

There's No Stopping India Now

By Musafir

There is no denying the fact that the expressway leading to Gurgaon (an extension of Delhi) and its toll booths are world class. The massive structures (multi-storied apartment complexes, office buildings and shopping malls) on both sides of the expressway resemble the suburbs of Chicago or San Diego.

"This is our humble abode." So my nephew, an IT executive in his 40s said while giving a tour of his townhouse in a gated neighborhood of Gurgaon. In a city where I started my career as an engineer on 20 dollars a month in the early 70s, my nephew's status was no small step for mankind by any means. His 2,500 square foot flat (townhouse) had Italian marble floors, contemporary furniture, richly appointed details, washer, plasma TV, microwave oven and laptop computers with broadband cables in every room. I must admit that his home was not an exception. This is the norm for most of the professionals in his age group living in big cities.

Delhi is under a massive reconstruction starting from Ghaziabad on one end of the city to ever expanding Gurgaon on the other end. The entire mega city is being connected by expressways and a network of underground (and overhead also) railway called the Metro. I found at least eight mega malls in an area of four square miles. One mall was dedicated to marriage accessories and another to jewelries only.

I spent three days in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), the New York and Los Angeles of the Indian subcontinent – New York because of its massive high rise buildings and its status as the financial capital of India and Los Angeles because of the thriving movie industry and exotic beach fronts. Mumbai has a unique and vibrant atmosphere that can only be felt in cities like Paris, London, Barcelona and New York.

While visiting Mumbai, I had the opportunity to visit the Prithvi Theatre established by Prithvi Raj Kapoor in the early 1900s. Mr. Kapoor started his career in the silent movies and was the first hero to act in a talkie movie. His theatre is still run by his famous clan. It was inspiring to watch a show there in the midst of aspiring actors and directors. The coffee houses of Mumbai bustle with young crowds in their 20s. Boys and girls hand in hand – hugging and giggling breaking all inhibitions – are the faces of new India. They are confident, independent of parental control and affluent

compared to our generation which was unsure with fear in heart and with an intimidated demeanor.

The Other India

India is not only Delhi and Mumbai. Most of its 1.2 billion people live in poverty in small towns and villages. I visited the state of Bihar and Jharkhand (the two poorest states of India) and went to the remote villages in those states. It is obvious that the new prosperity has not reached those corners of India yet. Illiteracy, unemployment and crime are rampant in those areas, but there are signs of hope, nevertheless.

During the last regime, Patna, the capital of the state of Bihar was known as the kidnapping capital of India. The new Chief Minister of the state, Nitish Kumar has turned the tables by arresting the criminals and showing his intolerance towards lawlessness. The people of Bihar, though poor and unprivileged, do not take solace in fate and 'karma' anymore. Even the poorest of the poor has the aspiration to give the best possible education to their children. They believe in democracy and are hopeful about the progress of the country. It is no coincidence that most of the legislatures (law makers) in those states belong to the oppressed class (Dalits). Some may not like it, but that is what democracy is all about – true representation.

Free Market Economy

If Bihar is considered the most backward state of India, Darbhanga, probably, will be the most backward town. I visited Darbhanga and stayed with Dr. Rajshekhar Srivastava and his family. Dr. Srivastava is an ophthalmologist. He runs a world class eye and ENT clinic which can be compared to the best in the U.S. He lives in a six thousand square feet house with his wife and two sons and their wives. Both his sons and daughters-in-law are doctors too and are in a joint practice with Dr. Srivastava. The Srivastava household employs numerous maids and servants to take care of their own electric generation and other household chores. Their clinic employs 32 technicians and sundry staff.

Dr. Srivastava's sons and daughters-in law never lived in Bihar before. His sons studied in a privileged private school in Dehradun where the Gandhi-Nehru family goes for schooling. After completing medical

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