

# Humanizing the Poverty Discourse\*

- Md. Anisur Rahman

## Abstract

*The poverty discourse in Bangladesh and elsewhere in recent times has regressed in human terms from the notion of poverty implicit in Tagore's as well as the ILO's "basic needs" concept. The motive desiring poverty alleviation is certainly to alleviate the real distress of disadvantaged people. This calls for inquiry into the nature of real distresses of different categories of such people. The intense distress of millions belonging to 'untouchable' communities cannot be measured by their incomes. The various kinds of distresses of disadvantaged womenfolk of the country in a male-dominated society are also not just a question of incomes. Innumerable people of the country are being victims of various kinds of terrorism and barbarism that call for inclusion of means of physical safety as an important component of their "basic needs". And classes of people dependent for their earning primarily on raw muscle power face uncertainty as to the continuation of their muscle strength to keep thus earning, so that the question of continuity of their earnings is also vitally important. To understand such attributes of poverty and also to seek permanent redress thereof it is necessary to undertake qualitative, and not simply quantitative, research. Finally, people's awareness of poverty is not static but dynamic, related to the demonstration of advancing living standards. In a country like ours where the affluent and the disadvantaged live in close physical proximity this demonstration is all the more striking.*

*A serious neglected question in the poverty discourse is that of keeping those people who live in abject distress (poverty), engaged in positive pursuits of life rather than in negative pursuits like engaging in anti-social or fundamentalist activities. Incremental progress in 'poverty' counts is no answer to this "problem of turbulence of the other half of the glass". What is needed is to bring such people in the fold of communal solidarity formations where they may get a mental 'home' as well as participate in different kinds of positive collective initiatives. Structural change is needed to enable the bulk of disadvantaged people in the society to be freed from patron-client relations with influential quarters ('malik's) to be able to form solidarity groups of their own for mutual support and cooperation. The masses of the people need also to be made literate in order to raise their capabilities. Method of acquiring literacy in a very short time is now available, and a national campaign in this direction is urgent.*

*Finally, on such an intimately human question like poverty/human distress the concerned people themselves should be involved in outlining its dimensions.*

## 1. Retrogression of the poverty discourse

Ninety years back Rabindranath Tagore gave a concept of ‘development’ that implicitly carries with it a notion of poverty as well:

*“One indicator of a developing nation is that the insignificance of every individual is disappearing. To the extent possible everyone is acquiring the right to claim the full glory of humanhood. Thus people of such a nation are contemplating how everyone will live in decent” (bhadrochito” or like decent people) houses, get decent education, eat well, clothe well, save themselves from disease, and will enjoy sufficient leisure and individuality.”*

Note that on the question of development Tagore talked of what *people*, not *experts*, are contemplating. And he is particularly known for his deep insights into the human mind. The words *decent*, as well as *leisure*, in his statement are also significant.

In the mainstream development discourse the notion of “basic needs” that attracted world attention was first enunciated by the International Labour Office (ILO), as follows:

“ Firstly, ... certain minimum requirements of a family for private consumption: adequate food, shelter and clothing, as well as certain household furniture and equipments. Second, ... 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 the 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.” (italics added.)* ILO. *employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One World Problem*. Geneva. 1976.

Especially noteworthy in this concept is that “basic needs” of humans have not been viewed as means to somehow subsist – the concept includes *cultural needs* as well that carry the sense of ‘leisure’ in Tagore. Also noteworthy is that such needs have been seen not as static but needs in the context of the overall state of socio-economic development of the concerned state, a notion that is implicit also in Tagore’s notion of ‘decent’.

Unfortunately, in recent times the notion of “basic needs” of humans has become considerably narrower, when thoughts are expected to develop rather than contract with the passage of time (1). Today, as in many other countries, “basic needs” in Bangladesh are measured by a so-called “poverty line”: The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, in collaboration of the World Bank, has conceptualized this “poverty line” principally as a “food basket” representing a fixed number of calories, adding to it expenses incurred for other items by families who consume this given number of calories. (2)

I have discussed elsewhere (3) that such a ‘poverty line’ or for that matter a conception of ‘basic needs’ in effect expresses a concern mainly for preserving the *physical labour power* of the disadvantaged people – I shall call these people *dhukhi(distressed) manush* in the language of the Father of the Nation - with a non-serious nominal allowance for their other needs. Such notion of poverty and concern for poverty alleviation treat these people, as it were, not as human beings but as livestock from which others can extract milk, meat and physical labour. Such notion of poverty is inhuman and may be said to represent nothing but a philosophy of crude exploitation of human labour. A human concern for poverty must represent a concern for alleviating real human suffering and want in the lives of the *dukhi manush*. But are their sufferings and wants mainly rooted in having less than needed calories or, for that matter, only less incomes?

## 2. The nature of distress of *dukhi manush*

It may not even be known to many of us that a large population in this country – *harijans, dalits, mnuda, muchhi, rabidas, kaora, baoali, pal, bagdi, nagarchi, sweepers, rishi, buno, manota, bedey, shabdakar etc.* – belonging both to Muslim and non-muslim communities are regarded as ‘untouchables’ by the wider society. They are not to be physically touched by people of other ‘classes’, they are not served tea in the roadside tea stalls, their children are not welcome in schools. Quite a lot of research undertaken in the programme of RIB (Research Initiatives, Bangladesh) has revealed the soul-stirring nature of the distress of these communities which can neither be measured nor alleviated by money. The bulk of members of these communities have also lost their landed property unlawfully as they have lacked the social power to resist such misappropriation. The total population of such communities is not formally known, but different discourses of knowledgeable quarters refer to this number as anywhere between fifty to

hundred-and-fifty lacs (5 to 15 million) with the number of *harizons* alone constituting about 15 lacs.

Apart from such hapless ‘untouchables’ living lives of subhuman social status irrespective of their income status, people in many localities are living lives in constant threat from terrorist plunder of their lives honour and property, and this dire lack of security is also an indicator of their acute distress. This includes the plight of indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts who for generations are being thrown out of their land unlawfully. News of land and property of powerless people in mainland Bangladesh also being taken away by barbaric violence and such people thrown into destitution are also appearing frequently in the news media – is it sufficient to note that they were above the ‘poverty line’ before such disaster happened to them? And even if in *aggregate* income counts the percentage of people above the ‘poverty line’ is rising, large numbers of people are still falling below this line from above it being victims of various calamities, some losing everything they had – can the dire pain of those thus falling below the ‘poverty line’ from above it be said to be offset by the ‘joy’ of those who are rising above it? Can the social ‘utility’ gained by a given rise in someone’s income be said to equal the social utility lost by fall in income by the same amount of someone else? Even a more humane question: if one son of a family moves ahead in wealth and income by plundering another son’s possessions, is it legitimate to say that the parents should rejoice if in the aggregate the family moves ahead? Why shouldn’t there be the same sense of value in assessing whether a society is moving ahead?

Nor can the constantly oppressed and terror-stricken lives of a large section of the country’s women be improved by merely increasing their income. Countless women are deprived of flowering into adulthood because of early marriage; countless are daily oppressed physically within the family; numerous others are constantly in fear of unjust divorce; and following such divorce (or death) of husband it is difficult for so many of them to survive with honour. Not to speak of one’s own hunger, facing a choice between giving a morsel of food in one’s child’s mouth and keeping one’s honour the mother’s mind and body get paralysed, and her final choice cannot be predicted or assumed. In such reality seeing the question of distress of women in a linear scale with first calorie then honour is manifestly unreal and inhuman – their intense dual need i.e. feeding one’s child and protecting one’s honour whip them simultaneously. Can the unspeakable pain and social dishonour from *dorra*(*stick beating*) or *stone-throwing in public* of a

hapless woman be obliterated by raising her income above the 'poverty line' – isn't this the acutest indicator of her poverty notwithstanding her level of income? Countless parents do not also have the means to send their teen-age daughters to school feeling reasonably secure that she will safely reach school and come back home, a question of security for which also the 'poverty line' does not grant any allowance that is such a necessity - if not for safe transportation not even for two mobile phones, the gift of modern civilization, with which a girl and her family could at least be in touch when she is on the road. Finally, the "basic needs basket" for women is also in so many cases in the control of heads of their families so that their incomes under their own control may hardly rise with such provision. Is the "basic needs" basket-type provision for womenfolk sufficient in such a dishonourable fearsome unequal family relation and social environment of intense insecurity?

There are numerous other instances of intense life's struggle of people in this country which are not reckoned in the poverty count. Rickshaw pullers may for the time being be above the 'poverty line', but many of them may not be able to retain this earning ability losing muscle strength for pulling passengers. Many others in the labouring class have to make a living doing very hard labour which they cannot sustain for a long enough period even if they are currently above the 'poverty line'. Thus the current poverty count ignores the question of sustainability of incomes as also that of social security against likely future joblessness as well as old age. And are the distressed not also entitled to some time for culture and recreation as in the thinking on human needs of Tagore and the ILO?

One would propose that it is vitally necessary to consider the distressed people not primarily as suppliers of physical labour but as human beings, and to conduct inquiries directed to understanding the manifold miseries of their lives to seek lasting redress to them. Such inquiry calls for qualitative, and not merely quantitative, research into the lives of people.

### 3. Incremental macro-poverty alleviation and 'the problem of turbulence of the other half of the glass'

Even after all this a very big question remains. Assume that somehow the aggregate poverty count shows that over a year the percentage of people above the 'poverty line' has risen from, say, 60 to 62. A reality continues, e.g. that 38 per cent of the people still remain under the 'line' (and as

discussed many of them have previously been above the ‘line’ and have fallen under it due to circumstances of the kinds mentioned). How can these 38 per cent be expected to cooperate positively with such a ‘development’ process, particularly those among them who do not see any promise of the process raising their personal status early enough? Why shouldn’t many among them reject such ‘development’ and engage in anti-social, even terrorist, activities individually or joining anti-social quarters including fundamentalist camps? I have been calling this problem “*the problem of turbulence of the other half of the glass*”. Incremental progress in poverty alleviation is no answer whatsoever to this problem, whether such progress is at the rate of two per centage points a year or more, as long as the ‘other half of the glass’ remains sizeable to create, even promote, serious instability in the society. The poverty discourse world-wide has been ignoring this ‘problem of turbulence of the other half of the glass’, and in most countries including Bangladesh that are experiencing some ‘development’ in the reckoning of experts intense social instability is continuing and even rising. Thus mere incremental progress in aggregate poverty count is no answer to the possibility of collapse of social order in any country (a total condition vis-a-vis marginal condition for progress). And from the point of view of social stability as well the problem of acute distress of a significant size of a society’s population remains a vital problem even if ‘poverty alleviation’ by conventional counts continues at a significant rate. This problem boils down to the problem of finding ways of keeping the ‘other half of the glass’ engaged in constructive life-ascending work even when remaining below the ‘poverty line’.

In reality, the size of this ‘other half of the glass’ is larger than current poverty counts suggest even considering income poverty alone. The reason is implicit in the Tagorian notion of development as well as in the ILO’s “basic needs” concept – to human beings the notion of ‘poverty’ is naturally *relative*, not *absolute* (recall James Duesenbury’s “theory of interdependence of consumer behaviour” (5). Seeing the dish antenna or dazzle of marriage ceremony in the neighbour’s house my children might also naturally wish to become such ‘*bhadroloks*’, and to attain such standards one may get inclined toward grafts or crimes or terrorism of various sorts. The frequent hijacking of mobile sets on the streets of Bangladesh is only a small indicator of such inclination. The teen-age daughter of a rickshawpuller committing suicide for not getting a new frock on the occasion of Eid – a news item in *The Daily Star* on the eve of Eid last year – is also a most painful manifestation of such awareness of poverty as a

relative awareness - how can such girls be pacified by telling them that they should not commit suicide for not getting the new frock in Eid because this has not been sanctioned in the “basic needs” basket by poverty experts? As assessed by the relevant Inquiry Committee, the recent nation-shaking revolt and barbaric killings of officers by members of the Bangladesh Rifles jawans have also been motivated directly or indirectly by the high disparity of salaries and perquisites of jawans vis-a-vis those of officers. Even after this assessment, if true, is there any reason for complacency if 60 per cent of the country’s population have indeed crossed a very low ‘poverty line’? It also needs to be remembered that because of the high density of population in the country the elite and the downtrodden of the country have to live and move around in close physical proximity of each other so that the demonstration of luxurious living hits the downtrodden rather hard in the eye, so that in this kind of society the problem of ‘turbulence of the other half of the glass’ is likely to be rather serious.

Finally, hasn’t the very awareness of *poverty* arisen from interpersonal inequality in standards of living? The notion was unknown to earlier egalitarian societies and is unknown to such (e.g. indigenous) societies even today. If so, then shouldn’t poverty count be also related with such inequality (or the nation’s overall economic and social development as per the ILO’s notion of “basic needs”)?

#### 4. In search of social solidarity

One way of reducing the pain of different sections of distressed people in a society – whether they are above or below a given ‘poverty line’ – is to give them some kind of social solidarity, i.e. *social capital* as this is often referred to. In this respect deep insights are found in our literary works. For example, the deepest ‘poverty’ of Ratan in Tagore’s *Postmaster* working in the office of the village Postmaster was not in terms of food and clothing – her deepest want was *human companionship- a mental ‘home’* which she had found in the Postmaster. This is why she wanted to cling to him when the Postmaster was transferred. Deserving of deep reflection is also the case of Apu’s mother in *Pather Panchali* of Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay (vide the second of the trilogy of Satyajit Roy’s world famous trilogy), who had asked her son not to go to Kolkata for college studies but stay in the village as an ordinary village priest – she also had no want of food-clothing-shelter working and living in a well-to-do family, but direly needed a mental ‘home’ that her son represented to her. And it is this lack of companionship in one’s

distress that Tagore has expressed in one of his songs – *mawmo dukkher shadhon* (the fulfillment of my pain) – where the person in pain is saying “*the moment that came for you and I uniting through my pain got lost when I saw pity in your eyes [instead of companionship in my pain]*”. It is through such companionship that the distressed find comfort in their distress even if the cause of distress is not immediately removed. Thus finding a mental ‘home’ the distressed can move on through one’s dire distress with a positive mental frame, and without such a ‘home’ one may be more easily prone to taking a negative role in society.

Such mentally ‘homeless’ people may get ‘homes’ by becoming members of ‘solidarity groups’ thereby becoming part of a collective identity, a member of a bigger ‘family’ which will give one comradeship in one’s joys and sorrows as well as come to each other’s assistance in dire need. Such solidarity groups can contribute to the members’ economic and human development as well through mutual cooperation and assistance by thinking and acting together, and members of such groups also gain self-fulfillment by contributing to the development of such collective. In many places in the country such solidarity groups of disadvantaged people have been and are being created whose members have joined hands with human values to help each other in advancing together through their lives struggles; are founding their own group saving-and-loan funds for assistance to members in need; are initiating and managing different types of cooperative economic social and cultural activities with a positive outlook to life notwithstanding their economic poverty (6); are mobilizing themselves for resistance against terrorist-type onslaught on their lives, property and honour. Some external agencies like Nijera Kori, The Hunger Project, RIB (Research Initiatives, Bangladesh) are also inspiring and assisting them in thus forming solidarity groups to move on with their lives in positive, creative collective self-engagement without financial assistance, support in which RIB and The Hunger Project following RIB have introduced a new trend by way of animation work to promote ‘gonogobeshona’ (people’s collective self-research) (7). By such initiatives all such disadvantaged people are not necessarily moving above the ‘poverty line’ soon enough, and many such people are remaining below such ‘line’ in their lifetimes, but in positive self-engagement in life’s struggle.

But all taken together such initiatives are still of a small order in relation to the multitude of distressed people in the society. Solution to the problem of the ‘turbulence of the other half of the glass’ lies in much wider spread of

such mutual solidarity and cooperative formations which can engage this 'other half' in positive self-engagement, and what is needed is to generate a social wave to spread such formations throughout the society so that the distressed may get mental 'homes' and move on through their live's struggles humanely and creatively pooling their thinking and other resources together as they themselves decide.

##### 5. The challenge of development and poverty

Indeed, the challenge of development and for that matter that of poverty may be seen as engaging all people of the society in the challenge of life's reality and possibilities in positive, humane creative pursuit. In such pursuit the economic poverty of different persons will be getting reduced at different rates with many seeing the end of their lives in such poverty, many of them sacrificing their personal needs to advance their children in their lives and themselves dying with this sense of fulfillment; many showing their creative talents in specific directions and thus fulfilling themselves notwithstanding living in poverty; many working for others' welfare or in service of the ecology notwithstanding their own poverty and leaving the world in the end with no regret. In the history of mankind in all societies in all ages this is what has happened – in no country has economic poverty of all people been alleviated in any phase of its development, but in progressive phases of its history substantial masses of the people have participated creatively in the development effort of the country. In recent times a self-aggrandisement-oriented development philosophy has overwhelmed us that is now in deep question with the global economic meltdown. This meltdown has not yet had any effect on the mainstream development and poverty discourse of the world – only Barack Obama is propagating the philosophy of *community service* which is the call of the Universal Declaration of Human rights as well, as against the individualist development philosophy that is still being espoused by leading world economists (8).

It is noteworthy, however, that three of the foremost pilosophers of the world – Karl Marx, Mao ze dong and Rabindranath Tagore – have not held such view of poverty. Marx and Mao actually never used the term 'poverty' and never identified 'poverty' as a problem to be solved. Marx had said that after the socialist revolution *the working class will create its own history.* During this elaboration of its own history many of the working class would inevitably breathe their last in economic poverty, but freed from exploitation by others they would demonstrate their most creative identity – this was the

essence of Marx's dream of social revolution. It was also his dream that some day the working class would reach such a height of productivity that there would be plenty for all to consume, but until such a stage were to be reached the question of what percentage of the working class would remain 'poor' was not a question for Marx. Mao was also never concerned with such question, saying after the Revolution that "*China has stood up*", i.e. the world will now see what China can do. And the whole world is now seeing how this giant is standing up to become the world's mightiest economic power – in this process of standing up economic poverty in China has reduced at a rate faster than before the revolution, but many, many Chinese since after the revolution have nevertheless died in poverty and are doing so even today. And Rabindranath Tagore said: "the problem of poverty is not a serious problem. Lack of happiness is the main problem... and happiness lies in engagement in creative acts that has wealth in itself." (9). Tagore also viewed the lack of opportunity for creative engagement in life as the principal problem and had endeavoured to inspire and mobilize people in his estates to engage in numerous types of collective development initiatives. Thus in different languages all these three social philosophers had identified the opportunity to engage in creative works as the most basic need of humans and toward this end had wanted to see the promotion of mutual solidarity and cooperation among them, as creativity of people of small means grows manifold in the framework of cooperation (10). In fact, the power of unlimited creativity is what distinguishes the human species from other species, and in this sense the need to exercise this power may naturally be viewed as the most basic *human* need.

In Bangladesh also it was not heard that after its liberation its people had wanted their problem of poverty to be solved – many had plunged into collective nation-building activities with whatever resources they had (11), and many others were ready to thus plunge if the call had come from the Father of the nation. Today they are being call "poor" and are being seated on the other side of the 'poverty line' for head counts with the promise of alleviating their poverty, a promise that many are rejecting and are engaging in anti-social activities, including many who are becoming fatalists and joining in fundamentalist religious camps in the hope of 'poverty alleviation' in the other world. Indeed, the advance of religious fundamentalism may be seen to owe itself in a large measure to the denial of a just share of human civilization and human dignity to the great bulk of human population while 'civilization' is advancing. The 'poverty line' of the current poverty discourse is not talking of this deprivation, but in the ultimate analysis it is

this deprivation that may be said to be the principal character of world poverty. And this poverty cannot be alleviated and social stability cannot be attained by considering the basic needs of humans as a static basket of goods like those of livestock, and promising this bundle to the distressed in macro-incremental terms, asking the distressed to wait patiently for one's turn.

#### 6. Structural change and mass literacy

Needless to say, major structural change is called for in order to create an environment conducive to the formation of solidarity groups in the country and for that matter of all round socio-economic development. In particular, the need for agrarian reform (involving both land and water rights, marketing and control over technology) is urgent for freeing the greater mass of the rural population from the current patron-client type of dependence on the so-called 'malik' (master) class. Agrarian reform was a promise of the liberation war and was a major proposal of the first Planning Commission which the then government turned down. The present ruling party promised agrarian reform in its election manifesto (10). A delegation of experts saw the Prime Minister on 22 March this year inviting the government to take early steps in this direction. No response has as yet been forthcoming, and it appears that like after independence vested interests may be resisting such a move, and wider social awareness and pressure need to be created for this.

It is also very urgent to make the masses of the country literate in order to expand their opportunities for employment, to compete in the world market more knowledgeably, to be saved from many types of fraud like thumb-signing false land transfer papers unable to read them, and overall for faster progress of their lives. The countries in East Asia known as "Asian Tigers" who have shown fast growth with considerable equity have all given priority to mass literacy. The theory of 'capability' advancement in modern development discourse also imply advancement on this front. The Prime Minister has promised to make the country fully literate by 2014, but on this front also no viable practical step has yet been taken. Today we have in our hands modern methods of imparting literacy very fast – e.g. the method of "*chhobi diye pawra shikh*"i ("learning to read with pictures") developed by Professor Ahsanul Haque with which anyone can learn to read and write in about a month or so. Students and youth of the country can be mobilized to impart literacy to all unlettered masses of the country with this method within a year or two. From the middle of 2008 patriotic youth of the country have launched a voluntary campaign to impart literacy with this method to

unlettered masses in many parts of the country and accounts of success are flowing in (13). Earlier this year a delegation went to the Education Minister proposing a nationwide mass literacy campaign using this method, but in this respect also no positive move is being seen. Perhaps vested interests who find it advantageous to keep the masses illiterate to be able to exploit them in the many ways that this permits are resisting such a move as well. It is, therefore, important that social pressure be generated in the country for urgent mass literacy campaign as well on a nationwide scale for which a fast-acting method is now in our hands. It remains a great shame that when our very independence struggle started with our language movement a large bulk of our masses are unable to read and write in their own language so many years after independence.

## 7. Conclusion

In the light of the discussion in this paper the practice of drawing the 'poverty line' by experts or international agencies according to their will from outside the lives of the people concerned ought to be rejected. Unlike, say, physics, this question is not a question of a hard science – it is a question of what deeply pains or distresses people, a question of their awareness-hopes-and-aspirations in the context of their daily lives, and also a question of social stability whose answer cannot be found without interaction with the distressed people. Externally conceived indicators of this nature naturally remain dissociated with the awareness and actions of the people, and the nation remains prone to major convulsions notwithstanding progress in terms of such indicators (like the very break-up of Pakistan at the very height of the "Decade of Development" celebrations of its rulers and foreign experts excited by the high growth rate the country was showing in the aggregate), so that the motive for using such indicators and its value become questionable. There are methods of consulting the people on such questions like sample surveys, dialogues with communities, 'gono gobeshona' ("people's own collective deliberations"). A Parliamentary Committee may also be formed which may ask people's elected representatives to initiate sessions on this question with communities in their respective constituencies which may subsequently be used to formulate the indicators of poverty with the assistance of experts. Can it be hoped that the opinions of the distressed people themselves will be given due weight in future in assessing poverty and for that matter development itself?

\*English version of paper presented in a seminar organised by The Hunger Project.at the Press Club auditorium at Dhaka on 8 June 2009,

## Notes

- (1) Both Rabindranath's and the ILO's indicators can be improved, e.g. none has mentioned old-age social security, and the ILO's "basic needs" concept has taken family as the unit while intra-family income/property/power relations are a major question in many societies.
- (2) *Poverty assessment for Bangladesh*, The Development Series, World Bank Office, Dhaka, October 2008.
- (3) Rahman, Anisur. (2004). "Globalisation: The Emerging Ideology of the Popular Protests and Grassroots Action Research". *Action Research*. 2.1. March.
- (4) The Chronic Poverty Research Report 2004-05 has given due importance to this question. But this report also has treated poverty as a mere income question.
- (5) Duesenbury, James.(1949). *Income, Saving and the Theory of Consumer Behaviour*. Harvard University Press.
- (6) A number of such initiatives have been reported in Kurratul Ain Tahmina *et al.* (2008). *Shubidha Bonchitoder Srijanshil Udyog Onushandhan, Prochar o Prosdhar (Part 1)*. Research Initiatives Bangladesh.
- (7) A recent detailed assessment of the work of Nijera Kori has been presented in Barkat, Abul (2008). *Development as Conscientisation, the Case of Nijera Kori in Bangladesh*. Pathak Samabesh. Dhaka. An assessment of 'gonogobeshona' in the programme of RIB has been presented in Islam, Muinul (2009). *The Poverty Discourse and Participatory Action Research in Bangladesh*. Research Initiatives Bangladesh. Many other NGOs are working with disadvantaged people, but their works are not mentioned here as they involve external monetary assistance to the disadvantaged whose continuation is uncertain, and high-interest micro-credit oriented as well.
- (8) e.g. Sen, Amartya K. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford U. Press. The Human Development Index of UNDP (HDI) needs also to incorporate an index for concern for others, or else Nazi Germany might come in the front rank according to this index. The conventional HDI index may be multiplied by a factor  $x =$  percentage of the society's population (above a certain age) engaged in some sort of community service.
- (9) Basu, Bishnu & Binoy Bondyopadhyay (eds.).(1989). *Rabindranather Shikhabhabna*. Protibhash. Kolkata.
- (10) Tagore's article "shyatontre porinam" in *Dharmo*, Rabindra Rachanaboli 13, is a profound discussion on this subject that I would invite all to read in today's global crisis originating in individual self-interest oriented world view of the affluent and powerful.
- (11) Rahman, M. Anisur (ed.) (1997). *Je agun jolechhilo, Muktijuddher chetonar shwatosfurto prakash*. Ganopokashoni. Dhaka.
- (12) Manifesto of the Awami League for the 9<sup>th</sup> national assembly elections, 2008, section 7.4.

- (13) Rahman, Tanzina. "Banishing Illiteracy". *Star Campus* 31 May 2009. For a more elaborate account of the voluntary mass literacy campaign of youth using this method see Johurul Hasan Tutul. "Nirokhorota durikaran and the youth of Bangladesh", *Bangladeshey Gonogobeshona*. Dec 2008.