

India: Celebrating “Americanisation”? Poverty amidst “American Values”

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Earlier this year, there was an article in the New York Times that positively salivated over the ‘Americanisation’ of India.

And the author was not referring to Bolivia, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina or any other country on the American continent when he referred to ‘Americanisation’. He was referring solely to the US, which has hijacked the term. Now, there’s arrogance for you.

The article in question praised America’s capitalism, exuberance and free spirit and therefore the liberalisation of India’s economy. Here we have another hijacking, this time of the term ‘liberalisation’. In reality, this form of ‘liberalisation’ frees up nothing, but merely hands over chunks of the economy to elite interests.

What liberalisation really entails is that people are merely ‘free’ to fend for themselves with stripped down welfare services, while big corporations are handed subsidies, tax breaks, cheap land grabs, public sector assets and the freedom to shift capital around the globe in order to loot and bring havoc to local economies. This rush towards privatisation of profit, socialisation of loss and monopoly capitalism goes under the benign term ‘structural adjustment’ – the plundering of public resources by any other name.

This ‘socialism for the rich’ is all too easily equated with ‘liberalisation’, yet when the need for socialism is vocalized by working people it is deemed stifling and oppressive. Well, it’s plainly obvious to whom this is stifling – the rich. It was Noam Chomsky who argued that the wealthy use free-market rhetoric to justify imposing greater economic risk upon the lower classes, while being insulated from the rigors of the market by the political and economic advantages that such wealth affords. This has become the ‘American’ way.

There is no doubt of course that many in India have gained from the economic reforms that began in 1991. There are now countless opportunities to go and work in an outsourced call centre, to sell coffee or sweep floors in a shopping mall, to work as a security guard at the entrance to some gated community, to assist Monsanto in its design to control the agricultural sector or to get a job with a transnational concern headquartered in the West whose prime interest is to set worker against worker in a race to the bottom in the seeking out of cheap labour economies and driving down wages.

And are people becoming any happier because of the frenzied consumer capitalism we now witness, or the wage slavery to corporate masters? Some are extremely happy. But, despite the GDP figures, which are very limited in their capacity for telling us anything much, on the whole, Indians are not a happy bunch. According to the World Map of Happiness, based on standards of wealth, health and access to education, India ranks in the bottom third, despite

all the optimism by the supporters of neo-liberalism surrounding the 'new' India.

But what of 'American values', which are said to now underpin this 'new' India, the 'economic miracle' where the rich and sections of the middle classes have materially truly never had it so good, but where almost 80 per cent live on less than two US dollars a day?

Let us put these values into context. The US can only sustain itself by using around 40 per cent of the world's resources for just five per cent of the global population. It can only sustain itself by the plunder of other countries, whether via direct military invasion or bullying and bludgeoning through the policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to create dependency and economic dominance.

What of US values, when bankers are handed over trillions of taxpayers money for their gambling activities, where arms companies, oil cartels and other powerful lobbies fund politicians to do their bidding once elected? What of the revolving door between government agencies and corporate concerns? A quick look at the make up of Food and Drug Administration, the Federal Reserve or any other number of state concerns for that matter will quickly tell you where their interests lie.

Hard work and a spirit of enterprise are too often posited as being US values by supporters of the US. Any serious analysis of how that country works will tell you that the quest for easy money and destroying competition are what keep the ruling elites in power there. What is there to celebrate in institutionalised corruption and a system fuelled by the lie of perpetual peace for perpetual war?

A war on drugs, when the CIA have been shown to be complicit in the drugs economy. A war on terror, when US forces terrorise and slaughter innocent civilians with their drone attacks. What values are these?

Imperialism has little in common with the values of freedom and the spirit of hard work and enterprise. Should such values be celebrated? Of course they should, especially when used for the public good. But let's not confuse the issue by 'Americanising' those values.

Let's not get caught out by the great con-trick of consumerism - the conspicuous consumption of 'things' to elevate personal status in the eyes of others. Because like the most ostentatious consumer, through its hollow PR slogans, the US tries to appear to be something that it is not, based on the conspicuous ownership of values it does not really possess. As with any effective ad campaign, however, some writers end up buying into the appearance but never question the reality.

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