



# Philanthropy and the Making of a New Moral Order: A History of Developing Community

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## Abstract

Community development, or the socio-economic transformation of local communities, has been a significant focus of organizational ethics. Such community development programmes—whether led by state, civil society, or businesses—are animated by modernization and have involved, I argue, the production of a new moral order. As part of which, communities were imagined in particular ways, historically. Drawing on a periodization of history of philanthropy of the Tata Group (India's leading multinational conglomerate) from the 1860s onwards, I outline the four stages involved in the production of this new moral order—each with a distinct formulation of community—as part of India's development. The shifts in imaginaries of community, I conclude, were justified and legitimized by the elites as part of the wider nation-building efforts.

**Keywords** Community development · Elites' philanthropy · New moral order · Social imaginary · India

The transformation of communities constitutes a significant site of organizational ethics. Common with other postcolonial contexts, in South Asia, this transformation of communities is understood as community development, part of wider global development. A wide range of organizations: from postcolonial nation-states and public-sector organizations to civil society agencies such as NGOs, think tanks, and activist organizations have all contributed, historically, to community development (see for example: Batten, 1974; Kapelus, 2002; Mansuri & Rao, 2004; McCarthy, 1995). Businesses have also contributed to community development as part of their CSR or through philanthropy—be it corporate foundations or philanthropic organizations founded and established by business elites (Banks et al., 2016; Gautier & Pache, 2015; Liu et al., 2013; Muthuri, 2008; Porter & Kramer, 1999, 2002). Whether state-led, civil society-based, or sponsored by businesses and its elites, such community development programmes have been animated by modernization. Part of the post-World War II international development era, modernization sought to transform entire societies in the so-called third world from 'traditional' to 'modern' by encouraging them to adopt large-scale industrialization,

urbanization, expansion of capitalism and markets, and intensification of science and technology (Bernstein, 1971; Esteva, 1992; Khilnani, 1999).

Despite the invocation of its transformative potential for development, modernization resulted in large-scale dispossession, exclusions, and violence that undermined local communities, their livelihoods, cultures and knowledge (Alvares, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Rahnema, 1997; Shiva, 1989). Contributing to extant criticisms of development and modernization, I focus on the role of the "modernizing elites" (Bernstein, 1971) in the production of a new moral order as part of postcolonial development in South Asia. In doing so, business elites' philanthropic organizations sought to install new "social imaginaries" of community, which were characterized by sameness and simultaneity (Anderson, 2006; Taylor, 2004). Social imaginary, following Taylor (2004, p. 2), is understood here as "not a set of ideas; rather, it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society". Far from static, the production of the new moral order under modernization, I argue, necessitated shifting imaginaries of community from time to time. These shifts in social imaginaries of community were deemed desirable and justified in the name development and nation-building (Kumar, 2021).

In probing the shifting imaginaries of community here, I present an "analytically structured history" of social imaginaries of community from twentieth century India

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(Rowlinson et al., 2014). Using periodization (Cooke & Kumar, 2020), I map and explain the shifts in community imaginaries. I draw on the nearly century and a half long history of philanthropy of the Tata Group. The Tatas are widely recognized, including here in *JBE*, for their ethical leadership, corporate stewardship, and philanthropic history (Balakrishnan et al., 2017; Elankumaran et al., 2005; Sivakumar, 2008). Alongside their leading role in the modernization of aviation, energy, and steel industries in the country, they have endowed institutions of higher education, founded leading research centres of science, social science, and humanities, and funded community development programmes, including in partnership with nongovernmental organizations, across the country (see for example: Lala, 1984, 2004; Witzel, 2010). Even if somewhat misplaced, that they are considered exemplary when compared to their contemporaries and have played an influential role in India's development (Lala, 1984; Witzel, 2010; Worden, 2003) makes it all the more important to scrutinize their philanthropy critically.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. A review of extant scholarship on modernization and development is presented next. As part of which, I also discuss the influential role of business elites and their philanthropy in development. In the second section, the research methodology is presented. From which, a periodization of “social imaginaries” of community are outlined in the third section. Next, I discuss how modernization has involved the production of a new moral order, which necessitated shifts in the imaginaries of community and how the shifts were justified by the business elites with the wider objective of building their own social acceptance. In conclusion, I outline the article's key contributions.

## Development, Modernization, and Philanthropy: A Review

Following colonialism, development became integral to re-inscribing the “non-West into a history not of its own making” (Seth et al., 1998, p. 8). In the second half of the twentieth century, development both structured the new relationship between the ‘West’ and its ex-colonies; and provided a ready template on which so-called third world countries were to model themselves. Modernization (with its associated assemblages of capitalism, democracy, industrialization, and urbanization, etc.) became the predominant development approach during the Cold War years (Brohman, 1995). Premised in the reductive and caricatured distinctions between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ societies, it offered a singular, sequential path to development that involved transformation of economy and industry, political and social institutions, and technology. Presented as an “evolutionary schema”, modernization stood for a particular form of social

change, with a fixed beginning and end point, and in which “modernizing elites” played a crucial role in setting development objectives and strategies (Bernstein, 1971).

Similar to other postcolonial contexts, India also pursued modernization vigorously. This involved large-scale, state-led investment in institutions of scientific research, higher education and training, and building a cadre of experts, bureaucrats, and administrators to lead its development effort (Chatterjee, 1993; Khilnani, 1999). As it subscribed to a state-led centralized planning model, it inscribed a ‘technocratic’ vision of development, where technical experts and trained administrators could be entrusted with the task of development. Echoing American conception of modernization as universally applicable, planning in the Indian formulation similarly saw its role as the pursuit of ‘universal’ objectives, over and above the particular or specific interests of civil society and representative democracy (Chatterjee, 1997). Its supposedly scientific nature, neutrality, and its leadership by technocrats and bureaucrats was supposed to insulate it from the demands and criticisms from narrow and sectional interests within the Indian society.

In community development, the particular was similarly side-lined in the pursuit of universalizing modernization. For example, Nehru believed that the Tennessee Valley Authority's success with community development exemplified the “means to achieve the modern India he desired” (Ekbladh, 2011, p. 102). It involved, *inter alia*, a turn to science and technology in agriculture, irrigation, and animal husbandry, along with social engineering led by an army of trained extension workers with expertise in wide-ranging fields from agriculture and public health to rural organization. Modernizing community development programmes, according to Nehru, similarly offered a cheaper solution to India's development challenges—food shortages, building a new national citizenry, and delivering welfare rights (Sackley, 2011).

India formally launched a large-scale community development programme in 1952 (see Thorner, 1981 for an early history of the programme). Initially launched on a pilot basis in Etawah district in Uttar Pradesh, it was soon extended to 410,000 villages across the whole country (Sackley, 2011). The programme found ready support from the Ford Foundation, which ostensibly supported the programme's fundamental and mutual reinforcing values of democracy, development, and self-help (Staples, 1992). Even as the Ford Foundation funded the involvement of US technical experts, especially in the areas of scientific agriculture, it is worth bearing in mind that US interest in the programme were shaped by contemporary Cold War geo-politics, whose central actors believed that the war between capitalism and communism will be won by those that deliver the “greatest benefits to the peoples of the world” (Ekbladh, 2011, p. 102; also see Sackley, 2011; Sunil, 2013).

Despite its early promise and extensive US technical support, the programme was far from successful. It was plagued not only by strategic and administrative inadequacies but was also found wanting in terms of community's participation: which was meagre, dominated by upper-caste, upper-class men, many of whom owned relatively large landholdings (Karunaratne, 1976). Offering an insider account, Staples (1992) has argued that the innovative programme, funded by the Ford Foundation, had run into a slow-moving Indian bureaucracy, plagued as it were by turf wars. He cited the lack of decentralized governance as one of the foremost causes of the failure of the community development programme in the country. Others offer a more charitable view, Hussain (1989), for example has argued that the technological revolution of Indian agriculture from 1960s to 1970s owed, more than what it otherwise acknowledged, to the success of the community development infrastructure introduced in the 1950s.

Notwithstanding the limited success of community development programme, modernization remained the predominant development force in mid-twentieth century India. As it turned the spotlight on the 'universal' and side-lined the 'particular', modernization (and so, development) caused dispossession, exacerbated gendered and ethnic inequalities, and caused lasting ecological damage, which I discuss in greater detail next.

Premised in the reductive binary of 'traditional' versus 'modern', modernization required the wholesale annihilation of 'traditional' beliefs, superstitions, and cultural practices. The emphasis on capital and technology led to extensive mechanization and use of chemicals which caused large-scale damage on local lands, water, and ecology (Escobar, 1995). Shanti George (1985; also see Baviskar & George, 1988), for example, has documented how the high-cost, high-speed, imported technology that fuelled the *White Revolution* in western India primarily benefitted the more affluent, large-scale producers as it involved expensive infrastructure that was not always appropriate to Indian environmental conditions and had led to increased costs to customers. And further that it had done little to alleviate rural poverty; instead, it channelled scarce nutrition away from rural households to privileged few in urban centres (George, 1985). Still others such as Shiva (1989) point to the gendered nature of the violence caused by modernization and development.

Building on the now familiar criticisms of modernization, I argue that development and modernization has involved the production of a new moral order and the identification and installation of a desirable, ethical ideal in whose name the new moral order is justified. A moral order, Taylor (2004, p. 4) argues, "stresses the rights and obligations we have as individuals in regard to each other, even prior to or outside of the political bond". Not limited to mere norms, the new

moral order must also contain an "ontic" attribute that makes them realizable. The order is conceived and conceptualized as social imaginaries. Distinct from social theory, they provide a "common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (*Ibid.*: 23). Drawing on which, I interrogate the "social imaginaries" of community that have animated community development programmes in India.

Although development has hitherto focused on India's post-independence modernization, I start before that. Interrogating business elites' philanthropy from the late nineteenth century onwards reveals important shifts and disjunctures in their subsequent imaginaries of community and development. Moreover, their earlier philanthropy was just as significant in preparing future administrators, scientists, and social scientists who would, I argue, go on to lead the new moral order and outline the inter-relationships between its individual members. In the production of the new moral order as part of modernization, business elites have played a significant role contributing both in the conceptualization and transmittal of imaginary, which are initially held by a few before they become more widely accepted; and ultimately "self-evident" so that they become indistinguishable from other alternates (Taylor, 2004).

Next, I review the influence of business elites' philanthropy on development, and their motivations for doing so.

## Elites' Philanthropy and Development

Business elites' philanthropy has long played an influential role in development. It has shaped global development agenda, influenced priority setting and allocation of scarce resources and, to a large extent, impacted outcomes, etc. (McGoey, 2015). In addition to influence that it enables business elites to wield over the development landscape, their philanthropy is motivated, *inter alia*, by the returns it yields for elites themselves. Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy, for example, enabled the accumulation of cultural, social, and symbolic capital; leading to his growing economic capital (Harvey et al., 2011). Others have recorded several benefits of philanthropy that might explain elites' motivation for gift-giving: it helps reduce firms' cost of capital (Zolotoy et al., 2019) and enables business elites to aggregate political and institutional power (Sánchez, 2000). In addition to the reputational benefits it endows (Gautier & Pache, 2015), philanthropy generates political legitimacy, accumulates goodwill and nurtures political connections for future profitability (Sánchez, 2000; Su & He, 2010), especially in developing or transitional economies (Wang & Qian, 2011).

Such a strategic and pragmatic use of philanthropy to accumulate social, reputational, and political capital by business elites has also been noted in the historiography of Indian philanthropy, including as part of their community

engagement. The mercantile elites from the western Indian port city of Surat, for example, were known to adjust their philanthropy in response to the changes in the governing regime (Haynes, 1987). While their earlier charity was directed at building and consolidating their credit worthiness within their own communities; the elites adjusted their mode of gift-giving with the demise of the Mughal empire and the rise of colonial administration. In order to build their social standing with the latter, the mercantile elite continued to finance community infrastructure within their economic and social networks to earn reputational capital; while adopting a more secular, civic orientated philanthropy to signal their self-identification with the colonial administrators (*Ibid.*). Others have also noted this modification in Indian business elites' philanthropy to reflect the colonial idiom of giving, which they deployed strategically to enhance the esteem in which the British held them (Palsetia, 2005; also see White, 1991 for a related discussion on the role of eighteenth century Parsi philanthropy). It helped the Parsis from Bombay (the community to which the Tatas also belonged) to build a collaborative governing regime (Palsetia, 2003). The modernization of Indian philanthropy, thus, placed its business elites into an influential position as they played a significant role in the transmission of modernity outwards to the Indian masses.

Before mapping the different imaginaries of community, historically, that animated the new moral order as part of India's modernization, I discuss the research methodology next.

## Research Methodology

The article is informed by and contributes to growing interest in historical approaches to business, management, and organization studies (Bucheli & Wadhvani, 2014; Cummings et al., 2017). As an organizational history of Tatas' philanthropy, the article is an "analytically structured history" (Rowlinson et al., 2014). Bridging narrative and analysis, such histories rely on analytic constructs to search for archival sources and construct a narrative as its primary explanatory mode. A more accurate description, though, following Cooke and Kumar (2020, p. 23) would be "analytical constructions of history", which makes the historian's agency in interpreting sources and constructing the narrative, abundantly clear. As an "analytical construction of history", the article interrogates the imaginaries of community.

It is based on extensive archival and secondary sources collected as part of a wider research project that interrogates the role of business elites' in India's development covering a range of sites, such as science and technology, civil society, selfhood, etc. (Kumar, 2021). The archival

sources, on which the article is based, comprised, *inter alia*, of a wide variety of internal and external documents, including minutes of meetings of the Trustees' Board of the various Tata Trusts (on which more below), project proposals, evaluation reports, annual reports of the Trusts, internal and external correspondence, memoranda, etc. These materials were sourced from, among others, the India Office Records, London; London School of Economics (Special Collections), London; National Archives of India, New Delhi, and Tata Central Archives, Pune. The secondary sources included: published articles, biographies, monographs, working papers, etc., which relate both to the histories of individuals and institutions part of the Tata family, and is informed by histories of the Group and its individual industries.

The first order of coding of the archival material, running into several hundreds of photocopied pages and notes, involved separating it into sites of development, discussed above. While some philanthropic gestures were expansive and covered more than one site, others were more straightforward. The material coded under 'community' was then organized chronologically with a view to identifying a timeline of philanthropic giving. This was followed by a second order coding around recipients of Tatas' philanthropy. In doing so, I was following Yates (2014, p. 274) acknowledgement that although historians analyse and interpret their data differently from qualitative researchers, they do "implicitly 'code' their data" (*Ibid.*: 274). Reading and sifting through the data resulted in an iterative coding and re-coding "as new themes emerge[d]" (*Ibid.*: 275). From this coding around recipients of Tatas' philanthropic giving, a periodization was derived.

This periodization, it is worth emphasizing, is not immutable but provisional, subjective, and open to challenge. These periods (or historical phases) that follow periodization should not be understood as tree-ring markers of *temporal* time, but a product of historians' interpretation of *historical* time (Cooke & Kumar, 2020). As a result, there is some overlap across the periods. While the imaginary of community is consistent within each period and is held together by its own internal logic; these imaginaries shift over time (and so, across periods). This periodization is derived from the object of study (*Ibid.*)—in this case, imaginary of community—and the sources. As with other analytically structured history, the periodization is not imposed on basis of an external historical events; instead, the interplay between internal organizational events and the wider context determines the shift from one period to the next (Rowlinson et al., 2014). The periodization provides not only the analytic framework of the article, but also guides its narrative.

Before presenting the historical periods itself, a brief, historical overview of the Tata Group and its philanthropy follows.

### Tata Group and Their Philanthropy: An Overview

The Tata Group was founded in 1868 by Jamsetji N. Tata (1839–1904). Born in a Parsi family from Navsari (modern-day Gujarat), Tata made his early fortune trading in commodities such as cotton and opium. In 1877, he ventured into the textile mill business, laying the foundation of a modern global conglomerate. Today, the Tata Group is active in industries as diverse as automobiles, aviation, chemicals, consulting, energy, hospitality, retail, and steel. It employs over 720,000 people worldwide, with annual revenue of US\$113 billion in 2018–2019. Jamsetji N. Tata's elder son Dorab J. Tata (1859–1932) is widely credited with the growth of the Group. He established Tatas' businesses in industries such as power, iron, and steel. The Group's expansion in the second half of the twentieth century was led by Jehangir R. D. Tata (1904–1993; popularly known as J. R. D. Tata). Under his leadership, the Group grew spectacularly diversifying into businesses such as automobiles, aviation, information technology, and tea. In 1991, the Group's reins were taken over Ratan N. Tata (*b.* 1937) who is credited with the global expansion of Tatas' businesses. Compared to other business families from India, the Tata Group and its leaders are often credited for their contribution to India's economic growth and development (Tripathi & Jumani, 2007; Lala, 1984, 2004, 2006; Witzel, 2010; Worden, 2003).

Sixty-six percent of the Group's holding company, Tata Sons, is owned collectively by the Tata Trusts. The Tata Trusts comprise of two leading and several associated Trusts. The leading Trusts are: Sir Ratan Tata Trust (founded in 1919) and Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (founded in 1932) popularly known as SRTT and SDTT respectively, they have significantly larger resources and are more broad-based both in the nature of development they fund (education, health, livelihoods, etc.) and how they fund it (endowments, grants, etc.). The associated Trusts are smaller and more focussed in their philanthropy, including *inter alia*, J. N. Tata Endowment Fund (1892; higher education); Bai Hirabai J. N. Tata Navsari Charitable Institution (1923; primarily for the benefit of Parsis living in Navasari); Lady Tata Memorial Trust (1932; research on leukaemia and other diseases); Nava-jbai Ratan Tata Trust (1974; supports SRTT); and J. R. D. and Thelma J. Tata Trust (1991; women's empowerment), etc. Cumulatively, the Trusts disbursed US\$ 115.26 mn in 2020–2021, which is indicative of the size of their philanthropy. It is also worth adding here that the financial disbursements made by the various Trusts are distinct from the CSR of individual companies of the Tata Group. The Trusts use a combination of institutional endowments (although this

has become much smaller compared to the scale of endowments made by the Trusts in the first half of the 20th c.); programme grants (commonly made to NGOs, think tanks, and community organizations); and individual grants (mainly educational and medical grants made to those in need).

Next, I present the periodization of imaginaries of community derived from the history of Tatas' philanthropy for community development.

### Periodization of Community Imaginaries

Based on the object of study: imaginaries of community, the history of Tatas' philanthropy can be organized in to four distinct periods.

#### Dismantling Kinship-Based Community (1860s–1930s)

Jamsetji N. Tata's father, Nusserwanji had a long and extensive record of charity, which is also said to have inspired the former. Among others, Nusserwanji extended financial support for fire temples and towers of silence (places of worship and cremation, respectively, in Zoroastrian faith) "which provide[d] devout Zoroastrian with a key to the gates of heaven" (Harris, 1925, p. 120; also see Karaka, 1884 for a detailed account of Parsi community's philanthropy). Unlike his father whose philanthropy was restricted to sponsoring their own Parsi community's infrastructure, Jamsetji Tata's early philanthropy was more secular, civic-oriented, and reflected the idiom of colonial administrators (Haynes, 1987; Palsetia, 2005). For example, starting from 1860 onwards, Jamsetji Tata made several gifts to schools, sanatoriums, maternity homes, flood-relief in Surat, earthquake relief in Italy in 1883, and memorials to British administrators and educationists who served India with sympathy (Lala, 2006).

By the turn of the twentieth century, though, Jamsetji Tata's views of philanthropy had turned more concertedly towards the national question. In 1899, Jamsetji Tata (cited from Lala, 2006, p. 112) outlined the problems with conventional charity, which he regarded as "patchwork philanthropy" that "clothes the ragged, feeds the poor, and heals the sick and halt (sic)". In its place, Tata outlined his vision for what he called "constructive philanthropy". "What advances a nation", he argued, "is not so much to prop up its weakest and most helpless members, as to lift up the best and most gifted so as to make them of the greatest service to the country" (*Ibid.*).

The secularization of philanthropy can also be founded in Tata's sons' philanthropy. "The objects to be aided by the funds", Ratan J. Tata (1871–1918; Jamsetji's younger son)



provided in his will, “should be public and general in preference to sectional”. He directed applying the Trust’s funds for devising schemes:

of a practical nature calculated to promote the welfare of the said community care being taken that such work is not undertaken from a stereotyped points of view but from the point of view of fresh light that is thrown from day to day by the advance of science and philosophy on problems of human well-being (sic).<sup>1</sup>

Donating a significant portion of his wealth to philanthropy: Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (henceforth SDTT) in 1932, Dorabji Tata directed that his wealth should be used:

without any distinction of place nationality or creed, that is to say, the institution, maintenance and support of schools educational institutions, hospitals, relief of any distress caused by the elements of nature (...) in advancement of learning in all its branches especially research work in connection with medical and industrial problems.<sup>2</sup>

He was unequivocal in his instruction that the objects to which his wealth was applied “should be of a charitable character for the benefit of all communities”.

Unlike Parsi charity—which had hitherto focussed on building infrastructure within one’s own kinship-based community in order to accumulate social reputation and trustworthiness—the “constructive philanthropy” for *national advancement* required envisioning new kinds of communities.

### Community of the Gifted (1890s–1950s)

In his pursuit of *national advancement* by supporting the “best and most gifted”, Jamsetji Tata made two significant gifts in the 1890s. One, he founded the J. N. Tata Endowment Fund in 1892 for sponsoring the higher education of Indians abroad; and soon after, he bequeathed a third of his wealth for creating a world leading institution of scientific research and training in the country. The J. N. Tata Endowment Fund supported the higher education of Indians abroad. Active today more than a century later, the Fund has supported 5,387 Indian scholars in their higher education in various fields, abroad. It is worth mentioning here that 40% of the Fund’s scholars come from the field of engineering and technology (Tata Endowment Fund, n.d.), which

reflects the Tatas’ philanthropic focus on applied sciences with an emphasis on their potential contribution to India’s development (Kumar, 2018). Although the Fund was initially launched to support the higher education of only Parsi students, Jamsetji Tata soon amended this and the scheme was made available “to all capable natives of this country” (Lala, 2006, p. 221).

It was followed soon after by an even more generous gift for the establishment of what subsequently came to be known as of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore. The institute was finally founded in 1909, following long and protracted negotiations with the colonial administration (see Subbarayappa, 1992 for a detailed account). In his will dated 16 December 1896, Jamsetji Tata outlined his vision for this gift:

for the foundation of an indigenous University in this city upon as broad as institutions of a like nature which have been founded through the munificence of private gentlemen in Europe and America to the intent that such University may become the means along with similar others of meeting the growing educational and scientific needs of this country (cited from Subbarayappa, 1992, p. 323).

Like his father, Dorabji Tata was also committed to supporting talented, meritorious Indians as an investment in furthering India’s development. In 1920, for example, he generously gifted £25,000 for the reconstruction of the engineering school at the University of Cambridge. His gift, Dorabji hoped, will ultimately become the “means of imparting a fuller and more thorough training in the subject to the thousands of students who will flock to it from the Empire in future years”. “With the growing demand for higher training in my country”, he hoped Cambridge will “bestow on it the response and the favour of increased facilities for the purpose”.<sup>3</sup> Promoting meritorious individuals, in his will, Dorabji Tata outlined that should any research institute be established in his name, “such person as are best qualified in that behalf preference to be given to pure Indians if equally suitable” (sic).<sup>4</sup>

The newly envisioned *community of the gifted* was expected to create a new generation of talented, meritorious individuals, who would lead India’s modernization and development—in industry, as well as society. Between 1910s and 1950s, the Tatas proposed and founded centres of research and training for leading social development. Such

<sup>1</sup> Ratan J. Tata’s will dated March 1913; with a codicil dated February 29, 1916; from File no. 178/RJT/PERS/LEG/WILL/1, Tata Central Archives, Pune (henceforth TCA).

<sup>2</sup> SDTT’s deed dated March 1932. File no. 177/DTT/DEED/AGR/1932, TCA.

<sup>3</sup> From Dorabji Tata’s letter dated 27 August 1920 published in the Cambridge University Reporter, 5 October 1920; File no. 175/Donations made by Sir Dorabji Tata to Cambridge University – 1920, TCA.

<sup>4</sup> From Dorabji Tata’s will dated 29 April 1927; File no. 178/DJT/PROP/WILL/1, TCA.

centres were aimed both at creating new disciplinary knowledge appropriate to the Indian context; and training the new cadre of administrators, demographers, social scientists, and social workers. The earliest example of which can be found in Tatas' unsuccessful plans to establish centres of social science research and training at IISc in 1910, followed by the establishment of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS, henceforth), Bombay in 1936, which I discuss next.

In 1910, Ratan J. Tata approached IISc with a proposal to establish a School of Social Studies to conduct systematic, positivist, research on Indian society to diagnose, and ultimately, reform Indian society (for a detailed discussion see, Kumar, 2018). As Tata's proposal ran into difficulties with IISc's leadership, he decided to relocate the research centre to the University of London. Following negotiations, Tata endowed a Research Chair at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1913. Among others, it conducted survey research on causes of poverty and administration of relief; education through lectures and scientific publications; and popular dissemination in press and among public intellectuals.<sup>5</sup> In 1917, Tata made an annual grant of £1,400 for 5 years, which led to the founding of LSE's renowned Department of Social Science and Administration. As part of which, studies were funded on a range of subjects including status of dockworkers, nutrition and physical development of schoolchildren, and links between wages and poverty.<sup>6</sup>

In 1932, the Tatas' returned to their earlier proposal to establish a social science research centre in India. A Bureau of Social and Industrial Research was proposed, which was expected to conduct similarly applied, reform-orientated research on the inefficiencies and inadequacies in Indian society.<sup>7</sup> Following extensive discussion, it was decided that more than research, a new cadre of social workers were required. For which a new research and training institute called the Sir Dorabji Tata School of Social Work, (later renamed as the Tata Institute of Social Sciences) was established in 1936. Its mandate was to train professionals in the practical application of contemporary social thought in order to *solve* the country's social problems (Kumar, 2018).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> 'Scheme for the proposed endowment of research into the principles and methods of preventing and relieving destitution of poverty', c. 1912, File no. Passfield 10/2/1, London School of Economics Archives.

<sup>6</sup> File no. LSE/Minutes/17/2/2, London School of Economics Archives.

<sup>7</sup> 'Preliminary Report for the Trustees of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust Suggesting Methods of Utilizing the Present Income of the Trust and the Broad Lines of Future Engagement'. File no. 198/DTT/PHIL/TISS/FP/4, TCA.

<sup>8</sup> From a proposal titled 'Tentative Plans for the Sir Dorabji Tata School of Social Work', dated 15 July 1935 (hand-written date on typed pages); from File no. 199/DTT/PHIL/TISS/MIS/1, TCA.

Similar to social work, the Tatas also invested in founding a specialized research and training centre for demography in 1950s. Initial plans proposed a semi-autonomous, multi-disciplinary institute that would help India overcome the lack of "well-trained and experienced demographers", necessary for the purposes of social and economic planning.<sup>9</sup> Further plans were developed by K. C. K. E. Raja who later served as the founding director of the Demographic Centre for Training and Research, Bombay (founded in July, 1956, through a collaboration between the central government, SDTT and the United Nations; it later came to be known as the International Institute of Population Studies). Citing population as the foremost hindrance to India's modernization and development, Raja proposed establishing an independent centre that would train its staff and students to develop their power of "observation, initiative, independent thought and curiosity" using the "group discussion method".<sup>10</sup>

Alongside a training programme, Raja proposed a programme of study covering: "fertility, mortality, migration, employment and socio-economic conditions" across different communities on the rural–urban spectrum. Not limited to demographic information alone, Raja proposed documenting geographical distribution of "intelligence among the people, particularly the children" as well as incidence of "defects and disorders known to be heritable". Such surveys and comparative studies were expected to yield baseline data without which "it will be difficult to ascertain, through later investigation, in what direction the country is tending to develop in these matters of vital importance".<sup>11</sup>

### Poor Communities and Self-help (1950s–1970s)

Tatas' philanthropy for more familiar forms of community development began in the 1950s. Its roots, though, lay in Tatas' earlier efforts at founding their company town of Jamshedpur (steel township, named after Jamsetji Tata), from the 1910s. Equipped with modern physical and social infrastructure "done upon the most modern lines" (Harris, 1925, p. 210), Jamshedpur "seemed a model for all great industrial enterprises, not only in India, but in any part of the world where land is easily obtained" (Fraser 1911 cited from Mukherjee, 2008, pp. 61–62). In 1916, the Tatas invited Fabian social scientists from the London School of Economics: L. T. Hobhouse, E. J. Urwick, S. J. Webb and his wife B. Webb to develop a new programme to "benchmark the

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Frank W. Notestein to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur dated 5 August 1955; file no. 187/DTT/PHIL/IIPS/MIS/1, TCA.

<sup>10</sup> From a note written by K. C. K. E. Raja with the Subject line: 'Certain suggestions for the preparation of teaching and research programmes for the Demographic Centre'; from File no. 187/DTT/PHIL/IIPS/MIS/1, TCA.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

development of the town and conditions for work against the highest possible standards” (Mukherjee, 2008, p. 62). Tatas’ efforts at imagining Jamshedpur into “a modern industrial town” (Harris, 1925, p. 211) were largely successful. Visiting it nearly three decades later, Elwin (1958) noted intermingling of races, castes, and religions, instead of segregation. He added:

the working men and women, especially away from their homes, are no longer conscious of caste differences (...) In the Company’s own canteens in the early days, there were separate kitchens for Hindus and Muslims. But many years ago it was decided (...) to abolish them (...) everyone looks for a golden life of happiness and opportunity in the iron town of Jamshedpur (*Ibid.*: 103).

Building on their earlier efforts to modernizing community in Jamshedpur, the Tatas turned their attention to funding similar such programmes for rural masses in the country in 1950s. The imperative for which came from an earlier strategic planning exercise commissioned by SDTT in 1944. The plan commended the trustees for their far-sightedness in rejecting ad hoc and individual appeals for charity. It proposed that the Tata Trusts focus on founding: an urban and rural demonstration centre in public health education; training of public health workers through teaching, curricular reform on public health, and scholarships; adult education; child guidance clinic; research on medical and industrial problems; and distress relief.<sup>12</sup>

The plan’s recommendations led to the founding of a Rural Welfare Board (henceforth RWB) in 1953. Primarily designed to be a demonstration project in “comprehensive rural welfare and development”, the Board piloted programmes in Devapur in Satara, Mithapur in Saurashtra, and Mulshi—the latter two being sites of Tata companies. RWB’s work philosophy was based on *self-help* and a denunciation of all political dogma.<sup>13</sup> Imagined as a series of techno-managerial interventions devoid of politics and ideology, RWB focussed *inter alia* on soil conservation, soil moisture retention, tree plantation, water conservation and supply, and establishment of multi-purpose co-operative societies. That it left pre-existing social and cultural hierarchies intact can be gauged from RWB’s programmatic interventions when it came to questions of caste where it limited itself to techno-managerial interventions such as mechanization

to alleviate drudgery, provision of additional subsidies for housing, and building portable trench-latrines, etc. However, challenging physical segregation of neighbourhoods based on caste, or helping diversifying ‘traditional’ occupations pre-determined and dictated by caste-based rules of hierarchy, purity, and pollution, or even social mobilization and organization of the oppressed castes did not form any part of RWB’s interventions.<sup>14</sup> An outcome report, three decades later, noted the modernization (albeit limited to social and physical infrastructure) sweeping across Devapur had made it “way ahead on the road to progress. It [was] an oasis in the famine tract of Maharashtra”.<sup>15</sup>

More instructive than the outcomes of RWB’s interventions for our purposes, though, were the underlying imaginary of community. RWB’s projects at Devapur were organized around the principles of co-operation and self-help, especially the latter. To foster a community-based ethic of self-help, where RWB encouraged

active and conscious participation of the local population, in the various economic, social and welfare activities undertaken to improve the conditions and quality of their living (...) It is essential to mould the attitude and outlook of the villagers for this purpose and this is an arduous (sic) long term process.<sup>16</sup>

Although clearly an exemplar, Tatas’ sought to replicate RWB’s approach to modernization elsewhere.

Following drought and famine in Bihar in 1966–1967, the Tata Relief Committee (established and sponsored by the Tata Trusts; henceforth TRC) conducted relief work in the state. It established village-level communities to “arouse the co-operative team spirit and for taking up cleanliness drives in the villages”. As a result of its efforts, the poor village communities were able to

adopt self-help measures for an all-round uplift of the villages. This, it was intended, would reorient the villagers’ psychology and also place the village economy on a sound basis by raising their standard of living to a dignified level.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Preliminary Report for the Trustees of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust Suggesting Methods of Utilising the Present Income of the Trust and the Broad Lines of Future Engagement. File no. 198/DTT/PHIL/ TISS/FP/4, TCA.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Devapur Project: Achievements of a quiet, persistent effort by Tatas for the development of a drought prone area (1952–1984)’, File no. 185/DTT/PHIL/RWB/BO/1963/1, TCA.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Y. S. Pandit, *A Survey of Devapur*, 1986. Tata Rural Welfare Board. File no. 185A/DTT/RWB/1986, TCA.

<sup>16</sup> Y. S. Pandit, *A Survey of Devapur*, 1986. Tata Rural Welfare Board. File no. 185A/DTT/RWB/1986, TCA.

<sup>17</sup> Work undertaken by TRC after drought and subsequent famine in Bihar, 1967. File no. 183/DTT/PHIL/TRC/BIHAR/1967/1-3, TCA.



## Community of Market-Ready Individual Citizens (1990s–Present)

With the onset of neoliberal globalization, the Tata Trusts' philanthropy grew in scale and scope. They also moved away from endowing research and training institutions and founding subsidiary nongovernmental organizations to adopting a partnership-based approach to their philanthropy.

Noting the dangers posed by neoliberal globalization, especially to marginalized farmers, low-skilled workers, artisans, and weavers across the country, the Tata Trusts intensified their techno-managerial approach to development. Focussing less on collectivization within communities but on individual members of the community: running programmes for expansion of credit provision, capacity building of self-help groups, conducting experiments for improving agricultural practice, promoting non-farm livelihoods in rural areas, developing innovative marketing strategies, and vocational training.<sup>18</sup> For example, in mid-1990s, SRTT launched its Public Initiatives theme to “enable women and men to attempt to respond to the needs of the changing society through individual endeavour”.<sup>19</sup>

Alongside the individualization of development, Tata Trusts also began investing in individual-centric skill-building to produce market-ready citizens. Several of its ‘public’ programmes were re-orientated towards employability and livelihoods. Following a strategic review and planning for the period 2012–2017, SRTT's Arts and Culture Initiative, for example, began to focus on: (a) sustaining livelihoods in performing arts; (b) crafts-based livelihood initiatives; and (c) community media and livelihood. Similarly, its Civil Society and Governance Initiative was strategically re-configured towards “enhancing the quality of life of youth, particularly from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds, by investing in their capacity building to access meaningful livelihoods, thereby augmenting incomes”.<sup>20</sup> Such strategic re-orientation prioritized investment in building individual capacities, over those targeting communities and collectives. Equally, they emphasized the potential economic contributions and returns from individuals' integration with the market *as* development, over more challenging developmental responses such as those relating to structural causes of poverty and inequality. It worked, therefore, to reconstitute development and poverty into the problem of individual deficits, capacity building and responsibility (Brown, 2005).

Here, the competitive neoliberal world is naturalized: as something that is irreversible, but also the now-forever changed reality, which needs to be negotiated through the acquisition of newer skills and networks at the level of the individual. The language of development is further de-politicized as it embraces managerialism: building competences, teaching people to manage their assets, developing innovative systems to help the poor cope, such as marketing strategies. This focus on developing linkages between the poor and the markets is also repeated in a number of different livelihood sectors. For example, SDTT supported “the creation of environment conducive for the rural poor to develop linkages with the private market for sale of products as well as for buying affordable technologies”.<sup>21</sup>

## Development's New Moral Order: A Discussion

Drawing on the periodization of community's imaginaries presented above, in this section I explain the shifts in it.

As part of development, Tatas' philanthropy sought to attain modernization, which involved the production of a new kind of moral order in society (Taylor, 2004). This required, first and foremost, dismantling of the pre-existing social order, organized largely along kinship lines and which involved philanthropy as tributes to the contemporary governing regime (Haynes, 1987). Abandoning kinship-based charity favoured by his father, Nusserwanji, Jamsetji Tata sought to move away from promoting such narrow sectional interests. However, the abandonment of earlier forms of kinship-based charity faced formidable resistance from within the kinship-based community.

Expectedly so, Tata's unrestricted “constructive philanthropy” was not always appreciated within their own Parsi community. In 1900, for example, there was considerable opposition to Tata's proposal to locate the IISc outside Bombay. In response, Tata promised to establish the Institute in Bombay provided the Municipal Commission contributed Rs. 100,000 to supplement his additional endowment of Rs. 50,000 each year for the next ten years. The Parsi elite in Bombay rejected the proposal, since it wanted to draw exclusive benefits from Tata's liberality and not have to share it with members from any other communities.<sup>22</sup> To such opposition from within his Parsi community, Tata noted his preference for

<sup>18</sup> SDTT's Biennial Report, 2000-02. File no. 182/SDTT/2000-02, TCA.

<sup>19</sup> Annual Report, SRTT. 1997-98. File no. 213/SRTT/1997-98, TCA.

<sup>20</sup> SRTT, Annual Report, 2011-12: 10-11.

<sup>21</sup> SDTT, Annual Report, 2002-03; File no. 182/SDTT/2002-03, TCA.

<sup>22</sup> From Jamsetji N. Tata's scheme for a Research Institute in India. File no. L/PJ/6/554, 2150, India Office Records, London.

constructive philanthropy which seeks to educate and develop the faculties of the best of our young men. And if this is to be done, what I ask my-fellow Parsees is: ‘What difference is it to them whether it is exclusively to their benefit or open to all?’ (cited from Lala, 2006, p. 113).

Similarly, in the case of the J. N. Endowment Fund, there were attempts to steer its support more extensively towards Parsis only. As late as 1935, for example, the Fund was approached by the Parsi Panchayat to investigate scope for exclusive scholarships for the higher education of Parsi students overseas. On this, the Fund’s trustees discussed that theirs was a “cosmopolitan trust”. Nevertheless, it decided to award an annual grant of Rs. 10,000 from 1936 onwards on the condition that the Trust will receive the applications directly from Parsi students and make selection autonomously.<sup>23</sup> The shift from a pre-existing social order to a new moral order was justified by the Tatas as part of national advancement. Emplaced as a higher and desirable goal, “national advancement”, or “national development” supplied the legitimacy that made the shift from kinship-based charity to secular philanthropy welcome, even necessary. Notwithstanding Jamsetji N. Tata’s reluctance to support political nationalism openly (Palsetia, 2003), national development did nonetheless provide a new logic that impelled his “constructive philanthropy”.

Initially limited to “just an idea in the minds of some influential thinkers”, the new moral order and modernization needed to be disseminated further before it could gather enough momentum to “shape the social imaginary of large strata” (Taylor, 2004, p. 2). Tatas’ embrace of the *community of gifted* sought to build such an elite cadre of administrators, demographers, engineers, innovators and scientists, who could be entrusted with the task of national development. These new ‘leaders’ were expected both to indigenize the colonial administration, but more importantly, to be trained in preparedness for the future, as and when Indians could govern themselves; whose new institutions would reflect the “spirit of progress or, a synonym, modernity” (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 133). In preparation of which, its elites such as the Tatas funded the development of “the ‘scientific’ understanding of society and history” (*Ibid.*: 144). The “scientific” understanding of society necessitated, first and foremost, new disciplinary knowledges—applied and reform-orientated. Through their endowment for a research chair at LSE, and more concertedly in founding institutions such as TISS and DCTR (later known as IIPS), the Tatas complemented the efforts of the Indian nation-state in

producing the necessary disciplinary knowledge, based on ‘scientific’ methods, to contribute to contemporary efforts in the delivery of social justice (Kumar, 2018).

However, it was not sufficient to attain “national advancement” or build the new moral order without transforming the wider society. Starting from the 1950s, Tatas’ philanthropy committed itself to extending its imaginary to the wider society, which needed “to be disciplined, but with the aim of inducing self-discipline” (Taylor, 2004, p. 44). Through subsidiary institutions such as the RWB, TRC, and later in partnership with other NGOs supported by the Tata Trusts, communities were now imagined (recall Taylor’s “ontic” attribute of imaginary) through self-help and responsibility. Here, individual lives were imagined in their relationship with each other and society. As “self-disciplined, honest, imaginative, entrepreneurial people”, they became the cornerstone of the new moral order, where they were expected to no longer be lazy (Taylor, 2004, p. 150). This individualization of society has intensified under neoliberalism as it became the dominant development theory (Brohman, 1995). There was a growing push towards individualization of citizenship and production of market-ready citizens as community was imagined though economically productive members (Brown, 2005).

Thus far, I have focussed on the shifts in imaginaries of community as part of the production of a new ‘modern’ moral order in society, in the name of India’s development. Although distinct, there were also some similarities which lent coherence to the analytic construct under discussion here, i.e., the community. I would argue that despite the shifts in community imaginaries, they were part of the extension of modern institutions and their principles both “below and beyond” the business elites as well as to other realms of society (Taylor, 2004, p. 147).

However, the dissemination and percolation of the modern, beyond the narrow strata of business and social elites, required its wider legitimacy and acceptance. Despite its exclusions and violence (only some of which are chronicled in the literature review, above), modernization has remained a powerful force in development. How might we explain its appeal? I would argue that the wider acceptance of modernization despite its destructive force rested on individual members of the society developing a new sense of belonging to the *imagined community*, that is, the nation. In a way never quite seen before, it introduced a simultaneity that came to define society as a whole. That is, in the *new imagined nation*, different events simultaneously marked the lives of different people (Anderson, 2006; Taylor, 2004). The simultaneity helped link people hitherto separated by history, geography, and economy; and was cultivated variously through maps, censuses, parades, and monuments.

The Tatas similarly hoped to cultivate simultaneity. From Jamshedpur’s canteens where the workers dined together to

<sup>23</sup> Minutes, 22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Board of Trustees, SDTT, dated 20 September 1935; and related correspondence with C. Manshardt. File no. 178/DTT/DJT/PERS/PROP/LEG/WILLS/BO/OPT-1, TCA.

self-help collectives of the poor learning and practising scientific agriculture, Tatas' imagined communities where there was a strong "horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 2006, p. 7) among its members. Despite the lack of mutual familiarity among the members of the nation, it ensured that "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (*Ibid.*: 6).

That the sameness was restricted and that there was no attempt at establishing sameness when it came to questions of caste, gender, and class-based relationships within the community (as is evident from Tatas' philanthropy) was justifiable as long as the larger national interest was being served (Kumar, 2021; Taylor, 2004). National advancement, nation-building, or national development—we can call it by any of its several names—the nation's modernization provided the ultimate reason for the large scale but selective transformation of Indian society (even as it left the realms of caste, family, religion, etc. intact). It functioned, discursively, ideologically, and materially, as a desirable objective worth pursuing. From loosening the hold of kinship-based order and replacing it with newly trained administrators, scientists, social scientists, technicians, etc., new communities were imagined and deemed necessary because they were crucial for national advancement. "Traditional" communities were modernized in the name of development and irrespective of its fallouts deemed necessary as long as it was in the nation's interest. Notwithstanding the internal contradictions and exclusions, the nation, thus, provided the power that drove the myth of progress or development.

## Contributions

In this article, I have outlined how modernization—in the name of development—is sustained, despite its exclusions and now familiar criticisms. Using business elites' philanthropy from late nineteenth century to the present, I outline how "modernizing elite" (Bernstein, 1971, p. 145)—to his list of politicians, bureaucrats, intellectuals, and military leaders, we should add business elites—have played a leading role in the production of a new moral order which necessitated shifts in the social imaginaries of community. Common to the shifts in the imaginaries of community were ideas of sameness and simultaneity (Anderson, 2006; Taylor, 2004). This is the article's central contribution.

The article makes two further contributions.

The Tatas are widely considered as exemplars in the field of business ethics, including here in *JBE*. For example, some scholars have commended its founder, Jamsetji N. Tata as an early exemplar of stakeholder welfare (Sivakumar, 2008); while others have acknowledged the integration of Gandhian trusteeship at individual, organizational, and institutional levels within the Tata Group (Balakrishnan et al., 2017).

Still others have noted how ethical codes and decision-making guidelines enable an ethical culture at Tata Steel, one of its more prominent companies, and more widely within the Group (Elankumaran et al., 2005). Problematising such scholarship, I call attention to the predominance of elites' imaginaries over that of others. As scholars of business ethics engage more substantively with the global challenge of inequalities (Beal & Astakhova, 2017; Rauf & Prasad, 2020), it is imperative that we identify, challenge, and move past such elite and elitist formulations of ethics and sites where they are practised. This becomes all the more important given the significance of community as a prominent site of business ethics. Extant scholarship, for example, has paid considerable attention to the role of businesses in community development—from strategies for community engagement (Bowen et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2013), its effectiveness, and contingent factors (Brammer & Millington, 2003). However, relatively little attention has been paid to what or who constitutes a community (Kapelus, 2002; Littlewood, 2014 are notable exceptions). The article's second contribution, therefore, is in bringing into relief how business elites have imagined and reified conceptions of community, historically. That is, even though much of the field of business ethics continues to imagine 'community' as if outside or different from the businesses themselves, I have argued that through their philanthropy, business elites' have periodically sought to reimagine community, with very limited input or engagement with the members of the community itself.

Notwithstanding the increasingly global nature of businesses, internationally, the nation has remained an influential force that has shaped Tatas' philanthropy and in turn its ethics (Kumar, 2021; Worden, 2003; also see Saifer, 2020 for a similar acknowledgement from the Canadian context). Taking an historical approach, the article's third contribution is that even though the community's imaginaries shifted over time, these shifts were deemed desirable, even necessary, because they were in the wider national interests. In doing so, business elites such as the Tatas continued their pursuit of selective sameness and simultaneity in pursuit of modernization—all the while remaining silent on its limits and exclusions, most notably on the question of caste and gender, for example. Even when ethical concerns warranted otherwise, modernization continued apace as long as it was in the national interest. The article's third contribution is in calling attention to the problematization of the national question.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The author worked as a part-time Consultant with the Sir Ratan Tata Trust between 2008 and 2012.

**Research Involving Human and Animal Rights** The research presented in this paper did not involve any human participants or animals.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was not needed as research is based on archival material only. Necessary permissions for researching archival sources were secured from the relevant archivist.

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