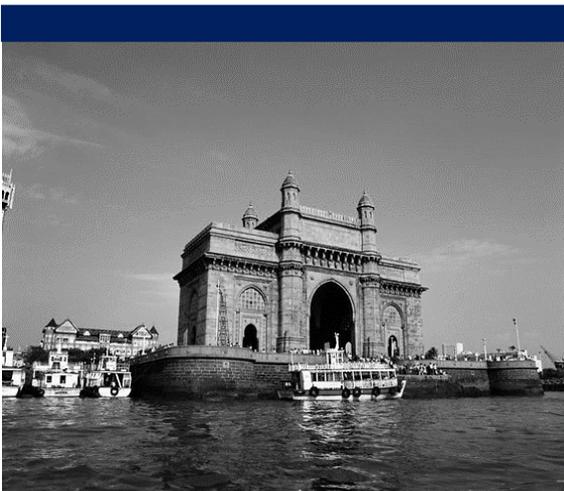




# REFLECTIONS OF A SOJOURN IN INDIA

*The Nexus between Economic Growth, Knowledge, Consumerism and Culture in a Growing Middle Class Society*



# Reflections of a Sojourn in India:

## *The Nexus between Economic Growth, Knowledge, Consumerism and Culture in a Growing Middle Class Society*

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"Our parents and grandparents struggled for a decent living. We don't want our children to face the hardships they faced. We have to be the ones to transform India and we have to do it now. Think of a time in the future when your child asks you, "You saw what dire straights the country was in. You knew what needed to be done. Did you do anything?" And you will be able to look that child in the eye and answer, "Yes, I did my best. I did it for you."

Quotation from "*Transforming India*" by **Atanu Dey**

### **1. Introduction**

In the recent past, we had the privilege of being part of a fact finding delegation of senior academics and managers from South Africa to visit India with a view to establishing mutually collaborative partnerships with Business Schools. The academic sojourn was for all intentions and purposes a mind boggling experience, especially when one considers how India has been able to capitalise on the intersections between globalisation, economic development, the knowledge and networking society, culture and the rise of the middle class. The development in India is not only phenomenal and palpable, but has many strategic lessons for emerging economies of the world, South Africa included.

Globally, India has also become an important actor, forming the 'I' in the BRICS group of nations. India plays a very important role in the leadership of the emerging markets and developing nations and boasts a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation, pioneering the global IT services industry and venturing into the international space race. It has a global Diaspora that contributes to leadership in various fields. On paper, India's potential is immense, with a growing middle class

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and approximately 500 million people between the ages of 18-25; its best years seem to be ahead.

Equally, India has many challenges and problems, and the chief amongst these is the issue of poverty. In tandem with progress, India has to prioritise the tackling of poverty with the same fervour that it has catapulted itself as being one of the leading economies of the world. It has to confront the scourge of poverty head on and reduce the economic gap between the rich and poor. The recent passing of the Food Security Bill by its legislature, one of the first of its kind in the world is a step in the right direction. Failure to reduce poverty would simply mean development without the poor.

In this paper an attempt is made to capture the nuances of the academic study tour to India. Initially, the paper contextualises the views of the authors against a backdrop of the history and political economy of India, and in particular the rise of the middle class which has, and is playing a constructive and significant role in the economic development of the subcontinent. The essay moves on to capture the intersections of critical global phenomena and processes and explains how these influence the modernisation of the country. The paper then uses conversations and reflections of a few individuals whom the touring party had the pleasure to meet to exemplify how modernisation has affected the psyche of the population, *per se*. Finally, it has to be noted that the contents and points of view expressed in this paper do not pretend to be definitive about the 'new' India, and are merely the reflections and 'snapshots' of an itinerant group of foreigners.

In terms of the itinerary, the short journey from South Africa brought the authors to Mumbai, one of the largest cities in India in terms of population and then onwards to Vishakhapatnam a naval base and then onwards to Hyderabad a relatively new IT and Pharmaceutical Hub. In Mumbai we engaged with publishing houses, whilst in the other two cities we engaged with senior academics and managers at leading Business Schools.

## **2. A Backdrop to India's Political Economy**

A keen observer on arriving on the subcontinent will soon realise that the present day India is a land of contradictions, largely emanating from an ideological commitment to market-led development on the one hand, which is biased towards capital accumulation and to the institutions of democracy, on the other. In other words, the tension is between the economics of markets and the politics of democracy. The former indicates economic policies directed towards a market-friendly regime, supported by international and national capital, urban-based middle and upper middle classes and neo-liberal politicians.

With a population of nearly 1.2 billion, India is the largest democracy in the world today. Notwithstanding its location in the so-called 'developing world', India has emerged as one of the most vibrant and fastest growing economies over the last two decades, with a steady annual growth rate of 7 to 9 per cent. Even when the western economies experienced recession in the recent past, the Indian economy continued to grow at a healthy rate of above 5 per cent.

In spite of its rapidly growing economy and robust democratic politics, it continues to be home to a very large number of poor people, in absolute terms - perhaps larger than in any other single country. Though the process of economic growth has enabled India to reduce poverty, both in absolute as well as in relative terms, social inequalities have continued to grow.

The process of economic growth, experts argue, is fundamentally changing the social structure of India, from a society characterised by a sharp contrast between a small elite and a large impoverished mass, to being one with substantial intermediate classes. Though there was no sudden moment of this change, the middle classes in India have been growing in size over the last century, more particularly after its independence from the colonial rule. However, the Indian middle class story witnessed a qualitative shift during the early 1990s with the introduction of economic reforms and an increasing integration of the Indian economy into the global markets.

Even more dramatic developments and innovations have been taking place in the service sector, especially financial services, capital markets, and information and communication technology (ICT). The ICT-driven revolution in financial services and capital markets has fostered 'finance capitalism' with an ever-increasing scope for capitalists to make vast fortunes out of dealing (buying and selling, rather than producing), whether it be in money, stocks and shares, futures, patents, licenses, commodities, or real estate. Advances in ICT have also contributed to the development of new products and activities in the media, leisure, recreation and entertainments industries, as well as to the commodification of knowledge, information and know-how.

The politics of democracy is represented by the ever increasing assertion of the historically deprived social classes in the electoral domain which are generally perceived as the marginalised from the development processes. The Indian middle class is placed quite centrally in this emerging contradictory scenario and it carries the burden of balancing them in the 'new' India. In short, the socio-economic articulation of the middle class has acquired vast legitimacy. Their attestation of the state policies is taken quite seriously by both the state as well as larger civil society organisations.

According to various historians and political scientists, the middle-class has been an important historical and sociological group in modern India. The idea of India as a modern and democratic nation state was imagined and articulated by the emergent middle classes during the later phase of the British colonial rule. The middle-class leadership of the Indian nationalist movement also provided foundational values to the newly independent country after the colonial rule had ended. Over the last two decades, the Indian middle class has been celebrated for its economic achievements in the new global economy. It has also been expanding in size, providing critical market base to the process of economic growth and stability to democratic politics.

These economic reforms, coupled with the process of globalisation, changed the orientation of the Indian economy quite fundamentally. From a land known for its agrarian communities, India began to be constructed around its urban areas and its vibrant and mobile middle classes. The educated and skilled members of this class are comparable to the best in the world today in terms of their individual achievements and capabilities to perform in the 'new' economy. They provide for a viable market-base and cultural universe for global capital to operate and flourish in India.

In addition to the above, the Indian growth story has also been mostly urban-centric. The urban sector contributes to more than two-thirds of the productive activity. Though the move from agrarian and rural employment to the urban and industrial service sector employment has been rather slow in India, the numbers of middle class Indians continues to grow.

### **3. A Genesis of the Indian Middle Class**

The middle class in India has grown at the intersection of colonialism, democratic state and capitalist economic development. The first moment of middle class development can be located in the colonial period. The impetus for this came from the British colonial rule. Over the two centuries of their rule, they introduced a modern industrial economy, secular education and a new administrative framework. The British opened schools and colleges in different parts of India, particularly in the colonial cities such as Calicut, Mumbai and Chennai.

Apart from those employed in the administrative jobs of the British government, they included professionals such as lawyers, doctors, teachers and journalists. They came from relatively privileged backgrounds, mostly upper-caste, and from families which were financially comfortable, but not rich enough to not have to earn a living. This was one factor which distinguished them from the richest strata of Indian society, such as the large hereditary landlords or the remnants of an indigenous aristocracy. It also clearly put the incipient middle class that had acquired modern education in India and abroad at the centre of the 'new' economy.

The second wave of the middle class began with the coming of independence from the colonial rule in 1947. Given that the democratic political leadership consisted mostly of members of the middle-class, and that the state began to play an active economic role in ushering-in socioeconomic transformation, the middle-class once again became an important category that lay between the state and society. The democratic Indian state not only retained the older bureaucracy, but also expanded it with a steady growth of the developmental state.

Thus, the nature of the middle class during the decades following independence was typically that of a salaried and professional class, without any direct creative involvement in trade, commerce and industry, "short on money but long on institutional perks". It derived its power primarily from the relative autonomy that

the state enjoyed during this period. Through its control over the bureaucratic system, the middle-class often hijacked the state apparatus and policies for its own benefits.

Quite like its ancestor, the colonial middle class, this new emerging class also had its contradictory dispositions. Its identity, its politics as well as its relationship with the state and economy was influenced by the characteristics derived from the ethnic and social locations of its members, such as caste, linguistic region, or religion. The internal diversity of the Indian middle class grew further during this phase. With the institutionalisation of electoral democracy, economic development (industrial and rural) and, perhaps most importantly, affirmative action (reservations) policies for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the state-run educational institutions, jobs and legislative bodies, broadened the social base of the middle class. These emerging segments of the middle class provided leadership and voice to the historically marginalised categories of Indian people.

The third wave of the Indian middle class begins in the 1980s, with the decline of the semi-socialist state, social and political agitation, the rise of the new social movements around questions of rights and identities, the rapidly changing global political economy and the economic reforms accelerating the speed of economic growth. This period also witnessed a paradigm shift in the discourses on the Indian middle class. The new middle-class began to be increasingly defined and discussed in terms of its consumption behaviour, constituting the social base of market-led capitalist economy.

The middle class in India has played a critical role in providing leadership to various sections of the Indian society. Middle classes were able to displace the traditional leadership, or the traditional leadership had to reinvent itself as middle class to stay in positions of influence. Although in proportional terms the Indian middle classes make less than a quarter of the total Indian population, its absolute size is larger than the population of many countries of the world, which by itself provides a wide consumer base to a market-based economy. An important feature of the Indian middle-class is its internal diversities of income, occupation, caste, community and region.

Finally, while the Indian middle classes are globally mobile, inhabit modern spaces and use the language of modernity, they also actively participate in articulations of identity politics of both the dominant “majorities” and of the “minorities”. Unlike the western context, the Indian middle class lacks autonomy. It remains dependent on patronage and perpetuates the patronage culture.

#### **4. India in the New Century**

A popular image of Indian modernity is now pervasive. It is inextricably tied to India’s explosive, urban growth brought on by globalising policies of economic liberalisation and a culture of rampant consumerism within the middle class – India’s *nouveau riche*.

On a daily basis an individual is bombarded in the media by the economic, social and ecological significance of a rising, consumer-driven Indian populace bent on living the good life as prescribed and benchmarked by the north. Hundreds of millions clamour across India for the hallmarks of cosmopolitan and globalising identity: mobility, security, luxury and choice — all inheriting in the spirit of consumer goods and services. Today the middle class is consumerist: cell phones, washing machines, flat screen colour television sets, cars, trips abroad and designer brands.

The new middle class is not an epiphenomenon defined by, and completely at the whims of the market, but a social group integral to producing the state-led strategies of market restructuring. Gone is a simple contestation between state and market. Middle class agency is constituted by a range of state and private strategies which are mutually interdependent and productive. Models of civic development are promoted when they conform to, and help create a middle class imagination of civic life premised on the centrality and continuity of the consumer-citizen. The new middle class has embodied a self-image as the primary agent of the globalising city and nation associated with high-tech, managerial efficiency and global economic competitiveness.

Moreover, far from being a homogenous and politically unified social group, the new middle class in India informs, and is informed by the nation in ways that are as conflictual and contestatory as they are often politically invisible. More important to understanding the shaping of Indian politics are the fluidities of potential convergences, the interplay and conflicts between the new middle class and broader matrices of social differentiation.

Contestations over urban space, definitions of national culture, suburban aesthetic identities and lifestyles, and spatial practices of exclusion and participation are the order of the day. What and where a mall is built; whether a street vendor is allowed to sell his goods in a middle class neighbourhood; what kind of house one lives in; how a new western-styled suburban interior can be both modern and definitively 'Indian' at the same time; how civil society associational activities and related discursive practices in the media link the middle class with state power.

Indeed the modernisation of India has afforded the country to be an important actor on the stage of global political economy and in this respect the rising middle class has contributed significantly towards this new happening.

## **5. Reflections, Conversations, Critical Observations and Experiences during the Brief Travels through India**

During a journey of this nature, a tourist is normally confronted with a multitude of images and dynamism of a local ecology. The cities which the touring party visited embody self-image as the primary agent of India as a country associated with high-tech, managerial efficiency, global economic competitiveness and a growing middle class. Given the specificities of the mission to India, the team was compelled to meet

and converse with various individuals and absorb mental images of particular localities. In consequence, this section attempts to foreground the inter-relationship of observer and observed through conversations and reflections of those individuals whom the touring party had met during its sojourn in India. In this respect, an attempt is made to weave qualitative ethnographic and oral information of iconic individuals (below) with the historical backdrop provided earlier in order to capture the nuances of the intertwined cultural and economic forces shaping contemporary India.

In a sense the 'new' India is a mystical pageant which attracts its locals (mainly the middle and upper classes) and tourists to pay homage to its new 'Cities of Spectacle'. It is a country teeming with life where entrepreneurship is the DNA of existence. Cheek by jowl, the pedestrian throng inter-mingles with traffic on the roads and shopkeepers in bazaars are at the ever-ready to do business the Asian way. Many still live in tenements above their shops and consider business as a twenty four hour operation. On average they work about sixteen hours a day.

The skylines of the cities begin to emulate their counterparts in the western world and condominiums become the new sought after abodes of the *nouveau riche*. Dynamic and youthful, the middle-class professionals aspire to reach the pinnacle of their chosen pathways. Billboards are everywhere and entice the younger set to emulate consumerism and purchase new products. Cell phones are ubiquitous and almost everyone is busy communicating, whether walking or travelling by motorised transport. Multinational food brands are evident as standalone business premises or in shiny glass shopping malls that are symptomatic of the consumerism that has swept the nation. Private cars abound and they compete with taxis in some of the busiest roads in the world. Students mill around internet cafes and other social sites. The city seldom sleeps and the sound of motor horns become almost deafening to a sojourner. Beggars are a plenty and they continue to hound someone who they easily identify as a foreigner. An enticingly easy image, it is propagated by hybrid forms of local, state and privately driven development which extol the possibilities of potential access for all.

### ***The Publisher***

Our first contact with a relic of the past was a publication house in Mumbai which has achieved global status for the production of books and periodicals at very competitive rates. Whilst the offices were equipped with computers and modern technologies, the bureaucracy of the past colonial era was palpable. Ceiling fans adorned the entire office space, excepting that of the manager's office – he had 'moved up the ranks' and was entitled to an air conditioner in his 'cabin', as he referred to it. Male and female office workers were busy with their tasks as if the world was dependent on their efficiency. When formally introduced, they humbly smiled, nodded their heads and immediately returned to their tasks.

The manager of the office was proud of his office brood, they were courteous and respected his authority – they were grateful they had a job. The manager proudly

announced to us that he had worked for his firm for more than thirty years and was considered a loyal 'servant' of the family who owned the business. They trusted him and that meant more to him than anything in the world. It was a question of integrity. Before we could conduct any business, we were offered the traditional Indian refreshment – tea. Because of heat exhaustion we alerted the manager to the fact that we preferred something cold and without any hesitation he commanded the services of his office staff to fetch us cold drinks from a nearby retail stand. The humility that underscored the hospitality was warmly welcomed by the touring party - a far cry from the services offered back home.

We asked the publishing house manager as to how the new India affected him. He said he now lived in a condominium in the new Mumbai (a planned city) which had all the trappings of a modern life. However, he informed us that he now had to travel by car and the transmuting time to work had increased by two hours. In effect, this meant he spent something like four hours travelling to and back from home. He also informed us that most of the convenience stores, including shopping malls were available in close proximity to his new residence and he did not have to procure any services or goods from the 'older' Mumbai – the equivalent to a central business district of a western city. Despite the few 'inconveniences', he enjoyed his new status.

He still respected and observed his religious traditions and customs. However, he confessed that he had become addicted to 'fast foods'. He also informed us that he spent almost three months in the year out of the country, doing business internationally. This, he said, broadened his horizons and has brought him into contact with some of the leading authors in the world, Robin Sharma, being one of them.

### ***The Cabbie***

The cabbie who drove the authors around in Mumbai was a geographer – par excellence. He did not have any navigation tool in his vehicle, yet he was able to find his way, and locate the tiniest nook. He no more drove the small yellow and black iconic *Fiat* taxi, but an *Innova* (an SUV seven-seater) which was fully air-conditioned. He was a proud driver and caretaker of the vehicle.

Perhaps, more importantly, he had become a tourist guide and could speak on the history and significance on any place, building or other artefact in Mumbai. He was, though, concerned about the growing vehicular traffic on roads that were old and in a state of disrepair. Equally, he was proud about the new *Skylink Bridge* that spanned quite a distance over the Arabian Sea. The new road levied a toll for usage and prevented traffic congestion – the majority of vehicles still used the old road system.

When asked about his family, he informed us that he had two children, a boy and a girl, and that he was hoping they became educated and realised his dream by becoming professionals, either a doctor or a successful financial agent.

He lived on the outskirts of the central business district of Mumbai and travelled to his taxi depot by commuter train. He was hopeful that one day he could live in the new suburbs of Mumbai and possess his own house and car.

When asked about the future of India, he said that he witnessed the progress his country had made and was almost certain that his children would live a more pleasant life than his own – he was optimistic yet diplomatic in voicing his concerns about modernity – he was of the opinion that it was not for the better of humankind. Spontaneously, he pointed us in the direction of young female college student who wore a skimpy pair of shorts and a body-hugging t-shirt. He was very critical of the female younger set and their lack of traditional female dignity – he was equally critical of the ‘Bollywood Set’ and how the movie industry was influencing the process of acculturation and the ushering in of a new western-based culture. Paradoxically, the cabbie enjoyed the economic fruits of the new development, but not the concomitant negative effects on the traditional conservative culture of India.

We also questioned him about the new government of Narendra Modi. His reply was short and abrupt. He retorted, “Any government in India was mainly for the super rich. The poor and even the middle class benefit the least”. He was particularly concerned about rising corruption in almost all state structures. This, he noted, was weighing heavily against India’s progress and was unjust. It affected the poor in a myriad ways – they could least afford the bribes that many government officials demanded.

### ***The Academic***

Although we had occasion to meet many academics during our brief stay in India, one of them stood out amongst them. Despite her many academic accomplishments, she was the epitome of humility. She had obtained her doctoral degree in management studies and was assistant professor. Organisers of the academic tour had made contact with this academic through a SKYPE session that involved conference discussions about economic development in the BRICS nations.

She informed us that she was excited to learn that the majority of our tour party were part of the Indian Diaspora. Her university had many linkage programmes with universities in the west, but the possibility of academic collaboration with our business school would be the first from Africa. She was respectful and made sure that we were comfortable being guests in her ‘mother’ India. She was the quintessential host and dotted on us from the time of our arrival at the hotel in Vishakhapatnam.

Perhaps more striking was her views on contemporary India. She was proud that she was an invaluable contributor to the skills development and economic progress in India. Her business school was rated highly in India and was a sought after destination for students aspiring to become MBA graduates. She informed us that the majority of their graduates were offered high level posts in national and international companies. Because her business school was highly ranked, rivalry for place in the MBA programme was extremely competitive and parents were willing to pay a fee of

three quarters of a million Rand, if their child met the necessary academic requirements and was allocated a seat. Parents considered their children's education as an investment for the future of the family. She also apprised us of the fact that many graduates who had found senior positions in firms abroad contributed significantly to India's revenue through remittances to their families. Many families would use these remittances to support themselves, including the cost of educating younger siblings.

The professor was also kind enough to inform us about the emergent class system in India. She considered herself as being middle class and believed she lived a comfortable life with her husband and extended family. She was though very critical of the super rich class – the very, very important persons (VVIPs), as she referred to them. She was of the opinion that they wielded super power and averred that they were beyond reproach on many matters, even in using their status to 'cut a queue'. When asked about the dowry system she said although this cultural relic of the past was extant, professionals like herself would negotiate their financial contribution in the form of income they contributed to the new household. Her husband was a professional and the question of dowry was not the definitive factor in their marriage. Both husband and wife contributed to the household upkeep.

She was optimistic about the future of India but very concerned about the rising cost of services, especially health care. She opined that public health care was in a state of disarray and that private health care was sometimes even beyond the reach of the middle class. She was concerned about the poor whom she said were marginalised in almost all instances of service delivery.

When questioned about her future aspirations, especially in terms of the upper income class, she was brutally honest and said that she believed that it was her ambition that catapulted her into the middle class, especially given that her family emerged from poverty. In all humility, she said, "Although I aspire to be rich, I will never forget where I came from, and will respect everyone - they are after all God's children and deserve equal treatment". She used this philosophy to underscore her teaching and learning practice at the university and her research papers also reflect this universality of approach - the university and the academic cannot be divorced from the larger community within which they are located. A lesson for many of our academics in South Africa?

This final statement of this academic resonated with the CEO of our institution who also constantly reminded his staff and colleagues about the need to benchmark the past as a reference point for the future – "never forget where you came from".

### ***The IT Specialist***

The IT specialist was a very interesting individual who was both a student and a software programmer. He had just returned from the USA for a short holiday in his home city, the same day the touring party arrived in Hyderabad. The authors met him because he was related to the CEO of an IT company which hosted us. He had

travelled for more than thirty hours and was still willing to act as our chaperone. Despite our protestations that he should retire and have a rest, he said he was requested to perform a duty by his cousin and that was paramount. He informed us that his relative was responsible for his academic and technical achievements and he would do anything for his extended family members.

The IT company had kindly provided the transportation for our visit in Hyderabad and the IT specialist insisted he would be our guide. His views on the 'new' India were remarkable. He had the advantage of being a local and in a sense a 'foreigner'. He was of the view that without doubt India was one of the leading countries in the IT field and that knowledge held him in good stead in the USA. He apprised us of the fact that the majority of IT firms in the USA had a substantial Indian workforce.

When asked about his views on contemporary India, he said, "Every time I return, India seems to have transformed". He was proud of the new infrastructural development in Hyderabad, especially the new highways and the mass transit railway that was being built. He noted that these new developments would go a long way towards easing traffic congestion which was symptomatic of the ageing cities of India. Similar, to Mumbai, Hyderabad was developing a new planned city and the middle class had moved into the suburbs occupying upmarket townhouses.

On the evening of our departure, he insisted we should visit the bazaar in the older quarters of the city. For the tour party it was indeed a spectacle. It was difficult to distinguish between pedestrian and motor traffic. It was as if everything simply flowed and there seemed to be a sense of 'order' in the 'chaos'. People were shopping late in the evening; vendors were plying their craft; bargaining for the best prices was at its peak; hooters were blaring; religious hymns were being chanted; the sound of drums had reached their crescendo; a religious parade made its way through the throngs of people; public vehicles were competing with local traffic to pick up workers who had finished work and needed to get home; rich and poor brushed shoulders; beggars went about their 'work'; there were lights everywhere (no power cuts); retailers were calling for clients; there was no respite from the heat and the temperature had reached 36 degrees centigrade; cool drink stands abounded; people were drenched in sweat; the scent of incense pervaded the entire bazaar; at times it was difficult to breath, especially given the exhaust fumes that collected over the bazaar like clouds of smoke; there was no conflict between individuals; people milled around and socially chatted; it was a labyrinth of human souls; the bazaar was alive; it was a pageant like we had never seen or experienced before. It is a memory that will forever be etched in our minds. Forever.

Our journey back to the hotel was relatively quiet. Some of our colleagues we assumed were either 'shell-shocked' or simply exhausted. The guide broke the eerie silence and was quick to point out that this was the real India. Rich and poor and the intermediate classes all intermingled with no artificial barriers. It was as if all was one – a labyrinth of organic and inorganic. When the older city bazaar was juxtaposed with the new shopping malls of the city, we realised that there was place and access for consumerism for everyone, whether in the older format or the new.

Money was the simple intermediary. The authors tried to make sense of this phenomenal economy and attempted to assess the trading stock that was available on the streets of the bazaar. Our rough guess is that it may have run into the millions of rupees. How much of this was part of 'informal' economy? It did not matter, all contributed to the overall development of a nation.

When we asked our host and guide about his views on the 'new' India, his response was simple, yet comprehensive. "Hyderabad is a mini cosmos of India. You have witnessed the old and the new city and that should alert you to the phoenix that is rising". In this imagery we saw the intersections of government, capital and civil society and the all pervasive effects of a development state. It seemed that despite the tensions and contradictions between the politics of the tripartite partners that made up the development state, there was a united force that aspired towards something better for India. The will of the people was there for overall development and ascendancy of a nation.

The IT specialist view of the 'new' India was extraordinary to say the least. It captured in essence the India we witnessed and experienced during our short stay. Rich and poor living side by side, new condominiums competing with the informal shacks that surrounded them and all of this interspersed with the new residential markings of the ever growing middle class.

## **6. Conclusion**

At 04h00 we boarded a flight in Hyderabad for Dubai on an onward journey to South Africa and landed at King Shaka International Airport at 16h00 the following day. Our sojourn to India had ended and we were back to face the different realities of South Africa. There was no 'enlightening' welcome back home – the electricity was off – we were experiencing a new phenomena in South Africa – load shedding.

We sincerely hope that this short excerpt assists the reader to grasp the vastly divergent experiences of the touring party. The essay is an analysis, biased as it maybe, of our conception of the intimately intertwined cultural and economic forces shaping contemporary India. We are hopeful that it will appeal to all, scholars as well as future tourists interested in the political economy of India, and in the development of emerging economies, globalization and consumer politics more generally, for our observations are as pertinent to India as they are to the economic and cultural forces which pervade all developing countries.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank all those people in India who made our academic sojourn a memorable one. We have learnt that the development of a country is no easy task and requires hard work, perseverance, and goodwill on the part of all its citizens. The will of the people is critical to all development trajectories.