

Anandavana

The Significance of the Forest in Bankimchandra's Green Novels

SUMITA BANERJEE

When Bengali literature was caught between two opposing currents – the slowly trickling down stream of Sanskrit and the rapidly engulfing deluge of English – Bankimchandra Chatterjee came to the rescue. And Tagore, in his tribute to the great pioneer, became one of the first critics to have realised Bankimchandra's remarkable role as a green crusader:

“Rammohan rescued Bengali literature from the morass in which it had sunk and placed it firmly on layers of solid granite. By pouring forth the tide of his own genius, Bankim had laid on these, layers of rich alluvial soil. Today the literature of Bengal offers not merely a fit habitation for the spirit. It is also fertile, green with swaying blades of corn”. (8)

In his plan to thread the labyrinth called life, Bankimchandra's novels have turned out to be veritable maps in his readers' hands. He often charted forests as well as rivers in the elaborate plots of his celebrated works. In *Kapalkundala* (K), *Anandamath* (A) and *Devi Chaudhurani*, for instance, the green thread of the interminable forest persists throughout. In his translation of *Anandamath* Sri Aurobindo as highlighted the importance of this