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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MANI SANKAR MUKHERJI'S KOLKATA: LITERARY REFLECTIONS ON AN URBAN LANDSCAPE

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Abstract

This paper explores the literary works of Mani Sankar Mukherjee, popularly known as Sankar, with a focus on how his novels reflect the urban landscape of Kolkata. Through an analysis of key novels such as *The Great Unknown*, *The Middleman*, *Chowringhee* and *Thackeray Mansion* the essay examines how Sankar captures the essence, spirit, and transformation of Kolkata. It delves into themes of colonial legacy, modernity, social and economic disparities, and human relationships, highlighting how the city is portrayed not merely as a backdrop but as a central character in his narratives. The essay demonstrates that Sankar's deep connection with Kolkata allows him to vividly depict its physical, socio-economic, and emotional landscapes, offering readers a comprehensive view of the city's dynamic and multifaceted nature.

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Introduction:-

The concept of urban studies in English literature provides a rich framework for understanding how cities are depicted, experienced, and critiqued in literary texts. Through detailed cityscapes, explorations of social stratification and class, reflections on modernity and urbanization, and the interplay between public and private spaces, literature offers a nuanced portrayal of urban life. By engaging with these themes, literary works contribute to our broader understanding of cities, highlighting their complexities, challenges, and possibilities. As urbanization continues to shape the modern world, the insights gleaned from urban studies in literature remain as relevant and compelling as ever. Urban studies, as an interdisciplinary field, provides a comprehensive lens through which we can explore the multifaceted nature of cities and urban life. When applied to English literature, this field reveals how literary texts have depicted, critiqued, and understood urban environments over time. The concept of urban studies in English literature encompasses themes such as cityscapes and urban imagery, social stratification and class, modernity and urbanization, and the dynamics between public and private spaces. This essay delves into these themes, illustrating how literature has engaged with urban experience and contributed to our understanding of cities. One of the most striking aspects of urban studies in literature is the depiction of cityscapes and urban imagery. Authors have long been fascinated by the physical and symbolic landscapes of cities, using detailed descriptions to evoke the essence of urban environments. Charles Dickens, for example, is renowned for his vivid portrayals of 19th-century London. In novels like *Oliver Twist* and *Bleak House*, Dickens captures the grime, bustle, and social contrasts of the city, offering readers a window into the complexities of urban life. Similarly, James Joyce's *Ulysses* provides an intricate map of Dublin, where each street and neighborhood contributes to the narrative's rich tapestry, reflecting the city's vibrant, multifaceted character. Urban studies in literature often address themes of social stratification and class. Cities are microcosms of broader societal structures, where wealth and poverty, privilege and marginalization, coexist and collide. In Dickens's works, the stark contrasts between the opulence of

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the wealthy and the squalor of the poor are laid bare, highlighting issues of social justice and inequality. Virginia Woolf, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, subtly explores the intersecting lives of different social classes in London, revealing the underlying tensions and connections that define urban society. These literary explorations prompt readers to consider the socio-economic dynamics that shape cities and the lives of their inhabitants.

The advent of modernity and the rapid urbanization of the 19th and 20th centuries brought profound changes to cities and their representations in literature. Modernist writers grappled with the disorienting effects of urbanization, capturing the alienation, anonymity, and fragmented experiences of city life. T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" exemplifies this, with its fragmented narrative and chaotic imagery reflecting the breakdown of traditional structures in the modern city. Similarly, Virginia Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique in *Mrs. Dalloway* mirrors the fluid, shifting nature of urban experience, where the past and present, personal and public, constantly intersect. The interplay between public and private spaces is a central concern in urban studies within literature. Cities are arenas where individuals navigate between the public realm of streets, parks, and marketplaces, and the private sanctuaries of homes and personal retreats. This dynamic is vividly illustrated in works like *Mrs. Dalloway*, where the protagonist's journey through London blurs the boundaries between her inner thoughts and the external world. The tension between public exposure and private introspection in urban settings underscores the complexities of identity and social interaction in cities. Urban studies in literature also engage with the concept of literary urbanism, where the city itself becomes a text to be read and interpreted. Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* epitomizes this idea, presenting a series of imaginary cities, each a reflection of different human experiences and urban conditions. These cities, while fictional, reveal deeper truths about the nature of urban life and the human condition. The notion of the urban palimpsest further enriches this perspective, suggesting that cities are layered texts, with histories, cultures, and memories inscribed upon their physical and social fabric. Literature that uncovers and interprets these layers offers profound insights into the evolution and identity of urban spaces.

Urban literature in Indian English literature explores the complexities of city life in India, capturing the unique blend of tradition and modernity, the clash of cultures, and the socio-economic challenges faced by urban dwellers. Through rich narratives and diverse perspectives, Indian authors portray the vibrant, chaotic, and often contradictory nature of Indian cities. Mani Sankar Mukherjee, better known as Sankar, is one of the most prominent contemporary Bengali authors who has vividly captured the essence of Kolkata in his novels. His works often delve into the complexities of urban life in Kolkata, a city teeming with history, culture, and contradictions. This essay explores how Mukherjee portrays urban Kolkata, focusing on themes such as the interplay between tradition and modernity, social stratification, the city as a character, and the resilience of its inhabitants. One of the central themes in Mukherjee's portrayal of Kolkata is the tension between tradition and modernity. Kolkata, formerly Calcutta, was the capital of British India until 1911 and remains a city where colonial past and Indian traditions coexist. In novels like *Chowringhee*, Mukherjee captures this juxtaposition through the lens of a hotel that serves as a microcosm of the city. The Grand Hotel, with its colonial architecture and cosmopolitan clientele, stands as a symbol of modernity, while the lives of its employees and guests reveal the enduring influence of traditional values and customs. The characters navigate these dual influences, reflecting the broader societal shifts occurring in Kolkata. Mukherjee's novels frequently address the stark social stratification and inequality present in urban Kolkata. The city, with its bustling streets and sprawling slums, embodies the contrasts between wealth and poverty. In *Seemabaddha*, Mukherjee examines the ambitions and moral compromises of a middle-class executive in a multinational corporation. The novel highlights the socio-economic divide, illustrating how the pursuit of success in modern Kolkata often comes at the cost of ethical integrity and social responsibility. Through his characters' struggles and triumphs, Mukherjee paints a realistic picture of the challenges faced by different social strata in the city.

Kolkata itself often emerges as a character in Mukherjee's novels, its presence palpable in the atmosphere, dialogue, and narrative. The city's landmarks, from the Howrah Bridge to the bustling markets of Burra Bazar, are not mere backdrops but integral to the storytelling. In *Jana Aranya*, Mukherjee portrays Kolkata as a city of opportunities and disillusionments. The protagonist, a young graduate struggling to find employment, becomes a metaphor for the city's own aspirations and frustrations. The streets, buildings, and neighborhoods of Kolkata come alive through Mukherjee's descriptive prose, creating a vivid sense of place that is central to the reader's experience. Despite the challenges and adversities depicted in his novels, Mukherjee often highlights the resilience and indomitable spirit of Kolkata's inhabitants. This theme is particularly evident in *Chowringhee*, where the characters, from the receptionist to the guests, exhibit a remarkable ability to endure hardships and find joy in small victories. Mukherjee's portrayal of Kolkata is not one of unrelenting despair but rather a testament to the human capacity for hope and perseverance. The city's residents, with their diverse backgrounds and stories, embody the vibrant, dynamic essence of

Kolkata. Mukherjee's novels are deeply rooted in the cultural and historical context of Kolkata. The city's rich literary heritage, political movements, and artistic traditions are woven into his narratives, adding layers of meaning and resonance. For instance, the backdrop of the Naxalite movement in the 1970s adds a historical dimension to *Jana Aranya*, reflecting the turbulent socio-political climate of the time. Mukherjee's attention to such details enriches the reader's understanding of Kolkata, providing a nuanced perspective that goes beyond mere description.

The works of Sankar are the living record of 1950s real society of Bengal and specifically Calcutta. The characters are so lively and strongly portrayed that they are still relevant and identical in present times. His novels basically focus on the middle-class phenomenon dealing with the characters associated with the professions like company managers, clerks, accountants and so on. The thesis investigates and represents the socio, political and economic condition of the post-independent 1950s Calcutta concentrating on the lives of job-seeker youths and middle-class people of the city involved into various professions like clerks, managers, accountants, receptionists and so on. The struggle for survival due to numerous social problems became the burden of the then society specifically of Calcutta that led people towards an empty, vacuum, alienated post-modern life devoid of stability, peace, and serenity. Mani Sankar Mukherji over the several years tried to get familiar with Kolkata meticulously. He explored the city life, love of the people, hatred, lies and how they died- all together he sheltered his Bengali city arrogance through his creation. Mani Sankar Mukherji presumably understands the city better than a large number. His tryst with composing and making it contact his pursuers made him visit the city like no other. He indorsed the evergreen clash of Bangal (East Bengal) and Ghoti (West Bengal) is mostly dependent on the station. People those who had managed to build their own house were considered as genuine Bengali. In an interview with the Times of India on 27 July 2019 he said Looking at the wonders in Kolkata, I have come to a conclusion that God may have made beautiful villages but to witness that man can make, one has to visit the cities...I was told by an English barrister, Noel Barwell, when I met in 1951, that the best way to write about Kolkata was to learn – How they live, how they love, how they lie and how they die' (ToI, July 27, 2019).

Kolkata was adopting the cosmopolitan culture since its inception. Therefore, people across the world came to Kolkata decades ago for earning a living. Sankar mentioned in the same interview, "Big cities like Kolkata usually have a great power of attracting ambitious people. They have zero belongings when they come but leave the city prosperous. During this stint, they take some and create some from their own learning" (ToI, July 27, 2019). Kolkata the capital of India and second city of British Empire was pronounced Calcutta in English. In the 19th century, Kolkata experienced rapid expansion as the British Empire's capital. The city has a revolutionary history of Indian independence struggle.

Calcutta was merely a village before the British arrived, and Murshidabad, about sixty miles north of Calcutta, served as Bengal's capital. Siraj-ud-Daullah, a Bengali nawab, attacked the city in 1756 and took the fort. Robert Clive took back Calcutta in 1757 when the British defeated Siraj-ud-Daullah on the battlefield of Plassey and took back the city. Calcutta was made the seat of the supreme revenue administration and the supreme courts of justice by Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India. In 1772, it became the capital of British India. After that, all the important offices were moved to Calcutta from Murshidabad. By 1800, Calcutta was a bustling and prosperous city that served as Bengal's cultural, political, and economic hub. Archaeologists accept that Kolkata has been occupied for more than two thousand years, its recorded history starts solely after the appearance of the English East India Company in 1690. Before the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals, the Portuguese, the French, or the British arrived, ancient evidence suggests that Kolkata was an established trading hub. The Maurya and Gupta eras are when the city got its start. The city has likewise been referenced in the antiquated amazing Mahabharata. Kolkata turned into the focal point of all social and political developments in whole India. The nineteenth century Renaissance and Reconstruction in India was spearheaded around here. The cultural heritage of the city of Calcutta was enhanced by many other prominent individuals. The Bengali word Kalikshetra, which means "Ground of Goddess Kali," is believed to have been the origin of the city's ancient name, Kalikata. There is also a belief that the city's original settlement on the bank of a canal (khal) gave it its name. Calcutta, an anglicized version of Bengali Kalikata, was given to the city by the British. In 2001, the Indian government renamed Calcutta to Kolkata. Job Charnock, a representative of the East India Company, first arrived in the city in 1690 and procured three villages from the landlord: Satanuti, Kalikat, and Gobindapur. The East India Company established the city as a Presidency city in 1699 and anointed it Calcutta. The grasp of British on Calcutta turned out to be strong post its statement as the capital city of British India in 1772. The city experienced prompt industrialization. Richard Wellesley, Governor General of Kolkata diligently worked on the architecture of the city and burgeoned it as the "City of Palaces". This was the epoch of great influence of British on the culture and civilisation of Kolkata.

The “Renaissance” period in Bengal initiated with the spread of edification and westernization. Numerous social reform movements were executed, and the developing scholarly populace began understanding the meaning of freedom and the city turned into the focal point of the Indian Independence scuffle. As an outcome, all the anxieties led to the transfer of the capital of British India to Delhi. But Kolkata became a major centre for the trade and independence struggle even after the transfer. The city still stunningly preserves with its status of being the cultural capital of India, with countless remembrance of the city’s colonial past dispersed across the length and broadness of the city.

Post Independence Kolkata, formerly Calcutta, experienced some turbulent decades. Profoundly impacted by India’s Partition, it received a huge number of displaced people during the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. Many the city’s populations took to the streets during the refugee crisis to demand housing, peasants’ rights, affordable public transportation, adequate food, and fair wages. Participants in these movements, which were led by a variety of Left parties, included students, refugees, members of the urban middle class, and labourers. They did in the face of the police. Kolkata has become synonymous with protest rallies, strikes, and street corners because of these movements. From the 1950s to the 1970s, these movements have shaped the perception of the city as politically active. By 1951, as per the census data, Calcutta had four lakhs thirty-three thousand Bengali Hindu refugees coming from East Pakistan, and their numbers kept on expanding over the years. The presence of countless migrants in Calcutta changed the political issues of the city fundamentally. Consequently, any conversation on the political movements of early postcolonial Calcutta needs to commence with them. Since 1948, the refugees have been organizing themselves, which culminated in the 1950 establishment of the United Central Refugee Council (UCRC), which was led by the Communist Party. Another Left political organization, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), also started mobilizing refugees under the pennant of the Refugee Central Rehabilitation Council (RCRC) simultaneously. During the 1950s, Calcutta perceived ordinary assemblies, gatherings, meetings, and hunger strikes by the refugees under the direction of the UCRC and the RCRC. In 1951, the “Eviction of Persons in Unauthorized Occupation of Land Bill” (more commonly referred to as the Eviction Bill) was the target of the initial and perhaps most significant refugee movement. The refugees who were settling down on private and public land in the city were the focus of the legislation. The immigrants, undermined by it, energized behind UCRC (and RCRC in certain states), with urges like the withdrawal of the bill, acknowledgment of the provinces and casting an election right for them. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, refugees remained politically active under the direction of UCRC. In the wake of revitalizing against the famous Eviction Bill, the refugees rioted when the public authority presented the policy of dispersal — of sending the displaced people from Calcutta to less populated regions inside and outside West Bengal. UCRC opposed this drive, specifically when displaced people were sent outside of the territory. Most of the refugees opposed this proposed act due to the state of the refugee colonies and camps in these areas and the lack of support from local governments for them. Refugees also got involved in other protests in urban areas. For instance, many refugee youth participated in the July 1953 protest the one paisa increase in the second-class tram fare. The tram movement transformed the city into a battlefield, engraved into public memory, coining the phrase “war for a pice” (ek poisharlora). The government attempted to control the movement with brute force while agitators threw bombs and brickbats at trams, set them on fire, uprooted tracks, organized rallies, and called for frequent strikes. Over the four thousand people were arrested. The conflict resulted in various injuries and the deaths of a few protestors. Apart from the refugees, the movement was a tremendous conquest due to the participation of a large number of workers, school and college students, as well as the overwhelming sympathy of the urban middle class. The Calcutta Tramways Company (CTC) was eventually forced to reinstate the previous fare. The next year, (1954) beheld a secondary teachers’ movement, requesting expanded compensations and dearness recompense. More than a thousand teachers, under the Left-led All Bengal Teachers’ Association (ABTA), struck work and started a demonstration fight close to the residence of the governor. Eventually the strike concluded. At least five people were killed, and many were injured in a fierce altercation between the protesters and the police. The teachers’ strike was so strong that it made the government agree to their demands. In addition to providing immediate relief to the affected population, these movements fetched together Left-leaning political parties opposing the Congress administration. The refugee movement, the tram movement and the teachers’ movement were significant junctures in the creation of the Communist Party-led united Left opposition in West Bengal.

The food movement, in which people marched against the government in demand of sufficient food at reasonable prices, ended in 1950s. The crisis of 1959 was brought on by a faulty public distribution system (PDS) and crop failure. The villages of Bengal encountered a crisis that was close to famine. In search of food, peasants moved to cities from the countryside. The Price Increase and Famine Resistance Committee (PIFRC) organized massive meetings and rallies for food in Calcutta beginning in 1959. Framed in late 1958, and overwhelmed by the Socialist

Faction of India, PIFRC was a stage that had delegates from practically all the Left-inclining resistance parties. On August 31, 1959, when a massive rally drew between ten to thirty lakhs people to Calcutta, the movement reached its zenith. From that point on, the whole city, from Maidan to Shobhabazar and Bhowanipore to Dumdum, turned into a scene of obliteration. Under the leadership of PIFRC, students, refugees, peasants, workers, and teachers were at the forefront of the movement. The police of the government attempted to combat it once more. The sheer number of deaths during this time period indicates the intensity of the movement in the city. Police firing ensued in the deaths of thirty-nine to eighty people. More than two hundred protesters were traceless. Numerous notable individuals came forward in support of the movement and opposition to the police. Martyr sections were raised for the time being in various segments of the city during the actual movement. On September 6, 1959, Triguna Sen, Vice Chancellor of Jadavpur University, protested the policies and atrocities of the government on behalf of his colleagues and students by raising a black flag. In addition, a more detailed construction was constructed at Subodh Mullick Square in central Calcutta when the Left Front came to power in 1977, laying the groundwork for a permanent one. The PIFRC urged individuals to exhibit photographs of the martyrs in Durga puja pandals. Martyr plaques and columns from this movement can still be found easily, especially in the south and epicentre of Calcutta. The food movement of 1959 established a Left political culture in the state, while the refugee, tram, and teachers' movements laid the groundwork for it. The 1959 movement officially lasted until September 26 and was referred to as a "turning point" in the history of West Bengali. Yet, the food crisis was not even close to finish. West Bengal would warm up to one more food movement in 1966, which would be more rough and more unconstrained in nature. The situation would be made more complicated by the ideological split in the Communist Party of India in 1964 and the establishment of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The food movement of 1966 was initiated from Basirhat, 24 Parganas, where the police started open firing at students who were organizing a dissent against the shortage of ration and kerosene (fuel). On February 17, 1966 a school student named Nurul Islam was killed in this hostility. As a result of this act, it stirred of a state-wide food movement. From Bashirhat, it scattered across southern Bengal and inundated Calcutta. More vicious and widespread, this movement had significant ramifications for Bengal political issues. It lasted about one and a half months and noticed a lot of young boys participating incredibly, specifically from the refugee colonies in south Calcutta. The students managed massive opposition against the police on College Street, which also turned into a war zone. Additionally, the turbulence arrived north Calcutta. Local young boys in the Shyambazar-Bagbazar region joined in the movement and set up convulsive battles against the police and the military. To support the movement and raise money for the martyrs, prominent members of the city intellectual community, the film industry in Calcutta, a few notable actors, and countless other prominent members of the civil society came out in support. Ajoy Mukherjee and other senior Congress leaders quit the party form the Bangla Congress, which voted for the Left Front in the 1967 election. Food shortages, sloppy PDS, and the government's overbearing treatment of protesters during the 1966 movement all contributed directly to the Congress government's defeat in the 1967 election. In addition, this movement established the context for the subsequent year's more extensive and violent Naxalite movement.

The city Calcutta has a long history of its evolution from three villages, Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kalikata since the arrival of Job Charnock in 1690. Prior to that it was under the rule of the Bengal Sultanate from the 14th to 16th Century. After that the city witnessed a variety of events and changed accordingly. During British Empire, Calcutta was the Capital of the British India till 1911. After independence there was acute violence in the city due to partition of the country which led to a huge change in the demographics of Bengal. A large number of Muslims left for East Pakistan and thousands of Hindus took over their place. During the 1950s to 1970s severe power shortage, discord in labour relations which include strikes by workers and lockouts by employers and raise of militant Marxist-Maoist movement caused damage and destruction of infrastructural property. Calcutta was becoming inundated by power outage, labour unrest, disappearing industry and violence. The city was turning into a dying city with the burden of social and political trauma.

Max Weber in his book *The Nature of the City* defines, a city is a space where trade and commerce dominate agricultural activities, "Economically defined, the city is a settlement the inhabitants of which live primarily off trade and commerce rather than agriculture." (Weber 66) Considering this statement, Ferdinand Tonnies, a German sociologist characterized and portrayed two fundamental principles of human affiliation or two differentiating kinds of human public activity, a typology with a continuum of unadulterated kinds of settlement. In the first place, 'Gemeinschaft' (community) which is characterized as individuals in provincial town have a fundamental solidarity of direction, cooperate for a long-term benefit, joined by ties of family connection and neighborhood, land worked publicly by occupants, public activity portrayed by cozy, private and restrictive living respectively, individuals limited by normal language and customs, perceived normal merchandise and disasters, normal companions and foes,

feeling of we-ness or our-ness, others conscious. Second, 'Gesellschaft' (association) which is described an enormous city, city life is a mechanical aggregate portrayed by disunity, wild independence and childishness, importance of existing shifts from gathering to individual, rational, calculating, every individual comprehended as far as a specific job and service provided; manages the counterfeit development of a total of people which cursorily looks like the Gemeinschaft to the extent that the people calmly live respectively yet while in Gemeinschaft individuals are joined disregarding all isolating elements, in Gesellschaft individuals are isolated notwithstanding all joining factors. Harold Lubell in his article "Urban Development and Employment in Calcutta" very rightly mentioned the cause of burden for the city,

Since before the World War II Calcutta has been the world's best-known example of a great city in decline...urban employment in the developing countries is primarily a consequence of the fact that the increase in productive urban employment opportunities falls far short of the rapid increase in the urban labour force caused principally by massive rural urban migration. (Lubell 1)

Thenovels of Sankar are a collage of various characters from different strata of the society confessing and suffering from multiple difficulties like exploitation, complexities in personal relationship, isolation, compromising moral values and so on due to financial crisis and joblessness. All these burdens are prominently reflected in the following works.

The novel *The Great Unknown* is originally set in 1950s Calcutta and its original Bengali version was published in 1955. The novel creates a mosaic of the tales of countless lives from the treasury of the author. This novel consists of stories within the big story of love, despair, longing, class barriers, betrayal and murder as seen through the eyes of the young protagonist, Shankar. He steps into the Old Post Office Street to become a clerk in the Calcutta High Court where he meets the last English attorney, Noel Frederica Barwell. In the judicial workplace of Old Post Office Street, the author found himself in the company of many unknown characters. At the time acquainting himself with unfamiliar situations and unknown people was an unavoidable part of his livelihood but later he realized that the canvas of his life became a celebration with those colours. He apprehended that he had developed a love for them in the depth of his heart. In this novel the author tried to capture the people of Old Post Office Street in his writing whom he had loved, admired once. The story offers an exceptionally private look into the universe of unfulfilled dreams and trickery, of startling misfortune, as well as trust and thrill. There are in total nineteen chapters in this novel and the author has painted the lives of many common people, majorly the stories of twenty-two main characters on the canvas as a collage. All the stories are fragmented in nature and resemble the prominent postmodern characteristics with a common thread of pain, miseries, sorrow, disbelief, unemployment and so on. Marian Stuart, Mr. Biren Bose, Emily Debenham, James Gould, Helen Grubert, Nicholas Douglas, Shefali Mitra are some of the prominent characters who showcase the various difficulties of their life leading towards an unfulfilled life and Shankar's psychic canvas gets colourful with the experience of handling difficulties of such characters with Barrister Sahib.

The Middleman was set in 1970s Calcutta where the central character is Somnath Banerjee. This novel shows the acute scarcity of jobs in the surroundings of Calcutta and how countless youths were in search of even a blue-collar job. Youths were getting deprived of managing a job despite having proper educational qualifications. Corruption, bribery, and extortion of money were very common for a job during that time and there is still prevalent in society. Protagonist Somnath was deceived by Mr. Chowdhury with an amount of five hundred rupees to get a job and transfer of posting location. The corrupt system consequently led the young life force towards the involvement of immoral affairs and activities as Somnath established Somnath Enterprises with the help of turning an innocent girl into a prostitute. Gradually Somnath became a corrupt businessman from an idealistic young fellow. The novel becomes a terrifying portrait of the price the city extracted from its youth.

The novel *Chowringhee* was originally published in 1962 in Bengali set in 1950s Calcutta in which the protagonist is Shankar. The novel revolves around the lives associated with one of the Calcutta's largest hotels, the Shahjahan, "Calcutta's most ancient inn". (Chowringhee, p. 85) The hotel introduces the major characters of the novel, Marco Polo, the Manager; Satyasundar Bose, the receptionist; Shankar, the novice in the reception of the hotel, Sanatan Das, the waiter; Mathura Singh, manager's bearer; as guests Madam Claybar, an elderly American lady; Dr Sutherland, the representative of World Health Organization. Shankar, the newest recruit who was brought to the hotel by Byron, a private detective recounts the stories of several people whose lives come together in the suites, restaurants, bar and backrooms of the hotel.

Thackeray Mansion is a novel in the sequel to Chowringhee, the third instalment in the life and tribulations of the innocent young Shankar. The narrator directs his keen eye and sympathetic ear to tell captivating stories of those who live in the homes within a home of Thackeray Mansion, and those who work in it as the mysterious disappearance of Philip sahib's wife, the hilarious monologues of the feisty Poppy Biswas and the grouchy Baradaprasanna, the seductive Sulekha Sen who morphs into the respectable Seema Chatterjee, and the love of Dorothy Watts for Rabindranath Tagore. Stories settle inside stories and the outcome is an amazing novel overflowing with joy and sorrows, laughter and tears, despair and hope.

The characters of the mentioned novels are burdened with several difficulties in their lives. Major issues of their survival like joblessness, unemployment, exploitation by political leaders and businessman which lead to alienation of the characters in the novels of Sankar. His novels often reflect the vibrant and multifaceted city of Kolkata, capturing its essence, spirit, and transformation over the years. Kolkata, formerly known as Calcutta, is not just a backdrop in his narratives but almost a character, intertwined with the lives and destinies of his protagonists. The city of Kolkata, in Sankar's novels, is a crucible where human relationships are tested, and moralities are questioned. The interactions between characters from different walks of life reveal the underlying tensions and solidarities within the urban landscape. Sankar's portrayal of Kolkata is thus deeply humanistic, focusing on personal stories against the backdrop of a bustling metropolis. Mani Sankar Mukherjee's novels are a testament to his profound connection with Kolkata. His narrative style, characterized by rich descriptions and empathetic characterizations, brings the city to life for readers. Through his works, Sankar not only chronicles the physical and socio-economic changes in Kolkata but also delves into the emotional and psychological landscapes of its people. His novels stand as a mirror to the city, reflecting its glory, struggles, and indomitable spirit.

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