



V&S PUBLISHERS

Originally written in Bengali by

BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTOPADHYAYA

Translated by Alo Shome



Krishna

CHARITRA

The Essence of Bankim Chandra's
Krishna Charitra



The Essence of Bankim Chandra's
Krishna Charitra

Translated from Bengali by Alo Shome



HINDOLOGY
BOOKS

Published by:



V&S PUBLISHERS

F-2/16, Ansari road, Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002

☎ 23240026, 23240027 • Fax: 011-23240028

Email: info@vspublishers.com • Website: www.vspublishers.com

Regional Office : Hyderabad

5-1-707/1, Brij Bhawan (Beside Central Bank of India Lane)

Bank Street, Koti, Hyderabad - 500 095

☎ 040-24737290

E-mail: vspublishershdy@gmail.com

Branch Office : Mumbai

Jaywant Industrial Estate, 1st Floor-108, Tardeo Road

Opposite Sobo Central Mall, Mumbai – 400 034

☎ 022-23510736

E-mail: vspublishersmum@gmail.com

Follow us on:



© Copyright: **V&S PUBLISHERS**

ISBN 978-93-505726-6-5

DISCLAIMER

While every attempt has been made to provide accurate and timely information in this book, neither the author nor the publisher assumes any responsibility for errors, unintended omissions or commissions detected therein. The author and publisher make no representation or warranty with respect to the comprehensiveness or completeness of the contents provided.

All matters included have been simplified under professional guidance for general information only without any warranty for applicability on an individual. Any mention of an organization or a website in the book by way of citation or as a source of additional information doesn't imply the endorsement of the content either by the author or the publisher. It is possible that websites cited may have changed or removed between the time of editing and publishing the book.

Results from using the expert opinion in this book will be totally dependent on individual circumstances and factors beyond the control of the author and the publisher.

It makes sense to elicit advice from well informed sources before implementing the ideas given in the book. The reader assumes full responsibility for the consequences arising out from reading this book. For proper guidance, it is advisable to read the book under the watchful eyes of parents/guardian. The purchaser of this book assumes all responsibility for the use of given materials and information. The copyright of the entire content of this book rests with the author/publisher. Any infringement/transmission of the cover design, text or illustrations, in any form, by any means, by any entity will invite legal action and be responsible for consequences thereon.

Dedicated to

The memory of my grandparents

Sri Nalin Bihari Dutt

∞

Smt Salila Bala Dutt

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to Sri Ram Avtar Gupta, Chairman, Pustak Mahal, for supporting my project and encouraging me to complete it.

My homage to Mahamahopadhyaya Anantal Thakur for translating Bankim Chandra's Sanskrit passages into English for my use.

Thanks to Manjushree Choudhary for her gracious assistance.

My gratitude to Sri Samir Kumar Shome, my husband, for his support, appreciation, encouragement and love.

Affection to my children and to other relatives and friends for their constant goodwill and understanding.

Special thanks to Sri Subas Maitra for his kind and optimistic appraisals, his steady guidance and insightful editorial skills.

Declaration

Bankim Chandra had written his book, Krishna Charitra, in the first person. All the interpretations in the book are Bankim Chandra's own. The translator does not take any credit for the opinions expressed in the narration, even when they are stated as 'I feel' or 'in my opinion'.

The translator's individual comments appear only in footnotes, Translator's Notes and Translator's Epilogue.

Contents

Life and Personality of Bankim Chandra 13

Introduction to Bankim Chandra's Krishna Charitra 15

Section I – The Beginning

The Purpose of My Work 19

How to Find the Real Krishna 21

The Mahabharata from Historical Point of View 23

The Pandavas 25

Interpolations and Distortions in the Mahabharata 26

The Unnatural and the Supernatural in the Mahabharata 27

Section II – Vrindavana

Yaduvansha (Sri Krishna's Ancestry) 31

Sri Krishna's Birth 33

Sri Krishna's Childhood 35

Sri Krishna's Adolescence 37

The Gopis of Vraja 40

Sri Radha 42

Closing of Vrindavana Lila 47

Section III – Mathura to Dwaraka

The Slaying of Kansa 51

Sri Krishna's Education 54

Jarasandha 56

Life in Dwaraka 60

Sri Krishna's Consorts 61

Section IV – Indraprastha

- Draupadi's Swayamvara 67
Report of Krishna's Meeting with Yudhisthira 70
 The Harana of Subhadra 72
 Fire in the Khandava Forest 77
 Krishna, the Humanitarian 80
 Krishna's Advice to Kill Jarasandha 82
Account of Krishna's Meeting with Jarasandha 84
 The Duel of Bhima and Jarasandha 86
The Ritual of Honouring the Best Person in the Assembly 89
 The Slaying of Shishupala 95
 Exile of the Pandavas 97

Section V – Upaplavya

- Warriors Choose their Sides 101
 Sanjaya's Mission 106
Proposal of Krishna's Visit to Hastinapura 111
 The Journey 114
 Day One in Hastinapura 116
 Day Two in Hastinapura 119
Krishna's Meeting with Karna 122

Section VI – Kurukshetra

- Bhishma in Battle 127
 Jayadratha Killed 130
Understanding the Work of the Later Poets 133
 The Fall of Ghatotkacha 136
 The Fall of Drona 139
The Religion that Krishna Preached 144
 The Fall of Karna 147
 The Fall of Duryodhana 150
The Last Days of the War 154

Setting up a Legislation 156

Sermons on Desire 159

Last Meeting with the Pandavas 161

Section VII – The Incidents in Prabhasha

Annihilation of the Yadus 165

Conclusion 170

Translator's Epilogue 174

Translator's Notes

A. *The Mahabharata and its Time* 175

B. *The Caste System in India* 177

C. *The Status of Women in Sri Krishna's Time* 179

D. *How Bhakti was Perceived in Mahabharata's Time* 181

E. *Some Critical Comments on Bankim Chandra's Krishna Charitra* 183

Appendix

A. *Rabindranath Tagore's Criticism of Bankim Chandra's Krishna Charitra* 185

B. *Bankim Chandra's Defence against Tagore's Criticism* 199

C. *Bankim Chandra's Study of Sri Krishna in Literature* 203



Life and Personality of Bankim Chandra

Bankim Chandra was the youngest of three sons of Durgasundari Devi and Jadav Chandra Chattopadhyaya. He was born in Kanthalapara, near Kolkata, on 26th June 1838. Jadav Chandra was a Deputy Magistrate and a man of culture. Sanjeev Chandra, one of Bankim's elder brothers, was a renowned writer, specially remembered for his fascinating travelogue, *Palamou*.

After a rigorous schooling in a convent school in Medinipur till July 1856, Bankim entered the Calcutta Presidency College to study law. In 1857, he took the very first entrance examination held by Calcutta University, clearing it in the first division. He appeared for the BA examination in 1858 but failed to clear one out of six papers – Bengali! Both he and Jadunath Basu were awarded the degree, however, as the first graduates of the University after being given seven grace marks each in Bengali. The examiner was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.

After his studies, Bankim Chandra served the government as Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector and showed considerable proficiency in his work in spite of his periodic conflicts with the bureaucracy.

According to the custom in his time, he was married to a five-year-old girl when he himself was eleven. A decade later, one year after the death of his first wife, he married Rajlakshmi Devi, who became his true life partner.

Bankim's first novel, *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), was in English. His first novel in Bengali, *Durgesh Nandani*, was published in 1865. Some of

his other masterpieces are *Kapal Kundala*, *Mrinalini*, *Devi Chaudharani* and *Ananda Math*. Throughout his writing career, Bankim contributed excellent articles to various newspapers and magazines. His work covered many subjects – politics, economics, social sciences, religion, philosophy and popular science.

In 1891, Bankim took premature retirement from service on health reasons and devoted the rest of his life mainly to the study of religious subjects. He died on 8th April 1894 at the age of fifty-six.

Paying tribute to Bankim Chandra, Tagore said that he did not write for fame... but to express the noblest and the most beautiful thoughts of a cultured mind in the finest of words.





Introduction to Bankim Chandra's Krishna Charitra

Sri Aurobindo had called Bankim Chandra a *rishi*.

In 1882, Reverend Hastie, a Scottish missionary, began to publish severe criticisms on Hinduism in *The Statesman*. Bankim decided to challenge his accusations. Under the pseudonym of Ram Chandra, he replied with vigour to the missionary's charges in the columns of the same paper. Until then, Bankim had made his name as a literary stylist. But from that time onwards, he turned more and more into a spiritual thinker. He devoted the last years of his life to examining the essence of religion and putting them in writing.

Sri Krishna is an enormous Indian icon for more than three thousand years. He represents love, devotion, wisdom and beauty. Bankim Chandra eagerly took up the study of Sri Krishna in India's vast cosmology. Bankim Chandra's *Krishna Charitra* is the longest and the most famous of his works in this category.

Krishna Charitra is a wonderful classic and a great work that showcases intense erudition. While translating, however, I have left out certain portions, some small and some large, of that wonderful effort, as I felt that, for the readers I have in mind, they would be too lengthy and obscure.

Bankim Chandra has been exceedingly thorough in his undertaking. He discusses roots of words at length to seek out their real meanings, compares statements by Sanskrit scholars, declares his own judgements on them, and reflects on philosophical concepts. He does all this to

defend his thesis. Moreover, he simultaneously deals with the difficult task of convincing a large readership of 19th century Bengal, immersed in *Krishna-bhakti*, of the validity of his search for Sri Krishna, the real person, hidden behind centuries of myths and legends.

As it should be, Bankim explains his methodology in detail in Section I of his book. Here, he also discusses the sources of his research material. Section I is divided into seventeen chapters. I have specifically chosen to cut short this part (rephrased as Section I in this book) to reduce the overload of data which, I reiterate, a genuine thesis would need, but would be of little interest to the common readers. The other chapters of the book (from Section II to Section VII), however, have been translated in greater detail.

Then, in the course of his work, Bankim Chandra has often expressed his exasperation with the European people. These outbursts, however, are quite irrelevant after six decades of India's independence. So, most of such passages have also been omitted.

It is said that making a translation is like serving two masters at the same time. Languages do differ in their grammatical and syntactical structures. And, a translator must meet the demands of the receiving language, while remaining true to the source language. I dare to think that I have not made many compromises. The primary purpose of my effort is to present to the readers a specimen of Bankim's robust power of reasoning and to show what truth he found about his beloved deity. A comprehensive review of Bankim Chandra's *Krishna Charitra* by Rabindranath Tagore (in translation) and a few of my short notes have been attached to the present work to put the study in the right perspective.

A longer English translation of Bankim's *Krishna Charitra* (stretching up to 371 pages), done by Pradip Bhattacharya in 1991 and published by The M P Birla Foundation under the series 'Classics of the East', is recommended for readers who would love to have the thesis with all its details.





Section - I

The Beginning





The Purpose of My Work

The majority of Hindus in India and almost all Hindus in Bengal believe that Sri Krishna is an *avatar* of God. In the province of Bengal, the worship of Krishna is widespread. Here, he is worshipped in the village temples and in the villagers' homes. Almost every month has a day reserved for his festival. There are ceremonies and Krishna-processions. There are singing of psalms and recitation of his name over and over again. People's clothing have the name of Krishna printed on them and people's bodies are anointed with his mark. Many Bengalis do not start even the writing of a note or a letter without super-scribing the page with his name. Beggars utter his name to receive alms. Even our pet birds are taught to sing, "*Radhe Krishna, Radhe Krishna!*" Krishna has a pervading presence in our province and indeed in our country.

If Bengalis really believe that Krishna is God incarnate, then there is no doubt that being immersed in Krishna-consciousness is the best way to promote *Dharma*. What can be more virtuous for a human being than remembering His glory with every breath? But, what is such believers' idea of God? How do they accept that their god was a butter-stealer as a baby and a womaniser in his youth and as an adult had deceived men like Dronacharya? Critics of Hinduism say that such unscientific approach to religion has only made the followers of Hinduism undependable and dishonest as a race. I have yet to come across a Bengali who has tried to refute these accusations.

As I myself am deeply devoted to Krishna, I took it upon myself to get acquainted with the true nature of my deity. I have studied the *Puranas* and the *Itihasas* in detail. As a result, I have found that a lot of

what is commonly known about Krishna is false. What is hidden under the make-believe stories of my God is something absolutely pure, refined and magnificent. I have come to know that such an ideal character as Sri Krishna has no parallel in human history. To explain how I have come to this conclusion is one of the two objectives of my present work. The second objective is to show why he is rated as the greatest of the great Indian heroes.

