

# Mumbai...Global City of Extremes

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Arriving at Mumbai International Airport and experiencing India for the first time the initial thing you see is the landscape of Mumbai, a landscape that tells you a lot about the city and the people who live there. Skyscrapers fill the horizon but if you look closer there are buildings everywhere. Slums are largely prevalent in Mumbai and the conditions are unthinkable for someone from the west.

Mumbai is the financial capital of India and yet a city of extremes. It's a megacity at the heart of modern India and represents a 'nodal point', a centre of power within the network society

(Castells, 2010). If you were to see inside the towers shadowing Mumbai, you would be likely to see operators in call-centres connecting with people from all over the world. These centres connect the ever-growing global network, a 'space of flows' that allows for distant and real time interaction (Castells, 2010).



As the centre for Indian foreign trade, global corporate deals and vast personal wealth, Mumbai also 'houses' a population of 20 million, half of whom live in slums without sanitation and other basic services. It is one of the world's most densely populated cities and symbolises India's emergence on the global stage in the 1990s with its 'liberating' economic

policies which have consequently doubled poverty within the city (Pilger, 2014). A graph of inequality isn't needed in Mumbai as you just need to look at its buildings. Slums

against tower blocks represent the disparity and the two different India's that live side by side. The idea that you can tell what's informing a society just by looking at its building resonates best with Mumbai and states that neo liberalism has arrived. Capitalism as we know has become a global phenomenon and according to Wallerstein (2004), the imperative of capital

accumulation has created a need for constant expansion of geographical frontiers. Sklair (2002) argues that global neoliberalism has created a crisis of class polarization and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. Within Indian cities rich enclaves coexist uneasily with slums and those in the elite and middle classes have little interest in putting pressure on authorities to provide services for the urban poor.

The increase of global inequality in the last few decades has occurred because the benefits of growth have been unevenly shared. Drawing on Wallerstein (2004), who said international trade is not a trade between equals, demonstrates

the power of neoliberalism and its production of unequal economic relationships.

Wallerstein (2004) explains that western countries - 'the core' - are stronger than

others and able to trade on terms that allow the increase of surplus values for themselves and away from weaker countries on 'the periphery'. India is a country that reflects this very well and the disproportion of economic power within the global capitalism system. Giddens (1999, p. 16) explains that rather than creating a 'global



village' one might say it's a 'global pillage'. Global neoliberalism has torn down barriers which have protected industry, agriculture and manufacturing. The multinational corporations which are based in the west: Coca Cola, Microsoft and Monsanto and how they grow are now seen as the measure of human progress (Pilger, 2014). According to Giddens (1999) it represents the disparity between the industrial (or post-industrial) north and the developing south which can be seen in India with the emergence of the global orientated high tech sector. Yet, opening up to the global free market can undermine the local subsistence economy and change the economy into one

that is dependent upon the sale of just a few products on the global market (Giddens, 1999).

Inequality is rampant in India, whether in cities or in rural areas the disparity is clear to see.

This was especially the

case in 2012 when the national grid collapsed which left 710 million people without power - but only half of which would notice. The demand for electricity grows with flat screen TVs and air-conditioning units becoming the 'must have' status symbols of India's relatively small middle class (Pidd, 2012). Blackouts

represent and raise questions about India today: how it's growing as an industrious nation, the growing consumerism of the affluent few and how they deal with the unintended consequences of it all. The Indian government forecasts growth of 8.5% this year, which looks promising seeing as car sales, which act as a proxy for consumer spending, where up the first half of this year (The Economist, 2016). Yet increasing car ownership, which has come to symbolise 20<sup>th</sup> century modernity and which India may look to replicate, has within it

perilous consequences

which could intensify existing environmental hazards.

As India develops and attempts to

avoid the worse, it enters a global stage that is already filled with risks. According to Ulrich Beck (1992) the idea of 'risk society' encompasses the consequences of scientific and industrial development through a set of risks and hazards. The unknown and the unintended consequences of the world we live in come to be the dominant force in society and the aim is to prevent the worse which is unlike any previous vision of society. Likewise looking at an issue like poverty in India through this has



profound significance as the hope of equality being at the heart of any progressive future project is in doubt. According to Beck (1992, p. 49) the dream of society before was that everyone should have a share of the pie. However, now the 'utopia of risk society' is that everyone should be spared from poisoning. The insecurities and hazards of modernisation and the 'globalisation of doubt' of what is unknown are dealt with in ways which seek to avoid the probabilities of harm. As Beck (1992) explains 'smog is democratic' and like many other risks,

it is unable to recognise national borders or class. However, for India there exists a set of risks which expose the new fragile industrious nation which is taking in deep-seated neoliberal capitalism and entering a world of

unknown consequences.

Himmatgram - a sustainable bio and dairy farm run by Snehalaya , a non-governmental organisation - every year struggles to make ends meet just like many farms in India. India already experiences a warm climate, struggling to farm enough just for its large and growing population. Climate change has become one of the defining risks of globalisation and industrialisation within modernity. A decline in

monsoon rainfall and increase in drought in recent decades has made farming harder. The weather is becoming more extreme and this summer a quarter of the population were facing severe water shortages. Farmers committing suicide and military personnel deployed to protect reservoirs marked the peak of the Indian summer (The Economist, 2016). Over half the population depends on agriculture for their living and are reliant on the monsoon season to deliver desperately needed rain. As providences of India squabble over ownership



of rivers a vision is a set in motion of a future which is entirely unpredictable. The consequences set out above regarding industrialisation and consumerism (particularly of cars) is increasing the risks associated with the environment. If global temperatures are to rise, as they do severe droughts will become more familiar, dryer years will be even dryer and wet years will be wetter (World Bank, 2013). Risks other than droughts and extreme weather patterns exist, however. Mumbai has the world's largest population exposed to coastal flooding. Many parts of the city including slums are built on land vulnerable to this and as urbanization continues to grow there are further risks of devastation. A consequence

of climate change will mean higher sea levels, particularly those around the equator which includes the sub-continent. Consequences will not just involve flooding but contamination of water supplies and a risk of disease (World Bank, 2013).

Yet, the consequences are not just exclusive to Mumbai, sea level rises will affect not just those

in that region or India in general but the entire sub-continent. Risks, as we have already seen with Beck (1992), are

global and one of the consequences of this is migration. Global movements are too frequently forced and with rising sea levels it is projected that it will lead to massive population displacement. Castles et al. (2014) explains that the continuing trend of migration towards cities and urban areas means that more people are concentrated in areas of greater environmental risk, with cities on the coast and settlements built on flood plains. This is a key change of our time and often means leaving the land and living in slums which are prone to disasters.

Looking at a map of the subcontinent, India surrounds Bangladesh, a former part of India. Bangladesh holds its own risks in that it is vulnerable to flooding as most of the country

sits just a couple of meters above sea level. If sea levels are to rise many people will be displaced and migration will be a likely course of action (Castles et al, 2014). Global environmental risks are driving mass migration and the involuntary movement of peoples which in itself presents new problems for the future.

India's experiences of globalisation and neoliberalism will have significant implications for the future. Preventing the worse and avoiding risks of a future which is unpredictable is the consequence of India attempting to establish itself on the world stage, a run-away world where extreme inequality exists and is constantly being re-made.

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