

India's Political and Economic Elites: Swiss Banks, Harvard And Mars, In India Everything Is Okay

Pockets of Consumerism amidst Abysmal Poverty

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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Fly me to the Moon... or Mars. It doesn't really matter as long as the Indian political and economic elites and sections of the cheer-leading middle classes quench their insatiable patriotic thirst for delusional superpower status. Noises coming from those involved in 'Mission Mars' state that sending a probe to Mars (ahead of China) will only boost national morale (1).

How will sending a probe to the red planet make 'the nation' feel better? How will spending so much money on such a project make the vast majority of people struggling with rising costs and poor infrastructure feel good? Because the media and certain opinion leaders say it should? Because India will be sitting at the same superpower table as the US - again, because the media and the rich imply it will.

Let's forget about all of India's problems and focus on the 'good points', the rich are fond of telling all of the critics. Formula 1, Forbes rich-listers, nuclear weaponry and space: what more could a country desire they state, as its leaders cede food sovereignty to multinational corporations by handing over nature's seeds to Big Agra, sell its public sector infrastructure to private concerns, kill and abuse some of its poorest people to drive hundreds of thousands of them from their lands and leave a legacy for future generations of a chopped down, sold off, wasted, poisoned environment?

Like the mind-numbing dross pumped out of Bollywood, the 'good points' merely serve to sleep walk the masses into believing in the great Indian dream. And, as with the US version, you have to be asleep to believe it. Part of that dream is an existing prosperous India with its burgeoning middle class, a thriving India with its recent record of high GDP growth and a powerful India straddling the world stage with its new found propensity for self delusion.

But the reality is an India of broken roads and other crumbling infrastructure made from skimmed-on materials and dodgy parts courtesy of backhanders and siphoned off cash, an India that harbours its dirty little secret of mass killing of the girl child in (and out of) the womb, an India of media-friendly candlelit marches protesting crimes against the middle classes, but which has little to say about the daily atrocities that constitute a terrible normality for the majority.

Scam after scam, illegal capital flight after illegal capital flight into Swiss banks. The 'nation-builders' who like us all to concentrate on the 'good points' and who talk much about boosting national morale with some or other project, while conspiring to stab the people in the back by robbing them of a decent healthcare system, education system, welfare state

and infrastructure (2). Yes, India, a country that could have been a shining example of social development, was sacrificed on the altar of greed and corruption for bulging Swiss accounts, for the private pockets of many of the country's public 'servants', 'wealth creators' and the multinational vultures who long ago stopped circling and are now swooping (3).

The nation's politicians and rich are often castigated for their criminality. But their actions stem in part from an 'Indian mindset' that is all too common. It's a mindset nurtured on self-aggrandisement, casteism, bribery, patronage, patriarchy, envy and cheating, traits that are pervasive throughout all social strata. And so when discredited politicians end up within touching distance of being elected PM due to very smart PR work (4) and a mass support base, should we be too surprised that India is in the state it is?

Throw garbage into the street, drive directly at pedestrians with horn blurring to intimidate them out of the way, demand money from local businesses if you are a police official who is that way inclined, watch the latest Bollywood dross, run out and buy some useless product because Kareena, Priyanka or another icon of deception says 'because you're worth it'... but never ever let this narcissism, this beggar thy neighbour attitude, this ubiquitous mindset, give way to contemplate why the rivers and soils have been poisoned and people are being made ill (5), agriculture is being hijacked by the likes of Monsanto, land is being grabbed on behalf of any number of corporations, the great nuclear power money fest is in full swing or why people are violently opposing state-corporate power. Much of this is the result of deals hammered out behind closed doors (6,7). Much of it results because too many are conditioned to be ignorant of the facts or to accept that all of the above is necessary.

Bow down to Krishna, Sachin Tendulkar or GDP growth figures? Take your pick, but the outcome is the same. This is a country where the majority sanctify certain animals, places, rivers and mountains for being representations of god or for being somehow touched by the hand of god. It's also a country run by Wall Street sanctioned politicians who convince people to accept or be oblivious to the destruction of the same. The paradox of India, the extremities of India... the glib clichés abound in the literature and brochures on India. As the tourism department says: Incredible India!

And as the herd, the herd conditioned to be bewildered, to loosely paraphrase US commentator Walter Lipman, buys into the rat race imported wholesale from the West and is manipulated by corporate-backed, product-touting celebrities and media, is there any hope for India?

The same question could also be asked of the US or Europe because similar forces are at work and play on insecurities and weaknesses of people and societies. The damning critique set out here is not reserved for India alone (8,9).

But there is some hope. Many are working strenuously to challenge the selling of the heart and soul of India, Europe or elsewhere (10,11).

Yet how easy will it be for them to be swept aside by the corrosive impacts of a rapacious capitalism and its hugely powerful corporations that colonise almost every area of social, cultural and life and encourage greed, selfishness, apathy, irretrievable materialism and acquisitive individualism, as well as the ignorance of reality 'out there' - what lies beyond the narrow concerns of spend and buy middle class India?

India was always ripe for Western capitalism's taking. Consumerism's conspicuous purchasing draws on and manipulates the pre-existing tendency to buy favour, the perceived self importance deriving from caste, the sense of entitlement due to patronage, the desire nurtured over the centuries to lord it over and seek tributes from whoever happens to be on the next rung down in the pecking order. Lavish, conspicuous displays of status to reinforce difference and hierarchy have always been important for cementing social status. Now icons of capitalism, whether renowned brand products, labels or product endorsing celebrities, have also taken their place in the pantheon of Indian deities to be listened to, worshiped and acquiesced to.

And the corporations behind it all achieve hegemony by altering mindsets via advertising, clever PR or by sponsoring (or hijacking) major events, by funding and slanting research findings and research institutions in their favour, by infiltrating officialdom and achieving lop-sided trade agreements and by doling out loans and patronage in turn for the structural adjustment of agriculture, retail, food production, the privatisation of sector utilities. They do it by many methods and means.

Before you realise it, culture, politics and the economy have become colonised by powerful private interests and the world is cast in their image. The prevailing economic system soon becomes cloaked with an aura of matter of factuality, an air of naturalness, which is never to be viewed for the controlling hegemonic culture or power play that it really is.

In the meantime, over 250,000 (and rising) farmers have committed suicide, the bulk of the population are struggling to escape from or stay out of poverty, money is being siphoned off hand over fist via scam after scam, filth-ridden towns and cities become more filth-ridden by the day and the female to male ratio indicates an alarming imbalance (12). Seeds, mountains, water, forests and the biodiversity are being sold off. The farmers and tribals are being sold out. And the more that gets sold off, the more who get sold out, the greater the amount of cash that changes hands, the easier it is for the misinformed to swallow the lie of Wall Street's bogus notion of 'growth' - GDP. And India suddenly becomes capitalism's poster boy 'economic miracle'. A miracle blighted by dying or uprooted local communities and economies that do not have to die or be uprooted (13).

This isn't so much a 'wounded civilisation' as VS Naipal once noted, but one suffering from internal haemorrhaging as it continues to be bled dry from both within and without. But all is fine as long as the cash continues to be stashed away, the kids can be sent to Harvard and it's a case of touchdown Mars.

Notes

- 1) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-24547892>
- 2) http://www.gfintegrity.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=230&Itemid=111
- 3) <http://www.countercurrents.org/todhunter260413.htm>
- 4) <https://www.facebook.com/notes/shelley-kasli/mechanics-of-narendra-modis-pr-agency-apco-worldwide-orchestrating-our-future/500231493335095>
- 5) <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/309654/punjab-transformation-food-bowl-cancer.html>
- 6) <http://www.projectcensored.org/8-kia-the-us-neoliberal-invasion-of-india/>

- 7) <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/business-wins-secretive-eu-india-trade-talks>
- 8) <http://www.countercurrents.org/todhunter070113.htm>
- 9) <http://www.countercurrents.org/todhunter310712.htm>
- 10) <http://corporateeurope.org/about-ceo>
- 11) <http://www.navdanya.org/>
- 12) <http://50millionmissing.wordpress.com/>
- 13) <http://www.countercurrents.org/shiva011113.htm>

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About the author:

Colin Todhunter is an extensively published independent writer and former social policy researcher. Originally from the UK, he has spent many years in India. His website is www.colintodhunter.com
https://twitter.com/colin_todhunter

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