

## **Patisars Today: Tagore, Modernity and Social Change in Contemporary Rural Bangladesh<sup>1</sup>**

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***Abstract:** In Patisar, Tagore developed his paradigm of modernization which he had started earlier at Shelidah and continued to practice later at Shriniketan. At the heart of this paradigm lay the notion of human-centred development - development of human capability set in the context of nature. He came to regard village and community as the theatre of development, rather than the city or the state. The paradigm highlighted human agency and volunteerism, and included cooperatives for mobilization of the poor, schooling for development of human capital, healthcare, infrastructure development, modernization of agriculture, development of cottage industries, micro-credit for indebted peasants, alternative dispute resolution for good governance, rural appraisal for knowledge generation and, above all, the growth of self -potency and human creativity. Tagore thus envisioned the most holistic modernization paradigm that has ever been articulated-- more comprehensive than the idea of 'second modernity' and cosmopolitanism proposed by Ulrich Beck, one of the leading sociologists of the world today, more philosophically grounded than human development, bottom-up development, green development or deep ecology.*

**Key words: Tagore, Social change, modernity, rural development, Bangladesh**

### **Introduction**

In January, 1914, in an unparalleled move for a Nobel laureate, Tagore had deposited part of his award money into the agricultural bank of Patisar- one of the most inaccessible villages of the Bengal delta lying on the bank of Nagar across the difficult terrain of *Chalan Beel*. It grew a single crop in the year and went under flood water in the monsoon. Here the winter was harsh and bitter and poverty pervasive. In November, 1889 Tagore at 29 came to Eastern Bengal with the task of overseeing the family estates. Here in the bosom of nature, his literary works flourished. The charming landscape where 'heavens' were 'bare' in the moonlight, the vast water of the rolling Padma, the deep solitude that he found here and, his exposure to the suffering souls of the poor peasants not only shaped his literary vision, it also played an important role in forming his vision of modernization. Tagore became a central figure in articulating an alternative form of modernity - that both incorporated and challenged the hegemonic Western modernity from the interstices of colonial encounter. In Patisar, Tagore developed his paradigm of modernization which he had started earlier at Shelidah and continued to practice later at Shriniketan. At the heart of this paradigm lay the notion of human-centred development - development of human capability set in the context of nature. He came to regard village and community as the theatre of development, rather than the city or the state. The paradigm highlighted human agency and volunteerism, and included cooperatives for mobilization of the poor, schooling for development of human capital, healthcare, infrastructure development, modernization of agriculture, development of cottage industries, micro-credit for indebted peasants, alternative dispute resolution for good governance, rural appraisal for knowledge generation and, above all, the growth of self -potency and human creativity. Tagore thus envisioned the most holistic modernization paradigm that has ever been

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articulated-- more comprehensive than the idea of 'second modernity' and cosmopolitanism proposed by Ulrich Beck, one of the leading sociologists of the world today, more philosophically grounded than human development, bottom-up development, green development or deep ecology. It can even be argued that Tagore spelt out and practiced most of the ideas of modernization or social development that has been proposed since the idea of underdevelopment was 'invented' in 1949.

The objective of this paper is threefold. Firstly, it seeks to examine Tagore's concept of modernity and his paradigm of modernization which he developed alongside his literary career. Secondly, the paper argues that the current economic crisis and crisis in sociological theory forces us to re-visualize the global future in terms of his ideas and practice of rural development. Thirdly, it encapsulates the social change that is taking place in rural Bangladesh as a consequence of sweeping forces of globalization and highlight from this case study why Tagore's ideas are still relevant for the future as a model of development.

#### **Tagore's vision of modernity**

Tagore's own vision of modernity developed in the context of the colonial encounter which led to opposing ideological terrains – westernization and traditionalization. Westernization fuelled a style of thought and life that proclaimed the superiority of the West and adoption of the ideology of the colonial masters. In opposition to westernization, traditionalism expressed the timeless superiority of Hinduism and eternal greatness of the Indian past. Tagore himself, as Sarkar(1970) and Kopf(1979) show, moved between these two poles throughout his career. What they leave out is that Tagore had also developed a distinct view of modernity of his own which had its roots in Brahma modernism, but was largely shaped by his exposure to rural Eastern Bengal over the decade of 1890s when he stayed there to supervise the family estate. Brahma movement in Bengal tried to strike a balance between Western modernity and the Indian tradition through religious reforms. It also produced a deep sense of nationalism and commitment for social reforms. Tagore carried within him these values and norms from the early periods of his life. In one of his early letters Tagore proclaims that somebody who does not love his own country, cannot do any good work for his country and similarly a person who does not love his own time, cannot do good work for his time (Tagore, 1963: 512).

Tagore stressed upon two central themes-- change is the essence of life and what is important is here and now. Time has an eternal flow. "We must be prepared for it or our life will be useless" (Tagore, 1963: 513). But the present has no value without a past. So it is a bad thing to surrender blindly to the present era. He asserted that the Western modernity had both good and bad in it and its impact upon India was similarly both positive and negative. So it is the duty of each individual to examine the traditions of the past and the contours of the new for envisioning the future of life and society. Tagore was from the beginning of his writings ferociously critical of

the negative aspects of Indian tradition, the working of the colonial Bengali society and the educated urban elite of his time. He asserted long before V. S Naipaul (‘that “[w]e are mimic men.”... Look inside our mind, there lies corrosion, weakness, incompleteness, smallness, untruth...mistrust, fear” (Tagore, 1963:522). Tagore saw it as a form of paralysis. Indian tradition had greatness in the past. It had undergone decay under colonialism. The only trust people had was upon clericalism. But Tagore had great faith in the future. Once Bengal was in a state of great crisis, it was re-generated through the works of Chaytanya. He saw his time as pregnant with great future not with gunshots, but with great deeds. Although Western modernity was vitiated with crash materialism and hunger for plunder, it had also great power in the form of its search for knowledge and sacrifice for collective good. Tagore sought to harness this power of modernity for the regeneration of his own country. Tagore had set it as the mission of his life. He proclaimed in 1884: “Our sphere of activities lies near us, in our homes and in our neighbourhoods ( cited in Sen, 1943 :6). If the spark of his vision of modernity was triggered by the ideological battlefield of the colonial city of Kolkata, it found its concrete experimentation in the rural hinterland of Eastern Bengal.

In his tract on nationalism published in 1883, Tagore articulated these ideas more clearly. In *Swadeshi Samaj* published in 1904 he re-articulated these ideas in greater detail. Tagore came to hold that in the Western modernity city was the centre of civilization. It was separated from the countryside. In this type of city “... civilization burns itself up with its own fires; and more brilliantly it flashes out for the time, the blacker becomes its fuel, until at last it is reduced to ashes”( Sen, 1943: 59). In short, Western modernity was “...digging holes not only into the very foundations of his livelihood, but also of his life” (Sen, 1943:60). Here Tagore was more profound than Weber (Gerth and Mills, 1958) who foresaw the chilling end of modernity and a polar night of icy darkness that lay ahead of Western modernity. Tagore’s views on Western modernity and Eastern tradition can be summarized in the following way.

- Modernity was born in the city and driven by it. Any kind of urban-based civilization is doomed and bound to die sooner or later.
- Modern machine and industrialization generated ‘greed of grain’ which produced a huge gap between individual and collective interests, between the rich and the poor and led to the destruction of natural joy in productive activities. It has sacrificed people “... into the hungry jaws of the office” (Sen, 1943: 60).
- In Western modernity the driving force was the pursuit of wealth
- In Europe state was concerned with social welfare.
- Europe’s strength lay in the state and its power. The critical institution of modernity was state and its organized violence.
- European modernity’s another crucial feature was its search for knowledge and scientific achievement.
- The hallmark of Western modernity was power of enterprise undertaken both collectively and individually.
- The centre of pre-colonial Indian society was village and a harmonious balance between city and the countryside.
- The village had interdependence and organic unity that allowed it to function autonomously even in the absence of the state.
- In India social welfare was the responsibility of the society.
- In pre-colonial India, wealth was regarded as ‘social trust’ (Sen, 1943: 11). The pursuit of wealth was tempered with ‘competitive generosity’(Sen,1943: 11)

- During the colonial rule the organic unity of society had come to an end. The institution of private property led to its destruction. The rural elite began to live in cities and wealth flowed from the countryside to the city. The natural bond between man and man was ruined. Individuals became both atomistic and alienated.

Thus Tagore had a much more complex model of modernity than what has been so far available in the social-scientific literature on modernization which naively assumed a polarity of tradition and modernity and an inevitable linear progress from tradition to Western, urban, industrial modernity. Thus the Western view of modernity assumed sociology of fate that fore-ordained the triumph of Western modernity and dissolution of all other cultural and social forms-- the destruction of the other, malevolent and evil. Tagore, on the other hand, spelt out three societal forms-- organic traditional society, transitional society of decay that had lost its organic unity under the weight of colonialism and organic modernity – outlines of a future society grounded in a synthesis of Western modernity and Indian tradition – a vision of modernity which was fundamentally different from Western modernity. Thus he talked about multiple modernities.

#### *The paradigm of modernization*

In Tagore estates in Eastern Bengal which originally comprised Birahimpur estate of the present Kustia district with headquarters at Shelaidah, Sajadpur of Pabna district, Kaligram Pargana with headquarters at Patisar in the present district of Rajshahi, he came into close encounter with peasants and common people whose 'suffering' became gradually 'intertwined' with his 'daily work'. He described his fundamental task of modernization as self- governance – to '...take the Government of the country in our hands....'(Sen, 1943:21). In Patisar, Tagore developed his paradigm of modernization which he had started earlier at Shelidah and continued to practice later at Shriniketan. At the heart of this paradigm lay the notion of decentralized self-governance undertaken collectively by village people. It was human-centred development from the below – development of human capability set in the context of nature. He came to regard village and community as the theatre of development, rather than the city or the state. The paradigm highlighted human agency and volunteerism, and included cooperatives for mobilization of the poor, schooling for development of human capital, healthcare, infrastructure development, modernization of agriculture, development of cottage industries, micro-credit for indebted peasants, alternative dispute resolution for good governance, rural appraisal for knowledge generation and, above all, the growth of self -potency and human creativity.

In this task, he clearly identified the nature of underdevelopment in rural society that he saw so closely, perhaps more closely than a professional anthropologist. The rural society, he showed, was characterized by

- Low productivity of agriculture
- Drain of economic resources from the village to the city
- Illiteracy and lack of education
- Lack of self-potency

- Indebtedness
- virulent diseases like malaria, typhoid, Diphtheria
- Deep fatalism
- High litigation
- Theft and robbery
- Famine
- Master-slave relationship and high dependency of the peasantry upon the zaminadars

Tagore saw the rural society "... as an uprooted tree in the new age" that "... quietly accept every misfortune, die without effort, attribute every injustice to destiny" (Sen, 1943: 22). He found that the lights from the huts of the village were disappearing; it was being increasingly covered by the jungle. Deadly diseases were spreading and famines became more frequent. He saw the village as a 'mad man' tearing up his own body through constant litigation.

Tagore fully articulated his vision of rural development in his address in the Provincial Conference of the Congress in Pabna in 1908. He suggested for clustering a number of villages into a division which would take responsibility for running schools, industrial arts, common grain fund, commodity bank, and agricultural bank. Each division should have a public space for collective activities and recreation and informal dispute resolution. All conflicts and disputes have to be resolved locally (Mukherjee, 1997).

*The exemplar: beginning at Shelidah*

Tagore found Shelidah a good place to start his work on rural development. There was an agricultural bank and an elementary school at Shelidah. Tagore recruited a band of young people to work with him. In the context of the above features of underdevelopment, when Tagore started his development work at Shelidah in 1899, he gave particular emphasis to the development of agential capability of peasants through the spirit of cooperation, education, higher agricultural productivity, good governance and provision of health care. He undertook it in Shelaifah and Patisar. The Estate of Birahimpur was divided into five divisions each headed by a chief along with two Hindu and two Muslim members elected from the area. The responsibility for development work in each area was given to this committee (Rafiq, 2011). Young development workers in cooperation with villagers and under the supervision of Tagore began to repair roads and dams, excavate tanks, and clear jungle. An experimental farm of more than 25 acres (80 *bigha*) was set up to introduce new agricultural techniques and new crops like American maize and potato in the area as early as 1899. He even toyed with the idea of nurturing silk worms in the area so that peasants could have alternative source of livelihood (Paul, 1988). Four schools including a girl's school and a gymnasium were set up (Sen, 1943). Meso level developmental enterprises such as a weaving school, sugar crushing mill, brick kiln, and jute and cloth trade were also attempted in the nearby district town of Kushtia so that it could forge a virtuous circle of rural-urban development. A hospital was also established here. In 1906, Rathindranath Tagore,

the poet's son was sent to USA for training in agronomy. He undertook the task of rural development at Shelidah from 1910 (Mukhopadhyaya, 1997). In 1907, Tagore had organized young volunteers for rural development called *Kishorebrati*. Adhikari (1974) who participated in it has described what they did for rural development. They consisted of a team of 24 boys and their task was threefold: to take part in agricultural work, to work for the ideal village and organize other young people for rural development. They had to work in the farms of their own and in other farms for learning modern agricultural techniques. They were also given responsibility to turn Komarkandi village into an ideal village. They had to collect detailed information about the village and its inhabitants. Their activities began after the school and continued into the evening. Tagore introduced a nationalist fair in Shelidah called *Katayani Mela* that generated awareness, patriotism, encouraged folk arts and provided recreation for rural people. Tagore also undertook to build up an ideal village called Lahinigram in 1915 (Karim, 2008). It did not, however, materialize due to the lawsuit by a local zamindar. The experiment for rural development here came to an end in 1919 when the Tagore estate was divided Shelidah fell into the hands of other members of the family.

#### *The paradigm at Patisar*

Patisar was almost a square village about a kilometre in length that housed the kutchery of Kaligram Pargana of Tagore Estate (Paul, 1407). The work on rural development at Patisar began in 1899 on the occasion of memorial service to Debendranath Tagore when Tagore established a Welfare Fund. In the past tenants used to pay a tiny amount to the zamindar for religious and cultural festivals of the community along with their rent. Tagore built upon this custom and persuaded his tenants to pay more for the general welfare. Every tenant had to pay about 6 percent of the rent to the Welfare Fund. Tagore matched this grant from his share of the rent. Later Tagore Estate made annual grant for development work here (Sen, 1943). For the task of development every village had a welfare society headed by an elderly person. The Kaligram Pargana was divided into three divisions. The village welfare societies were confederated into divisional welfare societies at the apex of which lay Kaligram Welfare Society headed by five chiefs. The total amount of money of the welfare was equally distributed among the divisions (Rafiq, 2011). Tagore found out a new source of income for this Fund. In the past, those who violated a social taboo had to offer an expensive feast. Tagore arranged that one could from then contribute to the Welfare Fund instead of the feast. In 1905 Tagore established an agricultural bank in Kaligram. This Fund provided money to run a high school and a charitable dispensary.

By 1915 Patisar had a full-fledged rural development programme that included a model farm, modern agricultural equipments brought from USA. A tractor was introduced for fast and deep ploughing and it became quite popular with the villagers. Roads were repaired, wells dug, jungles were cleared. Provision for proper medical treatment and medicines were made. As many as 200 rural schools including day and night schools were opened in the area. Two important innovations were introduced here. The agricultural bank at Patisar provided micro credit to farmers at an

interest rate of 9 percent. Borrowers were reimbursed 3 percent of the interest after they made full repayment and hence the effective interest rate was only 6 percent. Tagore introduced alternative dispute resolution in the area so that all disputes could be solved at the village level without resorting to expensive litigations. Tagore, in addition, planned for a rice mill at Patisar by floating shares of 5 and 10 rupees. He also tried to introduce other income generating activities such as umbrella-making and pottery. The scale of the work was considerable. In a letter of 1916 Tagore mentioned that the work of rural development included 600 villages (Rafiq, 2011).

#### *Expansion of the paradigm*

Tagore had purchased about 7 acres of land outside the village of Surul near Santiniketan in 1912. In 1920 Tagore met Leonard Knight Elmhurst, an agronomist at Cornell who was considerably familiar with the problems of agriculture in India. He persuaded Elmhurst to join his task for rural development at what then came to be known as Shriniketan. The task for rural development at Shriniketan began in full earnest from 1922 when the Institute of Rural Reconstruction was set up with Elmhurst as its first director and with the financial support of Mrs. Willard Straight. The early phase of it consisted of preparation for the task. The second phase focused on rural appraisal through which detailed knowledge of the problems of rural life were gathered. The actual work of rural development started in the third phase from 1924. The landscape of Surul was a daunting challenge, even a nightmare for any development worker. The earth was barren and cultivation was difficult due to the quality of the soil. It was only suitable for a single crop in the year. There was scarcity of water. Malaria was a scourge for the area. Monkeys used to destroy crops regularly. The main task of agricultural modernization that was undertaken was an increase in agricultural productivity through scientific management, introduction of new crops, especially winter crops, extensive irrigation work, orchards, experimentation with new seed varieties, mixing of organic fertilizer with chemical fertilizer. It also included dairy and poultry farming and later sericulture and fishery (Dikshit, 2010)

A central plank of rural development strategy was to propagate volunteerism and a spirit of cooperation. Particular emphasis was given to establishment of cooperatives which included cooperative banks, credit societies, irrigation societies and health cooperatives which started to function from 1924. A central cooperative bank was set up at Santiniketan in 1927 and two years later 268 cooperatives became linked to this bank (Sinha 2010). The programme also undertook to revitalize the rural cottage industries alongside other non-farm activities such as weaving, leather work, shoe-making, pottery, sugar making, and sewing. The programme undertook a comprehensive strategy of agricultural extension work through organizing young volunteers called *Balakbrati* giving farmers information and advice for farming in a very hostile environment.

Education was also pursued vigorously with the establishment of shikhashtra through which schools were set up for boys and girls and continuing education for adults. Healthcare became an essential part of rural development programme. A health centre was introduced in 1923 which

attracted hundreds of patients, mainly patients of malaria which was almost an epidemic in the area. Within a year healthcare was extended to 12 villages. The programme also started health campaigns for raising health consciousness among rural people. In 1923 it held 200 such campaigns (Sinha 2010).

*Tagore's vision of modernity and its relevance for contemporary development discourses*

The global crisis of today has made it imperative to revisit Tagore's idea of modernity and his experiments in rural development. It is also necessary to reexamine it for it is necessary to establish and recognize the legacy of Tagore as he foreshadowed many of the ideas of modernization and development that we deploy today. In spite of recent interest in Tagore's contribution in the field of rural development, the task is yet to be done. Finally, technological development has made it possible for a future with 'the end of city' and perhaps necessary to return to the village for a sustainable life in the planet in the context of the threats of environmental damage and climate change.

The rise of casino capitalism – the infinite search for paper assets and gambling on the future for high stake profit (Strange, 1997)) which began to develop from late 1970s is now fast becoming the predominant form of Western economy, the extraordinary pace of globalization, the fearful threat of climate change and the triumphant march of neo-liberalism that seek to destroy the welfare state have brought mankind face to face with a crisis that has no precedence. In this context Tagore has become vitally relevant for future development discourses and practices. Over the last two decades, the remorseless drive for hegemonic globalization has sacrificed humanity to, what Weber and Tagore both once saw, as the 'iron cage' filled with 'little men' like 'little cogs' (Weber in Gerth and Mills, 1958).

What Harvey (2012: 156-7) describes as feral city has become the site of great dispossession. But the problem is that we live in a society where capitalism itself has become rampantly feral. Feral politicians cheat on their expenses; feral bankers plunder the public purse for all its worth.... A political economy of mass dispossession, of predatory practices to the point of daylight robbery—particularly of the poor and the vulnerable, unsophisticated and the legally unprotected—has become the order of the day.... Thatcherism unchained the inherently feral instincts of capitalism.... Reckless slash-and-burn is openly the motto of the ruling classes pretty much everywhere.

It has become now necessary to re-examine Tagore's vision of holistic rural reconstruction. In the context of escalating greed, an increasing polarisation, obsession with materialism and popular culture that neo-liberal globalization has induced, the paradigm of Patisar may hold clue to the global crisis of today whether it is a Chinese youth selling his kidney for an iPhone or farmers committing suicide in India as a consequence of using genetically modified seeds or a hoodlum in Bangladesh killing for a few thousand taka.



It is useful to recall that although the use of the words growth and development are very old- the term "growth" in English dates from 1587, its current usage can be traced to Joseph Schumpeter's book *Theory of Economic Development* which was published in 1939. The first academic concern with underdevelopment led by Rosenstein-Rodan was undertaken between 1942 and 1945 with focus upon East and Southern Europe. The phrase 'underdeveloped areas' was possibly coined by Wilfred Bensen in 1942. On 20 January 1949, President Truman's declaration placed two billion people of the earth as living in underdeveloped areas (Esteve, 2000). It opened the floodgate of books on economic development. The early works were mainly concerned with mere economic growth in the post-colonial countries. In 1960s, it became quite clear that theories and strategies of mere economic growth were not adequate for development of the post-colonial countries. The decade saw broadening of the concept in terms of social development that merely included items like health, leisure and freedom as indispensable components of development. The idea of economic growth faced a major challenge with the publication of the Club of Rome report titled *Limits to Growth* in 1970 (Meadows and Meadows, 1970) that radically changed the narrow technical conception of development and paved the flowering of the concept of sustainable development later. It also led to the idea of development from below which found that large-scale development projects imposed from above and administered by a managerial class did not work and that small was beautiful and indigenous knowledge was the wellspring of development as Schumacher and Robert Chambers began to highlight from 1980s. The decade also saw the birth of the concept of sustainable development. Although its roots are quite old, it mainly flourished over the decades from 1960s to 1980s. Concepts like deep ecology began to flourish from this time as well. In its specific sense, deep ecology which was first articulated by in 1972 by Arne Naess is understood to have 10 characteristics (Drengson, 1999). It includes holism, ontological integration of humans with other species, location of the self as a central node in the web of life in the cosmos and an emphasis on self-realization, eco-centric view of life, and grounding of all our values in the perception that human world and nature constitute an organic whole (Adams, 2003). Every single idea that deep ecology has spelt out was articulated by Tagore much more vigorously and put into action.

The idea of people-centred development emerged in 1980s that saw ordinary men and women as agents of development and a specific paradigm of human development in 1990s. The decade also saw the emergence of the ideas of post development that called for an end to all efforts for economic growth and return to nature. As Sachs described it the project of development was "a blunder of planetary proportions" (Sachs, 2000:1). Today "[T]he idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape." Thus the paradigms of development that have emerged over the last 75 years or so clearly demonstrates that what Tagore visualized in 1890s and trialed in the first decade of twentieth century at Shelidah and later at Patisar are more radical than the current discourses of development.

The crisis of contemporary society has its resonance within sociology as well. It has found its expression in the idea of risk society and decolonizing sociology. Ulrich Beck, one of leading sociologists of the world today has shown that Western modernity has engendered a global risk society. As one journalist has put it:

We live in a terrifying new millennium of global risks. There is a risk that you will be bombed on your way to work by terrorists. Should you manage to get through the day unscathed, there's a risk of you catching avian flu, BSE, or being washed away by a tsunami or obliterated by a hurricane as you lie in bed dreaming of happier times (Jeffries, 2006:12).

According to Beck, modernity has a Janus-like face; it has produced remarkable economic prosperity, but its success has also produced a whole array of great risks – risks that can destroy the very fabric of our society. While the crisis of modernity has prompted many to declare the end of modernity, Beck views it as an essential feature of industrial or first modernity organized around the notion of nation-state. The West is now passing into a second stage of modernity – second modernity which is cosmopolitan and is much better placed to deal with global risks. Yet it has not been reflected adequately in social theory.

When a world order collapses, that's the moment when reflection should begin. Surprisingly, this has not been the case with the type of social theory dominant today. The mainstream of social theory still floats loftily above the lowlands of epochal transformations (climate change, financial crisis, nation-states) in a condition of universalistic superiority and instinctive uncertainty. This universalistic social theory, whether structuralist, interactionist, Marxist or systems-theoretical, is now both out of date and provincial (Beck and Grande, 2010: 409-10).

Beck and Grande (2010) argue that what passes for typical social theory was grounded in the first modernity and is hardly useful for 21<sup>st</sup> century in the age of second modernity. The dominant social theories of the first modernity were produced in the age of empire when people of the third world were denigrated as backward and their cultures traditional which were destined to converge upon what once Manning Nash described as the 'golden road' the West had taken-modernity. Yet Beck's theory of second modernity has many limitations. Beck confuses between the actual process of modernization and a normatively constructed view of modernity. Also problematic is Beck and Grande's view of stretched vs. compressed process of modernization (Calhoun, 2010). As Maharaj (2010: 570) scathingly observes, "we are left in the air as to whether the various modernities are chasing the identical dream".

The present crisis in sociology has prompted many to move away from "... this 'rusty' discipline, predominantly populated by the spectres of a line of white European erudite males" (Boatcă, Costa and Rodríguez, 2010:1; also Nazrul Islam, 2005; Aminul Islam, 2010).

From the interstices of a colonial periphery, Tagore experienced all the issues of modernity or modernization that social scientists are talking about today. Tagore's vision of modernity and his experiments of modernization provide much more useful and provocative answers to the questions that are agitating the minds of all who are concerned with the fate of humanity and its future. He offers a more interesting and alternative view of modernity.

Under our highly complex modern conditions, mechanical forces are organized, with such efficiency that the materials produced grow far in advance of man's selective and assimilative capacity to simplify them into harmony with his nature and needs. Such an intemperate overgrowth of things, like the rank vegetation of the tropics creates confinement for man. The nest is simple, it has an easy relationship with the sky; the cage is complex and costly, it is too much itself excommunicating whatever lies outside. And modern man is busy building his cage, fast developing his parasitism on the monster, Thing, which he allows to envelop him on all sides. He is always occupied in adapting himself to its dead angularities, limits himself to its limitations, and merely becomes a part of it (Tagore, cited in Elmhirst, 1976).

Yet the paradigm hardly expanded after the death of Tagore. Even Visva-Bharati abandoned several aspects of it. India went ahead with massive industrialization and manufacturing of built space. Tagore was hardly relevant for post-colonial development discourses in India or anywhere else. The pattern of development that took shape in South Asia has been aptly described by Gadgil and Guha (1995) for India. The development project entailed development of large urban centres through industrialization that consumed huge resources and housed a tiny class of omnivores. The rest of the country, the countryside held the overwhelming majority of people – the ecosystem people who depended for their livelihoods on nature – lived ‘in the sea of poverty’ (Gadgil and Guha, 1995:34). A third of the people were environmental refugees who had to leave rural areas due to poverty, landlessness or development projects that destroyed their sources of livelihoods.

#### **Social change in contemporary Bangladesh**

Bangladesh has experienced rapid social change over the recent years. Its economy and society has been increasingly inter-locked with the global economy mainly through the growth of garments industry, international migration and the new communication technology. The rural society has become inexorably linked to this process of change.

#### *Rural development models in Bangladesh*

After the partition of India, Pakistan went ahead with a similar kind of developmental project. Bangladesh followed the same terrain although with some variations. The contemporary rural society of Bangladesh has undergone considerable economic development. The path taken for rural development either with the support of government and donor agencies shows many of the features that Tagore experimented with at Patisar from a more profound philosophical perspective.

The modernization of rural society in Bangladesh was first showcased in the Kotowali Police Station of the district of Comilla in 1960s which came to be known as the Comilla Model of agricultural development. The model was launched as a pilot project in the Kotowali Police Station of Comilla in 1959 under the guidance of Akhter Hameed Khan who developed it. The Comilla Model used the area under the Kotowali Thana as the laboratory for experiments in rural development and had four components. Firstly, it took village as the primary unit of development and primary village cooperatives were confederated at thana level. Secondly, it introduced rural works programme through which employment was provided and infrastructure facilities developed. Thirdly, it established the Thana Training and Development Centre (TTDC) for

imparting training to farmers so that they could take leadership in the adoption of modern agricultural techniques and practices. Finally, the Thana Irrigation Programme provided water for the Green Revolution that was to ensue from here. The cooperatives constituted the basis for operation of deep tube wells, and use of HYV seeds, fertilizer and pesticide (Quddus, 1995). The Comilla Rural Academy turned into a laboratory not only for research and ideas for rural development in Bangladesh, but for early development of modernization theory through its association with the Michigan State University (Bertocci, 2002).

In many ways Comilla model was a replication of what Tagore experimented in the early years of the twentieth century. But it was less comprehensive and heavily subsidized by the state. In spite of early enthusiasm for it, it increasingly faced severe criticism. It was pointed out that the model favoured the middle peasants, the cooperatives were taken over by the rich and defaulting kulaks. The cooperatives could not be replicated properly outside the laboratory area. There was lack of meaningful participation by farmers in it and it failed to assist the poor. It hardly promoted the cause of social development (Khan, 1964; Bose, 1974; Blair 1978; Khan 1979; Vylde, 1982). The Comilla Model was introduced into the country through Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and later on administered through the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB). Over the years BRDB has achieved some success. It has led to the formation of 63,000 primary cooperatives with 2.3 million members, 449 thana cooperatives with capital formation of 8.5 billion taka. The total amount of credit disbursed stood at 96 billion taka (BRDB, 2012). The criticisms launched against the Comilla Model apply more so to the state-sponsored BRDB models.

The government has played an important role in the development of agriculture through subsidies, promotion of research and undertaken a variety of social protection measures for the poor and the disadvantaged. Other areas of vital intervention by the government are the expansion of education and gender equity.

From the birth of the new nation, NGOs began to play an important role in the relief and rehabilitation of a country devastated by the Liberation War. But soon they transformed themselves into development agencies playing vital role not only in the rural economy, but even internationally. Today Dr. Yunus, Grameen Bank and Microcredit are global brand names with global spheres of operation. BRAC is the largest NGO in the world which operates in a number of countries. The NGOs in Bangladesh have not become only famous and global leaders in development initiatives, their numbers have proliferated hugely. There may be between 22,000 and 24,000 NGOs in the country (the estimate includes unregistered informal clubs at the village level, Zohir, 2005). The NGOs have provided a broad range of services to the rural people designed towards an increase of agential power by organizing women and the poor into small groups, building awareness among them, injecting small cash for income generating activities, expansion of agriculture, providing healthcare, non-formal education, gender equity and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). It is remarkable that almost every measure that NGOs have fleshed out and adopted over the last forty years or so were all tried by Tagore either at

Shelidah, Patisar or Shiriniketan.

*Modernization of agriculture*

Bangladesh has achieved considerable success in the modernization of agriculture. The Green Revolution has spread rapidly making Bangladesh nearly self-sufficient in food production. There has been considerable mechanization in agriculture. The number of tractors increased from 300 in 1977 to 20,000 by 2005 and power tillers from 200 to 300,000. The number of deep tube wells increased from 4,461 to 27,117. Shallow tube wells from 3,045 to 12,899 during the same period. Mechanization has taken place in about 80 percent of land preparation and power-operated irrigation now covers 95 percent of cultivation (Rashid nd).

In 1947, the yield of aman rice was only 10.17 maunds per acre and of aus 7.96 maunds per acre. The average yield of rice in 1978 was 10.22 maunds per acre (Boyce, 1987). But by 1981 the yield of HYV rice had increased to 23 maunds and even 31.70 maunds per acre. By the middle of 1980s about 70 percent of farmers were growing modern varieties of crops ( Hossain, Quasem, Jabbar and Akash, 1994). During 1960/61-1964/5 the total rice production stood at 9.7 million tons, on the average. A decade later the increase was only a million ton (Faaland and Parkinson, 1976). By 1999/2000 the total rice production stood at 23.1 million tons and the total food grain production 25 million tons which was more than what the country could consume (GoB/FAO, 2004). By 2009-10 rice production soared to 31.97 million tons (BBS, 2011).

The dynamics of modernization in rural Bangladesh can be best understood through micro-level studies. Westergaard and Hossain(2005) through their re-visit of Boringram have presented an interesting example of it. In 1975-76 Westergaard (1980) studied a village she called Boringram in Sherpur of Bogra which she re-visited in 1995-6. In this village, the yield of aman rice was 15 maunds per acre in 1970 and it had not increased over the preceding two decades. Only five or six households in the village used to produce surplus food. The Green Revolution had spread to the village in 1980s. At the time of re-visit, the yield of aman rice was 36 maund and that of boro 50 maund – a remarkable rise. The farmers had begun to use modern inputs for agriculture and even power tillers. It did not, however, lead to differentiation and polarization of the peasantry as many scholars had predicted over the two previous decades. The percentage of rich peasants owning 10 acres or more of land had dwindled from 9 to 2 percent. There was no increase in the number of landless families. The agricultural wages had increased sevenfold during these twenty years. The non-farm sector had grown considerably.

Only a few from the rich households attended schools and were engaged in teaching. Only one landless family could send its son to high school who dropped out later. Another such family could send its daughter to the primary school. No one before 1970 had matriculated. By the middle of 1990s, enrollment in age group 6-10 stood at 81 percent both for girls and boys. The enrollment figure was about 50 percent in the age-group of 11-16. Boringram is not typical Bangladeshi

village as it was only three miles away from Sherpur town.

#### *Cultural change and modernization*

There has been impressive growth of education all over the countryside similar to Boringram. Bangladesh has achieved an impressive record in terms of human development. Bangladesh is one of the leading countries which has gained most in terms of human development since 1970(UNDP 2010). The forces of globalization have also made considerable impact upon Bangladesh. In 2009 about 5 million people went abroad and most of them were low-skilled people from rural areas. The remittances have significant impact upon rural life (Islam, 2012). As Fraser (2011: 10) found from the field globalization has made significant impact upon the life of rural people even in terms of their family life and expectations.

Our respondents make a very clear point: The expanding global labor market has profoundly affected people's lives in rural Bangladesh. The women we spoke to explicitly and implicitly connect changing economic circumstances and rapidly-changing local practices, including residence and marriage practices, investment in education, and expectations for their sons and daughters.

The forces of globalization are impacting upon Bangladesh rapidly and deeply, fundamentally changing its institutional ensemble and cultural life. The use of Internet in Bangladesh began in 1993 with only 500 users. It increased to more than 600,000 in 2009 and is projected to grow to 20 million by 2020. Bangladesh is now one of the fastest growing markets for cell phones. In 2009, the country had more than 50 million cell phones and the figure is projected to grow to 100 million by 2015. Today more than 50 percent rural people watch TV (Islam, 2012 for summary). In short, relative economic prosperity, migration, new communication technologies and exposure to modernity have drawn villages of Bangladesh to the orbit of global culture. In spite of economic prosperity that has been achieved over the last fifty years, social life in the country has been increasingly marked by greater inequality and fragmentation. Conflicts have escalated and a feral culture seems to be developing. Anomie has become widespread. The organic unity of social life has been destroyed by a runaway westernization and extensive revivalism. A more sinister trend has been the emergence of feral or 'brutal culture' –an escalation of violence in everyday social life.

#### *Power structure and demodernization*

The rural power structure in Bangladesh has been viewed in terms of two distinct models - the first is in terms of gradual modernization in which key institutions of rural society like samaj and shalish that constituted the moral universe of Muslim peasants of Bangladesh (Bertocci, 1970; 1996) are being increasingly manned by younger and more educated leaders or taken over by formal institutions of local government like Union Parishad. The other model is known as the net – the growth of small rural gangs who become involved in land grabbing, looting and killing often backed by the state through patron-client or neo-patrimonial ties (Islam, 1989 for a summary). Although the reality is much more complex (Islam, 2002), there is, no doubt, that rural society is becoming increasingly incorporated into the neo-patrimonial state which is creating both

modernization and de-modernization – fostering ties of kinship and locality as well as corruption. As a consequence of globalization and de-modernization, the rural society is drifting towards a state of anomie only counterbalanced by the spread of either religious pietism or religious extremism. Islamization has become a powerful process of social change in the country. In 1975, the country had only 1,976 madrashas with enrollment of 375,000. The number of madrashas increased to 15,661 and the number of students 2,824,672 in 2002. It is estimated that the country has 15000 Qoumi madrashas with 2 million students (Nahar 2007). The veil has spread rapidly across the rural-urban divide. Thus rural society has become a contested site where a variety of conflicting value systems – Western modernity, demodernization, religious resurgence and neo-patrimonialism are competing for dominance creating, in its turn, a broad terrain of anomie and leading to the destruction of social capital in rural society.

### **Conclusion**

Rural Bangladesh has been subject to a variety of rural development models. As a consequence, the Green Revolution has spread in the country, rural infrastructure has registered substantial improvement, and poverty has been considerably reduced. Schooling has expanded vastly. Women have been empowered. International migration, remittances and new communication technology have increasingly linked the rural society to the vagaries of globalization.

It has, on the other hand, led to fierce competition for scarce resources fuelled by endless greed or what Macpherson (1964) once called 'possessive individualism'. The moral universe of the rural society has been shattered by the forces of globalization, neo-patrimonialism, deep factionalism and political extremism. Economic growth has not brought in its train sustainable human well-being which lay at the heart of Tagore's vision. Tagore's paradigm of modernization that was trialed at Patisar may have more relevance and viability today – in this age of late modernity, 'second modernity' or postmodernity than it was ever before either in Bangladesh or anywhere in the Third World. Paul in his re-visit to his own village of Patisar in 1995 found an abundance of crops in the field, development of roads and highways, end of hunger, and profusion of consumer goods. But the old water bodies were gone. The river Nagar had become 'thirsty' (Paul, 1407:58). When Tagore visited Patisar for the last time towards the end of his life in 1937, the poet at the height of his glory moved from his raised podium to sit on a small stool on the floor with the simple peasants of his estate (Paul, 1407) perhaps to symbolically share his dreams with the wretched of the earth. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century his dreams for a return to the wellspring of life and an organic conception of modernity and cosmopolitanism linger on against Western modernity's 'cathedral of doom' (cited in Islam 1992; 172) as Kofi Awoonor-- another poet from another continent put it.

'On this dirty patch  
A tree once stood  
Shading incense on the infant corn.  
Its bough stretched across a heaven  
Brightened by the last fires of a tribe.  
They sent surveyors and builders  
Who cut the tree  
Planting in its place  
A huge senseless cathedral of doom.'

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Modernity and social change is a continuous process that is in progress all over the world. etc. freedom and the ideologies of social philosophies opposed to metaphysics and theology. 3 4 Luhmann. television and books. The description of modernity is just as carelessly applied to post modernity. meaningful concourse of idea among people by means of new media. radio. democracy. The role of modernity and tradition in social change in the developing countries was very relevant to the Indian scenario (Sharma. In the perspective of contradictory goals being pursued through social change in India. and the respect for individual which implies the freedom to follow one's own ideas (Sharma. or structurally homogeneous. In India. democratization and Sanskritisation. Modernity and Social Change. 12 Followers. Papers. Especially the earlier, politically unprecedented changes in Hungary and Poland had opened up a revolutionary space in which such events like the fall of the wall became possible at all. And yet they have not attained the same lasting influence on the international collective imagination. To reconstruct this phenomenon is to tell a story about how the iconic can trump the political. It is housed today in the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem. The identity of the author is unknown, but he probably came from Galicia and was associated with Mitnagdim and Maskilim.