

# THAKUR'S REPRESENTATION OF THE FARMERS: RELUCTANCE, REJECTION AND OPPOSITION

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## Abstract

When poet Rabindranath Thakur (1861-1941) was writing, his country Indo-Pak subcontinent had been undergoing long British colonial occupation. While under this colonial subjugation and local *Brahmin* (Hindu upper class) feudalistic torture, the severe victims were obviously the working class people who were mostly farmers. In such context it was expected of the greatest of the Bangla poets Thakur that he would uphold through his literature the larger section of his nation, the farmers, who were mostly Muslims living in East Bengal, the present Bangladesh. But in him we see complex contradictions to the nation's expected poetic commitment while representing those working class people. This paper aims at exploring the nature of Thakur's complex antagonistic treatment of the farmers in their own context which discloses his reluctance, rejection and opposition to that class.

**Key Words:** Thakur, farmers, East Bengal, own context, reluctance, rejection, opposition

Rabindranath Thakur's poetic genius is versatile and his contribution to Bangla literature is universally acknowledged. He has lived in a region of Indo-Pak subcontinent, Bengal, which remains under British colonial occupation for almost two hundred years (1757-1947). It is commonly seen that when colonized, the worst victims are the working class people. In the case of Bengal of British India, they are the East Bengal or the present Bangladeshi farmers (mostly Muslims) who receive torture mostly from the West Bengal *Brahmin* (Hindu upper class) *Zaminder* (landlord). So in Thakur's literature, how the farmers are treated is always a matter of great inquisitiveness.

When this issue is concerned, Bangladeshi critics will be concentrated on because they, by being from the same nation and context to which those farmers also belong, are believed to have those farmers' condition in the hand of Thakur as their exclusive field. Well-known scholar Talal Asad opines that critiquing culture, heritage and value system of a particular nation should be left as exclusive areas to the critics belonging to that nation as they have first-hand, regular and all-out participation in them. Asad writes:

ethnographers and others ought to limit themselves to description, reserving critique to those who participate firsthand in the language and culture under discussion: that is, people who offer their criticism on the basis of shared values and are prepared to engage in a sustained conversation of give-and-take.

(qtd. in Eilts 2006.)

But in this process, we would not pay attention to the Bangladeshi *Vokto Sreni* (the class of the worshippers) which includes scholars like Kabir Chowdhury, Serajul Islam Chowdhury, Syed Manzoorul Islam, Fakrul Alam and Kaiser Haq because they cannot find any weakness in Thakur as their duty is to worship, not analyse.

We may look at other Bangladeshi scholarly figures who do analyse Thakur in their researches. We see Sadat Ullah Khan in his “Poradhin Rabindranath: Rajnitir Aloke” (Subjugated Rabindranath: In the Light of Politics), Salimullah Khan in “Jasim Uddin O Jatiyo Shahityo” (Jasim Uddin and National Literature) and even Farhad Mazhar in *Rakter Daag Muche Rabindrapath* (Reading Rabindra Wiping the Spots of Blood), discuss the issues of *Zaminder* (landlord) Thakur’s allegiance to the British colonizers, communal discrimination to the Muslims and his contribution to Bangla literature as well. They also discuss his torture especially on the farmers of Bangladesh (East Bengal of British rule). But they do it from Marxist point of view which decontextualize the farmers. It is important to note here that the lack of Marxist solution has not been the reason of their misery. However, those scholars cannot go close to those farmers, their exclusive area, by not taking into account the farmers’ context.

Here we would like to keep the Bangladeshi farmers’ context as it has been in the face of the torture of *Zaminder* Thakur. The farmers’ context is the context of being Muslims living in brotherly relationship with Hindus and Buddhists, having their unique Bangla history, tradition, and culture. We would not reconstruct it with Marxism. In farmers’ own context or Bangladeshi context, we would try to analyse Thakur’s antagonistic approach towards them. By concentrating on some significant literary pieces of him, our objective is to see Thakur’s diametric, sometimes complex, disregard of the farmers that features through reluctance, rejection and opposition to them.

At first the drama *Roktokorobi* (1926) (The Red Oleanders) may be viewed. In this drama there are mine-workers, their master King Makarraaj and his country Jakkhapuri. The workers are forced to excavate earth to obtain gold for the King. Shardar (administrators) and Mudol (leaders and administrators for the workers) are there to help the King who willingly confines himself within his castle having an open window with iron net as the only means of communication with others. He himself, being compelled by his greed for immeasurable wealth, has built this system. There is also a prison where the mine-workers like Vishu and Fagulal are imprisoned. They are cut off from their normal human life. So much so long that they have forgotten their human names. They know that they are 69 ঙ (ঙ-৩৭০, being a Bangla letter) and 47 ঞ (ঞ-৫০ : , being another Bangla letter) respectively; the numbers with which they are identified as workers and prisoners. Outside Jakkhapuri there is an agriculture-based society from where Nandini, the protagonist appears. Full of life, Nandini likes simplicity and freedom. So she likes song and vast beautiful nature. She is in favour of agriculture as agricultural products grown on earth’s surface are willingly and happily given to men by the earth. She opposes obtaining ‘lifeless bones’ or riches like gold from inside the earth as it is forcefully done against the earth’s will. (Thakur 2001, p. 394)

Nandini indicates that gold and other mineral resources are the objects of greed, which, like curse, cause ‘murder and strife’ (p. 394). This realization leads her to oppose the King and his activities of suppressing humanity, especially his treatment of the mine-workers. In course of the story we see her soft but strong impact functions, and Bishu, Fagulal, her friend Ranjan, workers and even the King, a changed man by then, are ready to fight against the oppressive mechanism. Understanding his past misconception

and the true value of life for which embracing even death is profoundly noble, the king says to Nandini, 'After so many days I have realized the meaning of death; I got relief' (p. 426). At the end the hints are towards the imminent defeat of the oppressive and greedy mechanism and victory of the freedom of men.

Now Jakkhapuri of gold-mine is the capitalistic country where no human being, even the king, is truly free. Imprisoned in their own greed, the King, Shardar and Mudol imprison ordinary people and forcefully obtain their labour by making them mine-workers. Thakur shows how torturous the system of Capitalism can be especially for the ordinary people. Actually the drama is written after the World War I which has been the result of an unhealthy and dehumanizing competition among the capitalistic countries of Europe. This is why Thakur seems to aim at the Capitalism, the reason of global human misery, in *Roktokorobi*. He shows 'the fights between the destructive anti-human activities of Capitalism and the human desire for freedom' (Chowdhury 2010, p. 26).

But the fact has been at the local level in Bengal of Colonial Indo-Pak subcontinent. There has been another long-standing perpetual reason of Feudalism. The agriculture-based society, especially that of East Bengal, the present Bangladesh, has tortured feudalistic *Zaminder* or landlords from West Bengal and the native tortured farmers. The torture is immensely terrible and East Bengal farmers always look for relief. So they almost get back life when *Bangabhanga* or the Partition of Bengal (the event through which East Bengal, along with Assam, is to be a separate administrative entity) is declared by the British government in 1905. After the declaration 'it was no wonder that twenty thousand Muslims offered *Shokrana Namaj* (Prayer of gratitude to God) in Dhaka' (Iqbal 2007, p. 259). In this situation 'the destructive anti-human activities of' Feudalism 'and the human desire for freedom' could have been at Thakur's concentration in *Roktokorobi*.

But Thakur roles out the immediate event, and addresses the further one, Capitalism. The immediate social context of feudalistic torture on East Bengal farmers, along with the colonial one, which has invaded the farmers, does not remain in him as the prime concern of life. He may be deemed as 'usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious' (Eliot 1993, p. 2175). The reason of not having the needful conscience and its expression is perhaps his lack of confidence in considering himself a compassionate landlord. Actually, he has been like other landlords who never has done any welfare to any farmer. Reputed Thakur scholar Sadat Ullah Khan points out, 'in his own lordship there is no exception, that is, no information showing any example of the accomplishment of any social-welfare for the mass people', the farmers (2012, p. 16). This is how, by overlooking the immediate scenario of farmers' misery at the hands of the landlords, Thakur exhibits indifference towards a poet's first and foremost duty to respond to his immediate surroundings in *Roktokorobi*.

When in *Roktokorobi* Thakur does depict the agriculture-based society outside the focal point at Jakkhapuri of gold mine, he only shows the jubilation and freedom in the life of the farmers which is indicated by Nandini's song on *Pousha* (one of the months of winter in Bangla calendar, when different festivals are arranged by farmers on the basis of harvest) - "'Pousha" has beckoned you, come over, come, come, come' (qtd. in Chowdhury 2010, p. 25). Interestingly, Thakur has included only the mirth of the farmers, not their misery which is far more in proportion being generated by the landlords. These superficial dealings of the farmers give gesture to a distance, not

warmth, to have been existing between the vast majority, the farmers and the poet. Here lies poet's reluctance to represent farmers in *Roktokorobi*.

This observation on poet's reluctance to represent farmers through superficial dealing of them is also reflected in many of Thakur's songs. The song entitling "Krishno Koli" (Black Bud) may be taken as an example. One day while moving along a rural path, on seeing a beautiful dark village girl, he writes the song to express his delight. Here besides being ecstatic at the sights of moderate roar of the cloud, east wind, paddy field, soft shade of forest and nights of rainy season, he is overwhelmed at the girl's natural beauty. He names her Krishno Koli and sings,

It is she whom I call Krishno Koli, whom the villagers call black  
I saw her in a meadow on a cloudy day, I saw her black deer-eyes  
The veil was not on her head at all, free locks were resting on her back  
Black? No matter how much she is black, I saw her black deer-eyes.

.....  
It is she whom I call Krishno Koli, any thing else others may call  
I saw in the meadow of Maynapada the black deer-eyes of the black girl  
She didn't raise her veil to the head, she didn't have the scope to be ashamed  
Black? No matter how much she is black, I saw her black deer-eyes.

(Thakur 2012)

Incomparable aesthetic mind and expression of the poet are indeed beyond question here. But the truth is that Krishno Koli belongs to one of the farmer-families in a society of oppressive landlords. Here nature's embellishment on her physical beauty which is external is seen by the poet, but the landlord's socio-economic torture on her and her class which is internal is missed. Success in the former action can be achieved easily, as in doing so, there is only enjoyment. But success in the latter action, that is, discovering socio-economic condition of the common people and upholding it in poems is a serious responsibility prompted by severe pain on seeing others' misery. Only a serious lover of humanity with a mission can do it.

In contrast with Thakur in the light of our discussion, Poet Jasim Uddin is such a literary figure with a mission, a lover of the oppressed, the farmers. His poem 'Asmani' (of Sky) is based on the farmers of East Bengal. Here, with a view to making accurate and profound representation of the farmers, he selects a character named Asmani, the daughter of a farmer named Rahimuddi. Their village is named as Rasulpur. Specifying the names, the poet shows her shabby socio-economic condition with exact description of her hut, cloth, ability to have food and medicine in sickness etc. In the poem, the poet writes:

.....  
It is not a hut-rather a nest, roofed with thatch  
Even a little rain has water make its way into the hut  
Even a soft wind can shake it  
Under this roof they live for years

Never can she eat adequately, visible are a few chest bones of hers  
Give evidence of remaining unfed for the last few days.

.....

Hundred patches, hundred torn spots on her cloths  
 Ridicule her golden complexion.  
 In two bee-black eyes, even light smile is absent.  
 From them, only tears flow in torrent.  
 Her tummy is hanging in sickness, acute is her fever  
 Having medicine from quack is impossible as no money is with her.  
 ..... (Uddin 2011, pp. 223-224)

Poet Jasim Uddin's complete account of *Asmani's* miserable life indicates his intimate and true feeling for the deprived farmers. He does not venture the poem addressing the farmers from a distance. That is, they are not 'society's Other' for him (Spivak 1988, p. 272). He almost turns out to be *Asmani's* close door neighbour. Clearly, for him, the noble dedication of writing poems must aim at true reflection of his society of the poor farmers, millions in number.

Thus poet Jasim Uddin succeeds in upholding the farmers while Thakur cannot. We may even say that Krishna Koli of that song and *Nandini* of *Roktokorobi* are Thakur's artistic avoidance of a poet's commitment; his reluctance to uphold the farmers. It is of course not raising question regarding the latter's artistic greatness.

We can concentrate more on poet Jasim Uddin which will vindicate that Thakur's reluctance and avoidance of the farmers even take the form of rejection. Poet Jasim Uddin's collection of poems *Nakshi Kathar Math* (The Field of Tapestry) and the poem "Rakhali" (Of the Shepherd) are two of his literary pieces upholding simple but significant East Bengal farmers with their happiness, sorrow, love and the beautiful rural setting where they live. Poet gives them as gifts to Thakur. But Thakur tells Uddin, 'Perhaps you have written on the subject matter of farmer Muslims of Bangladesh, I will read it' (qtd. in Khan 2007, p. 27). East Bengal has been a part of Thakur's own country, and likewise its farmers who are mostly Muslims are his own compatriots. But as he mentions 'farmer Muslims' and 'Bangladesh', a meaning of distance is exerted. This intended psychological distance may be best described as his rejection of the farmers.

Thakur also reads Uddin's poem "Kal She Ashibe" (Tomorrow She will Come) of the collection *Baluchar* (The Sandy Shore). In the poem Uddin writes,

Tomorrow she will come, her face resembling the new sandy shore,  
 The face that the avis couple touch with their delicate wings for so many times.  
 Her bodily complexion is like the paddy field of the farmer of the sandy shore,  
 Partially yellow, partially faint yellow, elsewhere not at all.  
 ...  
 Will she see the rain-grown-vegetation standing on that sandy shore,  
 Whom the hermitess of winter remembers for putting off her cloths?  
 She may find what she looks for, or she may not; tomorrow she will come to the  
 sandy shore,  
 On this side of the shore is located my shabby little hut, I live within.  
 (Uddin 2011, pp. 63-64)

In response, Thakur comments, 'While reading your *Baluchar*, I am very much deceived. Seeing the subject matter as the sandy shore, I hoped to have the beautiful poetic description of remote sandy shore on the banks of the river Padma: how the avis fly, how the wind blows away *Kanshful* (a kind of riverside flower). But you have filled up the book with some love poems' (qtd. in Khan 2007, p. 280). That farmers are



capable of nurturing priceless emotion like love is something Thakur does not want to acknowledge. Thus Thakur reveals his rejection of the expected intimate dealings of the working class in his literature.

While rejecting the farmers, Thakur even rejects Lalon though Lalon is one of the most priceless jewels in the treasury of the indigenous tradition of thought of the region. The life, thought and songs of the bard, thinker and philosopher Lalon reflect thousand years' tradition, belief, value system, experience and wisdom of all the working class people, chiefly farmers, of East Bengal. So, with a mind that rejects farmers, Thakur, even if he wants, cannot grasp Lalon and the limitless depth in his thought. That is, '... when he wanted to borrow from Lalon, he could only imitate Lalon's music, could not exhibit power to steel anything from the thought of him' (Mazhar 2010, p. 29). Actually, at the time of rejecting farmers when Thakur rejects Lalon, one of the richest areas of Bangla literary tradition rejects Thakur. According to Eliot a good poet should know 'the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities' (1993, p. 2171). Thakur does not do the valuable exchange with his resourceful Bangla literary tradition from which both are to be benefitted. Perhaps Thakur cannot succeed in standing the test set by the universally acknowledged Eliotian paradigms of substantial poetic achievement of a poet.

This finding of Thakur's rejection of the deprived working class people or the subaltern gives insight into the significance of his drama *Achalayatan* (The Land of the Static) where he seems to make proper appreciation of them, and having the insight, it becomes clear that the appreciation is rather rejection of the farmers through intricate poetic representation. In the drama, Thakur upholds the contribution of the working class people Shonpangshus who play the major role under the leadership of Guru and destroy the high wall of the land of the static and reconstruct structure that allows free thinking and pure human feelings. Thakur shows the Shonpangshus as agreeing with Grandfather and expressing the indomitable determination to destroy the 'eighty feet high wall', 'reduce it to dust' and 'construct highway on the debris' (Thakur 2001, p. 364).

Thus, by reflecting his society, that is, the working class people, the farmers, and acknowledging their strength and major role in bringing about revolutionary changes into the society, Thakur apparently does justice to his identity as a poet. But in practical field, he does not perhaps support and tolerate East Bengal farmers' revolt against the West Bengal landlords as he has been one of them. This view is reflected when in *Achalayatan*, Thakur expects the arrival of European Enlightenment of free thinking, individualism, science and technology into India through the major role of the working class people by deliberately forgetting that his farmers at first have to remove hunger from stomach and have proper accommodation along with other basic rights. Such condition has been created by Thakur's West Bengal upper class. If the basic rights are met, only then the farmers can think of European Enlightenment which is again a matter of legitimate debate for the fact that the Renaissance and the Enlightenment bring no improvement to the working class people of Europe. However, Thakur aesthetically rejects his context of the sufferings of the farmers.

Thakur's rejection of the farmers is sometimes illusive when in his literature he includes events in contrast with the reality. In his novel *Ghore Baire* (The Home and the World) he shows Nikhilesh, an aristocratic landlord, as relentlessly trying to develop agriculture and help the farmers. Bimola, the protagonist and Nikhilesh's wife, narrates,

he spent many days in trying to invent the process of how from many date trees juice can be collected through one pipe, how by giving heat there they can be turned into sugar. In agricultural field, the crops he produced through various researches was astonishing.

(Thakur 2003, p. 528)

Here Thakur overlooks and reinterprets the fact that throughout the whole 19<sup>th</sup> century there has been much development in East Bengal agriculture where major contribution comes from the indomitable spirit of the farmers. And towards the end of that century, the West Bengal landlords simply enjoyed the 'ready-made benefits' (Iqbal 2007, p. 259).

Thakur's rejection of the farmers sometimes even turns into opposition. This may be found out relating his role in terms of the education of the agriculture-based society of East Bengal where he has his tenants harvesting profits for him. But well-known researcher of Thakur Fakrul Alam depicts how Thakur considers education as the birth right of each human being. Likewise, in his view, Thakur takes it seriously that people of *Purbabanga* or East Bengal will also be educated. Alam informs that 'his passion for education made him initiate educational schemes here on a few occasions' (2012, p. 21).

It is noteworthy that Alam has only mentioned Thakur's initiation of 'educational schemes here on a few occasions'. These claims of Alam signifying Thakur as the ardent pioneer of spreading education in the East Bengal becomes feeble when we see Thakur opposing the establishment of Dhaka University, the first ever institution of higher education to be available in East Bengal. Thakur has hardly been met as physically participating in any movement. But in his opposition of the proposed university in Dhaka he is so serious that he joins a rally at Garer Math in Calcutta and puts his signature to the campaign (Hashmi 2006). Alam has not been able to shed light into this affair because here Thakur cannot be extenuated.

Some say that Thakur opposes the establishment of a university in Dhaka thinking that it, being so near, would blur the significance of Calcutta University. That is, it is a device to 'save Calcutta University' (Hashmi 2006). Those who hold this view may be asked a question. If by being so near the proposed Dhaka University provides harmful effect to Calcutta University, why does Thakur establishes Shanti Niketan University at Bolpur with the prize money of the Nobel Prize; Bolpur which is much nearer to Calcutta than Dhaka is to the latter? Or, why does not he establish a university in Dhaka instead of Bolpur while he is expected to do it in East Bengal, the heaven of agriculture, as its farmers, by being tenants, supply fresh vegetables, fruits, corns, milk, eggs and meat to Rabindranath and other landlords, and, thus, contribute especially to Rabindranath by providing nourishment to his health and brain which ultimately results in his being awarded with the prestigious Nobel Prize. Renowned scholar, initiator and leader of *Nayakrishi Andolon* (movement for reintroducing eco-friendly organic agriculture with selective approaches from science and technology, which also aims at ensuring farmers' rights with honour) Farhad Mazhar observes

He must have accepted the objects both from his Muslim and Hindutenant (2010, p. 41). Then he ate and enjoyed the delicious food. Thus by increasing his glamour and stamina, those tenants must have contributed to the preservation of his health and body. Likewise they must have played important role in the nourishment of his brain whose calibre of imagination helped him to become such a great poet (p. 42).

Thus Thakur does not express his gratitude to those benign farmers (mostly Muslim) of East Bengal by establishing a university there while he even opposes the proposal of Dhaka University. Besides, he terminates unhesitatingly his attachment with the East Bengal farmers by stopping his regular visits to that region after becoming famous and busy by winning the Nobel Prize. This we come to know when Alam, having his own view regarding the issue, says, '... a much sought after man at home and abroad' after winning the Nobel Prize and busy with Shantiniketan (2012, p. 22). Obviously, his opposition of education in East-Bengal is deepened further by his global fame; his fame that cut off his relation with his duty, if at all the sense of is felt by him.

Now it is worthwhile to see actually why Thakur has opposed the establishment of Dhaka University where mostly children of the East Bengal farmers are supposed to receive higher education. Perhaps Thakur implicitly finds that through higher education East Bengal society may make a transition from being agricultural to being industrial. Again, when their children are highly educated, the farmers' movement of protest against the injustice of the West Bengal landlords may acquire remarkable intensity. One Forai Movement (Peasants and farmers movement initiated by Haji Shariat Ullah in 1818 with the original aim of ensuring pure religious life among the Muslims which later gains social and political dimensions while protesting the injustices of the *Brahmin* landlords and British colonizers) of the farmers already has given tremendous shake to the *Brahmin* landlords. However, in both cases, there may emerge a severe disturbance to the commercial benefits which Thakur and other landlords draw from the agriculture of East Bengal.

In colonial Indo-Pak subcontinent if Thakur is anti-colonial in his literature, it is a significant trait to show him as in favour of the farmers. It is so because in that case he is giving best effort to liberate the majority, besides others, from subjugation.

In this discussion first appears one event from Thakur's practical life- his family's involvement with the system of *Chirosthayi Bondobosti* or the Permanent Settlement; the system British regime introduces in 1793 allowing landlords to continue their ownership of land in exchange of their loyalty to the regime in the form of the payment of a specific amount of tax. It may be argued that continuing such lordship has been his family's decision which Thakur does not approve of. Here scholar Ahmed Shorif is relevant. He writes, 'Despite realizing that the landlords are parasitic, he did not become active to eradicate the system of lordship' (2014, p. 45). As action of a person clarifies the existence of similar preceding thought, Thakur's reluctance to be in movement to eradicate lordship shows that he has been an ardent supporter of lordship and the realization of lordship as parasitic is perhaps deliberately given no space by him in his mind. Thus Thakur is against the farmers by being the supporter of colonialism and feudalism.

In order to see whether Thakur is anti-colonial, his drama *Tasher Desh* (Country of Cards) (1933) may be taken into consideration. Thakur shows a country of cards where 'shackle is considered ornaments. . . jail in-law's house. . . dumb saint. . . fools scholars' and 'dying remaining alive' (Thakur 2001, p. 452). They do not understand the worth of freedom. So they live in all-out imprisonment. One day two normal human beings- a Prince and the son of a trader- arrive. They are so spontaneous and free in their attitude that they leave a strong impact upon every one. Most of the cards, including the Queen, want to break the rule of remaining confined within the all-out imprisonment in order to become human beings. Eventually, the King himself realizes the need of freedom



like the Queen. With eagerness the King asks the Prince whether he can also become a human being. He asks, 'Will I be able to?' (p. 453).

According to Thakur, freedom is as important as the prime characteristic of men with which they are identified as men. Thakur scholar Serajul Islam Chowdhury views that by exhibiting the country of cards and their imprisonment in *Tasher Desh*, Thakur indicates the colonized India, 'a colonized India under imperial rule' (2010, p. 28). Chowdhury opines that Thakur, through this drama, wants to make the Indians conscious, so that they fight against the British colonizers for a free India. Thus, the drama is anti-colonial, as observed by Chowdhury.

But in contradiction to Thakur's being anti-colonial in that drama, there are elements in other pieces of his literature. In his novel *Char Oddiyai* (Four Chapters), the protagonist Indronath, referring to the British colonizers, says 'They could crush our spine with a complete blow. That they could not do. I highly glorify their humanity' (Thakur 2003, p. 776). In this novel another character Ontu says, 'Patriotism is similar to getting on the back of a crocodile considering it to be a boat in order to cross a river'. To Ontu, movement for freedom of India is 'a conspiracy to occupy power' (p. 789). The novel was published in 1934. And 1930s was the most turbulent period of freedom movement against the colonizers. So, it is clear that Thakur is trying to discourage, dishearten and frustrate the freedom fighters through the novel. In his essay "Kalantor" (Another Era), Thakur expresses his heartfelt gratitude to the British for their arrival into India. To him, the British are superior, who contribute remarkably to backward India. Thakur says,

The inner power of the spirit of Europe hit upon the motionless minds of ours, the way rain water comes down from distant sky, hit upon land and tries to generate germination of life inside the lifeless earth. (Thakur 2000, p. 916)

Clearly, through *Char Oddiyai* and "Kalantor", Thakur is opposing the movement for freedom and supporting the British occupation.

If it is so, what Thakur really wants to mean in *Tasher Desh* is worth-noticing. He perhaps gives gesture to individual or society's liberty, not country's independence. It is ensured by Thakur himself in his essay "Attoshokti" (Self-power). There he says, 'I have not looked at the kingship; I have kept my eyes fixed on society. For this reason, freedom of society is truly the freedom of India because the freedom of doing welfare is the true freedom, the freedom to protect religion is the true freedom' (Thakur 2000, p. 106). Thakur urges that there is no problem if the British continues to hold the power of India. Keeping them in power, he wants to have freedom of society to do social welfare which is also a religious duty. Thus, Thakur is not anti-colonial in *Tasher Desh* as well as elsewhere in his literature. Ultimately this is another opposition of Thakur meant for the farmers of colonial subjugation.

Thakur has his philosophy of the completeness of soul. But when the country is subjugated, he must respond accordingly with the like philosophy and principle which if different, will embrace failure because "the significance of an intellectual trend is evident precisely from what it can say about the most burning contemporary questions \_if it presumes to point the way in an age of confusion." (Lukács).

In the short story "Megh O Roudra" (Cloud and Sun) Thakur again sounds anti-colonial and compassionate for the working class people though here they are not

specifically farmers but an ordinary boatman. In the story the protagonist Shoshivushon robustly protests the killing of an innocent ordinary boatman in the hand of a British officer. The officer from his steamer shoots at the sail of a boat and it sinks drowning the boatman who has been on board. The issue reaches the court and the officer, in a sense, ridicules the Indian opponent Shoshivushon knowing that the verdict will go in his favour. He says, 'In the sky avises were flying and I aimed at them. . . the steamer was moving fast and I could not see whether avises or crows got killed' (Thakur 1995, p. 174). Eventually the court permits him release. Being deeply frustrated, Shoshivushon withdraws himself from regular normal life. This helpless and yielding nature which is shown in the hero echoes poet's view expressed in *Char Odhyai*, that is, the colonizers are superior with their power and it is useless to revolt against them. Thakur is prone to submit with bowed head. His talent is 'horizontal', not 'vertical' (Sofa 2002, p. 300). Thus, by discouraging anti-colonial movement, he is against the majority, the farmers, in addition to others. So, here in "Megh O Roudra", the protagonist's feeling for one of the working class people turns insignificant as well.

Earlier we saw Thakur's opposition to the establishment of Dhaka University in East Bengal. This is in fact his general opposition to education for the farmers of East Bengal. Now it is to be seen what Thakur thinks regarding the religion and religious identity of the East Bengal farmers-Islam and Muslims. What we find is that in his literary works, the presence of Muslim characters is almost invisible and it is not incorrect to say

In the poetic sky of Thakur only the moon of *shorot* (a season in the Bengali calendar, which has religious significance for the Hindus) would shine . . . but the moon of *Eid-Muhorrom* (*Eid*, an occasion of joy for the Muslims and *Muhorrom*, a month in the Arabic Calendar, which has religious significance for them) would never shine  
(Ahmed 2008, p. 79).

Moreover, Thakur ignores Muslim period consisted of Pathan Age and Mughol Age of Indian history. It is also his opposition of the vital presence of Muslims in Indian history. However, the historical period of the Pathans and the Mughols is identified as the Medieval Age (1350-1800) of Bangla Literature by the well-known scholar of this literature Humayun Azad. He shows that the period is 'profoundly long' (2008, p. 19) and its 'Muslim poets can claim the credit of including the story of men before others' (p. 20) as only gods and goddesses had been the focus so far. Besides, Bangla language was much developed and then, "the language was much nearer to our present language" (p. 17). This fruitful period does indicate the healthy and happy socio-economic condition of Indian society consisting of both the Hindus and the Muslims. Frustratingly enough, Thakur does not acknowledge this truth. To him the Muslim period of Indian history is rather a dark chapter. In his essay "Bharatborsher Itihash" (The History of Indian Subcontinent), he writes, 'The regimes of Pathan-Mughal' besides those of 'Portuguese-French-English' are not the history of India but 'only the story of a nightmare of midnight' (Thakur 2000, p. 163). Thakur's disapproval of the Muslims, which the farmers are at the core, makes him deny even the authentic history which is very essential in the true emergence of a nation with its majority farmers.

The King of Bonghaldesh (as Bangladesh was formerly known) Lokkhon Sen of Sen Dynasty (1095-1204, as it was in that region) had to surrender to only eighteen Turk warriors led by Ikhtiyar Ud-Din Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1204 because the

king had always remained in close companionship with the ego-centric and luxury-loving Hindu upper class called *Brahmins*, and resultantly there was no national unity. But the fact was that Khilji's attack was a blessing in disguise as it liberated with the concept of equality inherent in Khilji's religion Islam the common people consisted of Hindu lower class and Buddhists who were mostly farmers, from the inhuman torture of the king and his *Brahmins*. In other words, 'Bonghal Buddhists and people of lower caste accepted Islam as their religion seeing the message of equality there' (Chowdhury 2007, p. 232). After this all-out liberation, there appeared the most fruitful and creative period of Bangla Literature through active participations and sincere patronization of Pathan-Mughol rulers during the time of their regimes which is already mentioned. But Thakur looks at this event simply as the invasion of some outsider Muslims. About this Muslim conquest, he writes, 'He has established country with the power of muscle, but in his spirit there was no diversity' (Thakur 2000, p. 915). Thus Thakur denies the farmers' history of needful liberation, and their contribution to Bangla literature.

In its extremity, Thakur tries to excite the Hindus against the Muslims instead of uniting the two; the unity that can resist the colonial Divide and Rule Policy. As the nation consists of Hindu and Muslim, to be in favour of the nation means to propitiate the antagonism while to be in favour of any of the two means going against the nation. Thakur goes against the nation and its majority, the farmers, when he says,

... the Hindus beat themselves, today the Hindus cannot beat others despite the fact that there is its necessity. And the Muslims can defend themselves although there occurs no special need of it, and if situation demands, they can give violent beating to others. (Thakur 2000, p. 1002)

Thakur, belonging to this frame of mind, is sure to exceed the much discussed critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Indian aristocrats who are preferred by the colonizers in their representations, the real picture of severe injustice and inhuman torture on the farmers and other colonized caused by those aristocratic landlords and British colonizers are always absent. Spivak finds that 'Certain varieties of the Indian elite are at best native informants for first world intellectuals interested in the voice of the other' (1988, p. 284). Thakur exceeds Spivak's aristocrats as he does not only represent the farmers in his literature as 'Others', or second-handedly. With his reluctance, rejection and opposition to those subaltern, he goes beyond.

Thakur has had the scope to truly represent the farmers which will be realized if scholar Talal Asad, as mentioned before, is taken into account here. From Asad's general level, through deductive pursuit, the particular level of the issue of the subaltern may be reached, and we may say that like critiquing, creative writing on a particular group of subaltern of a nation is also to be considered an exclusive area for the writers and poets belonging to that nation. When it is done, the subaltern do not remain 'Other' any more because of the oneness emanating from nativity. Poet Jasim Uddin utilizes the scope and authentically upholds the farmers for which he is entitled as *Polli Kobi*, the rural poet. As villages and farmers are major section and original geography of Bangladesh respectively, Uddin should rather be entitled as *Bangladesher Kobi* (Poet of Bangladesh). '*Bajan*' (father, from the point of view of greatness) Jasim Uddin succeeds but Thakur cannot (Khan 2007, p. 285).

This is how in the farmers' own context, when Thakur's standpoint in his literature against the farmers of Bangladesh or former East Bengal is analysed, it vindicates that he has reluctance, rejection and opposition to them.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> \*Except the quotations from Rabindranath Thakur (2012), Fakrul Alam, Serajul Islam Chowdhury, John Eilts, T.S.Eliot, Taj Hashmi, Gyorgi Lukacs and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, those from all others are mentioned in my translation from Bangla.  
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