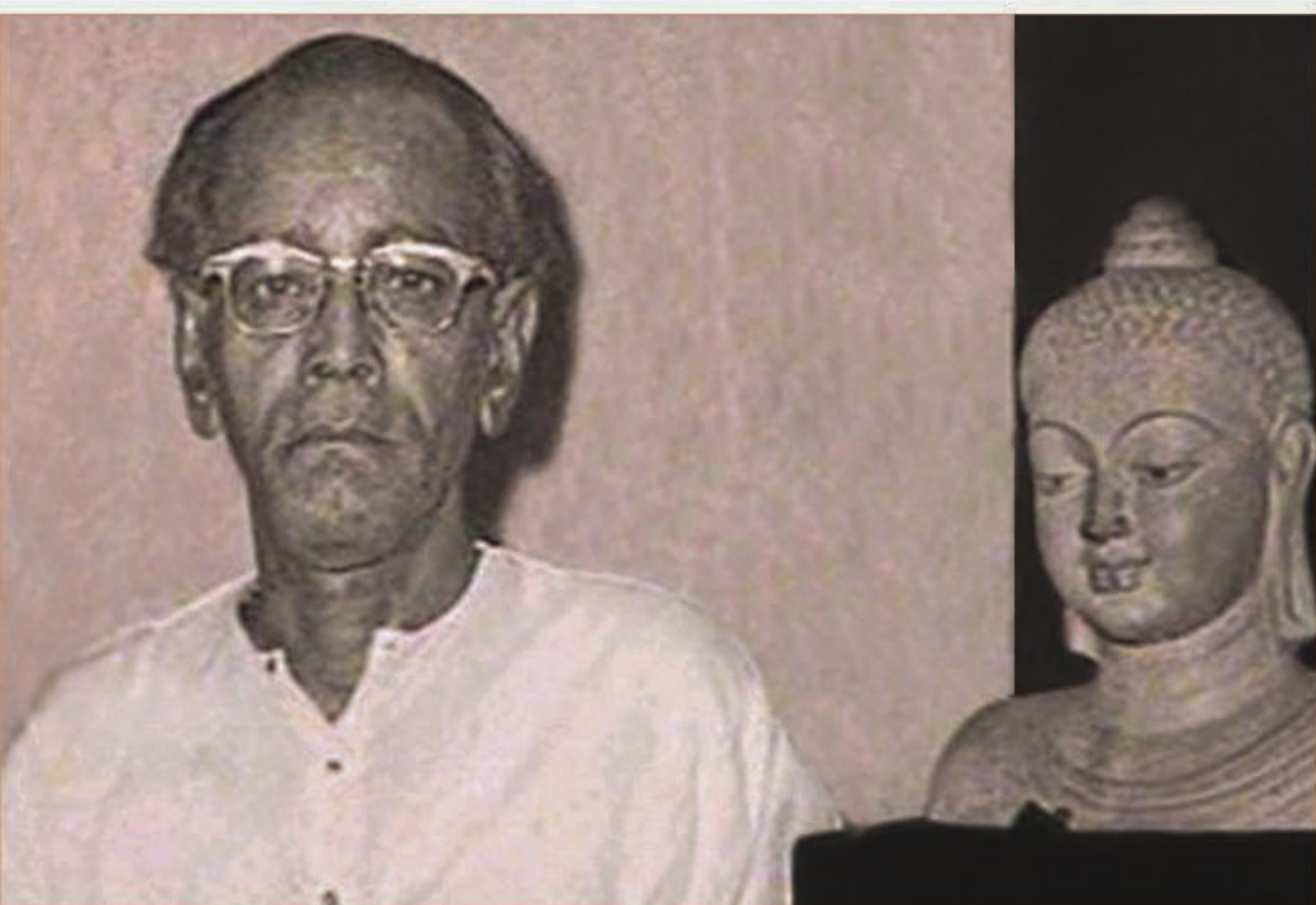


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ON THE EVE OF THE EMERGENCE OF BANGLADESH

TARASHANKAR BANDYOPADHYAY

Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (1898-1971) was one of the great modern Bengali novelists. His works depicts his commitment to the cause of emancipation of the oppressed. In 1971, despite being at the final stage of his life, he devoted his physical and creative energy to Bangladesh's freedom struggle. He was the president of Bangladesh Mukhtisangram Sahayak Samity (BMSS) in West Bengal that gave all out support to the nine-month long battle by creating public opinions through holding meetings, publishing booklets and organising art exhibitions. The following is a speech he made in the Calcutta Radio Station immediately after the proclamation of Independence by the Mujibnagar Government. The translation is based on the text taken from the book: Baridbaran Ghosh (Ed.). Manishi-der Boktrita. Parul. Kolkata. 2011.



Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (1898-1971)

From the ocean of time, the eastern part of Bangladesh – otherwise known as East Bengal or East Pakistan – is emerging with a new spirit, a new aura, in a new magnificent figure. She is borne up on the head, deity-like, by the 75 million people of East Bengal. Their leader is Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The entire world had heard their declaration loud and clear: this country is not East Pakistan, this is Bangladesh: Golden Bangladesh.

The song has been sung anew: 'My golden Bengal, I love you'.

Mujibur Rahman: thou are the friend of Bengal, the leader, the friend of the nation. A historical conflict has drawn to a close and a new chapter is being written. March 26, 1971 begins a new era in the history of East Bengal or East Pakistan.

After 25 days of non-cooperation movement, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman went on to declare: this country is not East Pakistan. This country is Bangladesh. The people of this country are Bengali.

Victory to Bangladesh of the Bengali people!

Victory to Golden Bengal!

From our side of the border, it stirred us no less. Merging our voice in their chorus, we also chanted:

Victory to Bangladesh! My Golden Bengal, I love you!

Mujibur Rahman: you are the friend of Bengal, a friend of my own. Triumph be

the field of history.

Contemporary history would be hard put to fetch a parallel for such valor, such an uprising. When it is a struggle to establish oneself, to defend the independence of the nation and oneself, an uprising is understandable. In such a struggle, arms match up against arms; the heroes equipped with martial weapons engage the enemies. But the struggle in which our collingual brothers and sisters are engaged is essentially uneven. On the one side stands the alien force, the exploiters disguised as rulers, who are fully equipped with the state of the art deadly weapons; on the other side are the children of the soil of riverine Bangladesh, who in their daily lives never had anything to do with any tools or arms other than the plough, the stick, the hoe, and the sickle. They have come forth to give battle today with whatever arms they could muster, filled with but courage in heart and smile in face. They have stepped forward all the same, knowing well what the consequences of such an uneven battle could be. As a Bengali

than valor, courage, and dignity. This involves enormous loss. Countless lives are going down the path of irretrievable loss every day. The homes and habitats – where people live in the fond embrace of their beloved ones – are perishing daily in the fire. Just as we feel exalted and proud for our brothers and sisters on the other side of the border, we are equally grieved and worried. Their lives and habitats should be safeguarded as much as possible. I do not know where to submit this prayer. If this prayer fails to make its way to any human ears or hearts, then I submit this prayer of mine at the foot of God – the paraclete who people invoke in their moments of utmost desperation. Meanwhile, I am losing my faith in the culture and civilization of humanity.

Today the story of the valor and pain of the Bengali-speaking brothers and sisters of the other side of border are moving the heart of the people of West Bengal in the hither side. Each new story puts our hearts astir. I can fathom some of their feelings in a few

again and again in Akashbani these days, those that people in this side are silently uttering over and over again:

*When today have you come mother -
 Out of the heart of Bangladesh,
 In such a marvelous figure!
 In thy right arm, the scimitar you bear
 While thy right hand dispels fear
 As both thy eyes fill with smile benign
 Wrath rages in thy third eye
 And in thy locks of free flowing hair,
 thunders in wait lie
 As the edges of your cloth shine
 O my sun-clad mother! under the sky.*

Today it feels like these are more than mere words. The words, the vision, the ideas today seem to match reality, taking concrete shape in the world of the tangible. By the sheer determination, work, and struggle of the brothers and sisters of the thither side of the border, Golden Bengal has now taken a tangible shape, out in the open for the Bengalis and the world to see. The land today has risen in their side, succoring and blessing them in the figure of the spiritual divinity. The blessing is having its effect felt evermore day by day in the face of all the hindrances, agony, and loss.

But something more needs to be told beyond hailing the struggle of our brothers and sisters or sharing in their glory and pain. A foreign military junta armed to their teeth has seized upon an unarmed nation; trampling their justified demands and rights; prosecuting the most barbarous and atrocious frenzies of killings, torture, and oppression; perpetrating sordid attacks on the dignity and lives of the women of Bangladesh; and all this has been broadcast around the world, decreed not only in West Bengal, but in all India; and yet the conscience of the world, which speaks the voice of all the nations, is resoundingly silent. Why? Let voice be raised in condemnation.

Yet that would be just the first step. Mere denunciation does not suffice against the mindless, barbarous operation aimed at suppression of the justified rights of a nation. The world must extend its hand – which upholds justice like the mythic hand that holds on to the Word in times of apocalypse – to resist the mindless, barbarous operation. Justice must cast its livid eyes. At the same time, voice must rise to succor and protect those who are in the side of justice. The hand of justice must give them a touch of reassurance.

Translated by: Mohammad Habib.



Cover of the forthcoming compilation of Tarashankar's two novellas on Bangladesh's Liberation war. Cover Design: Masuk Helal



Painting: Shahabuddin Ahmed, Courtesy: Depart

writer, I pay my wholehearted tribute to this magnificent valor, courage, and dignity. But this is a question that concerns more

songs composed by the Great Poet (Rabindranath Tagore). Let me also recite a few lines from the songs that are being aired