusudan Dutt Bar-at-law, returned from Europe to Calcutta. Almost the first thing he did was an unwise act that showed that the monetary distress he had suffered from in Europe had failed to teach him any useful lesson. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, his "friend, philosopher and guide", in whose house (as Michael had written in a letter from Europe) he wanted "a little room" to live in and "a lot of rice to keep body and soul together", had arranged for Michael's residence in a first floor flat, furnished handsomely in European style, on Sookeas Street, a well-known road in the Indian area of the city. But Michael, self-consciously an "England-returned" person, almost a European though not a born one, decided to live in the European area of the city and live in European style in the expensive Spence's Hotel. He lived in this Hotel for over two years until his family returned from Europe. In those days, Michael's Europeanism went to such ludicrous lengths that when men like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Pandit Ram Kumar Vidyaratna came to meet him in the hotel, he would embrace them and shower kisses on them ! His earning in the legal profession was nothing high, varying, at best, between Rs. 1,500 and Rs. 2,000 a month, and he lived alone in a three-room suite and offered drinks to all and sundry, even to the moonshee (clerk) who worked under him. Hoping that his income would rise high Michael spent at least a thousand rupees for personal needs ; consequently, he could remit only a few hundred rupees to Henrietta, too meagre an amount for the family's needs. He had hardly any funds left over to repay his debts with. And thus he had to write a letter to Vidyasagar :

> My dear Vid,
>
> I am glad you are better, for I want you to get me a thousand Rs. from Onoocool for Europe... though a Bengali, you are a man, and I believe you would risk anything to help a friend in such distress as I am ! My poor wife is almost as badly off as I was when I first wrote to you, and I am perfectly helpless... You are the greatest Bengali that ever lived and people speak of you with glowing hearts and tearful eyes ; and even my worst enemies dare not say that I am a *bad* fellow.

In joining the Calcutta Bar, Michael had to face considerable opposition. Within a few days after return to Calcutta, Michael formally applied to the Chief Justice, Sir Barnes Peacock, for admittance as an advocate of the High Court. When the matter was placed before the Full Bench, several judges raised objections. Mr Justice Phear referred to "the general bad reputation of Mr Datta", Mr Justice Norman said that Mr Datta was an unplesant person and got drunk at times ; Mr Justice Seton Karr wanted an early disposal of the matter because all sorts of vague rumours were in circulation.

Ever since Michael had gone to Europe, rumours about his 'character' had been afloat. Scandal-mongering reports were prejudicial to Michael's interest in two respects. First, he did not receive money due to him from the people in Calcutta with whom, before leaving for Europe, he had bonded himself in contracts. The facts that, driven to desperation, Michael appealed to Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and that a person of Vidyasagar's exceptionally vigorous intellect and moral convictions would not allow his own judgement and action to be tilted by gossips and scandal-mongering, eventually saved Michael in Europe. Vidyasagar's action not only provided Michael with funds but, further, strengthened his moral self-esteem. Scandal-mongering could have indeed prevented him from fulfilling his ambition of being a barrister-at-law if the Full Bench had placed faith in rumours. Once again, Michael's friends came to his rescue (friends, we may suppose, who had been inspired by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar) and a sheaf of testimonials on behalf of Michael reached the Chief Justice. Among the testifiers were, in addition to Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Kali Krishna Bahadoor, Rommanauth Tagore, Prosonno Coomar Sarbadhicary, Jotindro Mohon Tagore, Rajendra Lala Mitra, Peary Chand Mitra, Gholam Mahomed (son of Tippoo Sultan), Rajendra Mullick. Michael was allowed by the Full Bench to enrol himself as a barrister-at-law.

Michael became a practising barrister all right but his earnings were less than modest, his expenses were far above his means, his debts kept on piling up and he hardly enjoyed a day unharassed by monetary anxiety except at such times when, in the Keatsian fashion he would be "charioted by Bacchus and his pards". As the days went by this kind of respite and oblivion became more and more frequent : Michael had to shift from the expensive Spence's Hotel to Mrs. Herring's Hotel, a cheaper place, but he would still pay whole-time rent for a villa on the Ganga in Chandernagore and spend holidays there. When the family, on return from Europe, joined him, he rented a house on Rs 400 a month, a high rent in those days. This

house, no. 6 Loudon Street (Michael continued to stick to the residential area for Europeans and imitation-Europeans), had an impressive-looking (and therefore expensive) garden, decorated with busts and statuettes, made of marble and metal, of Homer, Dante, Vergil, Tasso, Shakespeare, Milton and others. He had several landaus one of which was so posh that his European friends, to his delighted vanity, called it the Grand Carriage and, of course, several pairs of horses. And Mr and Mrs Dutta hosted two or three big dinners every month. Money was no consideration for the Dutts. No truer statement has ever been made by any one than Michael's bumptious assertion : "Raj Narain's son never counts money !" His earnings as a barrister fell so low, perhaps less than a four-figure amount, that in June 1870 he left legal practice and accepted the post of Examiner of the Privy Council Records in the High Court on Rs 1,000 as the monthly salary.

The fixed income arrangement did not at all ease the monetary difficulties and, besides, Michael's health began to cause anxiety. In 1872, he went back to the legal profession. Meanwhile, he had composed a book in prose entitled *Hektor Badh* ; an abridged version of the *Iliad*-story, concentrated on the death of prince Hector. It is not an exact translation, nor is it a full treatment of the story. Writing during days of illness, Michael had mislaid and lost some pages of the manuscript but, nevertheless, thought it best to publish the book and dedicate it to his friend Bhudev Mukhopadhyay. Not many readers, young or old, will find the excessively Sanskritized prose pleasant to read.

Michael and his family shifted their residence to Entally, Beniapukur Road. His lean purse continued to haunt him. It is said that he requested, requested in vain, the Maharajah of Burdwan to appoint him as poet-laureate. He sometimes accepted law-cases that made it necessary for him to go out of Calcutta. He went to Chinsurah, Serampur, Jessore, Krishnagar, Santipur and Dacca. For professional reasons he went to Purulia, a place which abounded in Christian converts. Michael contributed a sonnet to the journal of the Christian community there, became the Godfather of a child and wrote a sonnet for the occasion. To Dacca he went twice, in 1871 and the next year, and made a deep impression on the East Bengalees of those days. In 1872, the Maharajah of Panchakote, a place close to Purulia, appointed him as the Manager of the State. After staying there for eight months, discovering nefarious cliques and malpractices, Michael resigned his post and returned to Calcutta. Panchakote forms the theme of three sonnets. Besides, about this time, he composed several poems on moral fables which continue to be read by

school children in Bengal. It was about this time also, towards the close of 1872, that he came in contact with a group of persons enthusiastic about organising a theatre and a dramatic company. This was the project of the Bengal Theatre by a group of men led by Sarat Chandra Ghosh. When they approached Michael for cooperation, he advised them to induct actresses and promised to write two plays. Of these two, *Maya-Kanan* (the Enchanted Garden) was completed by the poet but the projected other play, *Bish-na-Dhanurgun* (Poison or Arrow-String) was not.

In September 1872, Michael resumed practice in the High Court; by that time his health had been shattered alarmingly. He suffered from Chronic Laryngitis, Rheumatic Heart, Enlargement of Liver and Spleen; he often vomitted blood and frequently ran high temperature. His voice became strained and raucous; he lost weight and became very feeble ; the brightness of his face and eyes changed into dullness and dimness. His professional earning virtually ceased ; he had to sell off, at the first offer of a price, his costly furniture and books and sometimes even the fashionable costly dresses (brought over from France) of his wife and daughter. It was unrelieved misery in the home, misery that Michael sought to drown in strong wine. Sometime during this period, Michael composed a short poem which was to serve as an epitaph on his tomb. On the invitation of the distinguished Mukherjee family of Uttarpara, a few miles from Calcutta, Michael and his wife and children went to that place to enjoy peace and the invigorating breeze there, living in a fine house on the bank of the Ganga. Even in Uttarpara, Michael felt too weak to walk. Presently Henrietta too fell ill, a victim of high fever. When a friend came to see them, Michael said : "Afflictions in battalions." Gour Dass Bysack arranged for their return to their rented house in Beniapukur.

Within a fortnight or so, it was realised by all friends that the husband and the wife, both seriously ill, needed expert medical attendance and that separately. So Michael was shifted as an Indoor patient, to the Alipore General Hospital (later on called the Presidency General Hospital, and now-a-days the S.S.K.M.Hospital). In those days, this hospital was meant for Europeans only; Anglo-Indians, Parsees, Indian Christians were not allowed admission. Through the intercession of some influential friends, especially the eminent Surgeon Dr Goodeve Chakravarti, Michael was admitted. Henrietta, in their house, was looked after by their son-in-law, Mr Floyd. Michael went to hospital towards the end of June 1873; on the 26th June, Henrietta died. Stunned by the news, Michael said to his friend the barrister Manmohan Ghosh: "You see, Monu, my days are numbered, my hours are numbered, even my minutes are numberd." Infinitely more

pathetic than these words of the dying poet were the words of agonised anxiety that he next uttered to Monu : "If you have one bread, you must divide it between yourself and my children; if you say, you will, I depart with consolation." Michael received that consolation. At 2.00 p.m. on Sunday the 29th June of 1873, three days after his wife Henretta's death, Madhusudan Dutt passed away to the other world.

He died but the drama that had enveloped his personality all through the living days lingered even after his death. Now that Michael Madhusudan Dutt had died, what was to be done about the funeral rites ? As a Christian, he was to be interred in a Christian burial ground, but as his death approached, a number of Christians of the city, missionaries and clergymen in general, said that Michael had never been to a church (which was a fact), on Sundays or on ceremonial days and, though he had embraced the faith in early life, he must have subsequently lost faith and therefore did not deserve to be buried in holy ground. When the dying Michael heard of these gossips from the Rev. K.M. Banerjea and the Rev. C. N. Banerjea, he said, "I care not for man-made churches nor for any body's help. I am going to sleep in my Lord and He will hide me in His best resting place. Bury me wherever you like—at your door or under a tree; let none disturb my bones. Let green turf grow over my last resting place on earth."

As a matter of fact, there was no trouble at the time of the burial. Michael Madhusudan Dutt was buried in the Christian cemetery of the Lower Circular Road and the last rites were performed by the Rev. Dr Peter John Jarbo in the presence of about four hundred persons.

Sometime before his death, when Michael, in his sick-bed wrote some poems, he also wrote an epitaph for himself in anticipation of his death. The short poem would have been lost but for Sarmista, his daughter, who had carefully preserved it. The lines go thus in their translated version :

Pause a while, O passer-by
If born you have been in Bengal.
In this grave, as a child resting
In his mother's lap, here sleeps at the feet
Of Mother Earth, Sri Madhusudan,
The poet born in the family of the Dutts,
A native of Sagar Danri, on Kapotaksha bank;
His father, the noble Rajnarain, the mother, Jahnavi.

(my translation)

Let us note that he writes his name wholly in the Indian tradition—Sri Madhusudan—without the tag of the later-earned Christian name.

Epilogue

MICHAEL Madhusudan Dutt's death caused a profound sense of loss among the intellectuals of Bengal, a sense of loss mingled with a lofty pride that such an outstanding personality was a child of Bengal. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the leading intellectual and creative writer of Bengal of those days, commented that since the Bengalees had wept for their departed poet, the cultural advancement of Bengal could not be doubted. The advancement of a country, wrote Bankim Chandra, must be adjudged in terms of the eminence attained by its poets. In the millenial history of Bengal, said Bankim Chandra, there have been two outstanding poets: one was Jayadeva Goswami, and now there has been Madhusudan. If any wealth-vaunting European (so wrote Bankim in those days of nineteenth century European imperialism) were to ask the people of Bengal; who are your greatest Bengalees ?—we should instantly answer, Sri Chaitanya Deva among holy men, Sri Raghunath among philosophers, and Sri Jayadeva and Shri Madhusudan among our poets. Fly now the national flag, says Bankim Chandra, and stamp on it the name : Sri Madhusudan.

Michael Madhusudan was indeed one of the central and luminous figures of the Indian Renaissance of the nineteenth century, and along with some contemporaries and some juniors—Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo—he possessed an all-India consciousness that was rich, deep, variegated and creative. The Bengalee segment of his personality reveals itself in the recurring images derived from his observation of Bengalee flora and fauna ; the occasionl intertwinings in his works of the diction, verbal mannerism and set phraseology characteristic of common Bengali speech jostling with strained Sanskritism, the omnipresence in his writings of typically Bengalee wit, humour and intellectual attitudes. This Bengalee segment is a semi-circle in smooth alignment with the other semi-circular segment which shows him an Indian (irrespective of caste, creed, religion), an Indian to whom today's Sri Lanka and yeasterday's Ceylon (although Michael's projected long poem *Simhal-Vijay* did not progress beyond a few lines) and South India were as much a part of his sensibility as Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Sind, the Vindhyas, Mathura, Vrindaban, Mithila were. If ever an Indian writer was utterly free from regionalism, sectarianism, lingual parochialism, status-consciousness and monetary

snobbery, it was Michael Madhusudan Dutt who suffered from no inferiority complex.

An Indian, Michael was however an Indian of nineteenth century Bengal, a citizen of Calcutta where the impact of the British rulers was powefully concentrated. He had been in early age a student of the Hindu College which, through the influences of Henry Vivian Derozio and afterwards of David Lester Richardson, infused into the budding personalities of its students a deep admiration for Christianity and European civilisation. His writings (including his letters) are full of references to Greek and Latin literature, some outstanding representatives of the Renaissance and a few writers of nineteenth century Romanticism. He shows no awareness of the Industrial Revolution and the rationalistic and scientific trends of the mid-Victorian period though he was in Europe from 1862 to 1865. Michael makes no reference to Strauss and Ernest Renan whose *Leben Jesu* and *La Vie Jesus* produced a world-shaking stir among the Christians of the age; nor does he refer to Darwin and Huxley. Michael seems to be ignorant of Bentham and Mill and Herbert Spencer, thinkers whose ideas stirred other Bengali writers of the age, such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Confining ourselves to the world of letters, we find no mention of such contemporary European poets and Baudelaire, the Parnassians, the Symbolists, the Pre-Raphaelites of England, and Robert Browning.

One should be justified in thinking that the stimulus that Michael Madhusudan gained from Europe was emotional rather than intellectual, aesthetic rather than socio-political, idealistic rather than constructive and practical. He lived more in the imaginative-idealstic universe of the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, the *Commedia*, the *Paradise Lost* than in the realistic analytical world of Euripides and Aristophanes, Horace and Terence, Moliere and Voltaire. Aside from the untenability of Michael's arguments in the essay *The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu*, the fact remains that the basis of Michael's views was his profound love of his national entity. It was because he wanted that entity to be established firmly as an *identity*, as an unquestionable and radiant Indianness liberated from its age-old darkness—at any rate, that is how he found it —that he himself embraced Christianity, went to Europe, and in Calcutta lived in the 'European quarters' (*sahib-para*). And his fervent aspiration was to be a writer in Bengali. So deep was this devotion to his own language that he wrote to Gour Dass Bysack :

> "There is nothing like cultivating and enriching our own tongue...When we speak to the world, let us speak in our own

language ...Our Bengali is a very beautiful language..."

While in Europe, Michael addressed sonnets to Tennyson, Victor Hugo and a London scholar named Theodore Goldstucker, but these were sonnets *written in Bengali*. On the occasion on the six hundredth birth centenary of the great Italian poet, Dante Alighieri, he wrote a sonnet and sent it to King Victor Emmanuel of Italy ; the sonnet was *written in Bengali*. It is a significant fact that even when he composed some sonnets in Europe, the visible and tangible environments of the alien land yielded place to his vivid remembrances of the environments of his home-land. The title of one of these sonnets in Bengali is "The Palace and the Park in Versailles". The reader finds no visual image of Versailles but enters an Indian universe telling him of Indra's place Vaijayanta, Vrihaspati the minister of the monarch of the gods, Arjuna the great archer. Wherever he may be, whatever he may be doing, Michael Madhusudan's personality is Indian. Since returning from Europe, Michael constantly wore European dress, and yet, while once he spent a few days in Dacca as a barrister-at-law, he said at a reception meeting : "Though I wear European dress, I remain a Bengalee." On another occasion he went to Burdwan to meet Vidyasagar who was in that town at the time; Vidyasagar's house stood close by the bank of a lake-like tank, Shyam-sayar; tempted by the waters, Michael took off his European dress, jumped (in the characterstic manner of an Indian boy) into the water, swam and frolicked until Vidyasagar forcefully requested him to come out.

There was no duality in Michael. His personality was all of a piece. To fail to recognise the harmonious unity of Michael's personality is to fail to understand him. His Europeanism was an efforescence of his natural self.

Michael's Indianness, deeply ensconced within his character, manifests itself equally in moral and aesthetic respects. In all his works, as a total Indian, he sensitively follows Indian ideals of life. His presentations of husband-wife relations; parents-children relations ; relations between preceptor and disciple, master and subordinate ; all relations that pertain to the Indian social structure (and these relations and this structure occur in all his works, poetry and drama), are scrupulously based on traditional Indian values. It is also to be noted that all his themes are Indian, and derived from well-known sources. As we consider his works, both poetry and drama, such works a *Tilottama Sambhava Kavya, Meghanad Badh Kavya, Sharmishtha, Virangana, Brajangana*, we notice that the sources of these are to be found in the traditional Indian legends and literary works. Derivative though the fables are, Michael had reorganised and reinterpreted the source-materials. Such reorganisation has been the

traditional procedure in literary cereations in the East as well as in the West. The stories of Shakespeare's plays were not invented but derived from various sources : Holinshed's *Chronicles*, North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, and several other works. Milton did not invent the stories of *Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, but found them in the *Old Testament*. Chaucer borrowed the frame-work of his stories from Boccaccio, Homer and even the Buddhist *Jatakas*. In the present century, Aeschylean and Sophoclean themes have been re-interpreted (in accord with modern sensibilities) by a host of Western writers including Eugene O' Neill, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. After Michael, a whole *genre* of 'Badh'-Kavyas (following the pattern of the *Meghanad Badh Kavya*) sprang up in several Indian languages,[20] and this *genre* is Indian in its source, universal in its aesthetic character.

Not invention but re-arrangement ; not novelty of facts, but freshness of interpretation, can elevate the treatment of a recurring theme to supreme heights of imaginative achievement. Since Jung, the aesthetics of our times have rightly stressed the possibilities of symbolistic interpretations, changing from age to age, from artist to artist. The challenge that an artist must stand up to is the challenge of fresh interpretation. The reader of today will find in Michael—to use Dryden's phrase on Chaucer—"God's plenty !" This modern Indian poet's re-interpretation of a part of the Ramayana does not depart from the main course of the Valmiki-story but offers a characteristically modern humanistic outlook which rises far above the long tradition of differences between the Aryan and the non-Aryan ; the outlook that discerns treachery and unchivalrous meanness in the conduct of even royal princes ; the outlook that exposes the conspiratorial interference of gods and goddesses in the theatre of human action. A pious, holy-textbound Hindu may be aggrieved by Michael's disrespect for 'Ram and his rabble' and perhaps it is possible to disagree with and reject Michael's interpretation but the fact remains that this interpretation (whether it appeals or not to our intellect or piety) is a valid interpretation flowing from the humanistic and universalist values of the nineteenth century. Michael's interpretation of the Rama-Ravana story is as valid as Bankim Chandra's interpretation of the significance of Krishna (in *Krishna Charitra*). The originality and validity of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's re-interpretation of the Rama-Ravana conflict remains an unsurpassed illustration of the historic value and poetic achievement of the nineteenth century Renaissance of Bengal.

APPENDIX

Michael's Two Marriages

His marriage with Rebecca McTavish (like his separation from her) is one of the many hazy features of Michael Madhusudan's life. What was the background of Rebecca ?

Michael himself wrote to Gour Dass, "Mrs D. is of English parentage." Her father's name is not known ; she had no close relatives ; her grandfather was Dugald McTavish whose Christian name as well as the surname are Scottish. Michael must have used the word "English" in the sense of the modern inclusive term "British" : it was enough that (i) they were in love, and (ii) she was an English-speaking 'white girl'.

What was Rebecca's financial position like ? Dugald McTavish was an employee of Arbuthnot & Co, a firm in the Indigo Plantation business ; his vocation does not suggest that he was a rich person. Rebecca is said to have owned some landed property, presumably in the indigo-growing district of Kudappa. If her property was substantial, why was she an inmate of an Orphans' Asylum ? On the other hand, after her separation from Michael (who, we can be certain, was not a money-remitting erstwhile husband), how could Rebecca, in her middle twenties, bring up her four children unless she had some funds somewhere ? We are forced to presume that her properties were not meagre ; that she was in the Orphanage because she had no relative to accommodate her and that she went to the Asylum because that was the only suitable institution for Eurasians of those days. Further, since Michael's income at the time of marriage was less than Rs 50 it should not be wild to suppose that it was Rebecca's income (derived from the indigo-plantation properties) which supplemented her husband's.

The validity of the marriage is as vague as the separation. The late Professor D.N. Ghosh's assiduous enquiries showed that no relevant church-record of Madras exists any longer. A modern biographer, Dr Suresh Chandra Maitra (pp. 100-101 of his book) has plausibly suggested that since a ritualistic marriage was beyond the means of most Eurasians, marriages by Banns (a solemn declaration made by the groom and the bride at a gathering of friends and relatives) were resorted to.

No less hazy than the marriage was the separation. During the seven years of their married life, Michael was (from all obtainable evidences) a happy husband and a proud father of four. On December 20, 1855, he wrote

from Madras to Gour : "I have a fine English wife and four children." Yet when a month later, he left for Calcutta late in January 1856, he had severed all ties with Rebecca and the children ! The separation is a bewildering mystery, yet unsolved, perhaps altogether insoluble today on account of the unavailability of any kind of evidence.

Michael returned to Calcutta from Madras on February 2, 1856. There are at least two intriguing questions relating to this return.

(a) Michael's second wife was Henrietta ; she arrived in Calcutta from Madras sometime in 1858 ; some two years after his return. Regrettably, the early biographers provide us with no definite dates ; they do not even state that dates were not available to them. Dr Suresh Maitra, in his book *Michael Madhusudan Dutta : Jiban O Sahitya,* cp.iv, has discussed these matters as rationally and completely as possible, a century after the death of Michael and his wife, Their first child, a girl called Sarmista (after the name of the heroine of Michael's first play) was born in 1859 ; if we make a back calculation from this date, the conjugal life of Michael and Henrietta could not have begun later than the middle of 1858. Further, when the hearse carrying Michael's body moved towards the cemetry, among the accompanying mourners were his daughter, son, son-in law. If Sarmista were already married, she could not be more than fourteen years old. Not an impossible age but one remembers that in 1842, when Madhusudan himself was barely eighteen and his father had arranged for his marriage, one of the reasons for Madhu's escape from this early marriage was that the bride-to-be was hardly older than fourteen. That thirty years after his personal experience, Michael himself married off his own daughter, aged fourteen, seems rather incongruous and sharpens the modern reader's regret at the negligence of the early biographers.

We are forced to conclude that we know nothing about the antecedents of Henrietta ; we do not know whether there had been any sanctionable form of marriage between Michael and Henrietta ; we do not know whether when Michael applied for admission to the Calcutta High Court Bar as a barrister-at-law, the objection against him, on grounds of his antecedents and 'general bad reputation' raised by several judges had anything to do with his matrimonial status. But whatever all that might have been, the luminous fact remains that Henrietta was a splendid wife and mate. For admirers of Michael the man of letters, that is enough.

(b) On the day of arrival in Calcutta from Madras, i.e. 2. 2. 1856, Michael wrote to Gour Dass : "I came in this morning, in the 'Bentinck'. Just fancy, they have given me a new name...Mr 'Holt'."

Who gave this new name to Mr M. M. S. Dutt, and why ? Whom does Michael refer to by 'they' ? The Shipping Company for the duration of the

journey ? It is possible to surmise that the Shipping Company or the Travel Agent was responsible for the pseudonym ; it may be presumed that Michael wanted passage at a short notice ; the passage became available only when a ticket-holder of the name of Mr Holt happened to cancel his passage and his ticket was passed on to Mr M. M. S. Dutt ; so although Mr Holt did not actually travel by the ship, Mr M. M. S. Dutt was allowed by the Shipping Company to travel under that name.

NOTES & REFERENCES

1. Among the scholars whom I have found useful in my study of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, special mention must be made of the following : Sri Suresh Prasad Niyogi, Dr Rabindra Kumar Das Gupta, Sri Sukhamoy Mukhopadhyaya, Sri Tapobijoy Ghosh, Dr Pallab Sen Gupta, Dr Nil Ratan Sen and Dr Suresh Chandra Maitra. I have found the questions raised by Sri Debaprasad Bhattacharya thought-provoking.

2. See Yogindra Nath Basu, *Michael Madhusudan Dutter Jiban Chari*t, p. 25.

3. W. H. Carey, *The Good Old Days of Hon'ble John Company*, I, pp. 16–17.

4. Noteworthy among such works are the following : *The History of Bengal* (1757-1905) ed. N.K. Sinha (University of Calcutta, 1967) ; Nemai Sadhan Bose, *Indian Awakening and Bengal*, Calcutta, 1976 ; David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, Calcutta, 1965.

5. *Cf. Poems*, by Derozio, Calcutta, 1827 ; *The Shair and other Poems*, by Kashi Prasad Ghose, 1830 ; *The Persecuted*, by Krishna Mohan Banerjee, Calcutta, 1831 (the earliest drama of the modern kind written in India) ; *A Journal of forty-eight hours of the year 1945*, by Kylash Chunder Dutt, Calcutta, 1835 ; the first novel written in India.

6. Kashi Prasad Ghose's *The Shair* was noticed in several British journals of the eighteen-thirties, such as the *Athenaeum*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, the *Fraser's Magazine*.

7. See Amalendu Bose, "A Note on Dwarkanath Tagore", *Visva - Bharati Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1965-66.

8. See the Bengali essay "Madhusudan O Krishnamohan" by Sukhamoy Mukhopadhyay in the journal *Sahitya O Samskriti*, April-June, 1967 ; see also Suresh Chandra Maitra, *Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Jivan O Sahitya*, pp. 63-71.

9. Cf. *The Bengal Harkara*, 18.2.1843.

10. See Amalendu Bose, *Chroniclers of Life*, Calcutta, 1962, the chapter entitled, *Gaudy Butterflies, the Verse of the Annuals*.

11. *Valet* ; obviously a mistake for *valley*. But whose mistake ? —the printer's or the poet's ?

12. This reference to 'heathens' throws light on Michael's Christian consciousness. While he did not suffer from the narrow-minded, superiority-vaunting outlook of some Indian converts of his times, he could not at the same time, had he continued to remain a Hindu, possibly have submitted to the caste-prejudices and other restrictive dogmas of contemporary Hindu society. Michael was, first to last, an Indian. His unsigned editorial essay, 'The Days of Caste Numbered', published in the third number of the *Hindu Chronicle* of Madras' was reprinted in the *Athenaeum* of Madras and also in the Calcutta Daily, *The Harkara* (9.XI, 1850) : see Suresh Prasad Niyogi's "Madhusudan in the light of new facts", *Chatushkone*, May 1973.

13. See Suresh Prasad Niyogi, *Rizia*, *Chatushkone*, May, 1973.

14. There is a perceptive essay on the Mother-Child image in *Chatushkone*, May, 1973, by Dr Sisir Kumar Das. I suggest we should elaborate the dimensions of this image. We cannot overlook two other possible (more than possible, almost certain) sources of the image that could have been active in Michael's experience : (a) the figure of the Blessed Virgin with the Holy Infant in her lap, the theme of countless European paintings and sculptures, but specially of Raphael and Michael Angelo ; (b) the child Krishna and his mother Yasoda, symbols of the eternal Mother-Child relation, the theme of Indian poetry, song, dance, sculpture in sophisticated forms as well as in folk-art.

15. This letter was recently published in full by the Bethune College of Calcutta in 1976 in a memorial volume in Bengali entitled John Eliot Drinkwater Bethune, on the occasion of Bethune's death centenary.

16. See *Chatushkone*, May 1973, an article by Suresh Prasad Niyogi, "The Last Poetic Drama of Madhusudan : *Rizia, the Empress of Inde*" ; the play, written in English, has been printed at the end of this Number of the journal.

17. See Suresh Prasad Niyogi's "Michael Madhusudan Datter *Mayakanan*" in *Samakalin*, January, 1971.

18. See Tapobijoy Ghosh's analytical (and to me, thoroughly convincing) essay in Bengali entitled 'Nil Darpaner Ingrezi Anubad O

Michael Madhusudan' published in *Chatushkone*, May 1973, pp. 103-139.

I wholly agree with Mr Ghosh's conclusion : 'Just as there is no external evidence to show that Madhusudan was the translator of *Nil Darpan*, equally, examining the internal evidences of this translation, we can see that its technique of translation, its employment of language, its vocabulary, nothing testifies in favour of the notion that Madhusudan was the translator. (p. 117, translation mine.).

19. Maya Devi : In Monier-Williams's *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, the word *Maya* means : Illusion, Unreality, Deception, Fraud, Trick, Sorecry, Witchcraft, Magic, Phantom. Further, the word has metaphysical connotations in Buddhist texts, in Samkhya and Vedanta, in Shaiva and Vaishnava texts. There is no divinity called MAYA DEVI (Michael's term) in the Sanskrit tradition. Michael's concept is simply a fanciful fabrication meaning a goddess of Illusion, of conjuring tricks, of spell, of enchantment, of unreality—meanings attributed to Maya Devi and this meaning and concept are entirely Michael's own.

Let us also notice that Michael's creative imagination is repeatedly prone to the *maya* idea and occurs several times in his works : *Sharmishtha* (the curse depriving the king of youth), *Krishna Kumari*, III, ii, the princess's supernatural vision, also V, iii ; *Maya-Kanan* I, i (the vision of the garden) ; II, i, III, i (appearances of a dead spirit), IV ii (the king calls life a dream) ; finally, in this last play, *Maya Kanan*. V, ii, there are strange happenings in the spell-bound park. For examples of the *Maya* idea, see *Meghanad Badh Kavya, passim.*

20. Following in the footsteps of *Meghanad Badh Kavya*, a whole tribe of verse-tales dubbed *Badh-Kavyas* (Poems dealing with the slaying of some mythical or legendary hero) came to be produced in several Indian languages, along with Bengali ; such as, Hindi, Oriya, Assamese, Manipuri. A list of such works can be found in Suresh Chandra Maitra's Michael book, Appendix, 3.

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