

Capitalism: A Ghost Story

By [Arundhati Roy](#)

Global Research, March 22, 2012

[Outlook India](#) 21 March 2012


Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

Rockefeller to Mandela, Vedanta to Anna Hazare.... How long can the cardinals of corporate gospel buy up our protests?

The corporate or Foundation-endowed NGOs are global finance's way of buying into resistance movements, literally like shareholders buy shares in companies, and then try to control them from within. They sit like nodes on the central nervous system, the pathways along which global finance flows.

Is it a house or a home? A temple to the new India, or a warehouse for its ghosts? Ever since Antilla arrived on Altamont Road in Mumbai, exuding mystery and quiet menace, things have not been the same. "Here we are," the friend who took me there said, "Pay your respects to our new Ruler."

Antilla belongs to India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani. I had read about this most expensive dwelling ever built, the twenty-seven floors, three helipads, nine lifts, hanging gardens, ballrooms, weather rooms, gymnasiums, six floors of parking, and the six hundred servants. Nothing had prepared me for the vertical lawn—a soaring, 27-storey-high wall of grass attached to a vast metal grid. The grass was dry in patches; bits had fallen off in neat rectangles. Clearly, Trickle-down hadn't worked. 

But Gush-Up certainly has. That's why in a nation of 1.2 billion, India's 100 richest people own assets equivalent to one-fourth of the GDP.

The word on the street (and in the *New York Times*) is, or at least was, that after all that effort and gardening, the Ambanis don't live in Antilla. No one knows for sure. People still whisper about ghosts and bad luck, Vaastu and Feng Shui. Maybe it's all Karl Marx's fault. (All that cussing.) Capitalism, he said, "has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, that it is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells".

In India, the 300 million of us who belong to the new, post-IMF "reforms" middle class—the market—live side by side with spirits of the nether world, the poltergeists of dead rivers, dry wells, bald mountains and denuded forests; the ghosts of 250,000 debt-ridden farmers who have killed themselves, and of the 800 million who have been impoverished and dispossessed to make way for us. And who survive on less than twenty rupees a day.

Mukesh Ambani is personally worth \$20 billion. He holds a majority controlling share in Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), a company with a market capitalisation of \$47 billion and global business interests that include petrochemicals, oil, natural gas, polyester fibre,

Special Economic Zones, fresh food retail, high schools, life sciences research and stem cell storage services. RIL recently bought 95 per cent shares in Infotel, a TV consortium that controls 27 TV news and entertainment channels, including CNN-IBN, IBN Live, CNBC, IBN Lokmat, and ETV in almost every regional language. Infotel owns the only nationwide licence for 4G Broadband, a high-speed “information pipeline” which, if the technology works, could be the future of information exchange. Mr Ambani also owns a cricket team.

RIL is one of a handful of corporations that run India. Some of the others are the Tatas, Jindals, Vedanta, Mittals, Infosys, Essar and the other Reliance (ADAG), owned by Mukesh’s brother Anil. Their race for growth has spilled across Europe, Central Asia, Africa and Latin America. Their nets are cast wide; they are visible and invisible, over-ground as well as underground. The Tatas, for example, run more than 100 companies in 80 countries. They are one of India’s oldest and largest private sector power companies. They own mines, gas fields, steel plants, telephone, cable TV and broadband networks, and run whole townships. They manufacture cars and trucks, own the Taj Hotel chain, Jaguar, Land Rover, Daewoo, Tetley Tea, a publishing company, a chain of bookstores, a major brand of iodised salt and the cosmetics giant Lakme. Their advertising tagline could easily be: You Can’t Live Without Us.

According to the rules of the Gush-Up Gospel, the more you have, the more you can have.

The era of the Privatisation of Everything has made the Indian economy one of the fastest growing in the world. However, like any good old-fashioned colony, one of its main exports is its minerals. India’s new mega-corporations—Tatas, Jindals, Essar, Reliance, Sterlite—are those who have managed to muscle their way to the head of the spigot that is spewing money extracted from deep inside the earth. It’s a dream come true for businessmen—to be able to sell what they don’t have to buy.

The other major source of corporate wealth comes from their land-banks. All over the world, weak, corrupt local governments have helped Wall Street brokers, agro-business corporations and Chinese billionaires to amass huge tracts of land. (Of course, this entails commandeering water too.) In India, the land of millions of people is being acquired and made over to private corporations for “public interest”—for Special Economic Zones, infrastructure projects, dams, highways, car manufacture, chemical hubs and Formula One racing. (The sanctity of private property never applies to the poor.) As always, local people are promised that their displacement from their land and the expropriation of everything they ever had is actually part of employment generation. But by now we know that the connection between GDP growth and jobs is a myth. After 20 years of “growth”, 60 per cent of India’s workforce is self-employed, 90 per cent of India’s labour force works in the unorganised sector.

Post-Independence, right up to the ‘80s, people’s movements, ranging from the Naxalites to Jayaprakash Narayan’s Sampurna Kranti, were fighting for land reforms, for the redistribution of land from feudal landlords to landless peasants. Today any talk of redistribution of land or wealth would be considered not just undemocratic, but lunatic. Even the most militant movements have been reduced to a fight to hold on to what little land people still have. The millions of landless people, the majority of them Dalits and adivasis, driven from their villages, living in slums and shanty colonies in small towns and mega cities, do not figure even in the radical discourse.

As Gush-Up concentrates wealth on to the tip of a shining pin on which our billionaires

pirouette, tidal waves of money crash through the institutions of democracy—the courts, Parliament as well as the media, seriously compromising their ability to function in the ways they are meant to. The noisier the carnival around elections, the less sure we are that democracy really exists.

Each new corruption scandal that surfaces in India makes the last one look tame. In the summer of 2011, the 2G spectrum scandal broke. We learnt that corporations had siphoned away \$40 billion of public money by installing a friendly soul as the Union minister of telecommunication who grossly underpriced the licences for 2G telecom spectrum and illegally parcelled it out to his buddies. The taped telephone conversations leaked to the press showed how a network of industrialists and their front companies, ministers, senior journalists and a TV anchor were involved in facilitating this daylight robbery. The tapes were just an MRI that confirmed a diagnosis that people had made long ago.

The privatisation and illegal sale of telecom spectrum does not involve war, displacement and ecological devastation. The privatisation of India's mountains, rivers and forests does. Perhaps because it does not have the uncomplicated clarity of a straightforward, out-and-out accounting scandal, or perhaps because it is all being done in the name of India's "progress", it does not have the same resonance with the middle classes.

In 2005, the state governments of Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Jharkhand signed hundreds of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with a number of private corporations turning over trillions of dollars of bauxite, iron ore and other minerals for a pittance, defying even the warped logic of the free market. (Royalties to the government ranged between 0.5 per cent and 7 per cent.)

Only days after the Chhattisgarh government signed an MoU for the construction of an integrated steel plant in Bastar with Tata Steel, the Salwa Judum, a vigilante militia, was inaugurated. The government said it was a spontaneous uprising of local people who were fed up of the "repression" by Maoist guerrillas in the forest. It turned out to be a ground-clearing operation, funded and armed by the government and subsidised by mining corporations. In the other states, similar militias were created, with other names. The prime minister announced the Maoists were the "single-largest security challenge in India". It was a declaration of war.

On January 2, 2006, in Kalinganagar, in the neighbouring state of Orissa, perhaps to signal the seriousness of the government's intention, ten platoons of police arrived at the site of another Tata Steel plant and opened fire on villagers who had gathered there to protest what they felt was inadequate compensation for their land. Thirteen people, including one policeman, were killed, and 37 injured. Six years have gone by and though the villages remain under siege by armed policemen, the protest has not died.

Meanwhile in Chhattisgarh, the Salwa Judum burned, raped and murdered its way through hundreds of forest villages, evacuating 600 villages, forcing 50,000 people to come out into police camps and 3,50,000 people to flee. The chief minister announced that those who did not come out of the forests would be considered to be 'Maoist terrorists'. In this way, in parts of modern India, ploughing fields and sowing seed came to be defined as terrorist activity. Eventually, the Salwa Judum's atrocities only succeeded in strengthening the resistance and swelling the ranks of the Maoist guerrilla army. In 2009, the government announced what it called Operation Green Hunt. Two lakh paramilitary troops were deployed across Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

After three years of “low-intensity conflict” that has not managed to “flush” the rebels out of the forest, the central government has declared that it will deploy the Indian army and air force. In India, we don’t call this war. We call it “creating a good investment climate”. Thousands of soldiers have already moved in. A brigade headquarters and air bases are being readied. One of the biggest armies in the world is now preparing its Terms of Engagement to “defend” itself against the poorest, hungriest, most malnourished people in the world. We only await the declaration of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which will give the army legal immunity and the right to kill “on suspicion”. Going by the tens of thousands of unmarked graves and anonymous cremation pyres in Kashmir, Manipur and Nagaland, it has shown itself to be a very suspicious army indeed.

While the preparations for deployment are being made, the jungles of Central India continue to remain under siege, with villagers frightened to come out, or go to the market for food or medicine. Hundreds of people have been jailed, charged for being Maoists under draconian, undemocratic laws. Prisons are crowded with adivasi people, many of whom have no idea what their crime is. Recently, Soni Sori, an adivasi school-teacher from Bastar, was arrested and tortured in police custody. Stones were pushed up her vagina to get her to “confess” that she was a Maoist courier. The stones were removed from her body at a hospital in Calcutta, where, after a public outcry, she was sent for a medical check-up. At a recent Supreme Court hearing, activists presented the judges with the stones in a plastic bag. The only outcome of their efforts has been that Soni Sori remains in jail while Ankit Garg, the Superintendent of Police who conducted the interrogation, was conferred with the President’s Police Medal for Gallantry on Republic Day.

We hear about the ecological and social re-engineering of Central India only because of the mass insurrection and the war. The government gives out no information. The Memorandums of Understanding are all secret. Some sections of the media have done what they could to bring public attention to what is happening in Central India. However, most of the Indian mass media is made vulnerable by the fact that the major share of its revenues come from corporate advertisements. If that is not bad enough, now the line between the media and big business has begun to blur dangerously. As we have seen, RIL virtually owns 27 TV channels. But the reverse is also true. Some media houses now have direct business and corporate interests. For example, one of the major daily newspapers in the region—*Dainik Bhaskar* (and it is only one example)—has 17.5 million readers in four languages, including English and Hindi, across 13 states. It also owns 69 companies with interests in mining, power generation, real estate and textiles. A recent writ petition filed in the Chhattisgarh High Court accuses DB Power Ltd (one of the group’s companies) of using “deliberate, illegal and manipulative measures” through company-owned newspapers to influence the outcome of a public hearing over an open cast coal mine. Whether or not it has attempted to influence the outcome is not germane. The point is that media houses are in a position to do so. They have the power to do so. The laws of the land allow them to be in a position that lends itself to a serious conflict of interest.

There are other parts of the country from which no news comes. In the sparsely populated but militarised northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, 168 big dams are being constructed, most of them privately owned. High dams that will submerge whole districts are being constructed in Manipur and Kashmir, both highly militarised states where people can be killed merely for protesting power cuts. (That happened a few weeks ago in Kashmir.) How can they stop a dam?

The most delusional dam of all is Kalpasar in Gujarat. It is being planned as a 34-km-long

dam across the Gulf of Khambhat with a 10-lane highway and a railway line running on top of it. By keeping the sea water out, the idea is to create a sweet water reservoir of Gujarat's rivers. (Never mind that these rivers have already been dammed to a trickle and poisoned with chemical effluent.) The Kalpasar dam, which would raise the sea level and alter the ecology of hundreds of kilometres of coastline, had been dismissed as a bad idea 10 years ago. It has made a sudden comeback in order to supply water to the Dholera Special Investment Region (SIR) in one of the most water-stressed zones not just in India, but in the world. SIR is another name for an SEZ, a self-governed corporate dystopia of "industrial parks, townships and mega-cities". The Dholera SIR is going to be connected to Gujarat's other cities by a network of 10-lane highways. Where will the money for all this come from?

In January 2011, in the Mahatma (Gandhi) Mandir, Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi presided over a meeting of 10,000 international businessmen from 100 countries. According to media reports, they pledged to invest \$450 billion in Gujarat. The meeting was scheduled to take place at the onset of the 10th anniversary year of the massacre of 2,000 Muslims in February-March 2002. Modi stands accused of not just condoning, but actively abetting, the killing. People who watched their loved ones being raped, eviscerated and burned alive, the tens of thousands who were driven from their homes, still wait for a gesture towards justice. But Modi has traded in his saffron scarf and vermilion forehead for a sharp business suit, and hopes that a 450-billion-dollar investment will work as blood money, and square the books. Perhaps it will. Big Business is backing him enthusiastically. The algebra of infinite justice works in mysterious ways.

The Dholera SIR is only one of the smaller Matryoshka dolls, one of the inner ones in the dystopia that is being planned. It will be connected to the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), a 1,500-km-long and 300-km-wide industrial corridor, with nine mega-industrial zones, a high-speed freight line, three seaports and six airports, a six-lane intersection-free expressway and a 4,000 MW power plant. The DMIC is a collaborative venture between the governments of India and Japan, and their respective corporate partners, and has been proposed by the McKinsey Global Institute.

The DMIC website says that approximately 180 million people will be "affected" by the project. Exactly how, it doesn't say. It envisages the building of several new cities and estimates that the population in the region will grow from the current 231 million to 314 million by 2019. That's in seven years' time. When was the last time a state, despot or dictator carried out a population transfer of millions of people? Can it possibly be a peaceful process?

The Indian army might need to go on a recruitment drive so that it's not taken unawares when it's ordered to deploy all over India. In preparation for its role in Central India, it publicly released its updated doctrine on Military Psychological Operations, which outlines "a planned process of conveying a message to a select target audience, to promote particular themes that result in desired attitudes and behaviour, which affect the achievement of political and military objectives of the country". This process of "perception management", it said, would be conducted by "using media available to the services".

The army is experienced enough to know that coercive force alone cannot carry out or manage social engineering on the scale that is envisaged by India's planners. War against the poor is one thing. But for the rest of us—the middle class, white-collar workers, intellectuals, "opinion-makers"—it has to be "perception management". And for this we must turn our attention to the exquisite art of Corporate Philanthropy.

Of late, the main mining conglomerates have embraced the Arts—film, art installations and the rush of literary festivals that have replaced the '90s obsession with beauty contests. Vedanta, currently mining the heart out of the homelands of the ancient Dongria Kondh tribe for bauxite, is sponsoring a 'Creating Happiness' film competition for young film students whom they have commissioned to make films on sustainable development. Vedanta's tagline is 'Mining Happiness'. The Jindal Group brings out a contemporary art magazine and supports some of India's major artists (who naturally work with stainless steel).

Essar was the principal sponsor of the Tehelka Newsweek *Think* Fest that promised "high-octane debates" by the foremost thinkers from around the world, which included major writers, activists and even the architect Frank Gehry. (All this in Goa, where activists and journalists were uncovering massive illegal mining scandals, and Essar's part in the war unfolding in Bastar was emerging.) Tata Steel and Rio Tinto (which has a sordid track record of its own) were among the chief sponsors of the Jaipur Literary Festival (Latin name: Darshan Singh Construction Jaipur Literary Festival) that is advertised by the cognoscenti as 'The Greatest Literary Show on Earth'. Counselage, the Tatas' "strategic brand manager", sponsored the festival's press tent. Many of the world's best and brightest writers gathered in Jaipur to discuss love, literature, politics and Sufi poetry. Some tried to defend Salman Rushdie's right to free speech by reading from his proscribed book, *The Satanic Verses*. In every TV frame and newspaper photograph, the logo of Tata Steel (and its tagline—Values Stronger than Steel) loomed behind them, a benign, benevolent host. The enemies of Free Speech were the supposedly murderous Muslim mobs, who, the festival organisers told us, could have even harmed the school-children gathered there. (We are witness to how helpless the Indian government and the police can be when it comes to Muslims.)

Yes, the hardline Darul-Uloom Deobandi Islamic seminary did protest Rushdie being invited to the festival. Yes, some Islamists did gather at the festival venue to protest and yes, outrageously, the state government did nothing to protect the venue. That's because the whole episode had as much to do with democracy, votebanks and the Uttar Pradesh elections as it did with Islamist fundamentalism. But the battle for Free Speech against Islamist Fundamentalism made it to the world's newspapers. It is important that it did. But there were hardly any reports about the festival sponsors' role in the war in the forests, the bodies piling up, the prisons filling up. Or about the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act, which make even *thinking* an anti-government thought a cognisable offence.

Or about the mandatory public hearing for the Tata Steel plant in Lohandiguda which local people complained actually took place hundreds of miles away in Jagdalpur, in the collector's office compound, with a hired audience of fifty people, under armed guard. Where was Free Speech then? No one mentioned Kalinganagar. No one mentioned that journalists, academics and filmmakers working on subjects unpopular with the Indian government—like the surreptitious part it played in the genocide of Tamils in the war in Sri Lanka or the recently discovered unmarked graves in Kashmir—were being denied visas or deported straight from the airport.

But which of us sinners was going to cast the first stone? Not me, who lives off royalties from corporate publishing houses. We all watch Tata Sky, we surf the net with Tata Photon, we ride in Tata taxis, we stay in Tata Hotels, we sip our Tata tea in Tata bone china and stir it with teaspoons made of Tata Steel. We buy Tata books in Tata bookshops. *Hum Tata ka namak khate hain*. We're under siege.

If the sledgehammer of moral purity is to be the criterion for stone-throwing, then the only people who qualify are those who have been silenced already. Those who live outside the system; the outlaws in the forests or those whose protests are never covered by the press, or the well-behaved dispossessed, who go from tribunal to tribunal, bearing witness, giving testimony.

But the Litfest gave us our Aha! Moment. Oprah came. She said she *loved* India, that she would come *again* and *again*. It made us proud.

This is only the burlesque end of the Exquisite Art.

Though the Tatas have been involved with corporate philanthropy for almost a hundred years now, endowing scholarships and running some excellent educational institutes and hospitals, Indian corporations have only recently been invited into the Star Chamber, the *Camera stellata*, the brightly lit world of global corporate government, deadly for its adversaries, but otherwise so artful that you barely know it's there.

What follows in this essay might appear to some to be a somewhat harsh critique. On the other hand, in the tradition of honouring one's adversaries, it could be read as an acknowledgement of the vision, flexibility, the sophistication and unwavering determination of those who have dedicated their lives to keep the world safe for capitalism.

Their enthralling history, which has faded from contemporary memory, began in the US in the early 20th century when, kitted out legally in the form of endowed foundations, corporate philanthropy began to replace missionary activity as Capitalism's (and Imperialism's) road opening and systems maintenance patrol. Among the first foundations to be set up in the United States were the Carnegie Corporation, endowed in 1911 by profits from the Carnegie Steel Company; and the Rockefeller Foundation, endowed in 1914 by J.D. Rockefeller, founder of *Standard Oil Company*. The Tatas and Ambanis of their time.

Some of the institutions financed, given seed money or supported by the Rockefeller Foundation are the UN, the CIA, the Council on Foreign Relations, New York's most fabulous Museum of Modern Art, and, of course, the Rockefeller Center in New York (where Diego Riviera's mural had to be blasted off the wall because it mischievously depicted reprobate capitalists and a valiant Lenin. Free Speech had taken the day off.)

J.D. Rockefeller was America's first billionaire and the world's richest man. He was an abolitionist, a supporter of Abraham Lincoln and a teetotaler. He believed his money was given to him by God, which must have been nice for him.

Here's an excerpt from one of Pablo Neruda's early poems called *Standard Oil Company*:

Their obese emperors from New York
are suave smiling assassins
who buy silk, nylon, cigars
petty tyrants and dictators.

They buy countries, people, seas, police, county councils,
distant regions where the poor hoard their corn
like misers their gold:
Standard Oil awakens them,
clothes them in uniforms, designates
which brother is the enemy.

the Paraguayan fights its war,
and the Bolivian wastes away
in the jungle with its machine gun.

A President assassinated for a drop of petroleum,
a million-acre mortgage,
a swift execution on a morning mortal with light, petrified,
a new prison camp for subversives,
in Patagonia, a betrayal, scattered shots
beneath a petroliferous moon,
a subtle change of ministers
in the capital, a whisper
like an oil tide,
and zap, you'll see
how Standard Oil's letters shine above the clouds,
above the seas, in your home,
illuminating their dominions.

When corporate-endowed foundations first made their appearance in the US, there was a fierce debate about their provenance, legality and lack of accountability. People suggested that if companies had so much surplus money, they should raise the wages of their workers. (People made these outrageous suggestions in those days, even in America.) The idea of these foundations, so ordinary now, was in fact a leap of the business imagination. Non-tax-paying legal entities with massive resources and an almost unlimited brief—wholly unaccountable, wholly non-transparent—what better way to parlay economic wealth into political, social and cultural capital, to turn money into power? What better way for usurers to use a minuscule percentage of their profits to run the world? How else would Bill Gates, who admittedly knows a thing or two about computers, find himself designing education, health and agriculture policies, not just for the US government, but for governments all over the world?

Over the years, as people witnessed some of the genuinely good the foundations did (running public libraries, eradicating diseases)—the direct connection between corporations and the foundations they endowed began to blur. Eventually, it faded altogether. Now even those who consider themselves left-wing are not shy to accept their largesse.

By the 1920s, US capitalism had begun to look outwards, for raw materials and overseas markets. Foundations began to formulate the idea of global corporate governance. In 1924, the Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations jointly created what is today the most powerful foreign policy pressure group in the world—the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), which later came to be funded by the Ford Foundation as well. By 1947, the newly created CIA was supported by and working closely with the CFR. Over the years, the CFR's membership has included 22 US secretaries of state. There were five CFR members in the 1943 steering committee that planned the UN, and an \$8.5 million grant from J.D. Rockefeller bought the land on which the UN's New York headquarters stands.

All eleven of the World Bank's presidents since 1946—men who have presented themselves as missionaries of the poor—have been members of the CFR. (The exception was George Woods. And he was a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation and vice-president of Chase-Manhattan Bank.)

At Bretton Woods, the World Bank and IMF decided that the US dollar should be the reserve currency of the world, and that in order to enhance the penetration of global capital, it

would be necessary to universalise and standardise business practices in an open marketplace. It is towards that end that they spend a large amount of money promoting Good Governance (as long as they control the strings), the concept of the Rule of Law (provided they have a say in making the laws) and hundreds of anti-corruption programmes (to streamline the system they have put in place.) Two of the most opaque, unaccountable organisations in the world go about demanding transparency and accountability from the governments of poorer countries.

Given that the World Bank has more or less directed the economic policies of the Third World, coercing and cracking open the markets of country after country for global finance, you could say that corporate philanthropy has turned out to be the most visionary business of all time.

Corporate-endowed foundations administer, trade and channelise their power and place their chessmen on the chessboard, through a system of elite clubs and think-tanks, whose members overlap and move in and out through the revolving doors. Contrary to the various conspiracy theories in circulation, particularly among left-wing groups, there is nothing secret, satanic, or Freemason-like about this arrangement. It is not very different from the way corporations use shell companies and offshore accounts to transfer and administer their money—except that the currency is power, not money.

The transnational equivalent of the CFR is the Trilateral Commission, set up in 1973 by David Rockefeller, the former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski (founder-member of the Afghan Mujahideen, forefathers of the Taliban), the Chase-Manhattan Bank and some other private eminences. Its purpose was to create an enduring bond of friendship and cooperation between the elites of North America, Europe and Japan. It has now become a penta-lateral commission, because it includes members from China and India. (Tarun Das of the CII; N.R. Narayanamurthy, ex-CEO, Infosys; Jamsheyd N. Godrej, managing director, Godrej; Jamshed J. Irani, director, Tata Sons; and Gautam Thapar, CEO, Avantha Group).

The Aspen Institute is an international club of local elites, businessmen, bureaucrats, politicians, with franchises in several countries. Tarun Das is the president of the Aspen Institute, India. Gautam Thapar is chairman. Several senior officers of the McKinsey Global Institute (proposer of the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor) are members of the CFR, the Trilateral Commission and the Aspen Institute.

The Ford Foundation (liberal foil to the more conservative Rockefeller Foundation, though the two work together constantly) was set up in 1936. Though it is often underplayed, the Ford Foundation has a very clear, well-defined ideology and works extremely closely with the US state department. Its project of deepening democracy and “good governance” are very much part of the Bretton Woods scheme of standardising business practice and promoting efficiency in the free market. After the Second World War, when Communists replaced Fascists as the US government’s enemy number one, new kinds of institutions were needed to deal with the Cold War. Ford funded RAND (Research and Development Corporation), a military think-tank that began with weapons research for the US defense services. In 1952, to thwart “the persistent Communist effort to penetrate and disrupt free nations”, it established the Fund for the Republic, which then morphed into the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions whose brief was to wage the cold war intelligently without McCarthyite excesses. It is through this lens that we need to view the work Ford Foundation is doing, with the millions of dollars it has invested in India—its funding of artists, filmmakers and activists, its generous endowment of university courses and scholarships.

The Ford Foundation's declared "goals for the future of mankind" include interventions in grassroots political movements locally and internationally. In the US, it provided millions in grants and loans to support the Credit Union Movement that was pioneered by the department store owner, Edward Filene, in 1919. Filene believed in creating a mass consumption society of consumer goods by giving workers affordable access to credit—a radical idea at the time. Actually, only half of a radical idea, because the other half of what Filene believed in was the more equitable distribution of national income. Capitalists seized on the first half of Filene's suggestion, and by disbursing "affordable" loans of tens of millions of dollars to working people, turned the US working class into people who are permanently in debt, running to catch up with their lifestyles.



Many years later, this idea has trickled down to the impoverished countryside of Bangladesh when Mohammed Yunus and the Grameen Bank brought microcredit to starving peasants with disastrous consequences. Microfinance companies in India are responsible for hundreds of suicides—200 people in Andhra Pradesh in 2010 alone. A national daily recently published a suicide note by an 18-year-old girl who was forced to hand over her last Rs 150, her school fees, to bullying employees of the microfinance company. The note said, "Work hard and earn money. Do not take loans."

There's a lot of money in poverty, and a few Nobel Prizes too.

By the 1950s, the Rockefeller and Ford foundations, funding several NGOs and international educational institutions, began to work as quasi-extensions of the US government that was at the time toppling democratically elected governments in Latin America, Iran and Indonesia. (That was also around the time they made their entry into India, then non-aligned, but clearly tilting towards the Soviet Union.) The Ford Foundation established a US-style economics course at the Indonesian University. Elite Indonesian students, trained in counter-insurgency by US army officers, played a crucial part in the 1965 CIA-backed coup in Indonesia that brought General Suharto to power. Gen Suharto repaid his mentors by

slaughtering hundreds of thousands of Communist rebels.

Eight years later, young Chilean students, who came to be known as the Chicago Boys, were taken to the US to be trained in neo-liberal economics by Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago (endowed by J.D. Rockefeller), in preparation for the 1973 CIA-backed coup that killed Salvador Allende, and brought in General Pinochet and a reign of death squads, disappearances and terror that lasted for seventeen years. (Allende's crime was being a democratically elected socialist and nationalising Chile's mines.)

In 1957, the Rockefeller Foundation established the Ramon Magsaysay Prize for community leaders in Asia. It was named after Ramon Magsaysay, president of the Philippines, a crucial ally in the US campaign against Communism in Southeast Asia. In 2000, the Ford Foundation established the Ramon Magsaysay Emergent Leadership Award. The Magsaysay Award is considered a prestigious award among artists, activists and community workers in India. M.S. Subbulakshmi and Satyajit Ray won it, so did Jayaprakash Narayan and one of India's finest journalists, P. Sainath. But they did more for the Magsaysay award than it did for them. In general, it has become a gentle arbiter of what kind of activism is "acceptable" and what is not.

Interestingly, Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement last summer was spearheaded by three Magsaysay Award winners—Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal and Kiran Bedi. One of Arvind Kejriwal's many NGOs is generously funded by Ford Foundation. Kiran Bedi's NGO is funded by Coca Cola and Lehman Brothers.

Though Anna Hazare calls himself a Gandhian, the law he called for—the Jan Lokpal Bill—was un-Gandhian, elitist and dangerous. A round-the-clock corporate media campaign proclaimed him to be the voice of "the people". Unlike the Occupy Wall Street movement in the US, the Hazare movement did not breathe a word against privatisation, corporate power or economic "reforms". On the contrary, its principal media backers successfully turned the spotlight away from massive corporate corruption scandals (which had exposed high-profile journalists too) and used the public mauling of politicians to call for the further withdrawal of discretionary powers from government, for more reforms, more privatisation. (In 2008, Anna Hazare received a World Bank award for outstanding public service). The World Bank issued a statement from Washington saying the movement "dovetailed" into its policy.

Like all good Imperialists, the Philanthropoids set themselves the task of creating and training an international cadre that believed that Capitalism, and by extension the hegemony of the United States, was in their own self-interest. And who would therefore help to administer the Global Corporate Government in the ways native elites had always served colonialism. So began the foundations' foray into education and the arts, which would become their third sphere of influence, after foreign and domestic economic policy. They spent (and continue to spend) millions of dollars on academic institutions and pedagogy.

Joan Roelofs in her wonderful book *Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism* describes how foundations remodelled the old ideas of how to teach political science, and fashioned the disciplines of "international" and "area" studies. This provided the US intelligence and security services a pool of expertise in foreign languages and culture to recruit from. The CIA and US state department continue to work with students and professors in US universities, raising serious questions about the ethics of scholarship.

The gathering of information to control people they rule is fundamental to any ruling power.

As resistance to land acquisition and the new economic policies spreads across India, in the shadow of outright war in Central India, as a containment technique, the government has embarked on a massive biometrics programme, perhaps one of the most ambitious and expensive information-gathering projects in the world— the Unique Identification Number (UID).

People don't have clean drinking water, or toilets, or food, or money, but they will have election cards and UID numbers. Is it a coincidence that the UID project run by Nandan Nilekani, former CEO of Infosys, ostensibly meant to "deliver services to the poor", will inject massive amounts of money into a slightly beleaguered IT industry? (A conservative estimate of the UID budget exceeds the Indian government's annual public spending on education.) To "digitise" a country with such a large population of the largely illegitimate and "illegible"—people who are for the most part slum-dwellers, hawkers, adivasis without land records—will criminalise them, turning them from illegitimate to illegal. The idea is to pull off a digital version of the Enclosure of the Commons and put huge powers into the hands of an increasingly hardening police state. Nilekani's technocratic obsession with gathering data is consistent with Bill Gates's obsession with digital databases, "numerical targets", "scorecards of progress". As though it is a lack of information that is the cause of world hunger, and not colonialism, debt and skewed profit-oriented, corporate policy.

Corporate-endowed foundations are the biggest funders of the social sciences and the arts, endowing courses and student scholarships in "development studies", "community studies", "cultural studies", "behavioural sciences" and "human rights". As US universities opened their doors to international students, hundreds of thousands of students, children of the Third World elite, poured in. Those who could not afford the fees were given scholarships. Today in countries like India and Pakistan there is scarcely a family among the upper middle classes that does not have a child that has studied in the US. From their ranks have come good scholars and academics, but also the prime ministers, finance ministers, economists, corporate lawyers, bankers and bureaucrats who helped to open up the economies of their countries to global corporations.

Scholars of the Foundation-friendly version of economics and political science were rewarded with fellowships, research funds, grants, endowments and jobs. Those with Foundation-unfriendly views found themselves unfunded, marginalised and ghettoised, their courses discontinued. Gradually, one particular imagination—a brittle, superficial pretence of tolerance and multiculturalism (that morphs into racism, rabid nationalism, ethnic chauvinism or war-mongering Islamophobia at a moment's notice) under the roof of a single, overarching, very unplural economic ideology—began to dominate the discourse. It did so to such an extent that it ceased to be perceived as an ideology at all. It became the default position, the natural way to be. It infiltrated normality, colonised ordinariness, and challenging it began to seem as absurd or as esoteric as challenging reality itself. From here it was a quick easy step to 'There is No Alternative'.

It is only now, thanks to the Occupy Movement, that another language has appeared on US streets and campuses. To see students with banners that say 'Class War' or 'We don't mind you being rich, but we mind you buying our government' is, given the odds, almost a revolution in itself.

One century after it began, corporate philanthropy is as much part of our lives as Coca Cola. There are now millions of non-profit organisations, many of them connected through a byzantine financial maze to the larger foundations. Between them, this "independent"

sector has assets worth nearly 450 billion dollars. The largest of them is the Bill Gates Foundation with (\$21 billion), followed by the Lilly Endowment (\$16 billion) and the Ford Foundation (\$15 billion).

As the IMF enforced Structural Adjustment, and arm-twisted governments into cutting back on public spending on health, education, childcare, development, the NGOs moved in. The Privatisation of Everything has also meant the NGO-isation of Everything. As jobs and livelihoods disappeared, NGOs have become an important source of employment, even for those who see them for what they are. And they are certainly not all bad.

Of the millions of NGOs, some do remarkable, radical work and it would be a travesty to tar all NGOs with the same brush. However, the corporate or Foundation-endowed NGOs are global finance's way of buying into resistance movements, literally like shareholders buy shares in companies, and then try to control them from within. They sit like nodes on the central nervous system, the pathways along which global finance flows. They work like transmitters, receivers, shock absorbers, alert to every impulse, careful never to annoy the governments of their host countries. (The Ford Foundation requires the organisations it funds to sign a pledge to this effect.) Inadvertently (and sometimes advertently), they serve as listening posts, their reports and workshops and other missionary activity feeding data into an increasingly aggressive system of surveillance of increasingly hardening States. The more troubled an area, the greater the numbers of NGOs in it.

Mischievously, when the government or sections of the Corporate Press want to run a smear campaign against a genuine people's movement, like the Narmada Bachao Andolan, or the protest against the Koodankulam nuclear reactor, they accuse these movements of being NGOs receiving "foreign funding". They know very well that the mandate of most NGOs, in particular the well-funded ones, is to further the project of corporate globalisation, not thwart it.

Armed with their billions, these NGOs have waded into the world, turning potential revolutionaries into salaried activists, funding artists, intellectuals and filmmakers, gently luring them away from radical confrontation, ushering them in the direction of multi-culturalism, gender, community development—the discourse couched in the language of identity politics and human rights.

The transformation of the idea of justice into the industry of human rights has been a conceptual coup in which NGOs and foundations have played a crucial part. The narrow focus of human rights enables an atrocity-based analysis in which the larger picture can be blocked out and both parties in a conflict—say, for example, the Maoists and the Indian government, or the Israeli Army and Hamas—can both be admonished as Human Rights Violators. The land-grab by mining corporations or the history of the annexation of Palestinian land by the State of Israel then become footnotes with very little bearing on the discourse. This is not to suggest that human rights don't matter. They do, but they are not a good enough prism through which to view or remotely understand the great injustices in the world we live in.

Another conceptual coup has to do with foundations' involvement with the feminist movement. Why do most "official" feminists and women's organisations in India keep a safe distance between themselves and organisations like say the 90,000-member Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan (Revolutionary Adivasi Women's Association) fighting patriarchy in their own communities and displacement by mining corporations in the Dandakaranya

forest? Why is it that the dispossession and eviction of millions of women from land which they owned and worked is not seen as a feminist problem?

The hiving off of the liberal feminist movement from grassroots anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist people's movements did not begin with the evil designs of foundations. It began with those movements' inability to adapt and accommodate the rapid radicalisation of women that took place in the '60s and '70s. The foundations showed genius in recognising and moving in to support and fund women's growing impatience with the violence and patriarchy in their traditional societies as well as among even the supposedly progressive leaders of Left movements. In a country like India, the schism also ran along the rural-urban divide.

Most radical, anti-capitalist movements were located in the countryside where, for the most part, patriarchy continued to rule the lives of most women. Urban women activists who joined these movements (like the Naxalite movement) had been influenced and inspired by the western feminist movement and their own journeys towards liberation were often at odds with what their male leaders considered to be their duty: to fit in with 'the masses'. Many women activists were not willing to wait any longer for the "revolution" in order to end the daily oppression and discrimination in their lives, including from their own comrades. They wanted gender equality to be an absolute, urgent and non-negotiable part of the revolutionary process and not just a post-revolution promise. Intelligent, angry and disillusioned women began to move away and look for other means of support and sustenance.

As a result, by the late '80s, around the time Indian markets were opened up, the liberal feminist movement in a country like India has become inordinately NGO-ised. Many of these NGOs have done seminal work on queer rights, domestic violence, AIDS and the rights of sex workers. But significantly, the liberal feminist movements have not been at the forefront of challenging the new economic policies, even though women have been the greatest sufferers. By manipulating the disbursement of the funds, the foundations have largely succeeded in circumscribing the range of what "political" activity should be. The funding briefs of NGOs now prescribe what counts as women's "issues" and what doesn't.

The NGO-isation of the women's movement has also made western liberal feminism (by virtue of its being the most funded brand) the standard-bearer of what constitutes feminism. The battles, as usual, have been played out on women's bodies, extruding Botox at one end and burqas at the other. (And then there are those who suffer the double whammy, Botox and the Burqa.) When, as happened recently in France, an attempt is made to coerce women out of the burqa rather than creating a situation in which a woman can choose what she wishes to do, it's not about liberating her, but about unclothing her. It becomes an act of humiliation and cultural imperialism. It's not about the burqa. It's about the coercion. Coercing a woman out of a burqa is as bad as coercing her into one. Viewing gender in this way, shorn of social, political and economic context, makes it an issue of identity, a battle of props and costumes. It is what allowed the US government to use western feminist groups as moral cover when it invaded Afghanistan in 2001. Afghan women were (and are) in terrible trouble under the Taliban. But dropping daisy-cutters on them was not going to solve their problems.

In the NGO universe, which has evolved a strange anodyne language of its own, everything has become a "subject", a separate, professionalised, special-interest issue. Community development, leadership development, human rights, health, education, reproductive rights,

AIDS, orphans with AIDS—have all been hermetically sealed into their own silos with their own elaborate and precise funding brief. Funding has fragmented solidarity in ways that repression never could. Poverty too, like feminism, is often framed as an identity problem. As though the poor have not been created by injustice but are a lost tribe who just happen to exist, and can be rescued in the short term by a system of grievance redressal (administered by NGOs on an individual, person to person basis), and whose long-term resurrection will come from Good Governance. Under the regime of Global Corporate Capitalism, it goes without saying.

Indian poverty, after a brief period in the wilderness while India “shone”, has made a comeback as an exotic identity in the Arts, led from the front by films like *Slumdog Millionaire*. These stories about the poor, their amazing spirit and resilience, have no villains—except the small ones who provide narrative tension and local colour. The authors of these works are the contemporary world’s equivalent of the early anthropologists, lauded and honoured for working on “the ground”, for their brave journeys into the unknown. You rarely see the rich being examined in these ways.

Having worked out how to manage governments, political parties, elections, courts, the media and liberal opinion, there was one more challenge for the neo-liberal establishment: how to deal with growing unrest, the threat of “people’s power”. How do you domesticate it? How do you turn protesters into pets? How do you vacuum up people’s fury and redirect it into blind alleys?

Here too, foundations and their allied organisations have a long and illustrious history. A revealing example is their role in defusing and deradicalising the Black Civil Rights movement in the US in the 1960s and the successful transformation of Black Power into Black Capitalism.

The Rockefeller Foundation, in keeping with J.D. Rockefeller’s ideals, had worked closely with Martin Luther King Sr (father of Martin Luther King Jr). But his influence waned with the rise of the more militant organisations—the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panthers. The Ford and Rockefeller Foundations moved in. In 1970, they donated \$15 million to “moderate” black organisations, giving people grants, fellowships, scholarships, job training programmes for dropouts and seed money for black-owned businesses. Repression, infighting and the honey trap of funding led to the gradual atrophying of the radical black organisations.

Martin Luther King Jr made the forbidden connections between Capitalism, Imperialism, Racism and the Vietnam War. As a result, after he was assassinated, even his memory became a toxic threat to public order. Foundations and Corporations worked hard to remodel his legacy to fit a market-friendly format. The Martin Luther King Junior Centre for Non-Violent Social Change, with an operational grant of \$2 million, was set up by, among others, the Ford Motor Company, General Motors, Mobil, Western Electric, Procter & Gamble, US Steel and Monsanto. The Center maintains the King Library and Archives of the Civil Rights Movement. Among the many programmes the King Center runs have been projects that “work closely with the United States Department of Defense, the Armed Forces Chaplains Board and others”. It co-sponsored the Martin Luther King Jr Lecture Series called ‘The Free Enterprise System: An Agent for Non-violent Social Change’. Amen.

A similar coup was carried out in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. In 1978, the Rockefeller Foundation organised a Study Commission on US Policy toward Southern Africa.

The report warned of the growing influence of the Soviet Union on the African National Congress (ANC) and said that US strategic and corporate interests (i.e., access to South Africa's minerals) would be best served if there were genuine sharing of political power by all races.

The foundations began to support the ANC. The ANC soon turned on the more radical organisations like Steve Biko's Black Consciousness movement and more or less eliminated them. When Nelson Mandela took over as South Africa's first Black President, he was canonised as a living saint, not just because he was a freedom fighter who spent 27 years in prison, but also because he deferred completely to the Washington Consensus. Socialism disappeared from the ANC's agenda. South Africa's great "peaceful transition", so praised and lauded, meant no land reforms, no demands for reparation, no nationalisation of South Africa's mines. Instead, there was Privatisation and Structural Adjustment. Mandela gave South Africa's highest civilian award—the Order of Good Hope—to his old supporter and friend General Suharto, the killer of Communists in Indonesia. Today, in South Africa, a clutch of Mercedes-driving former radicals and trade unionists rule the country. But that is more than enough to perpetuate the illusion of Black Liberation.

The rise of Black Power in the US was an inspirational moment for the rise of a radical, progressive Dalit movement in India, with organisations like the Dalit Panthers mirroring the militant politics of the Black Panthers. But Dalit Power too, in not exactly the same but similar ways, has been fractured and defused and, with plenty of help from right-wing Hindu organisations and the Ford Foundation, is well on its way to transforming into Dalit Capitalism.

'Dalit Inc ready to show business can beat caste', the *Indian Express* reported in December last year. It went on to quote a mentor of the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DICC). "Getting the prime minister for a Dalit gathering is not difficult in our society. But for Dalit entrepreneurs, taking a photograph with Tata and Godrej over lunch and tea is an aspiration—and proof that they have arrived," he said. Given the situation in modern India, it would be casteist and reactionary to say that Dalit entrepreneurs oughtn't to have a place at the high table. But if this is to be the aspiration, the ideological framework of Dalit politics, it would be a great pity. And unlikely to help the one million Dalits who still earn a living off manual scavenging—carrying human shit on their heads.

Young Dalit scholars who accept grants from the Ford Foundation cannot be too harshly judged. Who else is offering them an opportunity to climb out of the cesspit of the Indian caste system? The shame as well as a large part of the blame for this turn of events also goes to India's Communist movement whose leaders continue to be predominantly upper caste. For years it has tried to force-fit the idea of caste into Marxist class analysis. It has failed miserably, in theory as well as practice. The rift between the Dalit community and the Left began with a falling out between the visionary Dalit leader Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and S.A. Dange, trade unionist and founding member of the Communist Party of India. Dr Ambedkar's disillusionment with the Communist Party began with the textile workers' strike in Mumbai in 1928 when he realised that despite all the rhetoric about working class solidarity, the party did not find it objectionable that the "untouchables" were kept out of the weaving department (and only qualified for the lower paid spinning department) because the work involved the use of saliva on the threads, which other castes considered "polluting".

Ambedkar realised that in a society where the Hindu scriptures institutionalise

untouchability and inequality, the battle for “untouchables”, for social and civic rights, was too urgent to wait for the promised Communist revolution. The rift between the Ambedkarites and the Left has come at a great cost to both. It has meant that a great majority of the Dalit population, the backbone of the Indian working class, has pinned its hopes for deliverance and dignity to constitutionalism, to capitalism and to political parties like the BSP, which practise an important, but in the long run, stagnant brand of identity politics.

In the United States, as we have seen, corporate-endowed foundations spawned the culture of NGOs. In India, targeted corporate philanthropy began in earnest in the 1990s, the era of the New Economic Policies. Membership to the Star Chamber doesn't come cheap. The Tata Group donated \$50 million to that needy institution, the Harvard Business School, and another \$50 million to Cornell University. Nandan Nilekani of Infosys and his wife Rohini donated \$5 million as a start-up endowment for the India Initiative at Yale. The Harvard Humanities Centre is now the Mahindra Humanities Centre after it received its largest-ever donation of \$10 million from Anand Mahindra of the Mahindra Group.

At home, the Jindal Group, with a major stake in mining, metals and power, runs the Jindal Global Law School and will soon open the Jindal School of Government and Public Policy. (The Ford Foundation runs a law school in the Congo.) The New India Foundation funded by Nandan Nilekani, financed by profits from Infosys, gives prizes and fellowships to social scientists. The Sitaram Jindal Foundation endowed by Jindal Aluminium has announced five cash prizes of Rs 1 crore each to be given to those working in rural development, poverty alleviation, environment education and moral upliftment. The Reliance Group's Observer Research Foundation (ORF), currently endowed by Mukesh Ambani, is cast in the mould of the Rockefeller Foundation. It has retired intelligence agents, strategic analysts, politicians (who pretend to rail against each other in Parliament), journalists and policymakers as its research “fellows” and advisors.

ORF's objectives seem straightforward enough: “To help develop a consensus in favour of economic reforms.” And to shape and influence public opinion, creating “viable, alternative policy options in areas as divergent as employment generation in backward districts and real-time strategies to counter nuclear, biological and chemical threats”.

I was initially puzzled by the preoccupation with “nuclear, biological and chemical war” in ORF's stated objectives. But less so when, in the long list of its ‘institutional partners’, I found the names of Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, two of the world's leading weapons manufacturers. In 2007, Raytheon announced it was turning its attention to India. Could it be that at least part of India's \$32 billion defence budget will be spent on weapons, guided missiles, aircraft, warships and surveillance equipment made by Raytheon and Lockheed Martin?

Do we need weapons to fight wars? Or do we need wars to create a market for weapons? After all, the economies of Europe, US and Israel depend hugely on their weapons industry. It's the one thing they haven't outsourced to China.

In the new Cold War between US and China, India is being groomed to play the role Pakistan played as a US ally in the cold war with Russia. (And look what happened to Pakistan.) Many of those columnists and “strategic analysts” who are playing up the hostilities between India and China, you'll see, can be traced back directly or indirectly to the Indo-American think-tanks and foundations. Being a “strategic partner” of the US does not mean that the Heads

of State make friendly phone calls to each other every now and then. It means collaboration (interference) at every level. It means hosting US Special Forces on Indian soil (a Pentagon Commander recently confirmed this to the BBC). It means sharing intelligence, altering agriculture and energy policies, opening up the health and education sectors to global investment. It means opening up retail. It means an unequal partnership in which India is being held close in a bear hug and waltzed around the floor by a partner who will incinerate her the moment she refuses to dance.

+In the list of ORF's 'institutional partners', you will also find the RAND Corporation, Ford Foundation, the World Bank, the Brookings Institution (whose stated mission is to "provide innovative and practical recommendations that advance three broad goals: to strengthen American democracy; to foster the economic and social welfare, security and opportunity of all Americans; and to secure a more open, safe, prosperous and cooperative international system".) You will also find the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation of Germany. (Poor Rosa, who died for the cause of Communism, to find her name on a list such as this one!)

Though capitalism is meant to be based on competition, those at the top of the food chain have also shown themselves to be capable of inclusiveness and solidarity. The great Western Capitalists have done business with fascists, socialists, despots and military dictators. They can adapt and constantly innovate. They are capable of quick thinking and immense tactical cunning.

But despite having successfully powered through economic reforms, despite having waged wars and militarily occupied countries in order to put in place free market "democracies", Capitalism is going through a crisis whose gravity has not revealed itself completely yet. Marx said, "What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable."

The proletariat, as Marx saw it, has been under continuous assault. Factories have shut down, jobs have disappeared, trade unions have been disbanded. The proletariat has, over the years, been pitted against each other in every possible way. In India, it has been Hindu against Muslim, Hindu against Christian, Dalit against Adivasi, caste against caste, region against region. And yet, all over the world, it is fighting back. In China, there are countless strikes and uprisings. In India, the poorest people in the world have fought back to stop some of the richest corporations in their tracks.

Capitalism is in crisis. Trickle-down failed. Now Gush-Up is in trouble too. The international financial meltdown is closing in. India's growth rate has plummeted to 6.9 per cent. Foreign investment is pulling out. Major international corporations are sitting on huge piles of money, not sure where to invest it, not sure how the financial crisis will play out. This is a major, structural crack in the juggernaut of global capital.

Capitalism's real "grave-diggers" may end up being its own delusional Cardinals, who have turned ideology into faith. Despite their strategic brilliance, they seem to have trouble grasping a simple fact: Capitalism is destroying the planet. The two old tricks that dug it out of past crises—War and Shopping—simply will not work.

I stood outside Antilla for a long time watching the sun go down. I imagined that the tower was as deep as it was high. That it had a twenty-seven-storey-long tap root, snaking around below the ground, hungrily sucking sustenance out of the earth, turning it into smoke and gold.

Why did the Ambanis' choose to call their building Antilla? Antilla is the name of a set of mythical islands whose story dates back to an 8th-century Iberian legend. When the Muslims conquered Hispania, six Christian Visigothic bishops and their parishioners boarded ships and fled. After days, or maybe weeks at sea, they arrived at the isles of Antilla where they decided to settle and raise a new civilisation. They burnt their boats to permanently sever their links to their barbarian-dominated homeland.

By calling their tower Antilla, do the Ambanis hope to sever their links to the poverty and squalor of their homeland and raise a new civilisation? Is this the final act of the most successful secessionist movement in India? The secession of the middle and upper classes into outer space?

As night fell over Mumbai, guards in crisp linen shirts with crackling walkie-talkies appeared outside the forbidding gates of Antilla. The lights blazed on, to scare away the ghosts perhaps. The neighbours complain that Antilla's bright lights have stolen the night.

Perhaps it's time for us to take back the night.

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