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Relevance of Tagore's thought of Co-operative in Socio-Economic Development of Rural People Living in West Bengal

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Abstract- Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore realized the need for co-operative for the development of very ordinary village people more than a hundred years ago, but still, there is a lack of consciousness and lack of action both on the part of people and government. The community development projects or programs for rural development in the country got high priority in Independent India after 1947, and till then, it is the areas of the country's big concern. However, with all attempts of the government - experiment and again experiment shows the result of very sloth progress or sometimes assorted picture in agriculture and allied activities, now compel us to evaluate the entire process and step forward to adopt the strategy of the cooperative system to address the problems and to achieve the desired result. In this connection, we seriously need to feel the necessity and appropriateness of Tagore's thought of co-operative system in various economic and social activities with modification as necessary to re-back the rural life as asset-based, resourceful, self-help, and self-reliant.

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Abstract- Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore realized the need for co-operative for the development of very ordinary village people more than a hundred years ago, but still, there is a lack of consciousness and lack of action both on the part of people and government. The community development projects or programs for rural development in the country got high priority in Independent India after 1947, and till then, it is the areas of the country's big concern. However, with all attempts of the government - experiment and again experiment shows the result of very sloth progress or sometimes assorted picture in agriculture and allied activities, now compel us to evaluate the entire process and step forward to adopt the strategy of the cooperative system to address the problems and to achieve the desired result. In this connection, we seriously need to feel the necessity and appropriateness of Tagore's thought of co-operative system in various economic and social activities with modification as necessary to re-back the rural life as asset-based, resourceful, self-help, and self-reliant.

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I. Introduction

The past glory of Indian villages always makes us proud. Villages were resourceful & self-sufficient to meet the need of its people from all aspects by mutual help and co-operation. Gradually, rural India lost its' all pride and became fully exhausted through the years of foreign rule. Immediate after independence, it was a great challenge before independent India to rejuvenate rural India for nation-building. Since independence, different strategies were followed under Five-Year Plans to improve the livelihood stratum of the rural people reducing rural unemployment and eradicating rural poverty towards a better quality of life. However, the result shows sluggish progress and sometimes with mixed picture. So, rural development always a great challenge before the government. Now, it is a proven fact that our nation can't progress without the progress of our rural parts due to its' rural base, and it is therefore, necessary to identify the problems and their causes in rural life very carefully.

The rural parts of our country always have a major share in the total population of the nation. According to the census 2011, 83.34 crores (or 68.85%) people among the country's total 121.05 crores population living in rural areas, and West Bengal has 9.13 crores population among which 6.22 crores (or 68.12%) are living in 37,468 inhabited rural villages. Also, there is an increasing trend of migration of people from rural to urban areas for searching better livelihood, education, and other modern facilities. The census (2011) reveals that the percentage of the rural population declined from 72.19% in 2001 to 68.85% in 2011. Various research studies explore the causes and consequences of rural migration to urban, which has now become a universal phenomenon in the country. Sali & Astige (2015) viewed that due to 'pull' & 'push' factors, people generally migrate from rural to urban. They pointed out that the 'pull' factors are better job facilities, better salary structure, more income, and better medical & educational facilities attract people living in rural areas. And, the push factors for which rural people migrate to urban areas are lack of employment opportunities, fewer wages, unavailability of basic amenities, landlessness, drought, etc.

Table 1: Distribution of Rural-Urban Population

Country/ State	Rural		Urban		Total
	Percentage of persons	No. of Persons (Cr.)	Percentage of persons	No. of Persons (Cr.)	Percentage of persons(Cr.)
India	68.85%	83.34	31.15%	37.71	121.05 Cr
West Bengal	68.12%	6.22	31.87%	2.91	9.13 Cr

(Source: Census 2011)

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Poverty is always a burning issue in the country. The poverty scenario in rural areas consistently stands at a higher side than urban areas. According to the Planning Commission, Govt. of India (2011-12), it is found that 21.92% of the total population of the country is living below the poverty line whereas 25.70% people living the below poverty line in rural areas and 13.07% people living the below poverty line in urban areas in the country. In the case of West Bengal, 19.98 % population living below the poverty line, whereas 22.52% of people were living in rural villages and 14.66% living in urban areas.

Table 2: Number and Percentage of Population Living Below Poverty Line (2011-12)

Country/ State	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Percentage of persons	No. of Persons (lakh)	Percentage of persons	No. of Persons (lakh)	Percentage of persons	No. of Persons (lakh)
India	25.70%	2166.58	13.70%	531.25	21.92%	2697.83
West Bengal	22.52%	141.14	14.66%	43.83	19.98%	184.98

(Source: Poverty Estimation 2011-12 by Planning Commission, Govt. of India)

Agriculture is the predominant occupation in West Bengal, which is mainly dominated by the small & marginal farmers. According to the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (2011), 60.32 lakh families belong to small and marginal farmers among 71.23 lakh farm families in West Bengal. The average landholding size is only 0.79 ha. The most surprising statistic is that 58.4% of households in rural areas of West Bengal depend on manual agricultural labor which is higher than the national figure also, i.e., 56%. With such many other difficulties, the state ranks first in paddy & vegetable production in the country and ranks second in potato production after Uttar Pradesh. The state also leads in the production of Jute, pineapple, litchi, mango, and loose flower. Despite such significant achievement, there is a trend of declination income generation from the agriculture sector. The Agriculture Department, Government of West Bengal, is working with a visual mode to make "Doubling farmers income by 2020 by ensuring farmers' access to Skill, Technologies, Markets and Financial inclusion", and to achieve in its mission, the Agriculture department works with agri-allied department viz. Animal Resource Development, Fisheries, Agri. Marketing, Horticulture, Cooperation, Water Resource Investment Department, Irrigation and Waterways, Forest, Sericulture, Food & Supply, P & RD Department, NGOs, etc. It has Information and Communications Technology (ICT) based agri-extension portal in the name of 'Matir Katha' to disseminate crop solutions to the farmers. There are so many other institutions work for the development of agriculture sectors; may be financial institutions, research institution, or others. However, with all these efforts, the agriculture sector has multiple challenges which are increasing day by day.

According to the statistic of the Agricultural department, the production of food grains in 2001-02 in the state was 165.01 lakh MT, and after ten years in 2012-13, it became 165.21 lakh MT. Fertilizer & Pesticide consumption have slightly declined in 2012-13 from the previous year in 2011-12 i.e. from 1,602,359 MT to 1,545,130 MT and 5400 MT to 4110 MT respectively. But, there is no remarkable progress in cropping intensity – it was 184% & 185% in 2007-08 & 2008-09, respectively, and it fell to 182% in 2012-13. Gross cropped area also declined as compared to 2001-02 to 2012-13, i.e., 9778815 ha to 9458675 ha and alike Net cropped areas also declined from 5521576 ha in 2001-02 to 5209702 ha in 2012-13 *(http://matirkatha.net)*.

The overall agricultural statistics of the state are not so impressive. One of the important challenges is small & fragmented land holdings, as reported by many studies. Fast deteriorating soil health & productivity due to excess application of chemical fertilizer and less use of organic inputs, inadequate credit flow from financial institutions, water scarcity & improper drainage systems, insufficient market infrastructure & predominance of middleman, lack of scientific attitude among the financially weak farmers, unavailability of quality seeds in remote parts, lack of awareness and mostly lack of co-ordination among various department working for agricultural development, etc. are few of challenges as pointed out by NABARD Consultancy Services (Nabcons) in their State Agriculture Plan West Bengal (2017-18 to 2019-20). Livestock always plays a crucial role in the life of landless laborers, small & marginal farmers, and women. However, indigenous varieties of livestock are not always much economically beneficial to them.

II. Tagore thought about Rural Village

With his great contribution in literature, art, and culture, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore put his remarkable thought and experiment in rural reconstruction near about 100 years ago. Tagore always dreamt for our rural villages as resourceful, asset-based, self-reliant, and self-respectful to meet all of its needs of citizens, where modern scientific knowledge and resources are used for development of physical, intellectual & economic progress of the villagers, where

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the village life is in its' full completeness in all senses. Mutual help and co-operation among the villagers will be the basis of all development to win over the curse of poverty and nation-building. Tagore, in his 'Samabayaniti', which refers to the 'Co-operative Principles' (1918), wrote that the villages are the real manifestation of the motherland; here lies her heart, and the Goddess of wealth finds her throne here (Rabindra-Rachanabali, 27th Vol, p.449). Tagore very nicely projected the sketch of village-society. He advocated for the formation of 'Mandali' with the cluster of villages. 'Mandali' will be the plenty of resources and the responsibilities of its' Prodhans is to make all arrangements for employment and fulfill all discontent within the village life. With the courage and full participation of the villagers, the 'Mandali' would establish their own educational, craft, and industrial training institutions, develop the storage of food-grain termed as 'dharmagola', create collective marketing center & banks. He expressed with his deep sense of real development perspective that the practice of local self-government would not achieve unless the village society becomes self-dependent and self-sufficient. He worried that there was no consensus on how to restructure the village-society in the country (p.460). The situation is more or less the same nowadays in the state.

III. Tagore's Ideas about Co-operative System

Tagore was one of the pioneers in advocating as well as experimenting co-operative system in the country. According to him, the 'cooperative-system' is an idea, which may be used in generating varieties of activities for overall socio-economic development of individual, group, and the society. It may be economic or social activities like health, education, and so on. In cooperative-system, many families and many people come and join hands together to find out their means of livelihood by contributing their piece of resources for creating a large volume of capital; the capital may be of various forms - their land, labors, money, etc. Tagore emphasized and relied on the 'power of common man' for their well-being and for the well being of our society, our nation, and above all for humanity, which can only be manifested by cooperative-system only. The poor, the disadvantaged, the unfortunate, or a very ordinary man alone is very weak and powerless that he can't do anything better to win over his poverty for his social and economic development. Thus, he/she depends only on own fortune for his/her all distress. In a cooperative-system, the plebeians gradually become powerful both economically and socially- they get resources in their hands, get back their self-faith, and self-confidence to start a harmonious way of living that connects them with the larger society and the larger world.

Society needs equilibrium in the distribution of resources for the well-being of humanity, but in reality, a large portion of it is under the control of few riches, and they always want to claim over the poor. According to Tagore, each human being has the right to have sufficient resources to govern his own life to lead an esteemed life, but it really shames for humanity where people are just living anyhow with a piece of bread. It is, therefore, necessary to make affordable the facilities of education, health, and employment for all.

Tagore was afraid of the cunning market competition at his time which has now turned a very perilous form. The majority of business units failed to prove their liabilities towards society; they want to win over all his competitors by hook and crook for their existences and maximization of their profits. The small units can't compete with the large one. Knowingly or unknowingly, all want to deceive others. In cooperative-system, there is very less scope of cunning competition; but there are mutual help and cooperation, and all together prosper themselves.

According to Tagore, the human civilization, the society, the religion, the politics, or whatever good things we have seen today are the endeavors of cooperation of humanity. So, he, again and again, reminds us that this cooperative-system is the only way to bring all equilibrium in the society for the well-being of common men, community, and the nation.

IV. Co-operative system in Addressing Problems in Rural Life

Tagore shared his ideas very prominently about how to address the problems of rural life through a cooperative-system. He first emphasized on co-operative farming & allied activities for economic growth & creation of employment opportunities. It is very clearly viewed that the agriculture & allied activities are the ultimate solution of village poverty and growth of the village economy as predominantly chief occupation of our country as well as our state is agriculture. He urged that if all the farmers accumulate their piece of land together for cultivation, storage their produced crop & then market it from a common center, they will save much wastages of money, labor & time. Thus, they would earn more profit, which is not possible for a poor farmer alone (p.454). Tagore was worried about 100 years ago taking with fragmented land in the hands of small & marginal farmers, and he urged to get rid of it through cooperative farming. He was very anxious to observe from his 'Kuthibari' at Sriniketan that each of the farmers unnecessarily wastes their labor by plowing their pieces of land separately. The farmers used to come with individual plow & bullocks and returned after finishing work in their small piece of land. Tagore suggested them unite themselves by accumulating their land, capital, and labor to afford modern machinery

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such as a tractor & other technology of farming. He wished that the farmers will not go to the middlemen to sell their products rather intermediaries come to the farmers for purchasing their crops with rational values. Tagore wanted to see the farmers an entrepreneur who would work based on cooperation among themselves (Rabindra-Rachanabali, 27th Vol. p.556). The dream of Tagore to see cooperative in the practice of agriculture & allied activities to rejuvenate rural life is still a dream for us. The Government did not act upon it much, nor the non-government organizations have come forward to work on the areas in the state. The cooperative societies working on the areas of agriculture have limited their activities on the areas of membership development, development of capital, credit flows to its members, supply of manure & fertilizers, etc. But, the main issue of small & fragmented agricultural land yet to be dealt with seriously.

V. Conclusion

Gurudev pointed out in his 'Samabayniti' that the cities are the source of 'potency/power', and the villages are the 'source of life' of our country. He strongly recommended that the co-operative system is the only way to save our country from the curse of poverty. He always believed in the inner strength of human beings and urged to eliminate the roots of human suffering. As the practice of agriculture & allied activities is the basis of our state; therefore, the weaknesses & the threats that are involved in the field must be addressed. There must be proper awareness among the poor farmers about the scope of their development through a cooperative basis. They must be united, and their small pieces of lands need to accumulate through common consensus. They must be encouraged to join their effort in terms of capital & labor to afford technologies, new innovation & modern machinery in the practice of agriculture. Then only their monetary return will be better, and the agriculture for the poor rural families will be a source of profitable earnings. Tagore believed that this is the only way for sustainable development, this is the only way to rejuvenate the rural villages, and thus, the whole country would get back its past proud. Tagore prayed before the almighty that India must grow & develop based on cooperation and collective capital of very ordinary people. He believed that the curse of poverty is never sustained before the power of the common man. Thus, everyone - the government, the civil society, the social scientist, the politician, and the very ordinary people should realize the words of Tagore that there is immense scope to prosper & develop based on cooperative and proceed accordingly. Then only the West Bengal will hoist the flag of victory in our country.

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