

Cooperatives as Alternative Form of Organization for CSR Effectiveness: Insights from Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract

Increasing thrust on sustainability has pervaded every form of organization today including business. Active involvement and participation in community activities is no more considered an act of traditional philanthropy but an integral and significant part of the business model and operations for inclusive growth of the multiple stakeholder constituencies along with the organization. This also throws challenges to modern organizations to look for alternative forms and redefined priorities beyond the confines of single-pointed pursuit of profits and economic growth. The present article primarily engages in this search for 'the other' form of organization in the pioneering initiative for rural regeneration by the Nobel Laureate poet and philosopher from India Rabindranath Tagore at Sriniketan, in the district of Birbhum in West Bengal. Sriniketan was a novel venture to uplift the neglected village and bridge the gap between the urban and the rural milieu. In this regard, this article will undertake a detailed study of Tagore's twin objectives—first, to educate the villagers in self-dependence and second, to gift the villagers a complete life. It will also attempt to uphold the ideal of village welfare as envisioned by Tagore through people-centric education with the help of local and global experts. The article explores through a qualitative study of Tagore's Sriniketan, a rural development project directed towards sustainability in viewing the spirit of cooperatives as an alternative form of organization. It will also finally highlight on how modern organizations can draw lessons on sustainability from Tagore's cooperative movement for creative and effective corporate social responsibility (CSR) interventions.

Keywords

Rural development, cooperative, education, village welfare, corporate social responsibility, sustainability

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Prologue

On August 7, 1941, in the city of Calcutta, a man died. His mortal remains perished, but he left behind him a heritage which no fire could consume. It was a heritage of words and music and poetry, of ideas and of ideals, and it has the power to move us today and in the days to come. We, who owe him so much, salute his memory.

These were the opening lines of the famous documentary on the Nobel Laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore by the world renowned film maker Satyajit Ray, the winner of Oscar award for Lifetime Achievement.

An early school dropout, Tagore was thoroughly disillusioned with structured formal education. This compelled him to create a centre of alternative education through natural learning. This was his daring and bold statement to challenge the dominant culture and practice of rote learning. Far from the madding crowd of Kolkata, he set up this seat of pilgrimage.

The place was named 'Santiniketan: Abode of Peace', where he preached exactly what he believed. During the inauguration of Visva-Bharati, he confirmed the need of connecting to our ancient past and gave birth to a new and expression-oriented model of aesthetic and holistic education.

Introduction

Visva-Bharati was later to emerge globally as a novel and pioneering experiment on education in living contact with nature and human beings. Tagore was a multifaceted genius whose initiatives spread beyond Visva-Bharati in the days to come that would include the rural folks within its fold. His vision of alternative education could never be complete without a palpable and enduring impact on the wider human community in which the Institution is located. But what was the origin of his comprehensive and inspiring vision?

Rabindranath Tagore got in touch with the rural world of Bengal when his father Maharshi Debendranath Tagore entrusted him with the task of looking after their extensive estates of Bengal. The major problem that captured his attention was the general decay in the countryside. Now Tagore was not only a poet but also a humanistic social thinker and in a sense activist too. He was firm in his belief that there could not be any possibility of national regeneration without the improvement of quality of life in the villages. Hence, he committed himself to the work of rural reconstruction, ameliorating the condition of the farmers and rural artisans by way of developing agriculture and cottage industries through the application of the cooperative principle to his mission of contributing to the well-being of the masses. His motto was one of self-reliance. Agricultural and rural industrial development constituted the major criteria for his rural rejuvenation programme. He never shifted from his firm belief in the effectiveness of constructive work among villagers and thus his vision for rural development went far beyond a package for an economic recovery. He visualized the village in its entirety. Long and intimate contact with rural life in Bengal had awakened him to the diverse needs of the hapless village community. This inspired him to dedicate his energy towards the betterment of their lot. Developing the villages was the poet's prime point and he wrote:

If we could free even one village from the shackles of helplessness and ignorance, an ideal for the whole of India would be established... Let a few villages be rebuilt in this way, and I shall say they are my India. This is the way to discover the true India. (Tagore, 1962, p. 322)

Tagore's thoughts of sustainable development of India have their deep roots in rural regeneration. The majority of Indian population lives in villages. He believed that the poor of India should be self-sufficient, economically independent and socially empowered. Through proper education, the spirit of self-confidence should be sown to fight off the maladies affecting rural India. He held the view that sustainable development can only be successful if the rural mass takes an initiative to form *cooperatives* and *panchayats* by their own attempts realizing their benefit.

In *Samabaya Niti* (Tagore, 1986), Tagore points out at the agricultural backwardness in India. It results from a subdivision and disintegration of agricultural lands, lack of finance and exploitation by moneylenders, problems in marketing products, etc. All these problems can be solved through *cooperatives* if properly formed. He believed the root cause of rural misery was the lack of self-confidence and dependence on outside help, especially from the government. So, the primary task was to make the rural mass aware of their strength and unite them. He further comments:

For this reason, the most urgent need in our country is not to place begging bowls at their hands, but to make them confident of their own power, to make them realize that a man united with others is a complete entity, whereas an alienated individual is but a powerless fragment. (Tagore, 1986, p. 313)

And hence keeping these ideas in mind, in 1908, Tagore, under his Scheme of Rural Development work, initiated the creation of youth organizations in the villages in the Kaligram Pargana of Bengal. He developed fieldworkers who would be able to identify themselves with the villagers. In 1922, he established a Rural Reconstruction Institute at Sriniketan, with the help of one of his trusted colleagues from abroad, L.K. Elmhirst. A group of eight villages was brought together for the programme. The objective of the initiative was to create an interest for rural welfare work by analyzing rural problems and solving them for a better perspective. It helped the villagers develop their resources and their standard of living. All these efforts helped in creating a spirit of self-help. It helped in developing leadership skills amongst the rural masses. An essence of universalism was sown and infused into one and all.

He also drew up the blueprint of a constructive programme which would include merging villages into regional units that would consist of schools, workshops, granaries, cooperative stores and banks and even common meeting places of the village folk for enjoyment and also for settling of disputes. Besides imparting rural education, the poet developed a relationship of affection with the villagers and farmers by taking keen and active interest in their genuine and arduous efforts to guide and propel them in their endeavour to improve their sanitation and health, to develop their assets and credit, to help them sell their products, to teach them better methods of growing crops and vegetables and of keeping livestock and to help them understand the goodness of associated life, mutual aid and common aspirations and goals. In 1928, Tagore stated his objective of creating a model for village development that would free the villages from the shackles of helplessness and ignorance and help discover the true spirit of India

Thus, this was not just an initiative to impart education to the rural milieu but a novel and unique attempt to offer a 'complete and holistic solution' to the diverse and multiple problems of the rural community, and thereby improving the quality of life of the village folks through transformative social action.

Towards Transformative Social Action: Leonard Elmhirst and Sriniketan

Tagore's engagement in social action went far beyond the commonplace notion of 'social service' that is often performed by people to derive a sense of self-satisfaction as if to have a breath of fresh air out of

the daily monotony of routine professional work for a living. Such 'glorified' social work is largely diluted in content and feeble in impact. Tagore's primary aim was to touch and transform the lives of the rural folks beyond the immediate context of his action, Visva-Bharati. From educational leadership, he assumed the role of community leadership.

Sriniketan was inaugurated in 1922. Tagore was 61. Elmhirst later observed that Tagore's ideas stimulated and permeated every nook and corner of Sriniketan though he was not involved with the nitty-gritty of its daily affairs. Tagore used to remind Elmhirst and the other workers that all these practical achievements and benefits, such as clean milk, fresh eggs and flourishing cooperatives, were only a means to a greater end, which was to liberate individual consciousness towards social and economic self-reliance and finally self-transformation.

Elmhirst writes:

Results, notable results, were achieved in a small area and in a few villages. Economic returns were such that the rising standard of living in the area was very noticeable. New confidence arose among the villagers...But time and again the problems baffled us. Without much more university research on the one hand (whether scientific, economic or sociological) and without more intimate contact between us and Government officials, and between officials and villagers at village level, on the other, there could be no progress over the wider areas around us... Another major difficulty was that, from 1920 on, the Government machine under the British tended to work with a mechanical routine and on a day-to-day basis, with much form filling. So many of the rural problems we uncovered needed understanding by officials, who had little or no experience in sitting down with village people in order to get at the root of the trouble. (1961, pp. 42–43)

Thus, the aims and objectives for the Sriniketan workers were stated as:

1. To win the friendship and affection of villagers and cultivators by talking a real interest in all that concerns their lives and welfare, and by making a lively effort to assist them in solving their most pressing problems.
2. To take the problem of the village and the field to the class room for study and discussion and to the experimental farm for solution.
3. To put the students in the way of acquiring practical experience in cultivation, dairy, animal husbandry, poultry keeping, carpentry, and smithing, weaving and tannery; in practical sanitation work; and in the art and spirit of cooperation.
4. To give the students elementary instruction in the science connected with their practical work.
5. To encourage in the staff and students of the department itself a spirit of sincere service and willing sacrifice for the people of the surrounding villages.
6. To train the students to a due sense of their own intrinsic worth, physical and moral and in particular to teach them to do with their own hands everything which a village householder or a cultivator does or should do for a living, if possible, more efficiently. (Palit, Mitra & Banerjee, 2009, p. 2)

The Sriniketan programme included four major areas: agriculture, crafts and industries, village welfare and education. There was some overlap between certain areas and the others and over the years, there was considerable restructuring and subdividing of the various departments. It was under the guidance of L.K. Elmhirst that the Institute of Rural Reconstruction was established in 1922 that attempted to comprehend the philosopher poet's dreams.

But all this was not to be left at the pedestal level of dreams any more. A whole ceremony of action was to unfold in the days to come that would transform the dreams into reality. The results were soon visible in two areas of intervention: regeneration of crafts and industries and rural self-reliance through village cooperatives.

Thus, thanks to the all-encompassing and integral vision of Tagore, an experiment in alternative education spread out to include the surrounding community through transformative social action.

Regeneration of Crafts and Local Industries

Reviving cottage industries and crafts was a major goal of Sriniketan. It sought to save and create local industries, initiate new artistic designs and train apprentices. Nandalal Bose was the key person in the area of craft design at Sriniketan. In 1930, he established Karu Sangha, a handicraft cooperative associated with Kala Bhavan (Hall of Arts and Crafts), to enrich the economic life of the local artisans. In order to revive local industries and crafts, such as leather products, tailoring and carpentry, training centres were set up in the area. In 1929, a mechanical workshop was established to offer training in mechanical drawing and design, smithy, lathe work and wood and metal turning. Lacquer work, raw silk production, pottery, tile making, cane work, embroidery, bookbinding and such other crafts were also gradually introduced over time. By 1928, in Sriniketan, 162 villagers had received training in weaving, carpet making, dyeing and calico printing. There were 18 centres within Birbhum district under the direct supervision of the crafts department and 5 outside the district. Thanks to the relentless efforts of the Institution, there were almost 6,000 weavers working in the district at that time.

The tanners in the district numbered close to 20,000. However, finding and creating a market for leather products was difficult because of the poor quality of the hides. In 1932, the Birbhum Asprisya Sevak Samiti was established with Rabindranath as the President and Kalimohan Ghosh as Secretary for relief of the untouchables. This marks a bold and serious attempt in India for the cause of upliftment of the untouchables initiated only after Gandhi's 1923 fast. A separate unit known as the Shilpa Bhavan (Hall of Industries) was started on a small scale in 1922, with the goal of providing vocational training to village apprentices and crafts training to the students of the academic departments of Santiniketan and Sriniketan. The unit was initiated by Pratima Devi, wife of Rabindranath Tagore, the poet's son. Pratima Devi, Kalimohan Ghosh and Gretchen Green were instrumental in reviving the crafts. Under Shilpa Bhavan's auspices, an organization called Palli Karukari Kendra was also founded by Pratima Tagore to provide part-time employment for rural women. Shilpa Bhavan thus proved to be one of the most economically and socially successful units in Sriniketan and it began to function as an independent unit in 1937.

An experiment in chrome tanning without the aid of machinery was initiated early in 1922, but unfortunately it proved unsuccessful as more than 26 per cent of the hides in the neighbourhood were found unfit for this process. Moreover, chrome tanning required expert knowledge and the use of many chemicals, and it was therefore found unsuitable for introduction in the villages. An apprentice of the department was sent to the Calcutta Research Tannery to learn bark tanning and subsequently the local villagers began to be trained in July 1924. A number of local *muchis* (cobblers) were imparted training in this area. Through the small tannery, the Institute tried to teach some of these people improved methods of tanning and shoemaking. Some of those who were trained by the Institute started working in their own villages and thereby earning a better living.

Rural Self-reliance through Village Cooperatives

The village welfare department intended to instruct the villagers in self-reliance. The work of this department mainly covered the following activities:

1. A study of village life in all its multifarious aspects: social, economic and political.
2. The development of the villages in regard to:
 - a. sanitation and health
 - b. economic progress
 - c. promotion of education
 - d. social and moral development.

The medical section looked after the sanitation and health issues of the neighbouring villages by organizing local health societies. The medical officer of the Institute also gave demonstrations and lectures on personal hygiene, food, village sanitation and preventable diseases.

In 1924, about 5,000 patients were treated in the dispensary. The medical officer, apart from his duties in the dispensary, was engaged in some research on diseases, such as malaria, diseases of the spleen and *kala-azar*. The results were visible soon. Through systematic treatment, there was a remarkable decrease in spleen and malaria complaints. Efforts were made through the village societies to settle disputes by arbitration, and to foster mutual trust that was once the backbone of social life but later had gradually waned off in the villages over time.

The poet had set up cooperative granaries (*dharma-golas*) in Sriniketan and over 200 cooperatives were established for grain storage, irrigation, banks, etc. The Santhals, the local aboriginal tribes of the neighbouring area, organized a successful cooperative by themselves with the assistance of the Institute in 1936. The Visva-Bharati Central Co-operative Bank was established in 1927 with the aim of fighting the malaise of rural indebtedness. It had 236 agricultural credit unions attached to it; 69 irrigation societies and 12 health societies were registered in the initial period.

The Pivotal Role of Education

The fruition of Tagore's dream to regenerate the rural community never obliterated the primacy of the role of education in awakening the human spirit for instilling self-reliance and facilitating social empowerment. However, the planning, design and implementation of education programmes in Sriniketan was different from Visva-Bharati in content, pedagogy and delivery.

Educational activities were implemented at all levels. By 1929, there were night classes for children and adults unable to attend day school in 12 villages, and one day school was established for girls. The oppressed classes too were not left behind. Nine night schools were running for them. Female education was a priority. The girls came from all castes, and no discrimination was made and the girls' school was located in the house of one of the teachers. The course was of the holistic type and included basic literacy, gardening, cooking, mathematics, crafts and recreational activities.

Initiatives in adult education were carried out through various activities. The first rural circulating library in Bengal came into existence which contained around 1,500 books. Apart from formal education, special lectures were delivered on epics and scriptures. In 1929, it was reported that 26 lectures were given in 19 villages on such topics as *Ramayana*, the life of Sri Chaitanya, cooperative health and hygiene and the work of Santiniketan and Sriniketan. Training camps were also organized to provide guidance on scout organization, cottage craft, first aid, elementary agriculture and cooperative organization.

For those who could not attend school, an early form of distance education was initiated through the Lok-Siksha Samsad, a society which organized study and examinations at home. A special education section was added later to handle other educational areas. The Lok-Siksha Samsad activities were

included under this section as well as teachers' training through a training centre for primary school-teachers called Siksha Charcha Bhavan. In training primary teachers, the centre supplemented the government curriculum with music, agriculture, sanitation, scouting and craft training to create a more holistic approach. This section took charge of monitoring the apprentices from the other sections and organized additional lectures and laboratory work in physics, botany and chemistry. A meteorological observatory was established in 1929 and the apprentices learnt how to chart weather conditions and map fluctuations. There were also some special women's educational projects, which were handled by the *Mahila Samitis* on nutrition, maternity, childcare, literacy, etc.

The aims and objectives of education in Visva-Bharati were to foster all-round development of individuals in consonance with nature in an experience of abundant joy and freedom. Beyond this, the education imparted at Sriniketan took special care to include inputs on skills' development that would enhance self-dependence of the rural folks, and also on effective functioning of village cooperatives for overall community development aimed at improving the quality of their lives.

Sriniketan: A Comprehensive Assessment

In terms of assessing Sriniketan, the most comprehensive analysis has been done by Uma Das Gupta, the noted historian for the year 1930, and she writes of some of the delicate issues which were being faced at that time. One of the issues concerned the scope of Sriniketan's activities. In the initial stages, the objectives had been concerned with transformation of the cultural and economic life of a few villages. By 1930, however, there were over two dozen rural village workers which were too many for a single village, but the annual income of about 50,000 rupees was not enough for more wide-ranging work. During the 1930s, under the leadership of Rabindranath Tagore, a new emphasis was put upon Sriniketan's economic self-sufficiency, thus causing a shift in policy away from the village self-help programme. Villagers still continued to be employed in Sriniketan but they were now the employees of the institution and not the men who were supposed to be self-organizing and self-supporting. Thus Rathindranath's model, though significant in its own value, was actually a departure from the vision of the poet.

In assessing the impact of Sriniketan, a range of aspects has been taken into account. Statistically verifiable achievements were found and highlighted in the reports of Elmhirst, P.C. Lal and others, such as greater crop output, soil reclamation and reforestation, upgrading of livestock, reduction of deaths due to epidemics, creation of cooperatives, revival and creation of cottage industries, establishment of schools and higher rates of literacy and so forth. One of the most specific studies done by Sugata Dasgupta on the village of Laldaha notes that when Sriniketan started its work there in 1930, the villagers were steeped in debt and lay shackled in the hands of indigenous moneylenders who controlled their social and political destinies as well. He reports that:

A comparative survey of the living conditions of this village carried out in 1959 with the base line date of 1939, recorded and maintained by the worker of the area, revealed that the people today use more clothes, furniture, utensils, torches and other equipments than they did 20 years ago and in comparison to other villages which either lay outside the work area of Sriniketan or were manned by less competent workers. The percentage of literacy for both men and women shot up to 100%. 100% of children of the school going age attended their school, income per capita was Rs 35/- as compared with Rs 16/- of the neighbouring villages. (Das Gupta, 1962, p. 112)

Das Gupta's survey of villages affected by Sriniketan programmes also reveals a proportionately higher number of democratic organizations in the villages. There are also the success stories of the teachers,

staff and students and the profound influences of Rabindranath's spirit and approach on other projects which, though less statistically verifiable, are generally acknowledged. The most difficult aspects to assess are the humanistic and cultural initiatives which Rabindranath felt to be so important. When one looks at all these aspects, the achievements of Sriniketan are considerable.

One can also not discount the acknowledged influence that Tagore has had upon two Nobel Prize winners—Amartya Sen and Mohammad Yunus—in their efforts to alleviate rural poverty and extend banking services to the poor. One of the most notable efforts in village upliftment is the one in the Santhal villages of Ghosaldanga and Bishnubati. We can see how Tagore's ideals of cultural development, agriculture, crafts and industries, village welfare and education have inspired the development. But perhaps the most important of Rabindranath's ideals that we see at work in the villages is his humane holistic approach and notion of *Atma-shakti* or self-reliance and the transformation of consciousness that was so primary in his vision for village upliftment.

At this point, it may be worthwhile to connect the spirit and vision of Tagore with modern business organizations that are undergoing a phase of transition to meet the challenges of unprecedented change and turbulence.

Modern Management and Cooperatives: Towards a Symbiosis

Since the last decade of the twentieth century, a discernible paradigm shift has increasingly been observed in both objectives and operations of business organizations. The onrush for the financial gains by monolithic transnational mega-corporations and the subsequent impoverishment of the finer human qualities and latent creative potential have raised many a conscientious voice among academics, management thinkers as well as practitioners to look for alternative models and modes of creating wealth and running organizations. This has also resulted in intense search for alternative forms of organizing our enterprises and alternative sources and methods of learning beyond the structured conventional curriculum that produces jet setters and go getters. Such futuristic movement accords cardinal importance to meaning of work, purpose of life, values, ethics and character (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2006; Ghoshal, 2005; Kind et al., 2005; Simon, 2008). Primacy of focus on return to shareholders is gradually being replaced by concern for multiple stakeholders including the community. The role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) went through a sea change from the earlier concept and practice of corporate philanthropy towards becoming an integral part of core business strategy. These days, it is not so easy to exploit the community and its resources to cater to business interests, namely, profits for owners and dividends for shareholders. Community, both within and outside the organization, has become more of a partner in progress following the principle of inclusive growth. But the forms of organization were still hierarchical in structure as well as culture, characterized by command and control where the employees get robotized under systemic pressure unbecoming of human beings, reminiscent of the opening scene and the running theme of Charlie Chaplin's masterpiece, 'Modern Times'. Razor-edge competition stood as a stumbling roadblock to the building of humane organizations where the members cooperate and co-create their shared destiny. Search for flexibility and freedom became imperative in organizational forms and culture while business leaders were compelled to understand that the new mandate is to evolve an organizational philosophy that is enlightened as well as inclusive in letter and spirit, principle and practice.

It is in this context that this article highlights the path-breaking contribution of Tagore towards rural regeneration by instilling self-reliance and catalyzing empowerment in villagers beyond the periphery of Visva-Bharati, his main educational institution.

Almost a century ago, Tagore expressed his concern about the increasing concentration of economic power and the impending destruction of rural India. Way back around the first quarter of the nineteenth century, he championed the cause of the labour force in villages who were exploited to enhance the monetary capital of a handful of minority capital accumulators. He instated his faith in the productive capital of the workers, as theirs was the real capital when compared to the economic power of the few capitalists. This power remained latent and hidden inside each member of the working class. Tagore's initiatives in rural Bengal were aimed at unleashing this latent power and channelling the same into creative expression for economic self-reliance and fulfilment in work.

In a series of profoundly illuminating writings between 1915 and 1940, Tagore gave expression to a social vision where exploitation would give way to a just, humane, collectively owned economy. At the foundation of his thought was the principle of cooperatives. This kind of structure would suit at best a typical small farmer, indebted and impoverished. He had a dream that one day the farmers would form their land in a collective manner, take part in producing their crops jointly through cooperation and sell all their produce through a common mechanism in the market. Perhaps this could offer a bold response to prevent the rampant profiteering; only then can the farmer be able to regain the rightful value of his labour. In the cooperative principle, Tagore envisioned the possibility of challenging the existing structure of power and of altering the dominant power relations. The objective of Sriniketan was to bring back joyful and vibrant life in its fullness to the village community, making them self-reliant and self-respectful, acquainted with the culture and tradition of their country and capable of making an effective use of modern scientific and technological resources for all-round improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic conditions.

It may be noted that visionary and inspirational business leaders today try to engage in CSR activities with holistic development of the community as a major thrust area. The philosophy and practices, design and development of Tagore's Institution can provide them with valuable insights and directions for creating futuristic, inclusive and humane organization culture in the days to come. The business leaders in modern organizations may not forget the powerful saying: Those who look deepest into the past can also see the farthest into the future. Thus, it is worthwhile to take a deep look into the ideas and experiments of Tagore for social development and sustainability on the foundation of the principle of cooperatives with Indian roots, as his global Institution Visva-Bharati is still thriving in glory beyond a century of its creation.

Relevance of Tagore in Modern Management

Let us now try to engage in a discussion to identify the pertinent lessons for leaders in modern organizations from Tagore and his novel concept of education and social transformation through cooperatives initiated about a century ago.

1. *Concern for 'The Other'*

The unique characteristic of Tagore was an abiding search for 'the other' in every stage of life and his creative pursuits. When the monotony of daily life became oppressive, this search within him became all the more intense and overbearing. As a child in the classroom where education was reduced to mechanical parroting, he would look out of the window to observe the flying birds singing aloud, the ripples in the water of the pond and the gentle breeze blowing. His mind had the capacity to expand beyond the confines of the school to welcome the world outside that lay beyond the reach of all other students.

2. *Organizational Learning from Nature*

The students at Visva-Bharati were to be taken along a novel process of learning in the lap of nature in intimate contact with the elements that constitute our Mother Earth. But the vision of Tagore was not restricted within the borders of an academic institution. His all-encompassing vision included the human folks who lived in and around that place. Hence, he later went ahead to give fruition to his project of Sriniketan in Surul near Santiniketan for the regeneration, upliftment and empowerment of the rural masses around Santiniketan.

3. *Tagore's Philosophy and CSR*

This has direct relevance to the field of management. Tagore's vision comes as an inspiration to business leaders who need to look beyond the frontiers of their organization to include the local community in development process through the principle of inclusive growth. The starting point has to be a compelling vision which transcends the boundaries of the techno-economic rationality of business to accommodate the 'distant others' whose presence is not just important for the building of the entire community but whose being is critical for the flourishing of an organization from the perspective of enlightened self-interest. Thus, Tagore's philosophy can serve as a beacon light to the champions of CSR and instil a profound human dimension in the thought process of corporate leaders who are otherwise obsessed with the rush for inflating the bottom line. Hence, it is often found that CSR initiatives get diluted down to the level of sporadic social service activities in the absence of a far-reaching vision. Moreover, the mandate by the Government of India on organizations to spend 2 per cent of net profits on CSR comes more as a compliance without any inspiration. In order that CSR becomes part of the core business strategy and a critical organizational process, the collaborative spirit of cooperatives must be awakened. In this regard, Tagore's vision and action may serve as guiding light to organizations today. Corporate social responsibility can then graduate from a cosmetic dressing up show for publicity to a meaningful and transformative social action.

4. *Beyond the Techno-economic Model of Progress*

There is another vital issue concerning CSR which is pointed out by conscientious critics. When corporations bring CSR initiatives to a community, they also carry with them the expertise that is rooted in the techno-economic model of progress. Thus, they do not care to engage with the community as an integral part of their learning process for mutual enrichment. They approach the indigenous folks as 'experts' with ready-made prescriptions as if they have come with the panacea for all the problems of that community based on a model of development that has its origins in the Western hemisphere. But technical solutions with economic modelling fail to deliver the goods as they miss out the intricacy and complexity of social issues. The result is a gross malady-remedy mismatch and such interventions simply end up in scratching the surface of the deeper malady-remedy mismatch.

5. *Self-reliance and Participatory Development: Learning from Life*

Tagore was a firm believer in rural regeneration as the foundation for national development but his was not a myopic vision of economic recovery. Beyond economic stability, he championed the cause of self-sufficiency of human beings with social empowerment. He evolved this vision out of his intimate contact with the rural milieu by taking keen interest in the lives of villagers and understanding the diverse needs of the rural folks. This also goes back to his passionate quest for an alternative learning scenario beyond the corridors of structured classroom and school education which he had ever despised and could never become a part of that grind. Close contact with the human and natural environment taught him how to touch the lives of villagers and transform them through life-sustaining and mind-enriching education.

This comes as a cardinal message to the business leaders of today. Beyond economic imperatives, there has to be the burning desire to contribute to the society by instilling confidence, self-reliance and empowerment in the lives of the community of the people in the context of which the business is located. But this would entail a whole process of unlearning of our dominant models of linear progress along measurable parameters and the gospel of market economy with competition and consumerism as its partners. Intimate contact with the local community also enriches our thought process, reshapes our structured world view and even transforms our lives. Top executives of Unilever were sent to spend 3 days together with the local tribal folks in Sarawak, Malaysia, participating in all their rituals before starting plant operations in that region. This gave them live experience of the denudation of natural resources in that region and severe damage to their means of livelihood as was also evident from the stories they heard from the stories of deprivation they heard from the local aborigines. It was a life-changing experience for the white-collar executives. Misplaced confidence bordering on arrogance thus sublimates into a sense of gratitude and humility and perhaps a sense of retribution. Willingness to learn from unknown and non-conventional sources opens up new avenues of content development and pedagogical innovations in management and executive education. Awakening of the human spirit in us and sensitivity to the others is the outcome of such a new mode of learning that can sober down the aggressive acquisition of knowledge with single pointed drive towards money, career and lifestyle.

6. *Organizations as Creative Community*

Within the borders of the organization, this kind of learning enhances emotive connectivity among employees and inspires otherwise monotonous work with experience of freedom and joy. This also unleashes the forces of creativity in the people who willingly take active part in the engaged learning that helps build a lively and vibrant organizational culture based on trust, transparency and cooperation. Tagore's principles for rural regeneration as practiced in the cooperatives formed by him can open up a space for dialogue in modern organizations and highlight the importance and effectiveness of functioning of 'organization as community' following a set of 'Communities of Practice'. Tagore was a live model of transcendental leadership whereby he could see far ahead of his times and thus initiated a process of community development with such practical steps as introduction of rural banking for economic self-sufficiency of the rural masses. His role model can help leaders not only in finding creative and practical solutions to the problems of the organizational community both within and outside but also in creating potential future leaders who will transmit the vibrations of inspiration to all others in the days to come.

7. *Spirit of Service and Sacrifice*

The foundation of social action in Tagore's Sriniketan project was the spirit of service and self-sacrifice. The roots of this spirit lie in the ancient Indian concepts of *Tyag* (renunciation) and *Seva* (service). Renunciation is about performance of action without claims on its fruits or outcome as a 'take-home' for oneself. *Seva* or service is the spirit of contributing to the welfare of the world with a feeling of gratitude. This can change the whole mood and spirit of CSR engagement in organizations whereby the business leaders themselves become the prime beneficiaries of this service because the community has given them an opportunity to serve. The model of the human thus radically changes from a techno-economic entity with a bundle of 'needs' to an exalted being with an abiding inner affluence and hence a compulsion to 'give', like the radiance of the Sun that gives light to the world out of its own inner effulgence.

Conclusion

Though there is no consistent theory or consensus within the fields of environmental ethics, environmental psychology or environmental social science, little empirical evidence consistently links all of the above-mentioned factors. In a globalized connected world where inclusiveness shapes the contour of relationships, it will be paradoxical if human beings still choose to pursue their isolated self-interest to the detriment of others. So time has come to join our efforts to change this outdated and meaningless perspective towards a humane and naturally consonant way of visioning and creating alternative forms of organizations as evident in the cooperative movement initiated by Tagore lasting more than seven decades after his demise in Sriniketan and, of course, its philosophical basis—Santiniketan: Abode of Peace. Struggling to meet the formidable challenges in the wake of unprecedented changes in the global business scenario, business organizations today can learn a lot from Tagore's cooperative movement on alternative structures and cultures for effective and meaningful CSR interventions and make a palpable difference in the quality of life and work of the community both within and outside the organization.

Epilogue

The example of Sriniketan of Tagore cited here lends an insight into cooperatives as an alternative form of organization in the context of self and collective human development. If we analyze the system, we observe that it teaches through the presence of light, the light of knowledge. Tagore wrote to Elmhirst on 18 April 1922, 'The work of Surul is a work of creation for in it you are not following some fixed paths prescribed in books, but giving expression to your own creative personality....' Again on 25 June 1924, he wrote:

I believe, I have the power of vision which seeks its realization in some concrete form. Unless our different kinds of works in Vishva Bharati are luminous with the fire of a vision, I myself can have no place in them. This is why all the time when Sriniketan has been struggling to grow into a form, I was intently wishing that it should not only have a shape, but also light: so that it might transcend its immediate limits of time, space and some special purpose...A lighted lamp is, for us, the end, and not a lamp of gold. (Elmhirst, 1961, p. 75)

This indicator of enlightenment helps man to realize that there is a beautiful world surrounding him. Man should allow his conscience to awaken and open his closed instincts to let the rays of knowledge wash away the darkness of evil and declare him as king of his individual self with the motto of serving fellow human beings.

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