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Rural Bengal in the Literary Imagination of Mir Mosharraf Hossain

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Abstract

This essay seeks to examine how rural Bengal was represented in the literary imagination of Mir Mosharraf Hossain, with particular attention to the interplay of agrarian structures, social relations, and moral critique. It argues that his writings provide valuable insights into nineteenth-century rural society by bridging literary representation and historical experience. Through an analysis of selected texts the essay explores how Mir Mosharraf Hossain transformed the village into a critical lens for understanding colonial Bengal and its unequal social order. Mir Mosharraf Hossain (1847–1912) occupies a significant place in the literary and intellectual history of nineteenth-century Bengal. As one of the earliest major Muslim writers in Bengali literature, his works reflect the complex social, economic, and cultural transformations of colonial Bengal. His literary imagination was shaped by firsthand familiarity with village life, landlord–peasant relations, religious customs, and the everyday struggles of the agrarian population.

Key Words Agrarian distress, zamindar, peasant, resistance, class

Introduction

Writing during a period marked by agrarian distress, the consolidation of zamindari power, and the emergence of new forms of social consciousness, Mir Mosharraf Hossain presented rural Bengal not merely as a geographical setting but as a deeply contested social world. Through works such as *Jamidar Darpan* (1873), *Udasin Pathiker Moner Katha* and *Gazi Miar Bostani* (1899), he articulated a vivid portrayal of rural society, exposing both its moral contradictions and its human resilience.[1]

1 Mir Mosharraf Hossain, *Jamidar Darpan* (Calcutta: 1873); also see Wakil Ahmed, *Mir*

The nineteenth century was a crucial phase in the history of rural Bengal. Permanent Settlement had entrenched a powerful zamindari class, often resulting in the increased exploitation of peasants and tenants. Agrarian conflicts, peasant protests, and debates over tenancy rights became central to colonial governance and vernacular public discourse. Ranajit Guha and Sugata Bose showed how the peasantry was not merely a passive victim of colonial and landlord oppression, but an active participant in shaping rural politics.[2] Hossain's literary works resonate with this historical context, particularly in *Jamidar Darpan*, where the violence and arbitrariness of zamindari authority are represented with striking realism. The text serves not only as a literary production but also as a social document reflecting the tensions of rural Bengal.

Hossain's writings foreground the village as a site of both oppression and cultural vitality. His rural imagination was attentive to caste and class hierarchies, gendered suffering, religious coexistence, and the moral economy of peasant life. The village in his literature emerges as a dynamic social space where power was negotiated daily.. As Sisir Kumar Das notes, Mosharraf's prose often combined realism with reformist intent, making literature a vehicle of social criticism.[3]

Rural Bengal was shaped by profound transformations in land relations, agrarian economy, and colonial governance. The countryside, which formed the backbone of Bengal's social and economic life, became a site of intense exploitation as well as resistance under British colonial rule. Permanent Settlement fundamentally altered the traditional agrarian order by strengthening the zamindar class and weakening the customary rights of peasants.[4] As Ranajit Guha argues, this created a deeply exploitative structure in which peasants bore the burden of both colonial extraction and landlord oppression.[5] The village economy, once governed by customary

Mosharraf Hossain: Life and Works (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1990), 45–67.

2 Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 12–35; Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 88–110.

3 Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature, 1800–1910: Western Impact, Indian Response* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1991), 402–405.

4 B. B. Chaudhuri, *Growth of Commercial Agriculture in Bengal, 1757–1900* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1964), 23–31.

5 Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement*

obligations and reciprocal relations, increasingly came under the pressures of commercialization and coercive rent collection and culminated in frequent resistances. Scholars like Sugata Bose note that such protests revealed the political consciousness of peasants and their refusal to remain passive victims of agrarian exploitation.[6]

The social structure of rural Bengal was equally complex, shaped by caste hierarchies, religious identities, and gender inequalities. Hindu and Muslim peasants often shared similar economic hardships. Village life revolved around agricultural cycles, religious festivals, local markets, and kinship networks, but it was also marked by tensions over land, labor, and social prestige. Women, though central to agrarian households, remained largely invisible in formal records and were subjected to patriarchal constraints that limited their mobility and autonomy.[7]

By the late nineteenth century structural inequalities remained intact. It was within this socio-economic and political context that writers like Mir Mosharraf Hossain represented rural Bengal. His works, especially *Jamidar Darpan*, reflect the lived realities of this world—its oppression, moral contradictions and struggles for justice. Thus, understanding the historical background of nineteenth-century rural Bengal is essential for appreciating how literature became a medium for recording and critiquing agrarian society.

Jamidar Darpan: A Mirror of Rural Oppression

Jamidar Darpan (1873) stands as one of the earliest and most powerful literary critiques of zamindari oppression in nineteenth-century Bengal. Modeled partly on the social realism of *Nil Darpan* by Dinabandhu Mitra, *Jamidar Darpan* shifts attention from the brutality of indigo planters to the tyranny of indigenous landlords. The title itself—meaning "The Mirror of the Landlord"—suggests a reflective exposure of the moral corruption, abuse of power, and structural injustice embedded in rural society. Through dramatic representation, Mir Mosharraf transformed literature into a medium of social

(Paris: Mouton, 1963), 145–160.

6 Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*, 88–110.

7 David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 56–61; though focused on South India, it provides useful comparative insights into agrarian social structures and peasant life.

protest, giving voice to the suffering of peasants and tenants who were often silenced in official discourse.[8]

The play centers on the exploitative relationship between zamindars and raiyats, revealing how landlords used legal authority, coercion, and violence to maintain dominance over village life. Zamindars are portrayed not merely as economic exploiters but as figures of arbitrary power who manipulated courts, police, and local administration for personal gain. Peasants, on the other hand, appear trapped within a system where justice was inaccessible and resistance dangerous. Rent enhancement, forced exactions, illegal cesses, and physical intimidation formed the everyday realities of agrarian life. As Ranajit Guha observes, colonial agrarian relations often rested on a structure where landlord authority was sustained by both state power and social hierarchy.[9] *Jamidar Darpan* dramatizes precisely this condition, showing how oppression functioned as a routine aspect of rural governance.

A significant feature of the text is its moral critique of landlordism. Hossain does not simply describe oppression; he exposes the ethical decay of a class that had abandoned its social responsibilities. The zamindar in the play embodies greed, arrogance, and a lack of compassion, standing in contrast to the suffering cultivator whose labor sustained the agrarian economy. This moral contrast gives the play reformist urgency. It suggests that rural injustice was not only an economic issue but also a crisis of humanity and social ethics. Sisir Kumar Das notes that Mir Mosharraf's realism was shaped by his reformist impulse, making literature a tool of both representation and intervention.[10]

The influence of *Jamidar Darpan* also lies in its historical authenticity. Unlike romanticized depictions of village life, the play reflects the concrete tensions of nineteenth-century Bengal, particularly in the decades following the Permanent Settlement and the growth of absentee landlordism. It resonates with broader peasant discontent that would later culminate in tenancy movements and legal reforms such as the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. By presenting the village as a contested social space, the text

8 Wakil Ahmed, *Mir Mosharraf Hossain: Life and Works* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1990), 52–60.

9 Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, 145–160.

10 Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature,* 402–405.

preserves the lived experience of rural oppression often absent from colonial administrative records.[11]

Thus, *Jamidar Darpan* serves as both a literary text and a historical document. It mirrors the violence of zamindari power while asserting the dignity of peasant suffering. Through its realism and social critique, Hossain established the village as a central site of literary and political reflection, making the play an indispensable source for understanding rural Bengal in the nineteenth century.

Zamindars, Power, and Class Conflict

The structure of nineteenth-century rural Bengal was deeply shaped by the relationship between zamindars, peasants, and the colonial state. Permanent Settlement institutionalized the zamindari system by granting landlords hereditary rights over land and fixing the revenue they were required to pay to the British government. Landlord power in colonial Bengal rested on a combination of legal rights, social prestige, and the backing of state authority. The peasant, therefore, confronted not just an individual landlord but an entire system of institutionalized domination.

This unequal relationship generated persistent class conflict in rural society.[12] Such conflicts reveal that rural Bengal was not a passive social order but a field of continuous negotiation and contestation. *Jamidar Darpan* captured this class conflict with striking realism. The zamindar in the play symbolizes unchecked authority, while the peasant represents vulnerability and endurance. Through this contrast, he exposed the moral corruption of landlordism and highlighted the structural injustice embedded in village life. His work reflects how class relations were experienced not only economically but emotionally and ethically, shaping everyday life in the countryside.

Growing agrarian unrest forced the colonial state to respond. The Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 attempted to regulate landlord–tenant relations but did not dismantle the basic hierarchy of zamindari domination. The landlord remained a figure of privilege, while the peasant continued to struggle for security and dignity.[13] Thus, the relationship between zamindars and peasants

11 Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*, 101–115.

12 Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*, 88–110.

13 David Washbrook, "Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India," *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (1981): 649–721.

remained central to the rural experience of Bengal, producing enduring tensions that shaped both historical reality and literary imagination.

Peasant Society and Everyday Rural Life

Peasant society formed the foundation of nineteenth-century rural Bengal, where the majority of the population depended directly on agriculture for survival. The village was not merely a geographical unit but a complex social world structured by land, labor, kinship, caste, and customary obligations. Peasant lives were shaped by seasonal agricultural cycles, uncertain harvests, and the constant pressure of rent demands imposed by zamindars and their agents. In such a setting, everyday rural life was defined by both subsistence and vulnerability.[14]

Rice cultivation remained the central economic activity, supported by supplementary occupations such as fishing, weaving, cattle rearing, and small-scale trade. However, dependence on the monsoon and frequent natural calamities such as floods and droughts made agrarian life unstable. A failed harvest often meant indebtedness, mortgaging of land, or migration in search of work. Peasants were therefore trapped in a fragile economic structure where survival depended not only on labor but also on access to credit and the mercy of landlords. Rural labor in Bengal was marked by chronic insecurity, where peasants lived close to subsistence and any disruption could lead to famine-like conditions.[15]

Village society was also governed by social hierarchies based on caste and religion. Hindu and Muslim peasants often shared the same economic hardships, though ritual distinctions and social boundaries remained strong. The village *panchaya*t, local elders, and religious leaders played an important role in regulating disputes and maintaining customary norms. Social life revolved around festivals, weekly markets (*haats)*, marriage ceremonies, and communal rituals, which created a sense of belonging despite economic hardship. Folk songs, oral storytelling, and local religious practices shaped the cultural life of the countryside, preserving both memory and identity.[16]

14 B. B. Chaudhuri, *Growth of Commercial Agriculture in Bengal*, 45–52.

15 Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital*, 88–110.

16 David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 56–61

Women occupied a central but often unrecognized place in rural households. They contributed significantly to agricultural labor through activities such as transplanting, threshing, cattle care, and food processing, while also managing domestic responsibilities. Yet patriarchal norms restricted their visibility in public life and denied them access to property or formal authority. Widowhood, child marriage, and dependence on male family members were common features of rural gender relations. In literary representations, women often appear as silent sufferers of both class and gender oppression, though they also embody resilience and moral strength.[17]

Everyday rural life was therefore shaped by a constant negotiation between exploitation and endurance. Peasants were not passive victims; they developed strategies of survival through community solidarity, informal resistance, and adaptation to changing conditions. Their struggles over land, rent, and dignity reflected a larger moral economy in which justice was understood through customary rights rather than colonial law. *Jamidar Darpan* captured these realities by portraying the village as a lived social space rather than an abstract ideal. Through such representations, the peasant world of Bengal emerges as historically specific and deeply human, marked by hardship, resilience, and collective memory.

Religion and Rural Coexistence

Religion was a central element in the social and cultural life of nineteenth-century rural Bengal, shaping everyday practices, moral values, and community relations. The countryside was inhabited by both Hindu and Muslim peasantry who, despite differences in ritual and social identity, shared a common dependence on agriculture and village economy. Rural coexistence was therefore not simply a matter of religious tolerance but a lived experience shaped by land, labor, and shared vulnerability. In this environment, religion functioned both as a marker of identity and as a medium of social interaction, often blurring strict communal boundaries.[18]

Village life revolved around agricultural seasons that were closely linked with religious festivals and local customs. Hindu celebrations such as *Durga*

17 Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 34–42.

18 Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 15–29.

Puja, Kali Puja, and *Nabanna* coexisted with Muslim observances like *Eid, Muharram*, and local shrine festivals. Participation in these events often crossed communal lines, particularly in the case of folk rituals, fairs, and village *melas*. Shared reverence for *pirs, fakirs*, and local deities reflected a syncretic culture in which religion was embedded in everyday survival rather than rigid doctrinal separation. As Richard M. Eaton has shown, rural Bengal developed a distinctive pattern of Islam that was deeply connected to agrarian expansion and local cultural adaptation rather than urban orthodoxy.[19]

In the literary imagination of Hossain, religion appears as part of this broader social world rather than an isolated spiritual category. His writings reflect both Muslim cultural identity and the shared ethical concerns of rural society. In *Jamidar Darpan*, the emphasis is less on communal difference and more on moral justice, human suffering, and the abuse of power. Similarly, in *Bishad Sindhu*, although rooted in Islamic historical memory, the narrative carries universal themes of sacrifice, oppression, and ethical struggle. This reflects Mosharraf's larger concern with humanity rather than sectarian identity.[20]

Religion in rural Bengal also shaped notions of morality, charity, and social responsibility. Village elites were expected to uphold ethical duties toward dependents, while religious teachings often framed ideas of justice and compassion. When zamindars failed in these obligations, literary criticism—such as that found in *Jamidar Darpan*—presented their actions not only as economic exploitation but as moral corruption. Thus, religion became a language through which rural society judged power and legitimacy.

The coexistence of Hindus and Muslims in rural Bengal was therefore neither entirely harmonious nor permanently conflictual; it was a negotiated social reality shaped by everyday interaction, economic dependence, and shared cultural practices. Hossain's literary works preserve this world by portraying religion as part of the moral and social fabric of village life, revealing how coexistence was sustained amidst inequality and change.

19 Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 267–290.

20 Wakil Ahmed, *Mir Mosharraf Hossain: Life and Works* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1990), 72–85.

Women in the Rural World

Women occupied a vital yet often invisible place in the social and economic structure of nineteenth-century rural Bengal. Their labor sustained agrarian households, but their contributions were rarely acknowledged in formal records or literary narratives.[21] The social position of women was shaped by caste, class, and religion, but across communities they were generally subordinated within the household and village structure.. As Tanika Sarkar argues, women's lives in colonial Bengal were marked by the intersection of patriarchy and community expectations, where family honor was closely tied to female discipline and obedience.[22]

In peasant society, women also played a crucial role in preserving social and cultural continuity. They were custodians of oral traditions, folk songs, ritual practices, and seasonal customs that shaped the cultural life of the village. Festivals, marriage ceremonies, and religious observances often depended on women's participation and labor. Yet this cultural centrality did not translate into power.[23] Hossain offers insights into the condition of women in rural Bengal. In *Jamidar Darpan*, their suffering often reflects the broader moral collapse of rural society, where class exploitation extends into the domestic sphere. At the same time, Mosharraf's portrayal of women is marked by sympathy and ethical concern. Female characters embody endurance, dignity, and moral strength, often standing in contrast to the corruption of male authority. In *Bishad Sindhu*, women similarly emerge as figures of sacrifice and emotional depth, suggesting that gendered suffering was central to his understanding of social injustice.[24]

The question of women in the rural world also intersects with broader colonial debates on reform. Social reformers in nineteenth-century Bengal discussed widow remarriage, female education, and the abolition of oppressive customs, but such debates were often centered on urban middle-class women rather than peasant women. Rural women remained largely outside the

21 Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 35–49.

22 Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 34–42.

23 Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12–26.

24 Wakil Ahmed, *Mir Mosharraf Hossain*, 72–85.

reformist spotlight, even though their struggles were more closely tied to land, labor, and survival.

Thus, women in rural Bengal were central and marginalized—indispensable to agrarian life yet excluded from formal power. Their labor, suffering, and resilience formed the hidden foundation of village society. Through literary representation, especially in the writings of Hossain, the silent presence of rural women becomes visible, revealing how gender shaped the moral and social fabric of nineteenth-century Bengal.

Literary Realism and Social Reform

The nineteenth century in Bengal witnessed the emergence of literature as a powerful medium of social criticism and reform. Writers increasingly turned toward realism to portray the everyday lives of ordinary people and to expose the structural injustices embedded in colonial society. In this intellectual climate, Mir Mosharraf Hossain stands out as a significant literary voice who used realism not merely as a narrative technique but as an ethical and political intervention. His works, especially *Jamidar Darpan* and *Gaji Mianar Bostani*, transformed literature into mirrors of rural oppression, revealing the exploitation of peasants, the corruption of zamindars and the moral contradictions of village lives.[25]

Literary realism in Mosharraf's writing is marked by his close attention to social detail and lived experience. Rather than romanticizing the countryside, he depicted rural Bengal as a space of conflict, suffering, and unequal power relations. In *Jamidar Darpan*, the village is not an idyllic landscape but a site where landlord tyranny and peasant vulnerability shape everyday existence. The dramatic form allows him to present dialogue, confrontation, and emotional tension in ways that make structural injustice visible to readers. This realism was influenced by earlier social protest literature such as *Nil Darpan* by Dinabandhu Mitra, yet Hossain's focus on indigenous zamindari oppression gave his work a distinct rural and class-centered perspective.[26]

The reformist impulse behind his realism is equally important. Mir Mosharraf did not write only to describe suffering; he sought to awaken moral

25 Mir Mosharraf Hossain, *Gaji Mianar Bostani* (Dhaka: Ahmed Publishing House, 1982), 8–12.

26 Dinabandhu Mitra, Nil Darpan (Calcutta, 1860); see also Sukumar Sen, *History of Bengali Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1971), 214–220.

consciousness and provoke reflection on injustice. His critique of zamindars is not limited to economic exploitation but extends to their ethical failure as social leaders. By exposing greed, cruelty, and abuse of authority, he questioned the legitimacy of a system sustained by privilege and violence. As Sisir Kumar Das notes, nineteenth-century Bengali prose often carried a reformist agenda in which literature became a vehicle for public debate and social intervention.[3] Mir Mosharraf's writings belong firmly within this tradition.

His realism also extends to the portrayal of women, religion, and community life. Women in his works are not decorative figures but participants in the moral world of the village, often bearing the burden of both domestic and class oppression. Religious identity, similarly, is presented within the framework of shared human suffering rather than communal division. This broad social vision strengthened the reformist dimension of his literature, suggesting that justice required transformation not only of institutions but also of moral attitudes and social relationships.

The significance of literary realism in Mir Mosharraf's work lies in its historical function. At a time when colonial records often reduced peasants to revenue figures and legal categories, literature preserved the emotional and ethical dimensions of rural life. His writings offer an alternative archive of agrarian society, one shaped by empathy and critique rather than administrative abstraction. They also contributed to a growing vernacular public sphere in which issues of land, class, and reform could be debated beyond official institutions.

Thus, literary realism in the works of Hossain was inseparable from social reform. By representing the village truthfully and critically, he challenged readers to confront the injustices of rural Bengal. His literature did not simply reflect society; it sought to transform it, making realism a form of resistance and reform in colonial Bengal.

Comparison with Contemporary Bengali Writers

Hossain occupies a distinctive place in nineteenth-century Bengali literature, particularly in his representation of rural Bengal and agrarian society. While he shared with his contemporaries a concern for social reform and literary realism, his perspective differed significantly from writers such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore. Unlike Bankim's often nationalist and elite-centered narratives or Tagore's philosophical and

humanist reflections on village life, Hossain's writing was rooted in the lived experiences of peasants, tenants, and the rural poor. His literary imagination emerged from the everyday realities of zamindari oppression, class conflict, and agrarian suffering, giving his works a sharper social and economic focus.[27]

Chattopadhyay, one of the foundational figures of modern Bengali prose, frequently addressed themes of society, morality, and nationalism in works such as *Anandamath* and *Krishnakanter Will*. However, his treatment of rural Bengal was often mediated through the concerns of the educated *bhadralok* and upper-caste Hindu society. The village in Bankim's fiction tends to function as a backdrop for moral or political drama rather than as a site of direct agrarian critique. While he acknowledged social inequalities, he did not focus with the same intensity on landlord–peasant conflict or the material suffering of cultivators. Hossain, by contrast, made class relations central to his literary project, especially in *Jamidar Darpan*, where rural oppression itself becomes the subject of the narrative.[28]

Tagore also engaged deeply with rural Bengal, particularly through his experiences in managing the family estates in eastern Bengal and later through his rural reconstruction work at Sriniketan. In stories such as *Galpaguchchha* and essays on village reform, Tagore portrayed the emotional complexity of peasant life and criticized social stagnation. Yet his approach was shaped by a broader humanist and philosophical vision, emphasizing harmony, self-development, and moral regeneration. Hossain's realism is more immediate and confrontational; his village is less a site of philosophical reflection and more a field of structural exploitation.[29]

Another significant difference lies in religious perspective. As one of the earliest major Muslim writers in Bengali literature, Hossain brought to Bengali prose a rural Muslim sensibility often absent in mainstream literary discourse. His works reflected the shared moral world of Hindu and Muslim peasants while also foregrounding Muslim cultural identity in a colonial literary sphere

27 Sisir Kumar Das, *A History of Indian Literature, 1800–1910*, 398–405.

28 Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Krishnakanter Will* (Calcutta, 1878); Sukumar Sen, *History of Bengali Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1971), 210–220.

29 Rabindranath Tagore, *Galpaguchchh*a; Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), 145–160.

dominated by Hindu bhadralok voices. This gave his writings a unique social depth and broadened the representational scope of Bengali literature.[30]

Thus, while Mosharraf shared with his contemporaries the larger nineteenth-century concern with reform and realism, his focus remained distinctively agrarian and subaltern. He wrote from within the social world of rural Bengal rather than observing it from an urban or elite distance. His literary engagement with peasants, women, and class conflict made his representation of the countryside more historically grounded and socially critical. In comparison with Bankim and Tagore, Mosharraf's work stands out for its direct confrontation with the structures of oppression embedded in village life.

Conclusion: Rural Bengal as a Historical Memory and a Site of Social Critique

Rural Bengal in the nineteenth century survives not only in official records and administrative reports but also in literature, folklore, and collective memory. Literary texts often preserve dimensions of everyday life that remain absent from colonial archives—emotions, moral conflicts, local customs, and the lived experiences of ordinary people. In this sense, literature becomes an important source of historical memory, offering access to how rural society was experienced and remembered. The writings of Hossain are especially valuable in this regard, as they transform the village into a site of historical reflection, recording the tensions of agrarian life and the moral struggles of peasant society.

Colonial records on rural Bengal largely focused on land revenue, tenancy disputes, famine, and law-and-order concerns. Such documents represented peasants primarily as taxpayers, laborers, or subjects of administration. They rarely captured the emotional world of the village—the fear of eviction, the humiliation of indebtedness, the role of festivals in sustaining hope, or the silent suffering of women within agrarian households. Literary works such as *Jamidar Darpan* fill this gap by presenting the human consequences of these structural realities. Through dramatic realism, Mosharraf reveals how landlord oppression shaped not only economic relations but also dignity, trust, and moral order within the village.

30 Wakil Ahmed, *Mir Mosharraf Hossain*, 45–67.

Historical memory is also preserved through the representation of peasant resistance. Mosharraf's writings echo this insight by presenting the peasant not as a passive victim but as a moral subject whose suffering carries historical meaning. The village in Mosharraf's literary imagination is also a repository of cultural memory. Religious festivals, oral traditions, kinship relations, and everyday customs appear not as decorative details but as elements that define rural identity. His portrayal of Hindu–Muslim coexistence, women's labor, and the ethical responsibilities of landlords reflects a social world remembered through shared practices rather than formal institutions. In *Bishad Sindhu*, even though the narrative is rooted in Islamic history, the emotional and moral concerns resonate with the rhythms of rural Bengal, linking sacred memory with local social life.

Literature as historical memory also challenges romanticized notions of the village. Instead of presenting rural Bengal as a timeless space of harmony, Mosharraf reveals it as a field of inequality, negotiation, and resistance. His realism preserves the contradictions of agrarian society—its solidarity and violence, faith and exploitation, suffering and resilience. This makes his work not merely descriptive but historically interpretive.

` Thus, rural Bengal as historical memory is best understood through the intersection of literature and history. Hossain's writings serve as an alternative archive that preserves the voices and experiences often excluded from official documentation. Through his literary imagination, the village becomes more than a backdrop; it becomes a historical subject in itself, carrying the memory of colonial oppression and the enduring humanity of those who lived within it.

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