

Rabindranath Tagore - A 19th Century Pioneer of Applied Cooperation in Development



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Applying the Rawlsian Lens

It was the early monsoon days in the *Zamindary*¹ estate Shelaidaha² belonging to *Maharshi* Debendranath Tagore in 1891. A phenomenal transformation was in the offing, in this deep rural and remote riverine area of Bengal (later to be called Bangladesh), in observing morning rituals and festivities of the particular day meant for initiating the sowing festival, through the reception of the '*Hujour*'³ and his crowning. The day was called '*Punyaha*'⁴ traditionally in the estates of the landlord's family. The *Hujour* designate this time was Rabindranath, the youngest son of *Maharshi*'s, at the former's thirtieth year of age. The first event to start with was the welcome showing in and reception of the *Hujour Babu* to the throne, accompanied by the office high ups and invited dignitaries, amidst a large number of the common *riyots*,⁵ of the estate.

As Rabindranath was being ushered in, he stops at the entrance seemingly shocked, and nearly backed out by a step or two. He frowns at the multiple bamboo fence partitions and hierarchical divides across the subjects along their socioeconomic status. Why are there so many uneven divides, was his explicit question. Why were the poor

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The paper resulted from the author's interactions, as a panellist, with the participants in the First Annual Symposium on Development Cooperation Dialogue, FIDC, held in Delhi during March, 20-21, 2021. The author is indebted to the organisers and also to the participants of the session. Usual disclaimer applies.

Muslims and low caste subjects pushed so far outward! In reply the highest estate officer, the *Naeb*, informed that this has been the tradition, the custom observed since time immemorial. 'But this is *Punyaha*,' said Rabindranath, 'a day to be united, a day of getting together for all, not meant for divides among people!' [(Chowdhury, 1976), p39 Amitava Chowdhury, Jamidar Rabindranath]

'*Punyaha*' for uniting, for coming together was visibly impossible among so many hierarchical separations over, designations, status, and religion and castes, staring as a mammoth inert establishment of inequality and deprivations. The 'King' refuses to enter and legitimise the injustice he perceived. He walks out, declaring 'distinct choice is yours -me or your oppressive tradition as your chief administrator'.

After about an hour, the *Naeb*, accompanied by the upper caste high-ups of the estate came to the Bungalow (the Kuthibari), informed that the divisions were reduced, and requested Rabindranath to join. He, in good faith, went back to find from the entrance, some minor reshuffling of the fences to have taken place only. Disgusted he reached out to the mass of his subjects making a loud call (he possessed quite strong baritone voice): 'I call you my *Prajas* (the subjects) sitting and standing separated by the fences! Break all the barriers and come close to me as near as you can. I will also take a seat amongst you'.

The effect was magical. At the loud heartiest call of the Hujour designate Rabindranath Tagore, there arose, a mass shattering of the fences, a massive

breakthrough of lock-gates, and a spontaneous crossing of the boundaries of century-old traditions (since the permanent settlement), by the people. Breaking all artificial barriers of false power and vested interest, the people reached their king [Chowdhury, *ibidpp* 39-41]. This was the beginning, starting with a bang, a massive blow to the plinth of inequalities and injustice when whimpers of a large mass of helpless people would usually fade out into silence. A real Rawlsian approach and Sen's Capability Approach started, nearly a century before John Rawls's and Amartya Sen's theories were born.⁶ A new morning of hope dawned for the people in the Tagore's estates in East Bengal.

Tagore saw rural reconstruction as his 'life's work'⁷ as reflected through the three main phases comprising a period of 1899-1940: first, innovations in managing the family estates in the 1890s; second the national programme of 'constructive swadeshi' he put forward in 1903-9; third rural reconstruction in Sriniketan, later made a department of Rural Reconstruction and Development at his Visva-Bharati university, in 1915 that exists even today (Roy, 1988, pp 8-9).⁸ This can be further subdivided into three sub-periods. The first started by his sole endeavours at own expenditure, through his attempts to introduce new agriculture in and in the neighbourhood of Seilaidaha, sowing American corn, nainital and aragachi varieties of potato, Patna peas, sugarcane and cauliflower. Later on as we see the details below while easier arrangements for financial facilities for the cultivators was made, weaving and handloom works and

modern agricultural technology innovated as his son Rathindranath returned learning it from America. The second phase was in 1908-1909 for total reconstruction of the derelict villages of Birahimpore and Seilaidaha through initiating villagers' own efforts forming cooperative institutions. And the third, centering in Patisar, the district headquarter of most of the Tagore's estates in East Bengal extending works to restart reconstruction works of pargana Kaligram and spreading the extensive rural rejuvenation drives in Shantiniketan and Shriniketan, West Bengal during 1915-40. These phases simply represent some distinctive features of his actions that essentially brought about the remarkable rural transformation through his journey which can otherwise be taken as a continuum of innovative rural reconstruction activities. Throughout this period, Rabindranath had been relentlessly exploring novel 'functionings' and institutions for enabling the people to organise towards increased capabilities.

Here we look into the first phase only as we focus on the pioneering actions and thoughts that characterise Rabindranath as a development cooperation activist. It was him who first demonstrated at that early period of formative India, the pivotal significance of cooperation in villages as micro units to start with, later to be spread by linking not only through trade and commerce but over a whole lot of self-respecting, self-strengthening indigenous way of village societies, to be resurrected *a' la* our olden days. We focus on the three remarkable innovations he made of applied cooperation in rural development in the first phase only because that is virtually the pioneering

period of Tagore's struggle for rural reconstruction in India.

In what follows, the next section narrates the development of Rabindranath as the cooperation activist of development sourcing from the biographical literature on him, the estates' administrative accounts of the period concerned and his own letters, lectures and literary works. This contextualises the revolutionary means and measures Rabindranath introduced in this country (and perhaps the world) for implementing development through cooperation. In Section III, we present the policy action and organisation that he brought about as an application of his philosophy of cooperation for development. The fourth section will place a brief secondary record of what was achieved by him way back in those days, occasionally mentioning his later continuations in Birbhum, (Shriniketan) in West Bengal. The concluding fifth section will derive the essential message that Tagore left for us, in his writings directly relevant to his philosophy of cooperation for development. Wend with the optimism he left in his last call for survival through the crisis of civilisation faced by humanity when the West was in War within, in the 1940's is quoted in the section four..

Creating Capabilities through Enhanced Functionings

It was not really the first time that Rabindranath, the *chhotojamidar* (Zamindar the junior) visited his estates in 1891. He used to visit since he was quite young in 1875, accompanying his favourite elder brother Jyotirindranath. But since Debendranath had decided for

some time in mid-1880s to assign Rabi the job of managing the estates, he put the youngest son into a few training and apprenticeship sessions of a few months duration each. He explicitly said to Rabi,⁹ 'Only if I get convinced that you are equal to the responsibilities I will send you to our East Bengal estates as the Zamindar'.¹⁰ He perhaps knew at the outset that Rabi was the man. Rabindranath's approach to his duties rather than being decided from above at some point of time, virtually emerged through these periods of his exposures to the stark social realities down to the earth, of their estates. From the very beginning he became prone to build up the strength of people, not by gracious mercy from the top but from within, building up the poor subjects' own strength and self-respect-capabilities through developing the power of mutual cooperation and people's cooperatives.

Before coming to the details of these socioeconomic breakthroughs of him, it will be useful to take a cursory glance at the size of the estates under focus and which were since long put under a legally constituted Trust by

Prince Dwarakanath, the celebrated grandfather of Rabindranath. As was traced by Maharshi Debendranath in his autobiography, by 1840 Dwarakanath purchased vast estates in the districts of Hooghly, Rajshahi, Pabna, Cuttac, Midnapore, Rangapore, Tripura etc. and commercial ventures in Indigo and Tea plantations, Sora (sodium chlorate), Sugar trade, and coal mines in Raniganj. However, by the time Rabindranath was included in the management plan, the estates under the Debendranath's possession was slightly smaller including Birahimpore, Dihi Sajadpur (centered at Selaidaha), and pargana Kaligram in East Bengal, and Cuttac in Orissa, which legally were transferred earlier by Dwarakanath through a trust deed to three trustees in view of convenience in estate administration in future. The size that Rabindranath would be administering can be contemplated from the table below:

This annual value was considerable in the late nineteenth century.

Rabindranath's grasp of the problems was developed through his repeated

Income:		
Pargana Birahimpore	Taka ¹¹	52,858/-
Dihi Sajadpore	"	78,338/- +
Pargana Kaligram	"	50,420/- +
Taluk Pandua	"	15,845/-
Taluk Balia	"	5,550/-
Kismat Sadui	"	431/-
Mouja Biratgram	"	235/-
Total (Rounded up)	"	2,32,950/-
Carry Over from last year	"	1325/-
Total income	"	2,34,275/-
Total Expenditure	"	2,29,965/-

Source: Account of income and expenditure of Rabindranath Tagore's estate in the 1880s (adapted).

exposures to his people since his early years. Later at a relatively mature phase, he observed that so-called leaders in India, most of whom were either the British well wishers in Congress (the party itself was initially made up of Britishers in 1885), or their Indian associates. These cultured, learned and wise people were inclined to ignore the villages. In an article in Bengali, entitled 'Samajbhed' (Society Divided, if translated in English) he wrote, "The old Panchayat system of village societies with the heavy by-laws of the government ('chaaprash' in contemporary Bengali) strangulating around the throat, has been committing suicide and the ghosts there from have been suffocating the villagers loading on the chest; own food now insufficient to feed the traditional village schools; they have to beg for the doles from the government because of famines while the rich and the dignified from the countryside after putting out the lamps in their birthplaces moving out to reside in Kolkata and enjoy joyrides in motorcars."¹²

Remarkably, Tagore's rural rejuvenation programme started with the proposal to reduce the need to go to the district or sub-divisional judges court to ask for justice in all cases of complaints.¹³ Being invited to speak in Pabna Provincial Conference of Congress in 1897, though himself being a Zamindar, he addressed the country Zamindars who were reluctant to bring about developments in their own estates in the following sentences (Author's translation):

In his opinion it was possible to resurrect villages' own judiciary that was indigenous and more capable to

enforce justice in villages than ghosts of cases lodged in the courts of British rulers. This approach was quite evident in a few of his contemporary articles on the problems of the villages. He wrote, (translation by the author), ["T]he matter of our worries is whether there will survive any remainder of the original system we had in our country earlier that would meet all its own wants through its own simple rules In our country the king carried out functions of wars, protection of the kingdom and executing justice. But from imparting teaching and providing enough water to subjects were so easily performed by the indigenous society that so many sweeping invasions of new external kings was not able to reduce us to animals destroying our organizational equilibrium (dharma), did not spoil the society to destitution (lakshnichhara-void of affluence). There was no end to wars between kings but the society underneath continued with its building of airy spaces for worship or guest houses under the serene peaceful groves, digging of ponds, teachings of *shubhonkori*, our own a mathematical excellence by the village tutors while olden village schools did not have to stop imparting of wisdom, own epic the Ramayana was being recited in the domestic worship platforms called *chandimandaps*, and chanting of hymns and folk balads (*kirtana*) would enchant the village courtyards. The society (*samaj*) did not wait for the help from outside and did not lose its opulent beauty to the outsides'.¹⁴ Similar view and path was reflected in the novels written at about the same time, though published a little later -*Gora* (1904), or *Ghare Baire* (1916), for example. Among other things, Tagore's practical reading

of the deceptive judicial system with its extortive tentacles and elusive tangles of the court officials, police and Zamindars has been somewhat reflected in these novels.

Tagore had a clear vision and deep trust on the strength to be built from within the people and comprehension of the inability of external superimposition of rules to development preached by the Western concepts of nationalistic patriotism. "I therefore speaking to the landlords would claim that unless the riyots are gotten enough educated, healthy and strong against others' or own extortionary hands, no effective law whatsoever from a favourable ruling power can protect them from evils. Everyone's mouth will be watering at the first sight of these weak deprived people. If the landlord, moneylenders, police, Kanungos, court officials or any such person can hit and kill them at freewill, how can these people be taught to become the rulers before they are taught to become capable human beings?"¹⁵ He himself already started his counteracting programme of rural reconstruction, as mentioned above, and kept hammering on the societal inertia stubbornly standing on the way.

He clearly found in his young age the falsehood out of contradictions in the Westerners Nationalistic drives as were depicted in his contemporary writings. His disapproval of so-called nationalistic patriotism was repeatedly resounded over time. As for an example, he wrote:

"I am not against one nation in particular, but against the general idea of nations. What is the Nation?

"It is the aspect of a whole people as

an organised power. This organisation incessantly keeps up the insistence of the population on becoming strong and efficient. But this strenuous effort after strength and efficiency drains man's energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative. For thereby, man's power of sacrifice is diverted from his ultimate object, which is moral, to the maintenance of this organisation, which is mechanical. Yet this he feels all the satisfaction of moral exaltation and therefore becomes supremely dangerous to humanity. He feels relieved of the urging of his conscience when he can transfer his responsibility to this machine which is the creation of his intellect and not of his complete moral personality. By this device the people which loves freedom perpetuates slavery in a large portion of the world with the comfortable feeling of pride having done its duty; men who are naturally just can be cruelly unjust both in their act and thought, accompanied by a feeling that they are helping the world to receive its deserts; men who are honest can blindly go on robbing others of their human rights for self-aggrandisement, all the while abusing the deprived for not deserving better treatment."

Tagore said this in support of his distrust in the Western Industrial Revolution in the name of Civilisation, he expressed a few paragraphs earlier: "...I am willing to accept it (the West, England in particular) with all humility. I have great faith in human nature, and I think the West will find its true mission. I speak bitterly of Western civilisation when I am conscious that it is betraying its trust and thwarting its own purpose." Realisation like this was not a

consequence of thorough reading of the western history and philosophy only. Tagore acquired this from his practical experiences from his formative days of the late nineteenth century. He was able to locate the caveats and loopholes from his everyday experiences with people coming to him reporting the injustice they had to bear with in the courts and officials, in the landlords' office or even past experiences with the torturous indigo planters. His exposure to district courts was not to be ignored.

Rabindranath's own words on his exposure, which was expressed in many of his literary creations, was considerable. Quite some time later, in 1938 while he was implementing similar plans and development cooperation gained momentum: "In performing my managerial duties I had opportunities to get close contacts and experiences of rural Bengal. I saw with my own eyes the scarcity of drinking water in rural homes, saw the frail weak bodies reflecting the rampancy of diseases, and deprivations from food, shelter and basic needs. Ample proofs I found that illustrate the illiterate inert mind-sets that shoved them deceived and distressed time and again into incapacities".

Even earlier in 1930 when his rural reconstruction at Shriniketan adjacent to Shantiniketan was advancing fast he used to recollect his East Bengal experiences: "Riyots would come to me with information of their complaints, pains and delights, or appeals. I experienced the villages through them" [Chowdhury (1976) p,20]. He narrated later among the workers who joined his cooperative movement for rural reconstruction, "I used to think at that

time that even if I can emancipate 2-3 villages from their illiteracy, ignorance and incapacities, that will make small ideals for the whole of India. Even now I think, we have to develop a few villages where everyone will receive education, mirthful feeling of fulfilment will be flowing all over, folk songs, music, folklores religious recitations and musicals will go on like olden days of centuries ago." [Chowdhury, *ibid* p .20]

The Innovative Rabindranath

In this section, we take up the innovative strikes that Rabindranath made as first steps to implement his ideals of rural socioeconomic development. He introduced new systems, rules and financial institutions all to be looked after by the cooperatives of the self-strengthening, poor villagers themselves finding gradually their recovered self-respect to be a very effective strength.

Most innovative initiative was to integrate the distressed people into an accessible system of justice to be run by the villagers themselves. Trying to resurrect our indigenous *sarpanch* system, he suggested them to mutually select three heads from the three main estates, Seilaidaha, Birahimpore and Kaligram respectively, who in turn will select three persons from their jurisdictions. The local petty cases will be resolved at these village courts (Bicharsabha) and more complicated ones would be resolved taking the Hujourbabu (the Jamidar) who is the head ex-officio in that case. Only the cases that render impossible to an accepted solution, will be taken to the government courts. [Rathindranath Tagore 1961, pp 250-254].

This was a masterstroke from two aspects. Firstly, it integrated the people of an estate into transparent, less confusing case proceedings especially free from the self-styled middlemen's exploitation. Secondly, by increasing intermingling of known villagers as parties, witnesses or simply onlookers, it would increase the scope of relationships becoming closer, initiating a dependable basis for trust to be used for other development activities through cooperation.

Another innovative opening was to convince the riyots and share croppers (the subjects of the landlord) that their freedom from sufferings lied in their own strength of unity and their possible endeavours to explore the means through cooperation instituting a village welfare society called the 'Hitaishi Sabha'. This society was entrusted with executing the activities for development and welfare (Kalyan).

Third, a direct attack on their continuous sufferings from debt traps. He instituted in due course in this early phase, a Cooperative Bank himself and persuaded the villagers to keep the 'Common Fund' in the Bank and repay all other loans using loans from this bank. As a result they were soon freed from the debt traps.

To make a long story short, Rabindranath's rural rejuvenation programme started with a proposal from him to stop or at least reduce going to the government courts, usually far off from the villages for justice, to a minimum. He was successful in convincing the riyots (his cultivators and other dependents) that this will not only reduce the efforts and time but also costs of receiving dubious justice, often going in favour of

the rich landed gentry and the money lenders. This was truly a masterstroke also for its contribution to fast reduce the debt burdens of the poor people. He introduced two kinds of contributions on the part of the members of Cooperatives. One was 'Hitaishi Britti' (development fund) and the other was Kalyan Britti (welfare fund), to be spent entirely by collective decision of the members. Every rupee of rent had to be supported by three paisa¹⁶ each by the rent payer, for development. The development fund will be matched with equal amount by the landlord (Rabindranath's estate). The allocation of expenditure was to be determined by the Hitaishi Sabha (the Development Committee), elected by the riyots themselves.¹⁷

Same arrangements were there for the welfare fund (kalian britti sanchay) with separate receipts being issued and equal matching total amount would be donated by the landlord. This would make about five to six thousand Rupees a year. Beside, from new sales or transfers of parts of the estates (Mohals), 2.5 per cent of the sales value to be paid by the releaser, and 5 per cent of the purchase value to be paid by the new lessee, to the Common Fund as the new financial bank was initially called. These funds were to be spent on roads, ferry ghats, renovations of temples, mosques, and establishing schools and *madradas*.

Simultaneous attention was paid to education and medical treatments. Though from the common fund, primary schools, three minor schools in the three parganas, and one high school at Patisar, the Sadar (central) collectorate were built up, the expenditure on students' hostels and school buildings

were separately given by Rabindranath himself. Maharshi Charitable clinic was established in Selaidaha, where Homeopathic, Ayurvedic and Allopathic treatments were made available. Free distribution of Quinins also took place as malaria was quite widespread in those days. Besides a spacious hospital was set up at Patisar and three physicians stayed in the three parganas. Rabindranath was the first pioneer of making health cooperatives in India.

Simultaneously, with building up of roads and availability of safe drinking water, he attended to building up cottage and small industry development activities. A local weaver was sent to Serampore to learn weaving technology and a local Muslim handloom weaver was sent to Shantipur to learn better handloom works and pottery works also were also introduced.

Evidences from Secondary Sources

In this section we place a few secondary works that would lend resounding support to what we argued through in the previous paragraphs.

There are authors who identified the self-reliance and strength from within, through cooperation among the incapable and deprived themselves as the major motif forces in Tagore's vision of rural reconstruction and human development. (Dasgupta, U. 1978, Chattopadhyay, 2018)

Anisur Rahman of the Action Research Movement, we come to know from Marsh,¹⁸ provides an impressive account of Tagore's 'experiments

of self-reliant village development' on the family estates in the 1890s: the formation of one or more village communities (*pallishamaj*) to take charge of co-operative-based collective self-development. Among other tasks, the co-operatives were to take charge of literacy for all; development of local industries; community health care and recreation; safe drinking water; model farming; collective paddy stores; domestic industry-based work for women; campaigns against drinking of liquor; developing fellow-feeling and solidarity among the villagers; and the collection of demographic, economic and social statistics for every village. The experiment with self-reliant village development was initiated in three places -Shilaidaha, Kaligram and Sriniketan.

Rahman explored resounding support in similarly impressive detail, the rural reconstruction initiatives carried out under the management of Leonard Elmhirst. In fact Elmhirst carried the ideas and actions to Dartington that was thoroughly welcome and generated highly effective rural development in England.¹⁹ The continuity of Rabindranath's development activism is well charted in this work.

In his biography of Tagore in the 'Builders of Modern India' series (1971) pp,149 Banerjee too had described Elmhirst's experiments, saying, it 'in many ways anticipated the Community Development Programme (CDP) introduced in [India] several years after the First Five Year Plan under the direct supervision of the Planning Commission'.²⁰ Quite akin but not

identical observations are also found in some relatively recent works.²¹

In the 1916 district Gazetteer of Rajshahi, L.S.S. O'Malley, I.C.S. reported: "It must not be imagined that a powerful landlord is always oppressive and uncharitable. A striking instance to the contrary is given in the Settlement Officer's Account of the estate of Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali poet, whose fame is world-wide. It is clear that to poetical genius he adds practical and beneficial ideas of estate management, which should be an example to the local zamindars.

"A very favourable example of estate government is shown in the property of the poet Sir Rabindranath Tagore. The proprietors brook no rivals. Sub-infeudation within the estate is forbidden, raiyats are not allowed to sublet on pain of ejection. There are three divisions of the estate, each under a sub-manager with a staff of tahasildars, whose accounts are strictly supervised. Half of the dakhilas are checked by an officer of the head office. Employees are expected to deal fairly with the raiyats and unpopularity earns dismissal. Registration of transfer is granted on a fixed fee, but is refused in the case of an undesirable transferee. remissions of rent are granted when inability to pay is proved. In 1312 [that is 1906] it is said the amount remitted was Rs. 57595. There are lower primary schools in each division and at Patisar, the centre of management there is High English School with 250 students and a charitable dispensary. These are maintained out of a fund to which the estate contributes annually Rs. 1250 and the raiyats 6 paise to rupee in their rent. There is an annual

grant of Rs. 240 for the relief of cripples and the blind. An agricultural bank advances loans to raiyats at 12 per cent per annum.The bank has about Rs. 90,000 invested in loans".

Sudhi Ranjan Das, a former Vice Chancellor of Visva Bharati University, wrote in the preface of the collection entitled, *The Cooperative Principle* by Rabindranath Tagore (Sen, 1963) writes in his introduction in 1963,

"But over half a century ago when nobody bothered about the principles of co-operation or of their application to the rural problems, Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore thought about them and devotedly worked in this field of study as a pioneer for the uplift of the countless men and women residing in remote villages scattered all over Bengal and wallowing in the mire of poverty, ignorance and superstition."

These writings on such matters make it clear that Tagore worked with a clear understanding of cooperation for development as the only potential escape velocity-trajectory, capable of emancipating the distressed, suffering rural poor of this subcontinent. It will be useful to scan through a few excerpts:

IN EVERY COUNTRY, the poorer classes make a far larger sector than the well-to-do. Then, which countries in particular may be named as poor? It is where the means of livelihood are the fewest and even those are often blocked. Where the "have-nots" can aspire to a better life, hope itself is a real asset. [The first few sentences in *The Cooperative Principle* by Rabindranath Tagore]²²

Tagore's remedy for a broken society was to heal it from within. Cooperation was the key. People must get together in their local communities to help each other and themselves. To give them a start, they would need advice and expertise.

"He who is lacking in hope must perish. No one can save him by offering alms or some other help. He must be made to realize that what is not possible for a single individual will be possible when fifty unite in a group. The fifty who have hitherto cultivated their separate holdings, side by side, will have all the advantages of a large working-capital if they pool all their resources - land, labour, granaries. It will not be difficult then to get the machines. A farmer can hardly do good business with a small daily surplus of a seer of milk, but if a hundred men collect all their, spare milk, they can produce and sell ghee after they have bought a butter-churning machine".²³

"The villages in the country must be built up to be completely self-sufficient, and able to supply all their own needs. For this, village-groups should be formed - a few villages going to form each such group - and the headmen of each group should make it self-sufficient by providing work for all, and seeing that all their wants are met. Thus only can self-government become a reality all over the country. The villagers must be educated, assisted and encouraged to establish primary schools, centres for training in arts and crafts, centres for religious activities, cooperative stores and banks. Our salvation lies in thus making our villages self-reliant

and knit together by the ties of corporate life. Our main problem is how to build up model village communities.²⁴"

Tagore's call was virtually for sustainable human development. And intra-regional development cooperation among the countries of South can be traced out in the paragraph above simply replacing 'villages' by 'less developed countries'. But alas, his call was drowned amidst the war in 1941. The poet died with deep sigh of pain but undaunted with hopes sounded in his *Crisis of Civilisation* closely before his demise:

"We know what we have been deprived of. That which was truly best in their own civilization, the upholding of the dignity of human relationship, has no place in the British administration of this country. If in its place they have established, baton in hand, a reign of 'law and order', in other words a policeman's rule, such a mockery of civilization can claim no respect from us. It is the mission of civilization to bring unity among people and establish peace and harmony. ... As I look around I see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilization strewn like a vast heap of futility. And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man. I would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in his history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice. Perhaps

that dawn will come from this horizon, from the East where the sun rises. A day will come when unvanquished Man will retrace his path of conquest, despite all barriers to win back his lost human heritage.”

Concluding Remarks

Amartya Sen, while developing his theories of development, especially with a view to rigorous argument that would sufficiently be undeniable to the competition of philosophers of development, mainly of the West, was aware of one of his deepest sources of inspirations to be Tagore. He once wrote, “For Tagore it was of the highest importance that people be able to live, and reason in freedom” with endorsing reference to Tagore’s celebrated poem, in *Gitanjali* “Where mind is without fear and the head is held high”. The thematic presence of distributive justice questions (akin albeit differently routed, compared to Rawls) in Tagore also seemingly clear as his comments on Elmhirst’s activities in Dartington, England vindicate. Regarding development of countries, same philosophical underpinning can be done on Sen himself. While writing on Tagore in a different academic context he made similar observations (Sen, 2005, p 98. p.93, p 113; 2011). These writings also reveal what a glorious admirer Sen has been of Tagore.

Our point is not so much in arguing that Tagore was the predecessor in these lines of thinking (Basu, 2009, pp 56-61) but is definitely to emphasise the necessity of cooperation that Tagore as an activist assiduously pushed on taking it as a powerful vehicle for

human development in freedom. To prove his point to a leadership reluctant to understand the centrality of villages in India, society and cooperation, for meaningful upliftment of the poor, the poet bypassed the political interference and drove his passionate struggle for the people home in Bengal. His ideas and actions inspired a massive movement of rural reconstruction based on harmony and strength from within, being built up through cooperation. It has spread widely in the less developed areas of the world over the last few decades. Thus his premonition in the last call we mentioned above has been coming true. A sensitive, civilisation in which the poor lives also matter all the same, is rising through explorative development cooperation for freedom from the bonded predicaments of incapables.

Endnotes

1. Landlords who were given the responsibilities to collect rents from the subjects and handover to the British Government were called Zamindars in this part of the country.
2. Named after some Shelley, a British Indigo Planter; Daha is a Backwater from a confluence of two rivers which were Gorai and Padma in this case. The bungalow popularly known as Kuthibari, was an inherited Manager’s residence cum secretariat of an indigo plantation belonging to the Tagores, most likely to have been abandoned after the famous indigo rebellion in the region in 1860 (Chowdhury 1976., p 28. , Tagore 1961 ,p 42).
3. The Zamindar taken as the king
4. The sacred day
5. the subjects
6. Tagore’s essential understanding of the role of society in enhancing people’s wellbeing can be taken as the earliest precursors of the late twentieth century conceptualisation of development as freedom from bondage

- of deprivations, and improvements in distribution of income that affect the people's perception of their quality of life resulting in and from *capabilities* through *functioning* determined by *entitlements* (Sen, 1985,1987,1999) which has a qualified but direct link to *distributive justice* (Rawls, 1999) ; Their arguments are quite elaborate, made rather too condensed here as summarised from the literature. John Rawls, in his Theory of Justice, developed a complex account of distributive justice based on his Difference Principles. Rawls's Difference Principle logically advocates that just economic systems must be organized in such a way that the least advantaged members of society are better off than they would be in any alternative economic arrangement (Freeman, 2018); Amartya Sen also argues, "The most important thing is to consider what people are actually able to be and do. The commodities or wealth people have or their mental reactions (utility) are an inappropriate focus because they provide only limited or indirect information about how well a life is going. ...The Capability Approach focuses directly on the quality of life that individuals are actually able to achieve. This quality of life is analyzed in terms of the core concepts of 'functionings' and 'capability'" (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy on line).
7. Tagore, (1934) p 11
 8. Roy, 1988, pp 8-9 Bhumika (Introductory observations)
 9. Rabindranath Tagore
 10. Supported by autobiographical recollections reported by Chowdhury, 1976 p 14]
 11. Indian unit of currency prevailing during the time. The exchange rate between Indian Rupee and British Pound Sterling was £1= Rs. 18 + in 1891; it is likely that in 1890s it was India's exchange rate vis-a-vis British pound was rising slowly but steadily. Though in 1899, it was Rs.15. By this rate, the income of the estates were £15,618.33 annually, considerable given the international value of £ at that time. Source: Quora.com, 17 Jun, 2015.
 12. Tagore, (1904a) pp508-511(author's translation)
 13. According to frequently published reports in the Newspapers over the period such as Amrita Bazar Patrika (English version 1893-95), the period was one of the large number of litigation cases accumulated in all courts because of misappropriation of lands by the rural landed gentry from riyots by force or forging of documents misusing clauses of 'Permanent Settlement. Cases often led to unlawful grabbing and redistributions through grafts to court officials, *peshkars*, *kanungos* and even judges (Tagore's speech in contemporary Pabna Provincial Conference of Congress; Chatterjee 1886, pp 264-279).To fight the unequal and expensive legal battles, the poor victims had to pay repeated visits to the distant courts, its officials, or to coax the *Gomostas* and *Naeb*s by immoral gifts or with money taken from the moneylenders to be debt-trapped for ever, etc.
 14. Tagore, (1904b) pp625-641
 15. Please see footnote 14. Also in Tagore (1897) in Chowdhury p18; Chatterjee (1886) in Sahitya Sangsad (1995),pp 264-279
 16. One rupee comprised of 64 paise.
 17. This history can be found from different sources, with some slight differences here and there. For constructing an adequate bibliographical support, see Chawdhuri (1976) and Rathindranath Tagore (1961) apart, important references and material are found in Roy (2011) and Sinha (2010).
 18. **Marsh, The Once and Future Village: From Tagore's Rural Reconstruction to Transition Towns in Contemporarising Tagore and the World**, ed. by Imtiaz Ahmed, Muchkund Dubey & VeenaSikri (Dhaka: University Press, 2013) pp 407-22
 19. In Rahaman (2006), pp 231-45 Parallels are drawn between Tagore's programme for rural reconstruction and the idea of transition adopted in the 'Transition Initiative', which began with 'Transition Town Totnes' in 2005-06, and is spreading widely in Britain and in other countries.
 20. Banerjee (1971), p. 149; Implicit endorsement of this is available in Sen (2005) p. 93, and Marsh(2013)
 21. Basu (2009), O'Connell (2012), Roy (2015), Nath (2017), Chattopadhyay, (2018).

22. Sen ed. (1963) pp9.
23. *Sen ibd* p.13
24. *Sen ibd* p.19
25. It has to be noted that most of the research works on Rabindranath's rural reconstruction has been in Bengali with scant introspective literature in other languages, English being the dominating one, from which only the relevant few have been cited below. A few lines selectively from the Bengali ones have been translated in the text and identified as such in the citations.

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