

Towards Golden Bengal
Thoughts of Tagore and Bangabandhu
on Inclusive Development

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Bangabandhu on Inclusive
Development

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In Memoriam
National Professor **Anisuzzaman**

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Foreword

Rabindranath Tagore, a Nobel laureate in literature, truly believed in the emancipation of the people of Bengal through realizing the socio-economic potential of this land. Thus, he wrote- "I love you, my Bengal of gold,/Your skies and winds will play music in my soul." These lines are now part of the national anthem of Bangladesh. Tagore believed that with the right kind of leadership, this dream of Golden Bengal (*Sonar Bangla*) would come true. The people of Bengal finally found one such leader in our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who could fulfil this dream of the poet. He was conscious about the rich history and culture of this land from a very young age, and always strived to materialize Golden Bengal Tagore dreamt of through his social endeavours and political campaigns. Through a lot of sacrifice and relentless struggle, he finally established an independent country for his beloved Bengalis. Thus, his name is synonymous with Bangladesh. This legacy of leadership aspiring to see a prosperous Bengal is indeed noteworthy.

Therefore, these two of the greatest Bengalis of all time, Rabindranath Tagore, and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, have always inspired me in my thoughts and endeavours be that related to inclusive development or other aspects of social and/or national life. I believe these two personalities (their thoughts, works and philosophies) were not only relevant and pro-people during their own times but also can guide us to overcome the development challenges of the twenty-first century. They are equally relevant for the world

pursuing sustainable development. Indeed, their thoughts remain both local and global.

Despite misrepresentation, misunderstanding, and misreading, Tagore's legacy still lingers. In fact, there has been a new wave to understand Tagore in his entirety. The different sides of Tagore as a thinker, doer, and dreamer blend well for Bengalis as opposed to many Westerners. His core identity has always been that of a poet and a creative writer. All his activities emanated from this center. He was not an organized philosopher, and had no interest in systematizing his thoughts either. He was a dreamer and a pragmatist at the same time. What was doable interested him the most. He did not have the temperament of a political activist, and therefore, never pushed anything beyond what he felt appropriate to a poet. Today's world is even worse than the one in which Tagore lived. The invisible enemy called the Corona virus has been holding the whole world at ransom for more than a couple of years. The world has been clearly divided between those countries that have enough people vaccinated and those that do not. Never ever has the world leadership appeared to be so uncompassionate. Self-interest and greed have overwhelmed the global community. Vaccines have been turned into a consumer product, defying the age-old dictum of many humanitarian leaders including our Premier Sheikh Hasina's. She has been continuously raising her voice in international forums to make this a global public good. If things continue to persist like this, the whole world is to the face a distal catastrophe that some of the better-off nations have not perhaps anticipated. This is a globalized world. And this virus knows no boundaries. So, even if the leaders of the developed world think that they are safe with their stock of vaccines, the pandemic may still hit back at its opportune moment. So, if we want to avoid a civilizational crisis as anticipated by Tagore, it is high time that the world came together to help humanity

survive this disaster. Tagore lived through two centuries and two world wars. He lived in both the Eastern and Western parts of the world. Indeed, he had a wider vision of the civilizational crisis. So, his wisdom can be relevant even today to face the ongoing global crisis.

Much like Tagore, how to address the issue of economic disparity was at the core of Bangabandhu's thoughts, his actions, and his overarching philosophy of inclusive development. His leadership qualities were both compassionate and aesthetic. He too was both local and global. He could motivate his people to embrace struggle for emancipation for decades. He was careful to develop co-leaders who eventually oversaw the War of Liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. He could reach out to people from all walks of life. This proved to be highly rewarding in liberating and reconstructing the country. He could foresee and always dream of a prosperous Bangladesh, or Golden Bengal (*Sonar Bangla*). He emphasized on long-term planning for a people-centric transformation of Bangladesh despite standing on the ashes of war. He looked forward to a world where human creativity and technological improvement would shape a peaceful era. He was equally committed to eradicating corruption from the society and administration to give people better services. He was extremely annoyed with unethical behavior of the elitist government officials and reminded them of the fact that they were surviving on the hard work and contribution made by countless poor farmers and workers. The latter were not at all corrupt, and so they deserved more respect from the former, he said repeatedly. According to him, corruption was rooted in a section of the educated who were a minority. Therefore, he opted for the Second Revolution for bringing about a qualitative change in administration through decentralization, and ensuring its greater transparency and accountability. He thought this structural transformation would create

opportunities for farmers and workers for securing higher respect from government officials and for a better share of their produces in the process. Unfortunately, he did not live to see his dreams come true. Fortunately, however, his daughter has been steering the country towards the goals set by Bangabandhu. Yet, despite amazing economic growth, Bangladesh remains a land of inequalities of all kinds that Bangabandhu always despised.

I have been trying my best to communicate my thoughts about the life and works of these two greatest Bengalis to my readers, especially the young ones, for quite some time now with a hope to inspire them to think about and work to shape the future of our society in the manner envisaged by Tagore and Bangabandhu. As part of this attempt, I am writing Op-Eds regularly in Bangladesh's daily newspapers. Thanks to the social media, I am receiving positive feedback from my readers about them. My readers and my colleagues (seniors and juniors alike) have urged me to compile these write-ups on the farsighted thoughts of Tagore and Bangabandhu on inclusive development. While I have got a lot of books published in Bangla containing such write-ups, I must admit that such books in English are only a few. This led me to take the initiative to compile some of my recent works on Tagore and Bangabandhu in English and publish a book. *Journeyman* has agreed to publish this compilation. I feel really indebted to them for that. Many thanks to Tarik Sujat of *Journeyman* for taking this initiative. I believe this book will be welcomed by my readers including many students who prefer to read in English.

The book is divided into two broad segments. The first one covers my write-ups on Rabindranath Tagore and the second on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In the first section, a total of eight articles on Tagore have been compiled. The pieces have been ordered according to their subjects instead of their date of publication. This is to ensure that the understanding

and/or interpretation of readers follow a systematic progress. I have tried to present an overview of Tagore's thoughts on socio-economic development and his emphasis on inclusivity as well as his issue-specific narrations including analyses of his thoughts and actions (e.g., peasants' rights, education, social cohesion, and environment) in these pieces. I have also compiled here a couple of write-ups where I have emphasized the relevance of Tagore's thoughts in today's world. I believe these pieces will enable my readers to get a brief and holistic narration of the works and social development philosophy of this great poet of Bengal, nay the world.

I most often like to point out the fact that Bangabandhu is perhaps the one political leader who succeeded the most in guiding his nation along the path of inclusiveness as envisaged by Tagore. In the second section of this book, a few of my selected write-ups on Bangabandhu have been compiled which, I believe, will reflect his vision for inclusive development. The write-ups on Bangabandhu compiled in this section have covered some selected aspects of Bangabandhu's leadership including his leading role in historic progression of East Bengal's autonomy; his kinship with Bengalis from all walks of life; and the challenges he overcame to start Bangladesh's transformative journey from the scratch to prosperity in the post-liberation phase. I have noted it for some time that the aesthetic dimension of Bangabandhu's leadership has remained somewhat under-explored. I have already written a comprehensive book (in Bangla) on "Aesthetic Bangabandhu" which will soon be published by Bangla Academy. Here in this book, I have extracted two of my own write-ups on aesthetic dimensions of Bangabandhu from that book and compiled them in this collection. I believe these will enable my readers to get a glimpse of how aesthetic he was as a politician, as a statesman and above all as a people's protagonist in Bangladesh.

All the write-ups compiled here have already been published separately in different newspapers or books. I am especially indebted to the newspapers for helping me communicate my thoughts on Tagore and Bangabandhu. The philosophical linkages between these two great Bengalis have indeed been a rewarding intellectual journey for me. I would like to especially thank a youthful editor, Tanvir Mustafiz Khan, without whose efficient and effective support this book would not have been possible. As always, I also feel grateful to my younger colleagues from the research organization *Unnayan Shamannay* led by its dynamic Research Director Abdullah Nadvi, who never get tired in supporting me in all my intellectual endeavours. I am particularly indebted to Professor Ahmed Ahsanuzzaman of Independent University Bangladesh (IUB) for his excellent edits job in addition to providing invaluable inputs to make this book further reader-friendly. And it is needless to acknowledge that my family members sacrifice the most for my engagements in research-based writings. Their love and patient cooperation are my strength. If my readers find this book useful, then all the credit would go to them who provided me all the support to continue these intellectual endeavours. Surely, I am ever so grateful to all of them. Limitations, if any, are all mine.

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