

India's rich too green to give grandly?

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With the Gates-Bufferett give-it-away tour just in India, many have been questioning if the country's rich are up to such philanthropy. Gross exaggerations of wealth and poverty are on display every day in India — the BMW next to the bullock cart or the coiffured Jimmy Choo-wearing woman waiting for her driver as the shoeless human mule shuffles past with two oil drums on his back. With millions malnourished and uneducated, with ancient monuments crumbling, with indigenous art, theatre and music unsupported and fading, why can't the uber rich give to the country that helped them so?

India is a country with a long tradition of charity, whether Samadhi (the last stage of life when, after having sought prosperity, one gives away all possessions as a step to enlightenment) or giving alms and tithes (giving ten percent of your income away to the poor). There is also a strong culture of giving to one's immediate family and supporting the families of domestic help. It would be unfair to say that many of the rich in India don't donate to countless charities and religious institutions. They do and without the generous tax incentives offered in many other countries.

But in a place with six industrialists on Forbes.com's list of the world's top 50 billionaires, where are the grand Gates-and-Bufferett-esque acts of beneficence, aside from Azim Premji's \$2 bln donation, which was so exceptional it proved the rule? Where are even the generous offerings that India's own 19th century tycoons made? Cowasjee Jehangir Readymoney built hospitals, colleges, Mumbai University's Convocation Hall and artful public drinking fountains. Banker and cotton trader Premchand "Cotton King" Roychand built Mumbai University's iconic library and clock tower. David Sassoon built one of the city's largest libraries. And the ubiquitous Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy built hospitals, schools, art institutes, and even a causeway when the government wouldn't. And before that there were many benevolent Rajas and Nawabs that have left the land peppered with architectural gems.

So why not now?

Did the violence from partition, the population boom and a famine take its toll not just on the economy but the psyche too? When there is so much poverty around, does that make people hold on to their wealth — large or small — more assiduously? Building new monuments and caring for old ones also understandably gets pushed aside when there are millions to feed and educate. Moreover the embrace of socialism, for all its



Microsoft founder and philanthropist Bill Gates (L) Wipro Chief Azim Premji (2L) Melinda Gates (2L) and Warren Buffett (R) take part in a joint press conference in New Delhi on March 24. Two of the world's richest men, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, took their charity roadshow to New Delhi where they hope to coax their rich Indian peers to part with some of their wealth.

noble intentions, too often results in the ethos: the state must provide, so why should I? And finally, it can be argued, industrialists do a better service to society concentrating on nurturing successful companies that provide jobs and build up the economy.

But maybe even having said all that, there is another notion that could be in play.

While some of India's billionaires have inherited their wealth, most are first or second generation and it's only been in the past ten years that India's rich have noticeably spent big. And most often on what? Fast cars, flash homes, lavish parties and looking beautiful.

Don't we all when we first get money and have the freedom to spend as we like?

- When we're first given pocket money from our parents, we buy candy and toys.
- When we get our first job we spend on fun:

music, movies, partying and looking good.

- Then if we've really saved up, we buy... a car.
- Then a house.
- Then along come kids, so finally we don't only spend on just ourselves.
- We spend on our children's education and our health.
- Then we turn to culture -- we must expose the kids to museums and monuments, concerts and theatre.
- And when we're really comfortable, we might spend generously on our spirituality or that which really tugs at our reflective, mature (and maybe fearful of eternal damnation) hearts: à la charity.
- The post-script, when all else is taken care of: we spend on our legacy.

Many of India's rich recently joined that club. The newspapers are filled with stories of super

yachts, lavish parties and grand homes. Aren't they a little too green to give in a grand way? Even Warren Buffet said he waited till his old age to be philanthropic, using the convenient but solid rationale that it's better to give away billions than millions.

So maybe we shouldn't be too despondent. After all, there are many industrialists-backed hospitals and educational trusts already and several Indian tycoons have released plans for universities too. Maybe more museums and theatres will propagate and precious monuments will find generous patrons to help maintain their upkeep. Maybe the grand Gates-Bufferett-esque gestures in India are just a season or two away.

The writer tracks the India growth story for Reuters Insider as the senior reporter/producer in New Delhi.

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Vintage Bollywood studio faces uncertain future

AFP, Mumbai

Mehboob Khan has carried equipment at the Filmistan Studio for the last 40 years, rubbing shoulders with some of the greatest names in Bollywood and playing a small role in the making of hit movies.

The ageing, slightly-built labourer is happy to show visitors around the complex in Mumbai and glows with pride as he pushes open the high, wooden gates to get to the studio's very own prison.

"Every actor, be it Dilip Kumar or even Shah Rukh Khan, has been imprisoned in this jail while shooting their films," he told AFP. "If there's a jail scene in any Bollywood film, there's no better place to shoot in Mumbai."

In a modern-day world of big budgets and jet-setting film stars, the Filmistan Studio in the Mumbai suburb of Goregaon is as much a part of Bollywood's past as Pinewood Studios is to British cinema or Warner Bros to Hollywood.

The studio began life in 1943 as a production house and went on to make nearly 60 hit films in the golden age of Bollywood in the 1940s and 1950s, including "Nagin" (Snake), "Anarkali", "Shaheed" (Martyr) and "Shabnam".

The 14-set studio was sold to a mill owner in the 1950s and has been rented out ever since to filmmakers.

But doubts were recently raised about its future amid reports that the 4.5-acre (1.8-hectare) site could be sold for up to six billion rupees (\$131 million) and turned into a residential or commercial complex.

The Times of India newspaper said the studio's landowners -- a real estate firm -- had decided to sell because it was no longer financially viable.

"This is just a rumour that the studio is not doing well," insisted Anil Kumar Jalan, one of seven brothers who owns the film set location that is a world away from the modern cinema of special effects and exotic foreign locales.

"We have overbooked many times. In fact, we are thinking of expanding because there is too much demand.

"My father, Tolaram Jalan, has been associated with this studio from 1944 and we have emotional ties with it. He produced 72 films and we will see



A worker closes the main gate of the jail premises at the Filmistan Studio in Mumbai.

to it that shooting will never stop here. We don't want to sell this studio."

With Indian property law stating that landlord and tenant have to agree to any sale, the studio is

looking to the future and is keen to show what they can still offer.

In an area of Mumbai now known for gleaming call centre offices, the studio provides a

slice of traditional India, including a small garden for shooting romantic songs, a temple for heroes to worship at and even an authentic village.

Its web site -- filmistanstudio.com -- boasts of its place in Bollywood history as well as its ability to service the growing Indian television and film industries at competitive rates.

Recent productions shot in the studio include the 2009 comedy drama "Delhi-6" starring Abhishek Bachchan and the comedy "Horn 'OK' Pleassss", the website says.

Like Mehboob Khan, Filmistan manager Jasraj S. Purohit is particularly proud of the prison.

"We have renovated the jail recently. We have got extra rooms that can fit into cells. There is also a torture room that gives you a real feeling of the jail," he said.

"If you notice the bars, you'll see that they're made of rubber and can be stretched. The audience thinks they're made of steel and clap in theatres when the hero bends them.

"We have then also furnished our old police station and given it a completely modern look. (The actor) Dev Anand just shot his film 'Chargesheet' over there recently."

Older filmmakers have an attachment to Filmistan Studio and are keen for it not to go the same way as two other vintage studios -- Kamalistan and Natraj Studio -- which closed down in recent years.

"I've been coming to this studio for the last 25 years. It has the best facilities that one could think of," said unit production manager Inderjit Chadha, who recently worked on the animated film "Toonpur Ka Superrhero" (Toontown Superhero).

"I've got a long association with the studio and emotional ties. One of my first films, 'Vardi' (Uniform) was shot here in the 1980s."

Mehboob Khan also has fond memories for the past, taking out a photograph of himself with Dilip Kumar from his pocket.

"I'm a big fan of Dilip. This picture is very precious to me. Those days it was a different world. Actors were friendly and their pictures used to run for months.

"But today the films don't even run for more than a week at the box office and there is no passion in actors while they act."

AFP