

Mass Poverty and Social Inequality: India's “Independence” for Whom and From What ?

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On 15 August, India will celebrate Independence Day. There will be the usual celebratory flag waving and nationalist sentiments. The mainstream media will wallow in it, and key figures will indulge in the type of self congratulatory back-slapping that is common across the world when celebrating nationhood. But what will people be celebrating? The throwing off of British colonialism, the development of nationhood? Perhaps both of those things, but maybe neither, for what has ‘the nation’ and ‘independence’ come to mean in 2013?

Forget nations, flags or fly pasts. Freedom and self determination should be about ordinary people, ordinary people who farm and produce, who create genuine wealth, things of genuine worth.

Forget about sound bites referring to ‘the world’s biggest democracy’. Placing an X on a ballot paper every four years or so does not constitute democracy. If people are misinformed, misled and manipulated to think and act in a certain way, while backroom deals are carried out without their knowledge, they are but ignorant links in a chain (1,2).

Then there is no freedom, no self-determination. Someone else has appropriated the freedom and has enslaved. Someone else is determining the agenda.

Look no further to see this in action in that self-anointed bastion of ‘freedom and democracy’, the US.

Influence is bought and paid for by millionaire backers who fund politicians when running for office. And just in case that does not work to full effect, there is the infamous ‘revolving door’ that allows top corporate people to move in and out of the high echelons of government with ease in order to ensure the required policies are enacted. And don’t let the media get in the way of any of this. It won’t. Concentration of media ownership and the integration with armaments companies, banking interests and industry guarantees the public remain blissfully ignorant of issues, not least of how ‘democracy’ really works.

It all serves to ensure that the one percent maintain hegemony over the 99, maintain their unimaginable wealth and privileges and maintain the rest of the population in ignorance, in a state of powerlessness, in a state of poverty, relative poverty or vulnerability.

Yell moronically ‘USA!USA!’ when the authorities protect the people from imaginary or manufactured demons, or sign up and go to kill and die under the patriotic banner of ‘god and nation’. Mission accomplished, manipulation assured, control complete.

Class-based interests

And just who is doing the controlling? Never mind that a select number of companies predominate, dig further and you will find four institutions hold major stakes in most of these top companies and in doing so exert control over international finance and monetary policy via the IMF, World Trade Organisation, World Bank and Central European Bank (3). Control and wealth is highly concentrated in the hands of certain individuals or families.

In India too, a relative handful of families control much of the economy and society and are all too willing to fall in line with Western elite interests (4,5), whose hegemonic strategy lies in depressing wages, exploiting markets and maximising profit. Their interests do not lie with those of the 800 million who live on less than two dollars a day, the bulk of the people residing in the eight states that contain more poor people than 26 sub-Saharan African countries combined or the almost one in two children who are malnourished or their families; nor do their interests lie with the tens of millions across India who are having their lands stolen, their rights trampled on, their villages destroyed, their homelands occupied by paramilitary forces just because the rich require their land, their acquiescence, their mineral rich mountains, their agriculture.

The system cannot remedy this situation. It thrives on it. It produces it. But, of course, in an attempt to justify imperialism and plunder, the lie is forwarded that globalisation or neo-liberalism exists to lift the poor out of poverty, to liberate the masses from their burden.

The reality is that, in the name of 'economic development', what is currently happening in India constitutes the biggest land grab since Columbus and the biggest forced removal of peoples from their lands in history (6,7). Elite interests and supporters of their agenda in the media imply that the victims are unfortunate 'collateral damage' on the road to the promised land.

Sure, certain people have prospered in India in recent years. Sure, many now have lifestyles that their parents could only have imagined. But even under slavery, the lives of slaves improved over time. Moreover, notwithstanding the massive human 'collateral damage', there is been a terrible price to pay in terms of the damage caused in pursuit of an unsustainable model of development that destroys traditional agriculture, destroys the ecology and strips bare natural resources. This type of 'development' is warped and wholly unsustainable, whether within India or on a global level.

The poverty alleviation rate in India is more or less the same as it was back in 1991 when the US educated, World Bank/IMF trained Indian bureaucrat politicians began to assume power and shift the country towards the neo-liberalism required by their US backers (5).

India 's education system, healthcare system, infrastructure and welfare system has already been sacrificed via illegal 'capital outflows' into foreign bank accounts, which has accelerated since the opening up of the economy in '91. A few have been enriched. At what cost to the rest?

In the West, it's the same story. The secular theology of neo-liberalism has resulted in what many of us predicted. Tens of millions now bear the brunt of 'austerity', as companies rake in record profits and the extremely wealthy increase their wealth again by record amounts (8,9). Call it monopoly capitalism, a 'new world order' or some other name. The result is there for all to see: a rich and increasingly internationalised elite and the impoverishment of workers throughout the world.

On Independence Day, or during similar events in other places, we should urge people to think hard before bowing down to the flag, before swelling with pride and saying 'god save the queen', 'the land of the brave' or 'mera pyara Bharat'.

Most nation states are run for the benefit of and to protect elite interests. And those interests have little respect for national boundaries or for the people they share the same land mass with. History shows that such interests have no hesitation in sacrificing (their own) national economies (10) or the lives of their compatriots en masse in barbaric wars (11) for ever greater power and ever more profit.

What do freedom, self-determination and patriotism actually amount to when the colonial oppressor is still present and has the compliance of India's increasingly wealthy elite. Was this always to be India's fabled 'tryst with destiny'?

Don't be distracted by bogus notions of freedom, self-determination and patriotism.

The colonial oppressor is still there, and he has the compliance of India's increasingly wealthy elite.

Notes

- 1) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-eu-india-free-trade-agreement-corporate-driven-neocolonial-plunder/5338049>
- 2) <http://beejbachaoandolan.org/2007/09/>
- 3) <http://www.realnews24.com/the-large-families-that-rule-the-world/>
- 4) <http://www.worldcrunch.com/business-finance/rahul-gandhi-india-039-s-corporate-elite-and-the-enduring-power-of-family-dynasties/india-family-caste-business-gandhi/c2s11302/>
- 5) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/india-s-urban-slums-rising-social-inequalities-mass-poverty-and-homelessness/30756>
- 6) <http://www.countercurrents.org/sharma141109.htm>
- 7) http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Globalization/War_Against_Nature_VFTS.html
- 8) http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/04/business/economy/corporate-profits-soar-as-worker-income-limps.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- 9) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkhmGOxwbhM>
- 10) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-offshore-outsourcing-of-american-jobs-a-greater-threat-than-terrorism/18725>
- 11) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/endless-growth-based-on-consumerism-is-there-an-alternative-to-capitalism-and-oligarchy/5318000>

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