

Gonogobeshona in Bangladesh and the poverty and development discourse*

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“common sense knowledge goes in this field much farther relatively to such scientific knowledge as we have been able to achieve, than does common sense knowledge in almost any other field.”

[Joseph A. Schumpeter, History of Economic Analysis: 9]

1. Introduction

"Participatory (action) research" - PR or PAR – of the ‘school’ to which the present author belongs (Rahman 1985; 2007a; Fals Borda 1987) - is a process of "praxis" - cycle of action and reflection - in which disadvantaged people participate as full subjects in collective inquiries on problems of their lives rather than as objects of inquiry as in conventional academic research, take collective action to promote their lives guided by such inquiry, and review their experience of action to take further action¹. The ideology of the PAR movement calls for dual structural transformation for people's liberation - transformation not only of the relations of production but also of the relations of knowledge in society. Unfortunately, the discipline of economics has not taken much interest in this approach to research which has found quarter more in the discipline of sociology². The Cartesian compartmentalization of the disciplines breaking down the earlier unified discipline of ‘philosophy’ is unfortunate, while even today we get higher degrees in Philosophy rather than in the compartmentalized disciplines (e.g. Economics); Marx had called for all disciplines to unite under one banner - the "human science"; and with today's awareness we should perhaps call it one holistic "science or philosophy of ecology".

The Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) under its present enlightened leadership is taking economics, or "arthoniti", beyond its conventional bounds into the realms of

'anortho', and this is a very welcome move. It is a great pleasure for me to join hands with the BEA in its bid for de-compartmentalization of economics toward a holistic inquiry of life and society.

Collective self-inquiry by disadvantaged people is of course a natural, spontaneous activity that has not awaited initiatives by outsiders – groups of such people in all countries have been getting together to discuss their problems, taking collective action to promote their lives and have been reviewing such action. In Bangladesh there have been many inspiring spontaneous instances of people's praxis in the immediate years after independence (Rahman 1997; 2004b and 2005). A search for more recent instances of people's self-initiatives by about 70 journalists supported by Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB) has revealed numerous such instances taken in recent years (Rahman 2006) some which are progressively being reported by the media as well. In addition to such spontaneous people's praxis, PAR has started being 'animated' in Bangladesh, (elaborated below) since 2003 - with support from RIB. RIB introduced the term 'gonogobeshona' replacing the heavier term "participatory action research", considering that this would be more readily understandable to the disadvantaged people participating in such research. With RIB's collaboration the Hunger Project, Bangladesh, has also joined since December 2004 in spreading gonogobeshona in the country.

Gonogobeshona, whether spontaneous or 'animated', naturally reveals insights on poverty and development as looked at from the people's own points of view. This paper presents glimpses of some of the more illuminating cases of spontaneous gonogobeshona in Bangladesh in recent years as well as 'animated' gonogobeshona in the programmes of RIB and the Hunger Project, and discusses the insights gained from them for the discourse on poverty and development.

2. Spontaneous gonogobeshona : recent collective Initiatives of the disadvantaged

Agrarian revolution through land redistribution

A social leader of village *Maheswarchanda* east of Kaliganj thana, Jhinaidaha district, mobilized farmers of his village to deliberate for days and days on how to improve their economic and social life. This resulted in voluntary land redistribution in the village in 1996, with land leveling and removal of boundaries for collective farming. Agricultural extension officers joined them to advise on modern farming technology. Dramatic rise in production and earnings resulted, and all-round collective development initiatives in economic and social sectors followed. Villagers including the youth meet regularly to deliberate upon and review their activities and progress (Morol 2006 Part 1.pp 1-4).

Fish Revolution in Iliotganj

An agricultural and fish farmer mobilized, in 1988, 52 farmers in dhanuakhola village in Iliotganj union, Comilla district, to undertake collective fishing on agricultural land that gets waterlogged in the flood season precluding agricultural farming. His slogan was “*save yourself, save others*”. The initiative paid off and spread. Today there are about 50 very profitable collective fish projects in three upazillas of Comilla , some of them quite gigantic, one involving 350 farmers of seven villages pooling their land. (Morol 2006 Part 1. pp 118-159).

group fish farming by persons in acute poverty

Another enterprising group in *gurguri* village in Kundupukur union, Nilfamari sadar upazilla, of two unemployed young boys and six women of very low income families (one widow, one wife of a landless labourer with uncertain income, and the husbands of others not earning enough for family needs) started moving out of acute income-poverty without any support from outside to start with. They formed a *samity* and managed to take lease of two-and-a half acre low-lying land at a nominal rent for fish cultivation. With good return from fish they were able to buy eight cows, and their income rose

above a lac taka within a year-and-a-half. Seeing the impressive entrepreneurship of this group the upazilla fisheries office came forward in 2002 to give them a loan of 32 thousand taka free of interest repayable in five years. With this loan the samity rented a whole marsh for large scale fish cultivation, engaged labour to prepare it and bought a net and heaps of fishlings and feed for them, lime, fertilizers, etc. The fortunes of the samiti members, self-managing the samity with hard work and strict discipline, have changed dramatically. Within three years the samity has been able to repay half of the loan – an exemplary example of appropriate credit to the very disadvantaged to liberate their latent group-entrepreneurial talents in large scale production to contribute not only to augmenting their own income but also to economic growth of their village. ((Morol 2006 Part 2. pp 310-313).

The Krishi Bank of Jaldhaka upazilla, Nilfamari district, also initiated the formation of nine groups of low income farmers and gave them a total loan of 2,16,000 taka and helped them with technical know-how on vegetable farming, poultry and fishery. Fortunes of these farmers have started changing dramatically. The benefit has spread to other poverty groups in the village by way of greater employment and wage of day labourers, rise of fishing-net business, and stimulation to unemployed youth to get engaged in creative ventures like poultry and bio-gas production with cow-dung after taking training from relevant government offices. And some farmers have started storing the products themselves and sell them outside by-passing the middlemen, coining a new term for this activity - "rakhi business", thus keeping the full surplus from the enterprises themselves. (Morol 2006 Part 1. *loc. cit.*)

group saving-and-loan initiatives of low-income people

There are impressive accounts of people in poverty improving their economic status through group saving-and-loan initiatives of their own, and even with only technical input from outside. Self-initiated saving and loan societies of low-income groups in the country's villages abound whom either micro-credit from external sources has not

reached or who themselves have not gone for such credit. There are, for example, "mushtichal" samitis of women of extremely low-income households whom micro-credit from external agencies do not reach - e.g. "mushtichal mohila samity" of dalanbari village, Begumganj upazilla, Noakhali district, self-managing saving investment and loan operations (Morol 2006 Part 2. pp 305-307); and similar samitis of wives of rickshawallahs, van drivers and low-income farmers in *pirgachha* village, shahpara union, Gaibandha district whose members set aside two fistful of rice and one taka saving daily from which loans are given to samiti members for various small scale economic initiatives (Tahmina *et al* 2006b. pp 103-4). Another exemplary case is the fultala bazaar small businessmen's savings and loan scheme in Khulna started in 1981 with 296 members, which gives productive, business as well as distress loans to its members, including rice and khoil loan *without interest* when rice price goes up, and has also a pension scheme and an educational support programme to meritorious and needy children of the members. (Mukta *et al.* 2006 Part 1. pp 61-76).

"rakhi business" of chilly farmers

Mention may also be made of chilly farmers of khalishachapani of Nilfamari who have organized a hat in the village to bypass the farias and are managing it through an elected hat committee, another example of "rakhi business" to retain the surplus from sale of their products themselves. (Tahmina *et al* 2006b: 63-64)

3. 'Animated' gonogobeshona

RIB's own work in initiating 'gonogobeshona' has taken inspiration from the experience in 'animation' work and conceptualization of this task in the programme of Participatory Organizations of the Rural Poor (PORP) (1977-1990) in the ILO co-ordinated by the present author. (Rahman 1993 ch 9 & 2007a; Tilakaratna 1985). In this approach 'animators' from outside go through a workshop process of collective self-brain-storming

on their task to animate and assist people's self-inquiry to stimulate their collective action to promote their lives. Thereafter the animators go to the disadvantaged people to animate self-inquiry and collection action, with the challenge also that they should be able to withdraw after a period with the people becoming able to carry on with their self-praxis without needing further animation work by outsiders.

3a. gonogobeshona in dehidoba bill area, dinajpur

"When in December last activities under [people's] research were formally started, many of the elder researchers had thought that they would receive some special kinds of assistance. Hence everyone had presented accounts in details of what they did not have. All of them had a pale appearance, many behaved like people having come to seek some favour, and none cared for their bodies and clothes. The same persons looked different when they came to the gatherings toward the last months, their behaviour had altered, and they came as clean as possible and in their best dress. On the day of presentation of the report of gonogobeshona most of them had turned up in their best attires. Most of them have a stamp of a kind of personality on their faces, and they do not speak any more without thinking. Reports have started coming that many of them are economically a little better-off now, they do not quarrel in the family any more, all members of the family do their works with devotion, etc. How did this big change in them happen in these few months? Where did they get this strength? No doubt this strength has been acquired from the practical power of the philosophy on which PAR is based." (Azad 2006: Acknowledgment of debt p 1. Translated from Bengali).

The first such 'animated' gonogobeshona in Bangladesh was undertaken in the dehidoba bill area, belaichandi union, parbotipur upazilla, Dinajpur district under an already existing landless and fishermen' organization facilitated by an NGO, the Development Research Centre. The organization selected 100 extremely income-poor persons for gonogobeshona on the dimensions of their poverty and ways of overcoming them. These gonogobeshoks met regularly over a six-month period in small and large groups to deliberate on their poverty and on ways of moving forward. The causes of poverty were identified to be both social exploitation and injustice and personal failings of the disadvantaged themselves such as gambling, lack of disciplinary/planned management of family finance, and internal family feuds. The gonogobeshoks claimed the right to

cultivate fallow land which some vested interests were trying to usurp. They launched campaigns to publicise the results of their research and their claims to the wider community, including distinguished villagers sympathetic to their condition and effort, and started gaining popularity and sympathy in the locality. As vested interests sought to resist their mobilization and scheduled public presentation of the final results of their gonogobeshona, more than 150 youth of well-to-do village families in the area mobilized themselves in their favour, and the presentation of the results of gonogobeshona was held in an atmosphere of great festivity. This has taken their struggle for land to a new level of social mobilization. The gonogobeshoks supported by village youth have meanwhile started campaigns against local gambling networks, developing their own saving and loan-to-the-needy programmes, campaigns against extractive village money-lenders, and are also organising struggles for higher wages for farm land resulting in some rise in wages. The enthusiasm and frontline participation in the whole movement of women gonogobeshoks previously given to more docile conduct is particularly mentionable. (Azad 2006)

3b. gonogobeshona in Laksmichap union, Nilfamari

A team of external animators who worked in the above gonogobeshona programme formed their own animator organization, an NGO, Udayankur Sheba Shangstha (USS), and is carrying out animation work to promote gonogobeshona in collaboration with RIB in altogether fifteen unions of Nilfamari district (Ali 2006). A study of gonogobeshona under USS in three villages in Laksmichap union, with one female group and one male group in each village, reveals the following (Rahman, Matiur 2006):

These groups are meeting once a week in numbers 25/30 in each to discuss different aspects of their lives. They call this process "gobeshona", by which these people understand "to think, to exercise one's brain, to discover 'the real thing', to assess the positives and negatives of something".(Rahman, Matiur 2005 :24 – translated)

One can discern clear signs of change in these gobeshoks - in their thinking, awareness, movements, conducts, ways of speaking and in other activities. They are much more thoughtful compared to other people in these villages. Ever since starting this gobeshona process they think before taking every action. They think how they can overcome their wants, and are absorbed in such thinking. In their gobeshona they discuss issues of education of their children and their upbringing, health questions, question of dowry, the evils of early marriage, family wellbeing, family planning, etc. Outside the formal gobeshona session they also do, as they say, 'gobeshona' among themselves - with their husbands, with their parents, with other members of their families, about themselves, about their families, about the society.

With and through gonogobeshona the outlook of people of this locality has changed. They do not consider low income as the only reason for their poverty. They have concluded through their research that people also become poor because of lack of thinking, awareness and knowledge.

Teenage girls have also joined the elders in gonogobeshona to inquire into different aspects of their lives. As their thinking opened up they felt that they have more to contribute to their family wellbeing. They have started helping their younger siblings in their studies. As they said to the author of the study, "We shall try to see that outsiders are not needed to do what we can do." Teenage gobeshok Kalpona said on her own lack of schooling, "I wanted to study, but my parents did not send me to school as I am a girl. My mother said, "Am I not being useful to my family? Is my husband not feeding me? There is no need for you to go to school." I was deeply pained to hear this from Mother.'" (*op cit*: 30 – translated). The teenage researchers all decided that they would have to discuss this question with their parents, to convince them that girls can also do what boys can do.

Women's empowerment

One direct result of gonogobeshona in this place has been that women have gained the strength to speak out. Gobeshok Dipali Rani Roy said, "*Earlier I used to hesitate to talk before people - after doing gobeshona I have got the courage to speak. I am cleverer now - no one can cheat me.*" (op cit : 31 – translated). They have assessed through their gobeshona that they have first to improve their knowledge and wisdom so that others cannot cheat them. As they reported, they have discovered through their gobeshona that "knowledge is power". Gonogobeshok Morjina of vendipara said, "*Previously I had no wisdom, and my husband and in-laws did not give any importance to my words. Now doing gobeshona my wisdom has opened up. Now I can give advice to my husband on different matters, and my importance in the family has increased.*" (op cit :31 – translated).

Stimulated by the activation of their thinking many 'gobeshok' girls are trying various activities to raise family income while previously they used to confine themselves in the kitchen and gossip away their spare time - they are doing vegetable gardening on homestead land, have planted trees, are rearing ducks and chicken, some have purchased cows or goats, many have started knitting, some have started earning by working as housemaid in others' houses. Besides, previously they used to get lower wage for work outside, and now they refuse to work for lower pay.

Gobeshok Ramna of vendipara said, "*Previously I used to eat and sleep, now I have thinking going on in my head all the time. What is more, my shyness has disappeared once I started gobeshona. Now I am not shy, I do all kinds of work. And thus working I am reducing my wants. Now I am thinking what new work I can do. Before doing gobeshona I never thought like this. Now my thinking is advancing, and one after another ideas are arising in my mind.*" (op cit : 33 – translated).

Previously male gobeshoks used to spend much of their time gossiping in the bazaar. Now, in the own words of one gonogobeshok Monju of Sarkar para, *"Much money and time is wasted going to the bazaar. So we don't go to the bazaar unless we need to... previously we did not give any value to money; now we give it value. Now we spend with great consideration. We think a lot before spending. This thinking we never did before doing gobeshona."* (op cit : 33 – translated).

Quarrels and reconciliation in the family: Gonogobeshoks of laksmichap have conceptualized quarrels as a 'hole' in the family that impedes the family's progress. They have discussed in the gobeshona groups the reasons for quarrels, the results of quarrels and how to reduce quarrels. Quarrels occur between husband and wife, between daughter-in-law and parent-in-law, between children and parents. They say, "quarrels bring no gain, so we shall not quarrel any more". Rabi of Sarkara para says, *"from after she started doing gobeshona my wife does not quarrel any more, there is a change in her manners and thinking... "*. He added: *"previously my wife and her mother-in-law used to quarrel a lot, and there was no peace in the family. Uniting in gobeshona their patience has increased, and they now discuss together how the family can be mobilized to get rid of want. Now there is peace in the family."* (op cit : 36 – translated).

Gonogobeshoks are now using their knowledge and thinking as a « punji » ('capital' from which income flows), and are taking various income-raising initiatives that they had not taken previously. Many are trying to save 10-12 taka from their daily earnings according to their capabilities. In addition to doing vegetable farming on homestead land, many are saving money and buying vans (3-wheeled cycle carriers), opening shops, rearing chicken and ducks, planting wild trees and fruit trees, and buying tins in phases for roofing their rooms saving one/two fistful of rice from daily feed waiting until they have 10/12 kg of rice to be able to roof their entire room. They have also become serious

about their children's education. They work much harder than before. Although these are very small enterprises that hardly catch the eye, these are initiatives they have taken for the first time to meet their wants after being stimulated by gonogobeshona.

These general statements are supported by a number of case studies of the transformation of individual gobeshoks and of their families reported in the above study.

3c. Gonogobeshona of 'untouchable' sweeper communities of Kushtia

Sweeper communities in the country belong to a number of marginalized, so-called "missing communities" who are outside the mainstream development agendas. In addition to their material poverty they are socially stigmatized as "untouchables" for the specific nature of their profession, and face discriminations that add as obstacles to their economic betterment.³ RIB initiated gonogobeshona with them which used the method of "interactive theatre" led by a team of youth from this community previously known for their unruly conduct but who were stimulated by the idea of such drama. They called their venture "*alor shondhaney*" implying their search for understanding and enlightenment.

In the interactive drama, simple 'draft' scenes depicting negative incidents in the community's life that ended with disastrous consequences were acted before the whole community and members of the wider society, inviting the audience to alter the drafts by way of proposals toward change. One example of the themes was gang rape that actually happened to a minor girl of the community who had committed suicide not meeting justice from the society or the authorities against the violation, and the audience was asked to validate the theme as depicting reality. Another theme was child marriage, and the draft drama evoked a heated discussion among the audience that finally resolved into

an animated acting by a 13-year old girl seeking to dissuade the young groom from taking the step of marrying an 8-year old girl. (Guhathakurata 2007).

This kind of drama-based gonogobeshona, and more regular gonogobeshona of members of the sweeper community that was also 'animated' (Akhtaruzzaman et al 2006), have changed attitudes to life of the youth of this community from despondent anti-social conduct towards serious study and civil social conduct. The present author had the opportunity to attend a presentation of the results of this gonogobeshona process to a civil society forum in Kushtia (Sept 8 2004), where these youth gonogobeshoks stood up one after another to express how their lives had changed from a sense of hopelessness toward a positive outlook of life; and the Senior Vice-President of the Dalit Human Rights Association, Dhaka who attended the presentation gave a lengthy speech at the end of the session saying that his Association had struggled for years to improve the condition of dalits in Bangladesh placing demands to the authorities, but had achieved nothing remotely near to what this gonogobeshona initiative had achieved in six months.

The sweeper colonies of Kushtia were visited by Professor Muinul Islam in autumn 2006 in connection of a study of RIB-supported gonogobeshona in Bangladesh that he is undertaking, more than two years after the above RIB-supported gonogobeshona project ended. The following extracts from a report by him speak for themselves:

"Members of a number of 'sweeper colonies' of Kushtia have started their collective gonogobeshona against social untouchability and ignorance using the praxis of gonogobeshona initiated among them... The project started in August 2003 and ended in July 2004. I met those gonogobeshoks in September 2006... I had feared greatly that perhaps, two years after the project ended, the enthusiasm for gonogobeshona had also ended. This is what is supposed to happen inevitably in the 'project-culture' in this country. But there was some 'new learning' waiting for me there. I saw that while

gonogobeshona sessions did not take place as frequently as every week as before, 30/40 gonogobeshoks are meeting 2/3 times every month even now to discuss their problems. No animator from outside is present any more in these sessions, but 3/4 'internal animators' have in the meanwhile taken upon themselves the responsibility of guiding them.

...

"From gonogobeshona they have learnt to understand that ignorance is what has locked them in a vicious circle. Lack of jobs is not the primary problem of these communities. Even with their low incomes lack of food, clothing and housing is not their major problem. They are unable to find any workable solution of their primary problem, which is social untouchability, because of lack of the appropriate knowledge. Again, it is for lack of knowledge that they are submerged in a culture of wasteful spending rather than spending their earnings on food, clothing, education and health. Through gonogobeshona they are searching for ways of solving their problems, and are taking initiatives to develop collective unity. Progressively, forceful position against drinking is emerging. Drinking and serving wine are progressively being dropped from social and religious rites. In the schools, after a number of successful collective protests against discriminatory behaviour people of other social categories are being compelled to change their outlook. Their own households are getting progressively cleaner. They are now being served together with other customers in nearby hotels, but with the condition that they will go there as clean people. As a result of their organised gonogobeshona the municipalities of Kushtia and Kumarkhali have been forced to raise their pays and perquisites. Local government officials are treating the organised united strength of these communities with respect.

"Such positive results of gonogobeshona are certainly not to be regarded as spectacular. But it is getting clear that the level of awareness of the communities as a whole is rising every day. The development of awareness is not confined to collective protests or making demands. In a number of the sweeper colonies collective programmes starting from

saving from their meagre incomes to their own 'micro-lending' programmes have also started. In a few places preparations are afoot toward larger-scale investments putting small savings together.

This much is getting clear, that the struggle for social dignity of the harijan communities of Kushtia has started. They are seeking freedom from the curse of untouchability by breaking their own chain of ignorance. The time to boast of success has not yet come, but that the journey has started can be said without any doubt. Leadership in this gonogobeshona of the harijan community is being given by a group of young boys and girls.

"There is another reason why it cannot yet be said whether gonogobeshona can make a lasting contribution to the participatory development of these communities. A number of NGOs have started all kinds of advocacy programmes with their own funds in this area after coming to know of these apparent successes of the effort of RIB. This is what is worrisome. The inevitable corollaries of NGO culture are 'dependence' and 'expectation of assistance.' If the expectation that funding from outside will become available gets root here also, then gonogobeshona will not get transformed into a self-propelled development."

(Translation of excerpts from Islam 2007)

4. Untouchables move forward combining gonogobeshona and the 'kajoli pre-school model' - story of the 'rishi's of Satkhira

Life of a number of similar untouchable classes have brightened up through gonogobeshona as by systematically getting together and deliberating collectively they are realizing that untouchability is not 'divinely' ordained but a human-made prejudice that can be challenged by their collective strength. They have started getting mobilized

and are challenging. The following account of progress on this front is worth narrating many times over:

The untouchable "rishi" community in Satkhira mobilized themselves through gonogabeshona, and among other activities demanded that the local hotels serve them. The hotels yielded to their collective pressure, but marked their utensils separately to assure other customers that they would not be served in utensils used by the untouchables. Still this was some progress – poverty alleviation/development step one. The rishi community then sought to set up a pre-school on a RIB-supported "kajoli" pre-school model that requires 26 students in a class and each parent to feed all the students in the class one day of the month (*Daily Star* 2005). Thirteen families were found with children of pre-school age. Coming to know of the vacant thirteen seats disadvantaged Muslim families approached them to send their children to this school, but wanted that their children eat separate food sent from their families and not food cooked by the rishi families. The school started in February 2006 with this arrangement, nevertheless a big step forward toward integration - poverty alleviation/development step two.

In a few months the final barrier dissolved - all the children in the pre-school are now sharing the same meals. Who can stop the 'non-touchability-conscious' child of any family to drink from the same glass with her 'untouchable' class-pal or to want to taste what is in 'that other plate'? - poverty alleviation/development step three!

(Information at RIB.)

5. Gonogobeshona in the "Hunger Project" in Bangladesh

The Hunger Project in Bangladesh has also initiated gonogobeshona of disadvantaged people in the country in collaboration with RIB starting in December 2004. As reported by the executive of the Hunger Project coordinating its gonogobeshona programme, currently this is being carried out in eight unions of five districts⁴. Voluntary animators

from the respective areas are playing the role of animators. There are 150 such animators working in these unions. Over 4,000 disadvantaged women and men are involved in gonogobeshana initiated in this programme.

As the co-ordinator of Hunger Project's gonogobeshona programme reports (Mahmud 2006), during the past two years, the gonogobeshoks have created over two hundred Gono Shangothans (people's organisations) in the eight unions. The leaderships of these shangothans are in the hands of the gonogobeshoks themselves. The gonogobeshoks claim that these are "our organizations": "*everything here is ours; the ideas are ours, the money is ours, the decisions are ours.*"

The gono shangothans are born spontaneously. Their creation is initiated from a realization that "*It is urgent to become more organized in order to establish our rights.*" (*op cit*: 3). Previously many organizations had been created in this region, but the leadership of the organizations was usually in the hands of comparatively well-to-do individuals and the members of the organizations were never able to fully establish their ownership. As a result these organisations disintegrated over time.

As one gonogobeshok remarked, "*Now we not only move about with our physical strength, now we think together, decide, now the power of our minds is vast*".

"There will be no more early marriages in Muktinagar"

Gonogobeshaks of Muktinagar union, of whom about 90 per cent are women, (Mahmood 2005: 20) have stopped early marriages individually and as a group. Several cases have been lodged against the Kazi, the Imam and the marriage broker of Muktinagar to stop early marriages. Altogether, between 2005 and September 2006 the gonogobeshaks have stopped more than 50 early marriages in this union. If arrangements were being made for early marriage some neighbourer, or in some cases the mother of the girl herself, informs the gonogobeshoks. Usually if the neighbourers fail to persuade the parents they call in the

gonogobeshoks. In the beginning when the gonogobeshoks went to stop the early marriages, parents would be irked and occasionally they even gave threats. This no longer happens. Now, if a gonogobeshok arrives, that means that that marriage has to be stopped for certain. As the gonogobeshoks are declaring, *“There will be no more early marriages in Muktinagar.*

Gonogobeshak Momena Begum has prevented several early marriages. She told the gonogobeshok programme co-ordinator, *“Many men in my area are in favor of early marriage. Yesterday I prevented one. The bride was 12 years old and the groom was 16 years old. There was even a dowry of Taka 5000 in the wedding. I stopped them. The UP (Union Parishad) member told me, “This marriage is going to take place”. I told him, “How can you give permission? You are a man of the law. If you say one more thing in favor of this wedding, I will lodge a case against the Kazi and the marriage broker. If you oppose me, I will lodge a case against you as well”. The UP member admonished me and said, “What are you saying woman? Why are you meddling here?” I said, “The marriage broker will be paid by both sides. The Kazi will also get some money. I am a gonogobeshak, I am not here to make money. I am here to protest against injustice, to solve a problem. This marriage will not take place. Show me the documentation for the bride’s age*

An example of how a traditionally very unassertive individual has become outspoken by joining gonogobeshona, is the case of gonogobeshok Momena Begum. She said, *“... if I had not become a gonogobeshok, I would have remained stupid. Let’s see who can cheat me now... That day a van driver said about me that because women were going around preventing early marriages, the life spans of men were decreasing. When I heard this I felt very angry, brother, my head just spun. I jumped down from the van and said to him, “Hey, fellow, stop this van! First you have to answer, how does the life span decrease?” When he heard my question, the driver was astonished. He had no answer to give. I said*

again, "If you don't know then why do you talk? Never speak like that again. Then you will not be able to drive your van along this road anymore."

"I am a gonogobeshak" – this is how the disadvantaged people who are involved with gonogobeshona introduce themselves. I have seen that most of them feel a sense of dignity in introducing themselves thus, as they feel pride in this identity. I wanted to know from them, how did it feel to identify themselves as gonogobeshak?

Gonogobeshoks Romisa Begum, Momena Begum, Ajeda, Morjina, Hafiza, Mukti, Momin, Enamul, all of them said the same thing: *"Gonogobeshana has enhanced our confidence. The respect we get from the villagers as gonogobeshoks is unthinkable"*.

As an evidence of the respect gonogobeshoks are earning from the wider society, the Director of a local NGO addressing a conference of gonogobeshoks in Muktinagar on 22 March 2006 said, *"...it is quite a departure that you are introducing yourselves as gobeshoks. Respected gobeshoks, I am extending my respect to you. I know a little bit about your strength....You are now much more aware of your rights. You are more vocal than anyone else in respect of claiming your rights. Your process of organization building and your unity are inspiring..."* .

"We will No Longer Take Micro Credit"

According to gonogobeshak Enamul Haq, *"We are using our own money for ourselves. We do not have to have our hand outstretched asking others for money. This is protecting our self-respect. No one can humiliate us anymore."* Using their own savings has increased their income, has created new self-employment. Thus the need for the gonogobeshoks to obtain micro-credit at high interest rates from NGOs has decreased. They are familiar with many stories of bankruptcy by taking loans from NGOs at high rates of interest. The gonogobeshok commented, *'We shall not take micro-credit any more'*. They even stated, *'We will stop micro-credit from operating in our area.'*

Gonogobeshoks of Muktinagar are asserting their rights to public services which were previously denied them. As an example, as one gonogobeshok Omar Ali recounted, “ *I did not get service from the government hospital even though I was a muktijoddha...But after we became a gonogobeshok they cannot derpive us any more. Last month...one of us went to get medicine for diarrhea. Without listening to him properly the doctor just asked him to take some liquid medicine from the drum. He did not take it. When he told me of this I went to the hospital with him and asked ‘why have you given him medicine without hearing him properl?’. He asked me, ‘are you a doctor?’ I told him, ‘Talking like this will not do. Give proper medicine.’ He asked me to get out. I returned with other gonogobeshoks and asked, ‘why aren’t you giving medicine...?’ He got very irritated...We complained in thepolice station, in the district headquarters. After one day he called us and gave medicine. Not only did he give us medicine, now he comes every Friday at 10 a.m. at the three-way junction to our village and blows the horn of his Honda, and listens if someone needs treatment. For small problems he gives medicine on the spot, otherwise he asks the patient to go to the hospital. He has been totally straightened up.*”⁵

6. Insights from gonogobeshona for poverty and development discourse

The above accounts of gonogobeshona, both spontaneous and 'animated', reveal important insights on the notions of poverty and development from the disadvantaged people's own points of view expressed by their collective thinking and action, and also on the role of gonogobeshona in addressing their poverty and promoting their development.

First, challenging the dominant poverty discourse, they show the comprehensive and complex nature of poverty by way of people's own sense of deprivation that cannot be gauged by income measures alone.

In the first instance, people's sense of deprivation includes the urge for human dignity as a fundamental human need, as evidenced most poignantly in the social exclusion of the 'untouchable' classes, and also in the general condition of women in the society⁶. The question of security of women in a male-dominated culture prone to physical violation as well as denial of self-determination including the constant fear of illegal but vested interest-supported 'divorce' and practice of 'hillah'⁷ – dimensions of acute poverty unfortunately ignored in the dominant poverty discourse and whose alleviation is nowhere assured by rise in family incomes - has led disadvantaged women to look for strength in collective solidarity and alternative financial means in their own collective control.

Of deep poignancy is also the tragedy of young girls, some even below their teens, deprived by early marriage of the right and opportunity to flower in their lives to fulfill their dreams of embracing the world with their independent urges and talents. Elder female gonogobeshoks, many of whom must have lost their own dreams thus, are mobilizing themselves empowered by gonogobeshona to resist such extreme cruelty to young girls. To suggest, as the preoccupation of the dominant poverty discourse with income-poverty implicitly does, that the poverty of these girls with their dreams thus destroyed would be alleviated by rise in incomes of their in-laws' families is fathomless cruelty itself.⁸

The alternative view of poverty revealed by gonogobeshona in Bangladesh is, of course, not new. Tagore's view of human needs, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the ILO's "basic needs" concept have all called for much more than bare subsistence as human need and right.⁹ The importance of human dignity as an indicator of poverty has been emphasised also by Wresinski (1987)¹⁰ and the ATD Movement that he created (Godinot & Wodon, ed. 2006) and by the present author (Rahman 1989). The comprehensive or holistic/systemic nature of poverty has been discussed in depth by

Max-Neef *et al* (1989)¹¹. Unfortunately, such views of poverty have been sidetracked by the dominant poverty discourse caught in the hegemony of international and national establishments¹²

The author has been personally asked the question: “Don’t these people, economically very poor with whatever other urgent needs and urges they have, nevertheless, need food first?” Quite a puzzle, indeed, to decide which need comes first if needs are to be ranked hierarchically. And this is where the failure to understand the holistic nature of the very basic human needs has occurred. As Max Neef *et al* have best clarified this 'puzzle':

“no need is, *per se*, more important than any other;....Simultaneities, complementarities and trade-offs are characteristic of the system’s behaviour. There are, however, limits to this generalization. A pre-systemic threshold must be recognized, below which the feeling of a certain deprivation may be so severe, that the urge to satisfy the given need *may paralyze* and overshadow any other impulse or alternative.... But such a situation does not hold true only in the case of subsistence. It is equally relevant in the case of other needs.

(Max Neef *et al* 1989: p 44; italics added).

Ask if the threshold for a starving woman offered a bowl of rice – for herself and/or for her starving infant - in exchange for her physical *honour*, is the rice bowl or her honour. Can it be different for different women, and even for the same woman at different times facing such intensely, very painfully, competitive choices, depending on where the ‘paralysis’ strikes her at the particular moment of choice? Similarly for the hungry 'untouchable' denied food in the village hotel– can we predict the nature of his paralysis at that particular moment? Or the young girl to be 'sacrificed' in early marriage and to a man obscenely older to her perhaps with one or more other wives living, weighing in desperation whether to agree or to commit suicide even if her food needs in such a marriage would be assured? Or, to relax with a ‘fever’ rather than paralysis, what will be the choice of a possessed painter, between a better-paid job that will give her little time for painting, versus a lower-paid job that will give her hope she may some day give an

exhibition at Dhaka? And doesn't the riverine and rain-soaked Bangladesh, and such bewitching company of nature in any country, produce natural poets and singers who would not give up composing and singing ferrying boats in the countryside notwithstanding the low earnings from such job? And finally, to give a macro example of historical moment, the independence struggle of Bangladesh as of other nations has shown people forgetting their material poverty to fight and die for national self-determination as that is where their 'paralysis' has struck at the final moment of reckoning.

Thus, as well-confirmed by gonogobeshona in Bangladesh, the dominant linear approach to the question of poverty with a physical-subsistence-first position ignoring fundamental human rights and urges is inconsistent with revealed human behaviour *even at extremely low levels of incomes*. What is obviously called for is an attack on poverty as an attack on deprivation of the opportunity for satisfaction of physical-subsistence as well as fundamental human urges taken together as a comprehensive concern.

The role of people's collective thinking in overcoming poverty

Gonogobeshona in Bangladesh also demonstrate the role that people's collective thinking, and access to means of collective thinking, can play in encountering their poverty.

The disadvantaged people of Bangladesh are identifying very readily with the term 'gonogobeshona'. The new identity of themselves as 'gonogobeshok' and the experience they are gaining in this new role in their lives is giving them a sense of status and empowerment with which they are asserting themselves vis-a-vis village leaders, local government officials, etc. - in relation to whom they previously had a sense of inferiority. The greater respect they are getting from these quarters is helping them recover their sense of self-dignity, a poverty-alleviating process by itself. This is also an important step toward improving the unequal 'knowledge relations' in the society that constitute part of the structural domination over the disadvantaged that create and recreate poverty.

Secondly, the experience of 'animated' gonogobeshona also shows that many among the disadvantaged and deprived have surrendered their thinking to so-called educated people who have appeared to be successful in their lives and/or who control their lives, or to 'fate', having become fatalists at their condition of perpetual poverty and lives of indignity. Processes of gonogobeshona have reactivated or stimulated the thinking of disadvantaged people given to despondency or not thinking their best. As some 'gonogobeshoks' among very disadvantaged producers in a village in Sri Lanka had reported to an external researcher inquiring what the 'animator' had done to them ((Tilakaratna 1987: 8), gonogobeshona is "removing the rust from their brain".

The re-activation or stimulation of people's thinking through gonogobeshona and its impact on people's lives are impressive. As the gonogobeshoks of Nilfamari report, they now "think before taking every action", a development of new awareness that by itself is very important in the search for ways of improving their conditions. Concretely, gonogobeshona is generating organizational awareness of the disadvantaged for both economic advancement and struggle for various rights. As a direct result of their new search for betterment of their lives stimulated by gonogobeshona the gonogobeshok groups are improving the economic management of whatever resources they themselves have, reducing wastage of money (e.g. through gambling) and time (whiling it away in the bazaar), and are initiating various new activities individually and collectively to raise their incomes. Awareness against others cheating them is growing. Many people's groups formed through gonogobeshona are initiating saving and loan programmes even with their meagre incomes not having thought of taking such initiatives before. Organised gonogobeshona groups are undertaking pressure-group activities for their economic and social rights, and successes are being reported. General social awareness about injustices to the disadvantaged and community/social support for them is rising. Gonogobeshona is showing itself to be an important way to promote women's self-articulation, assertion and empowerment. Internal family

relations are improving with family feuds giving way to civil discourse. Interest of gonogobeshok teenagers in education and participation in economic life of family is rising. Awareness against childhood marriage of girls is rising, and impressive mobilization is taking place among gonogobeshok women to prevent this curse.

The response to animation for gonogobeshona among communities regarded by the wider society as “untouchables”, a treatment that they had for ages accepted as their fate, has been profound. Such communities engaged now in gonogobeshona are launching organised resistance to their social exclusion with a new awareness of their right to social dignity, at the same time improving their own civic culture that had gone down frustrated by their social exclusion to reinforce the negative attitude of the broader society toward them. (While progress in this respect is encouraging, the note of caution sounded by Muinul Islam about the likelihood of these communities falling into the trap of the prevailing "NGO culture" that might disorient them toward seeking dependence-creating assistance is an important one). And the combination of gonogobeshona with the "kajoli" pre-school model is showing a way to break this inhuman social prejudice by uniting all disadvantaged people to promote schooling of their children together. This removes the prejudice and promotes 'capability' of the children of both disadvantaged communities in one integrated action, a model that RIB is taking to other disadvantaged communities with similar social separation to promote both the objectives together.

With all such gains, a new awareness among the disadvantaged is emerging from some of these gonogobeshona initiatives, on *the primacy of collective thinking by the disadvantaged themselves as a poverty-alleviating resource*, insofar as they can thereby manage their private finances better, find new avenues for individual and collective initiatives for further economic advancement, and understand and take strategies to confront injustices against them to which they had previously submitted without questioning. Gonogobeshona is revealing people's knowledge and thinking as a *force*, floating like a raft in an ocean as it were, that has its eclipses facing adverse social tides

and that can re-emerge as an assertive and forward-propelling power following processes of gonogobeshona. This raft needs to be developed into a strong vessel to be able to advance through the social and economic dynamics of the ocean. The case for state support in this direction as a 'capability'-raising measure at par with formal schooling which is rather late in the day for most disadvantaged adults, is obvious. The parallel with privileged quarters of the society (the so-called “shushil shamaj”) obtaining support for their seminars, conferences and workshops for promoting their own agendas and action plans is immediate. This points to the need, in fact, for considering this - i.e. opportunity and resources for access to means of collective thinking, as another element of human rights for all.

The role of outside knowledge

In promoting people's life outside knowledge has also a very positive role to play, *as a comrade and not as a master*.

The role of outsiders as ‘animators’ to promote gonogobeshona itself, obviously, is one such positive role, which has to be sensitive so as not to dominate but to stimulate and facilitate. Formal scientific knowledge also needs to come to the disadvantaged people as a comrade to assist in their advancement as it is coming in many villages where Krishi officers are advising low-income peasant groups in modern farming and other technology, on their own initiative or at the invitation of the peasants.¹³ In fact, disadvantaged people have a right to access the whole world of science and technology for advancement of their economic lives as well as an input in the process of their thinking and knowledge and personality building, but *in a relation of equality respecting people's right to self-determination* in which the carriers of modern science and technology will not impose upon them as 'superiors' but will bring such knowledge to them for their consideration. Such relation of equality between people's thinking and knowledge and formal science presupposes prior activation of processes of people's own

thinking and its assertion for which animation of gonogobeshona is obviously a very powerful method.

6. On the philosophy of development

Irrespective of whether dominant national and international governance structures take the linear or the holistic view of poverty, it remains unlikely that poverty in most countries will be eradicated in the life time of many generations to come. Even if the relevant national and international structures willed this - and the technology is certainly there - the human task of national mobilization for such a goal, with the requisite 'cadres'/'animators', who are also to be available, and handling the dynamics of human 'engineering' (art) involved in such a task with its inevitable tendencies for 'deviations', boggles the mind. And until this can be accomplished within a time span for which people can wait co-operatively, the question remains of fulfillment in the lives of those millions whose 'poverty' will not be eradicated in their lifetime. This is the problem that I have termed elsewhere as the problem of the "other half of the glass" (Rahman 2006), i.e. those who at any time remain in poverty with only a small statistical chance to come out of it in their lifetime i.e. those whose need for fulfillment from their life as they are most likely to live it remains a question also be addressed.

Every person is born and grows with specific personal urges whose satisfaction gives one the deepest fulfillment, and notwithstanding one's economic condition one can be helped toward fulfillment of such urges¹⁴. Thus, abandoned women sacrificing their own 'basic needs' to help their children forward with school education in a life of constant terror for themselves amidst rapacious male eyes could be helped by community mobilization for protection of their honour¹⁵; the physically challenged daring to do the impossible showing what humans can accomplish (writing with one's legs) can be helped by support in so many non-economic ways; the village artists dreaming of giving an exhibition in Dhaka instead of chasing higher income in non-artistic pursuits¹⁶ could be helped in

fulfilling this dream. From the holistic point of view these are all essential poverty-alleviating measures.

Furthermore, vicissitudes in one's life putting people in altogether newer situations also re-paints the canvas of one's personal urges and dreams – like the well-known case of a yoghurt seller in battala village in chapainababganj district who could not pursue his studies as his father could not provide money to buy him books, pursued a new dream building a library to lend books to needy students of his village with earnings from selling yoghurt (“with his own blood” as he says,) and, as he said to visiting journalists, “So far 62 boys are in the world of service educated with my books. When I see them I get back peace in my life.” (Tahmina *et al* 2006a: 35). Likewise, the young girls whose teenage dreams have been shattered by early marriage are bound to develop newer urges and dreams to move on in their lives, including identification with the dreams of their own children and of other teenage girls for their creative flowering unhindered by early marriage. And such persons can be helped by community and social support in various ways to fulfill their new-born dreams that may replace their frustrated ones. Building upon the immortal story of the village orphan girl *Ratan* in Rabindranath Tagore’s “Postmaster”, her frustrated urge for a sense of belonging that could not be fulfilled by Postmasters coming and going even giving her decent wage to alleviate her income-poverty, could perhaps be fulfilled by the creation of a solidarity organization in her village to which she could belong to be loved and to experience loving and helping others.

Gonogobeshona itself could help toward identification of such newer urges of persons with lost dreams, and also by developing solidarity and mutual care among disadvantaged people that themselves can be fulfilling as a life's experience.

'Poverty alleviation' by way of appreciating and supporting and giving a hand to their creative and cultural pursuits, community and environment caring actions and bids to

face the challenges of life against odds, of those who may not be able to cross the income-poverty line in their lifetime but who from their own life-evolutions set other goals for themselves in which they seek fulfillment, are possible at any stage of a society's development. Such support can help toward attainment of what Aristotle termed 'entelechy' or '*self-realization*' of such persons¹⁷ irrespective of progress in the satisfaction of their material needs¹⁸, the 'self' evolving through evolution of one's life itself. The need for social mobilization in this direction, to show that every person counts and deserves a hand in comradeship, right today, in his-her own self-realization, as a complement to long run strategies for poverty alleviation, is paramount.

In fact, great social philosophers have not identified poverty alleviation as the goal of mankind. Tagore has viewed the human born with the urge to do the impossible (Tagore 1921. "The Call of Truth": 321), happiness in life to him coming from fulfillment of one's creativity rather than from alleviation of one's income poverty¹⁹. Marx has likewise wanted the 'revolution' so that the working class can "create its own history". Mao ze Dong after the Chinese Revolution did not say that China would now solve its problem of poverty, but said that "China has stood up"²⁰, and would, like the "foolish old man" in the ancient Chinese fable, "move the mountain". And self-realization has been achieved by people through great sacrifices participating in national liberation struggle and in social revolutions, including the independence struggle of Bangladesh, not for alleviation of one's income poverty but for a much greater human cause.

This brings us to our final point - on the *indivisibility of humanity* and its implication for development philosophy. The philosophy of "individual freedom" as the foundational concept of development presented recently by Amartya Sen (1999) overlooks that human beings have a mix of 'individual' and 'collective' identity developed and moulded through the evolution of one's life in the laps of family, neighbours, wider community, society and ecology, and through life's journey in collaboration with such broader entities. In the

specific Bangladesh context the many examples of collective initiatives of the disadvantaged to advance their lives, and of gonogobeshona that unites the people further, show that life's situations bring humans together for collective thinking and collective efforts, and this dilutes or even dissolves one's sense of individual identity. (The above-mentioned yoghurt seller, e.g., is no longer an 'individual' – he has totally identified himself with others as deprived of opportunity of schooling as he was.). It would be odd to ask if such initiatives are 'promoting individual freedom' and hence whether 'development is taking place'!²¹ . Furthermore, except in a 'Robinson Crusoe society', apparently individualist urges are also shaped or moulded by social interactions and others' valuation of individual conducts and achievement and their fulfillment also rest on others' responses.

Finally, as Backstrand and Ingelstam observe: “Individual freedom is meaningless and dangerous when not rooted in an ethic and enlightened by social and spiritual considerations” (Backstrand & Ingelstam 2006: p 117). Sen has suggested that the conduct of individuals be subject to “public discussions and social interactions, which are themselves influenced by participatory freedoms” (Sen *op cit.* p 9); but the desired ethical conduct of individuals may not be ensured merely by participatory democracy, particularly in conditions of unequal distribution of economic and social power. And some ethical imperatives representing the most enlightened thinking of civilization, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights²² - with provisions like “*Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible*” (Article 29)²³ - may stand above any society-determined value, expressing concerns of all humanity which has a stake in how any society conducts itself. Thus enlightened, the notion of 'individual interest' merges with the notion of 'interest of humanity' and makes the concept of "individual freedom" at best redundant and at worst, contrary to the interest of humanity.

5. Conclusion

The central point in this paper is that assertion and development of people's own knowledge and thinking by way of collective inquiries by the people is a key to unlocking the door to eradication of poverty. The experiences of disadvantaged people of Bangladesh taking collective initiatives of their own following spontaneous or 'animated' 'gonogobeshona' fully support this point of view. These initiatives also reveal poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon not amenable to hierarchical ranking at the margin of their existence. Viewing poverty and development based on these experiences leads to questions of development philosophy, human values and the responsibility of all to humanity that have been discussed. The initiatives that disadvantaged people themselves are taking, individually as well as collectively, toward improving their economic and social status and to assert their human rights stimulated by gonogobeshona point to the importance of animation work to promote gonogobeshona as an important poverty-addressing strategy.

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¹ Joseph Wresinski and the ATD Movement that he created have also given fundamental importance to people's knowledge and thinking in overcoming poverty with years of work and thinking on this subject. For references see website http://www.joseph-wresinski.org/plan.php?id_secteur=4

² as a part of the 'Action research' school represented in the Sage *Action Research* journal.. See also Reason & Bradbury (2007).

³ During a visit of the author with some other colleagues of RIB to the sweeper community of Kushtia we were told that a youth from the community managed to get an LLB degree and got a job with an NGO, only to be sacked after three months upon revelation of his community identity!

⁴ The unions of Muktinagar, Jumarbari, Ghuridaha and Udakhali of Gaibandha, Kolkondo of Rangpur, Shardaha of Rajshahi, Aronghata of Khulna and Chakkisha of Netrokona district.

⁵ Other examples of successful pressure-group activities of gongobeshona groups are being reported., for example, women gongobeshoks of Baishyopara and Dangapara in sonaray union in Nilfamari district have succeeded in getting VGP cards

allocated in favour of the most needy in their areas through mobilized pressure on the Union Council Chairman against the prevailing practice of card allocation to those who can bribe the Council Members. (Ali 2006:29-30).

⁶ Stephanie Baker Collins in presenting the results of a participatory inquiry with a women group in Niagara Falls, Canada on the dimensions of poverty has brought out the stress of disadvantaged women also in having the feeling of constantly "being watched" ((2005: 18).

⁷ The fundamentalist practice prevalent in the society of forcing a divorced woman to temporarily marry another man and sleep with him to qualify to return to her previous husband if the latter forgives her and agrees to take her back. In this fundamentalist culture divorce by a husband is valid if only verbally uttered three times. Together this culture of divorce and *hillah* is a strong deterrent to insubordination of women vis-à-vis their husbands.

⁸ Other dimensions of poverty such as lack of opportunity for fulfilling specific human urges such as for creative/artistic self-expression have been revealed by the many individual initiatives that have been reported in the scanning of the journalists, which have been discussed in Rahman (2006)

⁹ Tagore: One sign of a nation moving toward progress is that in such a nation every person's insignificance is disappearing. To the extent possible all are able to claim the full glory of humanhood. This is why people are searching for ways of giving to everyone decent housing, decent education, good food, health care, and sufficient leisure and individuality. (Rabindranath Tagore "Batayaniker Patro", *Kalantar* 1919: 313-14)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25):

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

The ILO: "Firstly, they include certain minimum requirements of a family for private consumption: adequate food, shelter and clothing, as well as certain house-hold furniture and equipments. Second, they include essential services provided by and for the community at large, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, public transport and health, education and cultural facilities... The concept of basic needs should be placed within a context of a nation's overall economic and social development. In no circumstances should it be taken to mean merely the minimum necessary for subsistence..." (ILO 1976: 243; *italics added*).

¹⁰ As Joseph Wresinski observed in a submission to the Economic and Social Council of France (Wresinski, J., 1987): "Extreme poverty results when the lack of basic security *simultaneously* affects several aspects of people's lives..." Translated in Godinot & Wodon 2006: 25; *italics added*).

¹¹ The comprehensive nature of the poverty problem has also been emphasised recently in Kholiqzaman *et al* (2007) in their important study of micro-credit in Bangladesh revealing that micro-credit has on the whole failed to have the desired poverty-alleviating and women's empowerment effect in Bangladesh because of its failure to address poverty as a comprehensive phenomenon.

¹² As the author has discussed elsewhere (Rahman 2004), the dominant concept of poverty seems inspired by a "cheap labour ideology" of development, a very unfortunate one that treats labour as a means rather than as an end of development. On this Tagore has had the sharpest position, alluding to fulfillment of human mental faculties as the primary purpose of the Human, and referring to the "intense ingloriousness of mindless labour" in his debates with Gandhi on the *charka* (Tagore 1925).

¹³ One of the best examples of science in assistance of the disadvantaged in the country is the comradeship extended by Agricultural Block Officer Mr. Rahman in *chuhor* who has brought to landless extreme poverty groups scientific knowledge for productive use of every inch of homestead land and for producing organic fertilizer which have transformed the economic fortunes of these groups (Mukta *et al* 2005. pp 100-117).

¹⁴ Great insight on this question is obtained in the story of the recently filmed "King of Masks", the street performer in Sichuan in China in the nineteen thirties, with outstanding talents who in very shabby dress still enjoyed high regard as a member of an elite fraternity, and rejected an offer of a decent job in an opera troupe because it was a tradition in his family that the secrets of his art could be passed on only to an heir in the family. Nothing gave him greater fulfillment when he, finally, found a child to adopt as his heir with the help of a kindly prince. See website review of the film in http://www.ebertfest.com/three/3king_rev.htm .

¹⁵ A deeply poignant example of a shattered life dreaming anew in the words of a mother: "Unable to bear my husband's torture I have taken refuge in my father's house...Thought of committing suicide, but daughter Mithila came to the world giving me dream of struggling anew to live.." – A mother working in a women's handicrafts business in Lalmonirhat district town. (Tahmina *et al* 2006 b. p 93- translated) .

¹⁶ An example of paramount artistic urge recounted in the search for creative initiatives in the RIB project (Tahmina et al. 2006b: 47)

¹⁷ a term that has also been used by Abraham Maslow although in the framework of conceived hierarchy of needs (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow's_hierarchy_of_needs), and is being actively used by the "human potential" movement. (<http://www.answers.com/topic/entelechy>).

¹⁸ cf. Tagore: "If suffering must exist in this world, be it so; but let there be some loophole, some possibility somewhere to spur the best in man to a ceaseless endeavour, to nurse an undying hope. (Dasgupta 2004: 53).

¹⁹ As observed by Tagore, "*the [material] poverty problem is not so important. It is the problem of unhappiness] that is the great problem. Happiness may not compete with wealth..., but it is creative, therefore it has its own share of riches within itself.*" (Mitra 1989: 106).

²⁰ Mao Zse dong's famous proclamation in Tiananmen Square at the founding ceremony of the People's Republic of China.

²¹ The point of indivisibility of humanity has also been made by Tagore and Wresinsky. See Rahman [2004] for a presentation of Tagore's social philosophy. Wresinski said that "*it is not just the individual person but humanity as a whole which is indivisible, linked by one and the same destiny.*" (Wresinski 1989).

²² see the present author's article in the *Daily Star* (Rahman 2007b) on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

²³ Recall also the invocation of John F, Kennedy that inspired millions of a society known to be more 'individualist' than many others: "*Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.*".